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Negative Effects of Social Media Use on Teens

Teenagers in the current world are a unique generation. They are growing in an increasingly digitalized world defined by pervasive and intensive use of digital screens, especially through social media. The impact social media has on these adolescents has been debated for several years, prompting scholars and researchers to conduct studies to understand this issue. According to Suciu (2017), 54% of teenagers in the U.S spend most of their time on social platforms including WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and many others for social purposes thanks to advancing technology that makes it easy to share and communicate with just a click of the mouse. Although social media has evolved, it impacts teenagers, who constantly depend on it, differently.

Privacy Issues

While appropriate use of social media is harmless, teenagers tend to use social platforms improperly, resulting in privacy issues, which play a significant role in making social media riskier because their expected satisfaction exposes them to privacy issues. Inappropriate use of social platforms includes excessive sharing of information, posting false information, or social media stalking. Besides, social media gratification include social contact, entertainment,

information seeking, all of which translate to improper use. Privacy issues associated with inappropriate use include collecting personal data by 3rd parties and disclosing unintended contacts or personal information (Rani & Buvaneswari, 2017). This demonstrates how inappropriate the use of social platforms may lead to unintentional outcomes on an individual's reputation and digital footprint. Such exposures are the main source of social media-associated mental distress. When something is posted on social platforms, it may never be erased fully, meaning it remains online forever, affecting teens' self-representation. Nevertheless, most teenagers are not deterred from using social media despite these privacy concerns as their expected social gratification overrides their privacy.

Compromised Relationships

Besides, social media use compromises relationships among teenagers because they crave for social approval and instant gratification. As a result, the quality of their real-life relationships is diluted because of their more is better attitude online, whose impact is perceived social isolation. According to Miller (2020), there is a correlation between perceived social isolation. Teens are victims of these effects because they do not spend enough time on more authentic social experiences. Their teen relationships' quality diminishes since their preference for high volumes of random connections has impaired the value of creating long-lasting and genuine relationships. Instead, teenagers are concerned with the number of likes on their posts, followers, and comments, which serve as their satisfaction source.

FOMO

They are obsessed with social media because they feel psychologically closer to their online friends than their peers in face-to-face interactions (Rani & Buvaneswari, 2017). This

leads to generations of adolescents that substitute face to face relationships that are authentic with virtual ones that are less nourishing emotionally. Spending more time on social media or simply getting addicted to social platforms leads to fear of missing out (FOMO) among teenagers. FOMO cultivates anxiety for not being connected to the social world and the urge to see what others have posted, trumping whatever is going on in their actual situation (Miller, 2020). The more they use social media, the less they think concerning being present in real-time. Instead, they are pre-occupied with worries about why they were not invited to a party they see on social platforms or making sure they are not missing a single post from their friends. This tendency to play catch-up to never-ending social media updates means teens prioritize social interactions are not rewarding emotionally; they make them feel more isolated.

Depression and Deteriorated Mental Health

Also, improper use of social media among teens increases their risk of suffering from depression and deteriorated mental health (Shensa et al., 2018). Associated effects like hypersensitive insecurities are also a result of addictive use, cyberbullying, sleep deprivation, and evocation of jealousy. This is related to the absence of self-regulatory skills like metacognition and personality characteristics that contribute to their addictive behavior. The development of depression is associated with the youth's tendency to spend more time connecting with friends online and less time connecting with their friends in person. Because connections on social platforms do not satisfy them emotionally, they feel isolated socially (Shensa et al., 2018). The less they are connected with their peers empathically and deeply, the less the benefits of social interaction they enjoy. Human connection is a need for every individual; people feel more settled with more superficial connections. Miller (2020) indicates

that youths whose offline interactions are intense in equal measure with online relationships manifest fewer depressive symptoms than their counterparts with less in-person interactions.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is another negative effect associated with social media use because it repeatedly and wilfully damages the mental health of the youth (Miller, 2020). Instant messaging and text messaging are the commonest forms of cyberbullying. Social media bullying is extremely harmful due to the quickness through which information is shared electronically, the complexity through which the roles of the victim and the bully can shift, and its anonymity. Offline victimizations, depressive manifestations, and emotional distress are the commonly reported effects of cyberbullying among teenagers, contributing to the development of depression. Deprivation of sleep is another contributor to depression, and the use of social media exacerbates it. Around 60% of teenagers look at their devices in the last hour before sleep. Besides, they get approximately one hour less sleep than their counterparts who do not use their mobile gadgets before bedtime. Smartphones emit blue light that interferes with sleep, not forgetting that checking social platforms is not a sleep-initiating or relaxing activity as it may end up inducing stress. The youth usually intend to check WhatsApp or Facebook for a few minutes, but they end up spending over an hour, making them some time behind sleep, and they wake up more tired the following morning. This makes it challenging for them to focus and concentrate on their daytime activities and academic work, considering that they are students.

Self-esteem

Furthermore, social media use results in self-esteem issues (Shensa et al., 2018). Loss of self-esteem is an issue of concern, especially among adolescent girls, because they tend to compare themselves negatively with the images of those they consider richer, popular, thinner, and prettier. Many of them are bombarded with their peers posting perfectly taken photos of themselves. They are also following influencers and celebrities who have hair teams and makeup and do a lot of photoshopping. It is very challenging to maintain self-confidence when they have such figures for their role models. Surveys indicate that image-driven Instagram is the top cause of worries, depression, and anxiety concerning the youth's body image. Posting perfect images makes teens feel inadequate. The trend is also unhealthy for young people who seem unsuccessful at it. These problems arise because adolescents spend most of their time posting what they consider a perfect life, which makes others think they are happy and beautiful (Orben, 2020). They think making others think of them as beautiful and happy is the sole source of acceptance, and they cannot be rejected. Their esteem is lowered when they get positive feedback from their friends because they worry what their peers are liking is fake.

Their low self-esteem woes further extend when they try to compensate for their real-life interpersonal inadequacies. Most adolescents who suffer lower self-esteem tend to nullify their negative feelings through involuntary and automatic habits like constant checks on social platforms (Shensa et al., 2018). In return, this leads to a dangerous cycle whereby they develop a dependency on their smartphones and personal computers to improve their mood. Nevertheless, they do not get what they expect as the opposite is true as their mental health and esteem deteriorates.

How to Minimize the Negative Effects of Social Media Use

Exploration of the effect of social media on teenagers indicates that its appropriate use is less harmful. However, the effects can be minimized through various strategies. For example, parents should delay exposing their children to smartphones until they have developed self-identity. In such a case, they will be less affected. Also, teenagers reducing the time spent on social media. Spending too much time leads to addiction, whose effects are devastating (Suciu, 2019). Also, parents should guide and counsel their children concerning the proper use of social media.

Conclusion

The current generation of teenagers is growing in an era dominated by a digitalized world. They were born in a period of smartphones and evolving social platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and many others. While these platforms were meant to improve communication, teenagers use them inappropriately, exposing themselves to various risks. In this context, improper use means spending too much time on social media, sharing illegal content, posting false information, social media stalking, etc. Improper use of social media leads to unintended disclosure of personal information or contacts, which is distressful and likely to damage self-representation. Inappropriate social media use also compromises relationships among teenagers as they spend more time communicating with virtual friends than their in-person peers. It also increases their vulnerability to depression and other mental health issues like low self-esteem. They also experience cyberbullying, which further intensifies mental health issues. However, various strategies can help minimize these effects. They include reducing time spent online, parents delaying the age they expose their children to smartphones and personal computers, and engaging them in social media appropriate use discussions.

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