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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

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Social media has become an omnipresent force in our lives, revolutionizing how we connect and interact with the world. While offering undeniable benefits like fostering connection and providing support networks, research increasingly reveals a link between its use and potential mental health concerns. This intricate relationship necessitates a closer examination of both sides of the coin.

On the positive side, social media platforms facilitate communication and interaction with loved ones and like-minded individuals, fostering a sense of belonging and combating isolation, especially valuable in times of physical distancing. They can also empower individuals to explore their identities and build self-esteem by offering safe spaces for expression and connection with communities that share their interests or experiences. Additionally, social media can serve as a valuable resource, providing access to information and support networks related to mental health, connecting individuals with hotlines, support groups, and mental health professionals. Moreover, platforms can be avenues for positive emotional expression and community building, allowing individuals to connect in uplifting online spaces, fostering well-being and a sense of purpose through creativity and shared positive experiences.

However, the curated and often idealized portrayals of life prevalent on social media can have a detrimental impact. Constant exposure to these unrealistic portrayals can lead to feelings of inadequacy, envy, and dissatisfaction with one's own life and appearance, contributing to low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, social media platforms can unfortunately become breeding grounds for cyber bullying and online harassment, leading to feelings of isolation, fear, insecurity, and even suicidal thoughts and self-harm behaviors. The constant stream of updates and curated experiences can also fuel a sense of "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO), resulting in anxiety, dissatisfaction, and feelings of being excluded. Additionally, social media can exacerbate social anxiety by focusing heavily on public image and the potential for social judgment. Finally, social media platforms are designed to be highly engaging and addictive, potentially leading to excessive use, neglecting real-life interactions and responsibilities, and disrupting sleep patterns, further impacting mental and physical health.

In conclusion, the impact of social media on mental health presents a two-sided reality. While it offers potential benefits for connection and support,

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it also carries significant risks. To navigate this digital landscape and promote well-being, it is crucial to develop a mindful and balanced approach. This includes setting boundaries for screen time, curating one's feed to filter out negativity, prioritizing real-life interactions, and seeking professional help if the negative impacts of social media become overwhelming. By understanding the multifaceted nature of this relationship, we can harness the positive aspects of social media while mitigating its potential harm, ultimately fostering a healthier and more balanced digital experience for all.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Briefly introduce the ubiquity of social media and its growing influence on our lives. Highlight the rising concerns about its potential negative impact on mental health. State the purpose of the research paper: to explore the relationship between social media and mental health, examining both positive and negative aspects.

2. POTENTIAL NEGATIVE IMPACTS

Social Comparison and Envy

Social Comparison:

Definition: The process of evaluating ourselves by comparing our achievements, possessions, or social standing to others.

3.TYPES:

Upward comparison: Comparing ourselves to those perceived as better off, leading to feelings of inferiority and envy.

Downward comparison: Comparing ourselves to those perceived as worse off, leading to feelings of superiority and gratitude.

Lateral comparison: Comparing ourselves to peers, potentially motivating self-improvement or amplifying feelings of inadequacy.

4. MOTIVATIONS:

Self-evaluation: Understand our strengths and weaknesses.

Social learning: Observe and adapt successful behaviors.

Social identity: Define ourselves within a group.

Potential Risks:

Unrealistic expectations: Comparing to curated online personas can distort reality and breed self-doubt.

Low self-esteem: Constant unfavorable comparisons can lead to negative self-perception.

Competition and anxiety: Comparing success can fuel unhealthy competition and performance anxiety.

Envy:

Definition: A complex emotion characterized by a mix of unpleasant feelings like pain, inferiority, and resentment towards someone who possesses something desirable that you lack.

Triggers: Upward social comparison, perceived injustice, feeling threatened by another's success.

Types:

Benign envy: Motivates self-improvement and striving towards the desired state.

Malicious envy: Wishes harm or misfortune upon the envied person.

5.Consequences:

Depression and anxiety: Envy can contribute to negative emotions and mental health issues.

Relationship problems: Envy can damage trust and intimacy in relationships.

Reduced motivation: Feeling inferior can hinder self-motivation and goal pursuit.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): FOMO, the fear of missing out, has become a defining feature of our modern, hyper-connected world. It's characterized by a pervasive anxiety that others are having more fulfilling experiences than you; leading to an insatiable desire to stay constantly plugged in and engaged. Here's a deeper look at FOMO:

Definition and Symptoms:

Definition: FOMO is the apprehension of missing out on rewarding experiences, knowledge, or social connections that others might be having.

