

Influence of Social Media on Educational and Mental Wellbeing of Young Minds: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This study underscores the serious impact social media has on young people's educational and mental well-being. It emphasises the possible dangers of excessive and unrestrained social media use and how it can pose a detrimental impact on people's mental health worldwide, especially among youth. Empirical evidence repeatedly indicates that social media platforms can elicit emotions of jealousy and social comparison, exacerbating emotional well-being-related problems. Furthermore, the pressure to preserve a polished online persona can increase stress and anxiety leading to a negative impact on their wellbeing and academic achievement. Achieving a balance between the advantages of social media and its possible disadvantages is crucial for educators and politicians navigating this digital terrain. The study finds that social media has a profound effect on young people's behaviour, attitudes, and even cognitive processes, which can affect their academic achievement and psychological health in general. To effectively mitigate the negative effects of social media on today's young, policies and interventions must take these dynamics into account.

Keywords: Social media, Youth, Educational well-being, mental well-being

Introduction

From scrolling to trolling everything has become part of life for youth of this generation. Being 24X7 available on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter (X), WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube is trendy. In this technology-driven generation, it is vital to have online connections and identity. It becomes essential to be techno-friendly as it gives us access to global information and exposure. However, the problem arises when youngsters spend more time on virtual platforms. Various studies from across the world clearly indicate a deep link between high levels of social media use and depression or anxiety symptoms (Financial Express, 2022). Dr. Rachna Khanna Singh, Consultant – Mental Health and Behavioural Science, Artemis Hospital Gurugram warned on Thursday that teenagers are today spending excessive time on social media, which is adversely impacting their mental health (Health Desk, 2022 as cited in Financial Express, 2022). The studies show that the influence of social media impacts the mental health of youngsters adversely.

Children today are more concerned about their followers on social media rather than developing friendships in flesh and blood. This could negatively affect teenagers by distracting them, disrupting their sleep, and could expose them to bullying, rumour spreading, unrealistic views of other people's lives and

immense peer pressure. Behavioural changes like not spending enough time with friends and family, being aloof and low, spending more time on the phone and in the room, having a drastic change in academic results and seeing changes in mood and behaviour are concerning and should be looked into urgently (Singh, 2022). According to a report by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, one in five teenagers, aged 13-18, will have a mental illness. 11 percent of the population would suffer from a mood disorder like depression, or bipolar disorder and 8 percent would be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder like GAD, panic disorder, OCD, or social anxiety disorder.

The addiction of social media platforms may expose you to the most dangerous side of the world which includes bullying, social shaming, anxiety, mental disorders, depression, relationship issues, etc. The threat of getting into the rabbit hole of trolling or scrolling is very common. Various studies have pointed out that this generation engages in mindless scrolling very often. A series of studies were conducted by Harvard Business Review (2022) with a total of 6,445 U.S.-based students and working adults. The results show that 77% of employees use social media while on the clock, many of them for up to several hours a day. It further illuminates that it's so easy to get distracted by apps like Instagram or YouTube at work.

Impact of social media on educational and mental well-being

Social media are websites and programmes that help people talk to each other, get involved, share information, and work together. People use social media to stay in touch with their friends, family, and neighbors (Economic Times, 2024). Social media is a form of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos) (merriam-webster).

Kuppuswamy and Narayan (2010), argue in their study that these social networking websites distract students from their studies, but these websites can be useful for education based on sound pedagogical principles and proper supervision by the teachers. Moreover, the research concludes that social networking websites have both positive as well as negative impacts on the education of youth. Social media is widely used in users' daily lives and is deeply embedded in the world of technology. Cellular devices and their applications have shown primarily negative effects on individuals' lives. Studies have shown a lower self-esteem in young adults addicted to their smartphone (Aznar-Díaz, et al., 2020). Shearer (2022), conducted a study and found that participants reported the downsides of social media, which include comparing themselves to others, hyper accessibility to toxic posts and news reports, and seeking external validation from others. As described by Iwamoto and Chun (2020), when students are affected by social media posts, especially due to the increasing reliance on social media use in life, they may be encouraged to begin comparing themselves to others or develop great unrealistic expectations of themselves or others, which can have several affective consequences. Drouin et al. (2018) showed that though social media is expected to act as a form of social support for the majority of university students, it can adversely affect students' mental well-being, especially for those who already have high levels of anxiety and depression.

