Social media and mental health challenges

Mental health in current scenario has faced many challenges. A recent upsurge in the use of media alerted to invigilate its relationship with mental health. The term “social media” is a part and parcel of day-to-day happenings. It is important to understand its encroachment and extension in our lives. Social media refers to a computer-driven technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information by connecting with virtual networks and communities. By design, social media is internet based and gives users a quick electronic communication of content. Content includes personal information, documents, videos, and photographs. Users engage with social media via computer, tablet, or smartphone via web-based software or web application, often utilizing it for messaging.[1] Digital media is any media that are encoded in machine-readable formats. Digital media refer to any information that is broadcast to us through a screen. This includes text, audio, video, and graphics that is transmitted over the Internet, for viewing on the Internet.[2]

There is a huge growth of technology interface in communication. The first E-mail was delivered in 1971. It was considered to be the harbinger of the digital revolution. The first mobile phone was launched in 1984. The first smartphone supporting voice calls and E-mails was introduced in 1994. There were few important milestones in the development of digital platforms. Broadband which provided much faster internet access was introduced in 2000. LinkedIn and Friendster were launched in 2002, Pocketbucket and Myspace in 2003, Facebook (FB) and Flickr in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006. The innovation in technology impacted print media and it saw a downward trend. The reading habits emphasized by all scholars came under a big jolt. Letters came under the endangered list, and greeting cards have been replaced by ecards. Even more dramatic was the vulnerable telegram, the 163 years old but fast and dependable purveyor of ecstatic or wretched news, became extinct in 2013 without a whimper; in fact the earth shaking event went unnoticed.

In the last five decades after that seminal event of 1971, the spread of digital media has been phenomenal, aided to a large extent by smartphones. Over one in four people worldwide are on FB, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and other social networking sites (SNSs). Globally, the SNS users were estimated to be 2.95 billion in 2019.[3] People are spending increasing amounts of time on digital media. The use of social media is varied, wide, and almost inescapable. World over, the ubiquitous presence of social media is noted. India has a phenomenal demographic advantage and therefore has a huge list of social media users. On an average, Indians spend an estimated 3½ h daily using traditional media and 1 h and 29 min daily using social media, with the bulk of that time (76%) accessing SNSs through smartphones. As a result, there has been a steep increase in the number of smartphone users.[4,5]

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PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Despite the ever-increasing popularity of the social media, the explanations for snowballing use are not clearly established. Theoretical postulates propose that the self-disclosure made on SNSs activates the intrinsic reward system due to which the behavior is repeated. High rates of disclosure are driven by motivation to share one’s beliefs and knowledge about the world, suggesting that this could be part of the intrinsic drive to disclose about self to others. Opportunities to disclose one’s thoughts are hypothesized to be as a powerful form of subjective reward,[6] and the primary motivation for using SNSs are a need to belong and a need for self-presentation. It is also promulgated that FB profiles help satisfy individuals’ need for self-worth and appreciation.[7,8]

The user gratification theory emphasizes self-discovery, entertainment value, social enhancement, and the need to maintain interpersonal connectivity through the construct of behavioral intentions. Social influence is a process of internalization and identification, and it has positive impacts on the use of social media. Greater levels of engagement with social media were observed in students from more individualistic cultures compared to their counterparts from collectivist cultures.[9] The reasons for using social media also vary with age. Those younger than 30, are focused on connecting with friends and relations, entertainment, identity formation, and maintaining interpersonal connections.[10] In contrast, middle-aged and older adults use social media to connect with others with common interests and hobbies.[11,12]

MERITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The biggest boon of use of social media is that it provides
Different types of social capital, including social ties, are positively associated with the indices of psychological well-being, such as self-esteem. Researchers attest that social media networks enhance the chance to create and/or maintain offline social capital. Social media will foster a way of social inclusion in online communities. Persons with psychiatric disorders may share personal stories in a perceived safer space, thereby gaining peer support for developing coping strategies. Digital media has immense potential for improving mental health care that is being explored with telepsychiatry and telecounseling and providing psychological interventions. In fact for conducting research also, they are used widely.

**ADVERSE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE**

Excessive use of social media is considered to be detrimental for mental health and well-being. The link of social media and increased depression, anxiety, loneliness, and addiction is highlighted by researchers. The burgeoning use of social media especially by young adults raises concerns about these negative effects. A national survey of U.S. young adults, found that compared with individuals who use 0 to 2 social media platforms, individuals who use 7 to 11 social media platforms have substantially higher odds of getting increased levels of depression and anxiety symptoms. In a sample of adolescents and their parents throughout the U.S., social media use was moderately and positively associated with adolescent-reported fear of missing out and loneliness, as well as with parent-reported hyperactivity/impulsivity, anxiety, and depression. Evaluation of FB usage among college-age students revealed that one or more FB usage variables (number of friends and use for image management) were associated with major depressive disorder, dysthymia, bipolar-mania, and narcissism in the user.

This can be qualified by the fact that the time spent in face-to-face interaction and interpersonal relationships has been replaced by computer screens. This may lead to reduction in family time spent together and a feeling of loneliness. Though social networks may help in establishing a large number of networks, it may not be satisfying in the exact sense.