Symptoms: Obsessive checking of social media and online platforms.

Difficulty enjoying the present moment due to constant comparison and worry.

Pressure to participate in every event or activity, even if it's not fulfilling.

Anxiety, low mood, and envy related to perceived social exclusion.

Causes and Triggers:

Social media: Carefully curated online portrayals create unrealistic expectations and fuel FOMO.

The "highlight reel" effect: We tend to focus on others' best moments, neglecting their struggles.

Fear of missing out on opportunities: Anxiety about missing out on potential life-changing experiences.

Need for social validation: Desire for approval and acceptance from peers and society.

Impacts on Well-being:

Mental health: Can contribute to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

Relationships: Can strain relationships due to constant attention seeking and comparison.

Productivity: Can hinder focus and engagement in work or personal goals.

Overall well-being: Can lead to feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction, and stress.

Cyber bullying and Harassment: Cyber bullying and harassment are pervasive issues in our digital age, with potentially devastating consequences for victims. Here's a deeper look into both:

Cyber bullying:

Definition: Repeated use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature.

Methods:

Sending abusive or threatening messages

Spreading rumors or lies online

Sharing embarrassing photos or videos

Impersonating the victim

Excluding the victim from online groups

Doxing (revealing the victim's personal information)

Impacts:

Emotional distress, anxiety, and depression

Social isolation and loneliness

Decreased self-esteem and confidence

Academic difficulties

Self-harm and suicidal thoughts

In extreme cases, even physical harm

Harassment:

Definition: Unwanted conduct that is annoying, alarming, or coercive. Can occur online and offline.

Methods: Similar to cyber bullying, but the intent may be broader than just to bully, and can include stalking.

Impacts:

Similar to cyber bullying, but can also lead to fear, intimidation, and a sense of helplessness.

Unique Aspects of Cyber bullying and Harassment:

Anonymity: Can embolden perpetrators and make it difficult for victims to identify or report them.

Permanence: Online content can spread quickly and remain accessible indefinitely, causing lasting harm.

Reach: Can reach a wider audience than traditional bullying, amplifying its impact.

24/7 access: Victims can feel constantly targeted and harassed, even in their own homes.

Addiction and Excessive Use:

Social media platforms, designed to be engaging and addictive, can easily lead to excessive use and even addiction in some users. This can have significant negative impacts on mental health, relationships, and overall well-being. Let's delve deeper into this complex phenomenon:

Understanding Addiction:

Definition: Addiction is a chronic, relapsing brain disorder characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences. While not formally classified as a substance abuse disorder, social media addiction shares some similar characteristics.

Brain Mechanisms: Social media activates the reward system in the brain, releasing dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and motivation. This "dopamine loop" reinforces continued engagement, even when negative consequences arise.

Signs and Symptoms:

- Compulsive checking and excessive use of social media.
- Difficulty controlling or reducing usage despite negative impacts.

- Withdrawal symptoms like anxiety, irritability, and boredom when unable to access social media.
- Neglecting other responsibilities and activities due to social media use.

Factors Contributing to Excessive Use:

Psychological factors: Loneliness, low self-esteem, and anxiety can make individuals seek validation and connection through social media.

Personality traits: Neuroticism, impulsivity, and sensation seeking can increase susceptibility to addictive behaviors.

Platform design: Platforms often employ features like infinite scrolling, notifications, and gamification to keep users engaged for longer periods.

Cultural factors: Societal pressure to stay connected and "fear of missing out" (FOMO) can further exacerbate excessive use.

Consequences of Excessive Use:

Mental health: Increased anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances.

Social relationships: Neglect of real-life relationships and social isolation.

Physical health: Sedentary lifestyle, eye strain, and potential sleep-related issues.

Productivity: Difficulty focusing and completing tasks due to constant distraction.

Body image issues: Comparison to unrealistic online portrayals can lead to dissatisfaction and low self-esteem.