Research Questions

1. How does social media affect the overall educational well-being of youngsters?
2. What impact does social media holds on the mental well-being of the youth?

Research Objectives

1. To study the impact of social media on the educational well-being of the youth.

2. To study the impact of social media on the mental well-being of the youth.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed methods approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methods. By integrating both approaches, the researchers aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the research topic, enriching the findings through diverse data sources and critical perspectives.

Tools Used

To study the quantitative aspect, A google form was used which was divided into two sections. The first section consisted of questions related to educational well-being and the second consisted of questions related to mental well-being. Qualitative data in this study were collected through observations and semi-structured interviews.

Sample

The sample included youngsters in the age group of 18 to 30 years. Data was collected from 100 youths belonging to different educational institutes and regions for research.

Sampling technique

The study utilized purposive sampling, selecting participants who possessed the characteristics or experiences required to address the research questions effectively.

Significance of the study

This research will help in various ways mentioned below:

1. It will help educators to understand the ways social media influences the educational habits of youths.
2. It will help the Psychiatrists and stakeholders to understand the impact of social media on the mental well-being of youths and help accordingly.
3. It will help to understand the toll on mental health and provide them guidance to tackle online trolling.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to youth from higher educational institutes.

Results and discussion

The results of the present study give us an insight into the impact of social media on the Educational and Mental Well-being of the country's youth population. It was found in the study that 45.9 per cent of the youth used social media for 2 to 4 hours every day while 19.8 per cent of youth admitted that they used social media for more than 4 hours daily. Similarly, Ley et al. (2014) described that people who spend 2 h, on average, on social media applications will face many tragic news, posts, and stories which can raise the total intensity of their stress. Kanyinga and Lewis (2015) examined the relationship between social media use and psychological distress. These researchers found that the use of social media for more than 2 h a day was correlated with a higher intensity of psychological distress.

Table 1 : Impact of social media on Educational well being (percentage)

Questions	Yes a lot	Sometimes	Never
How often do you use social media for educational purposes?	23.4	30.6	9
Do you think social media helps you stay updated with educational trends and news? (like AI tools, fun learning apps, new skills, etc.)	36	31.5	4.5
How often do you use social media to stay informed about global scenario/events?	33.3	31.5	9
How frequently do you use social media to pursue specific interests?	29.7	37.8	7.2
How often do you use social media for entertainment purposes only?	25.2	27	2.7
Do you believe that social media platforms have a positive impact on your studies?	15.3	16.2	15.3
Do you believe that social media platforms have a negative impact on your studies?	18	25.2	4.5
Do you use any strategies to limit your social media use while studying/exams?	18.9	21.6	20.7

The above table 1 suggests that 30.6 per cent of the youth mentioned that they sometimes use social media for educational purposes and 25 per cent of them said that they use social media very often to be connected to educational platforms. 23.4 per cent said that they highly depend on social media for educational activities while 30 per cent of them agreed that they use social media only for entertainment, to watch funny movie clips or videos, to access celebrity gossip or to watch influencers. This stress-provoking effect of social media has been also pinpointed by Weng and Menczer (2015), who contended that social media becomes a main source of stress because people often share all kinds of posts, comments, and stories ranging from politics and economics, to personal and social affairs. According to Iwamoto and Chun (2020), anxiety and depression are the negative emotions that an individual may develop when some source of stress is present. In other words, when social media sources become stress-inducing, there are high chances that anxiety and depression also develop.

36 per cent of them said that social media keeps them updated on the new tools trending nowadays like AI tools, fun learning apps, and new skills. 37.8 per cent of youth agreed that social media helps them to connect to people having the same interests and helps them seek guidance in a specific area.

Almost 40 per cent of youth had no idea if social media has a positive or negative effect on their studies while only 15 per cent of them agreed to have a positive influence of social media on studies and 18 per cent agreed to have a negative influence of social media on studies. Social media severely impacts the academic performance of a student. The addiction to social media is found more among the students of higher studies which ruins the academic excellence of an individual (Nalwa & Anand, 2003). A similar study was done by MIT in 2016 which found that frequent access to social media led to a 7% increase in

severe depression and a 20% increase in anxiety disorders among students. The researchers also discovered that excessive nighttime social media use and emotional investment in social media (getting a sense of validation and belonging predominantly from social media) were linked to poor test scores in various academic criteria and also caused higher levels of anxiety and depression (Times of India, 2023). 20 per cent of students said that they do not try to limit their social media time during exams or while studying. Only 21 per cent of them said that they sometimes try to limit their social media scrolling during exams or while studying.