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND DEPRESSION**

Depression and use of media has a negatively reinforcing outcome. In fact, the lower response on social network may make a person feel more dejected and it may validate his/her poor self-esteem. Depressive ruminations are associated with more negative and fewer positive social networking interactions, ad thereby making people feel more depressed. Sometimes, social media may help in understanding the feelings of a person based on the declared status or self-disclosure, hence its two different perspectives must be considered.

Studies carried out among students found that higher number of FB friends lead to the feeling of lower emotional adjustment to university life. It is important to note that it is not the number but the quality of social media interactions which is an important predictor of mental wellness. In a study carried out among high school students, a statistically significant positive correlation was found between depressive symptoms and time spent on social media. The happiness and success of others being compared to self may not cause depression as found in a study carried out on 425 undergraduate students, however individuals having certain depressive predispositions are negatively impacted by the comparison of self by the success of others. Hence, it is not the time being spent on social media which may be contributing toward negative mood rather negative social interactions in general, associated with increases in depressive symptoms over time.

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND ANXIETY**

Once social media use becomes part of lifestyle, it becomes almost like a routine to follow. Several studies have linked social media to anxiety and compulsive behavior. Among British adults, 45% felt worried or uncomfortable once they were unable to access their E-mail or SNSs. Out of this constant connectivity, a new medical term has emerged namely phantom vibration syndrome (PVS) which is defined as perceived vibration from a mobile phone that is not vibrating. PVS is not uncommon and is probably a symptom of the anxiety that mobile phones elicit in those that are obsessed about signing in on their social media. At present, around 66% of the world population is using a mobile phone, and approximately 1.16 billion mobile phone users are present in India. PVS is found to be positively correlated with the duration of smartphone use. Studies have yielded evidence that the long-term use of smartphones can lead to the development of symptoms such as headache, extreme irritation, increase in carelessness, forgetfulness, decrease of reflexes, and clicking sound in ears. This association of individuals with their smartphones has led to the emergence of a new kind of psychological disorder called phantom syndrome characterized by a frequent false feeling of ringing and vibration from the smartphones.
Cyberbullying exists in different forms. It can include the posting of hurtful comments online, threats, and intimidation toward others within the online space and posting photographs or videos that are intended to cause distress or disgust, inciting others to make hurtful comments aimed at a person, or sending hurtful text messages on a smartphone. The incidence of cyberbullying across several European countries in children aged 8–16 increased from 8% to 12% between 2010 and 2014. Similar increases were shown within the USA and Brazil. Cyberbullying essentially differs from face-to-face bullying in several ways. First, one cannot escape from it by staying at home as it occurs via mobile phones or net. Second, the bullying is witnessed by a very large audience; messages/images/videos being in the public domain can be forwarded again and again, resulting in victims experiencing the abuse on multiple occasions. Third, because the material used in the abuse is permanently stored online, they are a permanent reminder of the abuse and can result in abuse being continually experienced by the victim.

Cyberbullying using digital or social media has adverse effects on mental health. For the victim, this could be significantly humiliating and causes a loss of confidence and self-worth. They may experience depression, anxiety, loss of sleep, self-harm, and feelings of loneliness. Victims may have lower self-esteem, increased suicidal ideation, decreased motivation for usual hobbies, and a range of emotional responses, including being scared, frustrated, angry, anxious, or depressed and may distance themselves from friends and relatives.

Identification of vulnerability factors for the development of SNS addiction is of interest to clinicians and researchers. The Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution Model proposes the interaction of personal (P), affective (A), cognitive (C), and executive (E) variables in the emergence of a specific internet use disorder. One of the P factors implicated in the model is personality which may create a vulnerability or resilience to the development of a specific internet use disorder. A cross-national meta-analysis of personality factors and SNS addiction revealed that FB use disorder was positively associated with neuroticism and negatively with conscientiousness. Similar findings have been reported for problematic internet use and problematic smartphone use.

Social Media and Narcissism

Narcissism significantly positively predicts the personal importance placed on FB, emotional attachment to FB, the requirement for admiration by FB friends, and intentions to post digitally altered images of the self on FB. Narcissists also report more use of FB for creating new acquaintances. A meta-analysis of 62 studies (2010–2016) revealed that trait narcissism is positively associated with time spent on social media; number of friends (e.g., FB) and followers (e.g., Twitter or Instagram); and frequency of posting status updates (FB), tweets (Twitter), pictures of the self, and selfies.

Social Media Use, Self-Harm, and Suicide

The link between social media use, self-harm, and even suicide is a matter of concern. The undeniable fact that adolescents can access distressing content online that promotes self-harm and suicide is a significant cause for concern. This content attempts to “normalize” self-harm and suicide and may end in adolescents replicating the actions that they are exposed to.

Conclusion

Social media has immense benefits if used with discretion. Social media is pervasive and has infiltrated numerous areas of activity including government, business, commerce, education, and information technology. The harmful effects of social media may have profound consequences for young persons. This area requires continued research globally so that not only the harmful effects are identified but also prevention and treatment is explored. Technology is here to stay. We have to learn to optimize its use and coexist.
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