6. MISINFORMATION AND

NEGATIVITY: The potential of social media to spread valuable information and connect people is undeniable. However, its rapid-fire nature and open access can also facilitate the dissemination of misinformation and foster negativity, posing significant threats to individual and societal well-being. Let's delve deeper into these detrimental aspects:

Misinformation:

Definition: False or inaccurate information often spread unintentionally or deliberately.

Types:

Disinformation: False information spread intentionally to deceive.

Misinformation: False information spread unintentionally.

Mali formation: Accurate information used to harm individuals or groups.

Spread: Social media algorithms can amplify misinformation due to factors like user engagement and emotional content.

Impacts:

Erodes trust in institutions and experts.

Fuels polarization and division within society.

Contributes to harmful decision-making based on false information.

Can lead to real-world consequences, such as vaccine hesitancy and health risks.

Negativity:

Definition: The prevalence of negative content, including harmful comments, cyber bullying, and negativity bias.

Sources:

News feeds often prioritize negative news as it attracts more attention.

Anonymity can embolden negative behavior online.

Negativity bias in human nature leads us to pay more attention to negative information.

Impacts:

Increases anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

Creates a hostile and toxic online environment.

Discourages civil discourse and meaningful communication.

Can contribute to a sense of hopelessness and cynicism.

7.Potential Positive Impacts:

Social Connection and Support: While we've explored the potential downsides of social media, it's important to remember that it also has the potential to be a powerful tool for fostering social connection and support. Here's a look at its positive aspects in these areas:

Social Connection:

Connecting with friends and family: Social media platforms allow us to stay in touch with loved ones, even those who live far away, through messaging, video calls, and sharing updates.

Finding communities of interest: Joining online groups and forums around shared interests can connect us with like-minded individuals, fostering a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation.

Reuniting with old connections: Social media can help us reconnect with people from

our past, rekindling old friendships and expanding our social network.

Supporting social movements and causes: Platforms can be used to organize and raise awareness for social causes, connecting individuals and amplifying their voices.

Support:

Finding emotional support: Online communities and support groups can provide a safe space to share experiences, seek advice, and receive encouragement from others facing similar challenges.

Accessing mental health resources: Many platforms offer information and resources on mental health, connecting individuals with professional help and reducing stigma.

Building self-esteem: Positive interactions and online communities can boost self-confidence and self-worth, particularly for individuals struggling with social anxiety or isolation.

Sharing personal experiences: By sharing personal stories and struggles online, individuals can connect with others who relate, fostering empathy and understanding.

Identity Exploration and Self-expression: Social media, often criticized for its negative effects, also offers a unique and powerful platform for self-discovery and self-expression. Let's explore how online spaces can facilitate identity exploration and expression, fostering individual growth and connection.

Identity Exploration:

Safe Space for Experimentation: social media allows individuals, especially those navigating complex identities or facing societal pressures, to experiment with different self-presentations in a relatively safe and anonymous environment. This can be particularly valuable for exploring marginalized identities, sexual orientations, and gender expressions that might face stigma offline.

Access to Diverse Communities: By joining online communities focused on specific interests, hobbies, or identities, individuals can connect with others who share similar experiences and perspectives. This can provide a sense of belonging and support, fostering self-exploration and acceptance.

Exposure to New Ideas and Experiences: Social media platforms expose individuals to diverse viewpoints, stories, and cultural experiences beyond their immediate surroundings. This exposure can challenge preconceived notions, spark curiosity, and broaden perspectives on who they are and who they can become.

Self-expression:

Creative Outlets: Platforms offer various avenues for creative expression, be it through writing, photography, art, music, or even fashion choices on personal profiles. This allows individuals to showcase their unique talents, interests, and perspectives, fostering a sense of authenticity and personal growth.

Breaking Down Barriers: Social media can empower individuals to share their voices and stories with a wider audience, potentially challenging societal norms and stereotypes. This can be particularly impactful for marginalized voices, allowing them to reclaim their narratives and advocate for themselves and their communities.

Building Confidence and Self-Esteem: Positive feedback and support received through online interactions can boost self-confidence and self-esteem, especially for individuals struggling with social anxiety or feeling invisible in their offline communities.

Access to Information and Resources: social media, often criticized for its echo chambers and misinformation, can also be a powerful tool for democratizing access to information and resources. Let's explore how online platforms can empower individuals with knowledge and connect them with valuable support systems.