Table 2: Impact of social media on mental well-being (Percentage)

Questions	Percentage	Most selected response
How do you feel when someone makes a negative comment on your post or criticize you on social media?	23.6	I overthink about the comment
How do you handle negative comments on your post on social media?	70	Ignore the comments
How long can you stay away from your mobile phone/ laptop? (excluding sleeping hours)	40.9	1 to 2 hours
What would you do if you were in a no network zone for a day?	52.7	Focus on my hobbies
Have you ever felt pressured to change your appearance or habits after seeing posts from your peers or influencers on social media?	11.8	Often
Do influencers you follow on social media promote healthy or unrealistic lifestyles?	44	Unrealistic
Do you believe in relationships made on social media or virtual platform? How would you rate it? (Here relationship can be friendship, love, etc.)	10	Yes sometimes
How often do you take breaks from social media to protect your mental health?	17.3	Very few times
Do you believe that social media hinders your ability to retain information and learn effectively?	20	Yes a lot

The results of the present study highlight that 32.7 per cent of youth said that they do not care about the negative comments on their social media posts while 23.6 per cent of them acknowledged that they keep overthinking about that incident. 9 per cent of them said that they feel very sad about the criticism over the internet. The results are supported by Tang et al. (2013) who observed that the procedures of sharing information, commenting, showing likes and dislikes, posting messages, and doing other common activities on social media are correlated with higher stress. 70 per cent of the youth said that they ignore the negative comments on their post on social media. 10 per cent of them said they give a befitting reply. 40.9 per cent of the youth said that they can hardly stay away from mobile phones/laptops for a maximum of 2 hours. 31 per cent of them said that they can stay away for half a day. Only 20 per cent of them said they could stay away from their gadgets for a whole day at a stretch. 7 out of 100 respondents said that they cannot stay away from their phone even for 5 minutes.

10 per cent of the respondents felt the pressure to change their appearance or habits after seeing posts from their peers or influencers on social media. 11.8 per cent of them felt an urge to match the levels of their peers. Charoensukmongkol (2018) reckoned that the mental health and well-being of the global population can be at a great risk through the uncontrolled massive use of social media. These researchers also showed that social media sources can exert negative affective impacts on teenagers, as they can induce more envy and social comparison. 56 per cent of the respondents feel that the reel lives are real and the social media influencers promote healthy lifestyles while 44 per cent of them felt that things and posts on social media are very unrealistic and far from real-life situations. 38 per cent said that they don't believe in virtual relationships while 10 per cent of them said that they make friends and acquaintances through social media. Youth, particularly from the age group of 16–24, embraced social media sites to connect with their friends and family, exchange information and showcase their social status (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). 17.3 per cent said that they take breaks from social media to protect their mental health. 20 per cent said that sometimes social media hinders their ability to retain information and another 20 per cent said that retention of knowledge and attention span is highly affected by social media.

Conclusion

This study underscores the serious impact social media has on young people's educational and mental well-being. It emphasizes the possible dangers of excessive and unrestrained social media use and how it can pose a detrimental impact on people's mental health worldwide, especially among youth. Empirical evidence repeatedly indicates that social media platforms can elicit emotions of jealousy and social comparison, exacerbating emotional well-being-related problems. The effects of social media on education of youngsters is extensive and varied. It provides chances for cooperation, information access, and creative learning opportunities, but it also comes with a lot of difficulties. Students' widespread use of social media can cause them to get distracted, have shorter attention spans, and lose their ability to think critically. Furthermore, the pressure to preserve a polished online persona can increase stress and anxiety leading to a negative impact on their wellbeing and academic achievement. Achieving a balance between the advantages of social media and its possible disadvantages is crucial for educators and politicians navigating this digital terrain. The study finds that social media has a profound effect on young people's behaviour, attitudes, and even cognitive processes, which can affect their academic achievement and psychological health in general. To effectively mitigate the negative effects of social media on today's young, policies and interventions must take these dynamics into account.

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