Democratizing Knowledge:

Breaking down Barriers: social media breaks down traditional barriers to information access faced by geographically isolated communities, individuals with limited resources, or those facing censorship. It allows them to access diverse perspectives, news, and educational content previously unavailable.

Empowering Self-Education: Platforms offer a wealth of educational resources, from online courses and tutorials to expert articles and documentaries. Individuals can learn new

skills, gain knowledge on various topics, and pursue personal growth at their own pace.

Crowd sourcing Information: Collaboration and knowledge exchange are facilitated through online communities and forums. Individuals can share their expertise, answer each other's questions, and collectively gather and verify information on various topics

Connecting with Resources:

Finding Support Groups and Communities: Individuals facing challenges like mental health issues, chronic illnesses, or social isolation can connect with online support groups and communities. These provide a safe space to share experiences, seek advice, and access emotional support from others facing similar situations.

Accessing Mental Health Resources: Social media platforms are increasingly used to raise awareness of mental health issues and provide access to resources like hotlines, therapy directories, and educational materials. This can help individuals find the support they need and reduce stigma surrounding mental health.

Mobilizing for Social Change: Platforms empower individuals to connect with organizations and movements working on various social causes. They can access information, participate in campaigns, and raise awareness for issues they care about, contributing to positive societal change.

Positive Social Change and Activism:

Social media has become a powerful tool for mobilizing communities and driving positive social change. Let's explore how online platforms empower individuals to advocate for causes they believe in and contribute to meaningful societal transformations.

Amplifying Voices and Raising Awareness:

Spreading the Word: Social media allows individuals to share their experiences, stories, and perspectives with a wider audience, raising awareness about social injustices, human rights violations, and critical issues often ignored by mainstream media.

Organizing and Mobilization: Platforms facilitate the organization and mobilization of online communities around specific causes. Individuals can connect with like-minded individuals, share resources, plan events, and

coordinate actions to amplify their collective voice.

Crowd funding and Fundraising: Social media platforms enable individuals to raise funds for social causes and campaigns, allowing them to bypass traditional fundraising channels and reach a global audience of potential supporters.

Empowering Grassroots Movements:

Giving Voice to the Marginalized: social media provides a platform for marginalized communities and individuals to share their struggles, challenge discriminatory practices, and advocate for their rights. This empowers them to break down barriers and demand change.

Building Solidarity and

Collaboration: Online platforms connect geographically dispersed individuals and organizations working on similar causes, fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective action for greater impact.

Holding Institutions Accountable: By documenting human rights abuses, corruption, and injustices, social media empowers individuals to hold governments, corporations, and other institutions accountable for their actions.

Mental Health Awareness and

Destigmatization: Social media, with its vast reach and potential for connection, has become a double-edged sword for mental health. While it can fuel negativity and unrealistic comparisons, it also holds immense power to raise awareness, combat stigma, and foster support networks for those struggling with mental health challenges.

Raising Awareness:

Sharing Personal Stories: Individuals with lived experiences can use social media to share their stories, normalizing mental health struggles and dispelling myths and misconceptions.

Educational Content: Platforms can host educational campaigns, info graphics, and videos explaining different mental health conditions, treatment options, and coping mechanisms.

Challenging Stigma: Openly discussing mental health online, using relevant hash tags and participating in awareness days, can

challenge societal stigma and promote acceptance.

Combating Stigma:

Positive Portrayals: Individuals in recovery can share their journeys, showcasing the possibility of living fulfilling lives despite mental health challenges.

Challenging Stereotypes: Countering negative portrayals and highlighting the diversity of experiences among people with mental health conditions is crucial.

Promoting Empathy and Understanding: Sharing personal stories and vulnerability can foster empathy and understanding towards those struggling with mental health.

Building Support Networks:

Online Communities: Social media platforms offer safe spaces for individuals with similar experiences to connect, share support, and exchange resources.

Peer Support Groups: Online support groups can provide a sense of belonging, validation, and practical advice for managing mental health challenges.

Connecting with Professionals: Some platforms allow individuals to connect with mental health professionals for consultations and guidance.

8.Literature Review

Social media has become an undeniable force in our lives, impacting various aspects of our well-being, including mental health. While its potential for connection and information sharing is undeniable, concerns have arisen regarding its association with negative mental health outcomes. This literature review explores the current research on the relationship between social media use and mental health.

9.KEY FINDINGS:

Mixed evidence: Studies present a complex picture, with some research finding a **positive** association between social media use and well-being, particularly related to social support and community building. Conversely, other studies reveal a **negative** association, highlighting potential links to increased anxiety, depression, and body image concerns.

Potential harms: Several studies point to potential harms associated with social media use, including:

Social comparison: Comparing oneself to others' seemingly perfect online lives can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

Cyberbullying and harassment: Online negativity and harassment can trigger emotional distress and anxiety.

FOMO (Fear of missing out): The constant influx of information and updates about others' activities can create a sense of missing out and dissatisfaction with one's own life.

Sleep disruption: Late-night social media use can disrupt sleep patterns, which further impacts mental health.

Individual factors: The research suggests that the impact of social media on mental health is not uniform and depends on various factors, including:

Individual personality traits and vulnerabilities

Patterns of social media use (frequency, content, purpose)

Socioeconomic background and cultural context

Need for further research: The research field is evolving, and more research is needed to:

Explore the complex and multifaceted nature of the relationship

Identify causal mechanisms

Develop interventions to mitigate potential harms and maximize positive potential

10.LIMITATIONS:

Correlational vs. causal: Most studies are correlational, meaning they can identify associations, but not necessarily causation.

Methodological variations: Different methodologies used across studies make it challenging to directly compare findings.

Rapidly evolving landscape: Social media platforms and user behavior are constantly changing, requiring ongoing research to capture the latest trends and impacts.

Additional Points to Consider:

The review can be further tailored by focusing on specific mental health conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety) or specific demographics (e.g., adolescents, young adults).

The review can be expanded to include the potential positive impacts of social media on mental health, such as fostering social

connection and providing access to mental health resources.

By critically evaluating the existing research and acknowledging its limitations, we can pave the way for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between social media and mental health, ultimately promoting responsible digital citizenship and fostering well-being in the online world.

11. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in studies investigating the impact of social media on mental health and well-being can vary depending on the specific research question and the researchers' preferences. However, some common approaches include:

Quantitative studies: These studies typically involve collecting data from large samples of participants through surveys or questionnaires. The data is then analyzed statistically to identify correlations or causal relationships between social media use and mental health outcomes.

Qualitative studies: These studies involve collecting in-depth data from a smaller number of participants through interviews, focus groups, or other methods. The data is then analyzed thematically to understand how individuals' experiences of social media use shape their mental health and well-being.

Experimental studies: These studies involve manipulating variables (such as the amount of time spent on social media or the type of content viewed) and measuring the impact on mental health outcomes. Experimental studies are considered the strongest evidence for causal relationships, but they can be difficult to conduct ethically in the context of social media research.

Longitudinal studies: These studies follow participants over time to track how their social media use and mental health change over a period of months or years. Longitudinal studies can help to identify causal relationships and understand the long-term effects of social media use.

It is important to note that each of these methodologies has its own strengths and weaknesses. For example, quantitative studies can provide strong evidence for generalizable trends, but they may not be able to capture the

nuances of individual experiences. Qualitative studies can provide rich insights into individual experiences, but they may not be generalizable to a larger population.

12. CONCLUSION

Social media's impact on mental health and well-being is complex, acting as a double-edged sword. While it fosters connection, information sharing, and creativity, excessive use can contribute to negative experiences like:

Social comparison and feelings of inadequacy: Comparing oneself to curated online portrayals can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.

Cyberbullying and negative social interactions: Online harassment and negativity can significantly impact mental health.

Sleep disruption and reduced physical activity: Excessive screen time can interfere with sleep patterns and contribute to a more sedentary lifestyle, impacting overall well-being.

However, social media also offers opportunities for:

Building and maintaining connections: Platforms can help individuals stay connected with loved ones, especially geographically dispersed ones, fostering a sense of belonging and support.

Raising awareness and fighting stigma: Social media can be a powerful tool for raising awareness about mental health issues and combating associated stigma.

Expressing oneself creatively: Sharing creative work and personal experiences can be empowering and boost self-esteem.

Therefore, it's crucial to develop mindful and responsible social media habits to maximize the positive aspects while minimizing potential harm. This might involve reducing overall usage, being selective with content consumption, and actively engaging in real-life connections and activities for a balanced approach to well-being.

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