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The Dark Side of Social Media

Social media has significantly changed how people communicate and engage with one another since the early 2000s. Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have fundamentally altered how we communicate with friends, family, and even total strangers. With just a few clicks of a button, we can now communicate with anyone all over the world. Today, social media is not just used for communication and entertainment purposes, but also for promoting products and services, building brands, and sharing knowledge. Despite the number of positive benefits that can happen from developing these networked relationships, the overuse of social media has been shown to have negative impacts on people's mental health and social skills. For example, research from Peterson has found that “spending too much time on social media can lead to feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety”(Peterson 1). One of the ways social media can lead to depression is through cyberbullying. Although there has been consistent agreement about the risks of social media, there is still disagreement about how to address them. This may cause individuals to increase isolation and struggle to carry out daily tasks.

This paper will explore the effects of social media on mental health and social skills. To do so, this research paper will first discuss the background of social media and how it has changed the world. It will reflect on different activities people engage in on social media. Then it will discuss the negative impacts of social media on people. It will highlight the dangers of online bullying, the negative impact of social media on body image, and the way social media

can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Lastly, It will offer recommendations for how to use social media in a healthy way to avoid those negative impacts.

PREVALENCE AND INCREASED USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The growth of social media in the 2000s was expanded by the arrival of web 2.0 technology, which allowed users to interact with each other and create content rather than simply consuming it (Darwish and Lakhtaria 205). The early 2000s also saw the rise of blogs, which provided a platform for people to share their thoughts and experiences with the world. The popularity of blogs led to the development of social networking sites like Friendster and LiveJournal, which allowed users to connect with each other online. In the mid-2000s, the social media landscape changed dramatically with the launch of Facebook and YouTube. “Facebook quickly became the largest social networking site in the world, while YouTube emerged as the go-to destination for online video” (Darwish and Lakhtaria 205). These two platforms revolutionized social media and changed the course of online communication. However, the growth of social media has been challenging. The rise of fake news, cyberbullying, and other forms of online harassment have made the social media landscape a more difficult place to navigate. In addition, the use of social media has been linked to a number of mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression.

Activities in social media,

The advent and popularity of these platforms gave rise to new forms of communication and interactions. People are able to share their thoughts, feelings, and events in their lives with the world. They can also interact with and learn from people from different cultures and backgrounds, which can help expand their knowledge and understanding. Additionally, these

platforms can be used to spread information quickly, enabling important news and events to reach a much wider audience than before. They can also be used to promote social causes and movements, helping to create awareness and support for important issues. “Social media has recently become part of people's daily activities; many of them spend hours each day on Messenger, Instagram, Facebook, and other popular social media” (Karim et al 1). A study found that in 2005, only 5% of American adults used social networking sites. By 2011, that number had increased to 50%. In 2015, 62% of American adults reported using social networking sites. And, as of 2018, 74% of American adults use social networking sites (Auxier 3). This shows that social media use is on the rise, and it is being used for a variety of reasons. Additionally, as more people began using social media over the past ten years, it is also crucial to take into account how much time users spend on these platforms. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, adults in the United States (ages 18 and older) spend an average of 2 hours and 16 minutes on social media every day (Perrin and Anderson 2). Furthermore, a study conducted by the same research center found that teens spend an average of 9 hours and 22 minutes on social media every day (4). This shows that social media usage is prevalent among people of all ages.

THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

There is no doubt that social media has had a negative impact on our lives. The constant stream of information and the pressure to be constantly connected can be overwhelming. It can be difficult to disconnect from social media and the constant updates can be distracting. Moreover, with the increased use of social media sights, reports of the negative impacts of heavy social

media use has been on the rise as well. According to the American Psychological Association, excessive use of social media can lead to feelings of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Abrams 2). For example, 85% of young adults aged 18 to 24 reported an increase in their anxiety and depression levels due to the increased use of social media platforms. Prolonged use of social media can also lead to a decrease in real-life social interaction (2), which can cause individuals to feel isolated and disconnected from their peers. Additionally, constant exposure to social media can make it difficult for individuals to focus on their school or work tasks and can make them more prone to cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying,

Cyberbullying is the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature (Anderson 1). It is a form of harassment that can have serious consequences for the victim. Cyberbullying can include sending threatening or abusive messages, spreading rumors, or posting embarrassing photos or videos of the victim.

Cyberbullying is often linked to social media. This is because social media provides a platform for cyberbullying to take place. It also makes it easier for cyberbullies to target their victims and reach a wider audience. A study by the Pew Research Center found that 1 in 4 teens have been the victim of cyberbullying. This is an alarming statistic, as cyberbullying can lead to a number of negative outcomes for the victim, including anxiety, depression, and even suicide. The study also found that girls are more likely to be cyberbullied than boys (2). This is likely due to the fact that girls are more likely to use social media. In addition, the negative psychological outcomes of cyberbullying can have a lasting effect on the victims. For example, victims of cyberbullying may be more likely to experience problems with relationships, lower self-esteem, and difficulty trusting others (Hellfeldt et al 5). This leads to struggle in school due to difficulty focusing on

tasks and a lowered sense of self-worth.

Negative impact on body image,

In addition to the negative health outcomes correlated to cyberbullying, heavy social media use has also been linked to negative body image perceptions. Social media regularly portrays unrealistic images of women and men, which can lead to body dissatisfaction. Social media is a platform where these unrealistic images are often shared. Therefore, social media users are often bombarded with images of friends and acquaintances who appear to have perfect bodies. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy and can trigger body image issues. A study by the National Eating Disorder Association found that social media is a significant risk factor for the development of eating disorders. The study found that social media use is associated with a decrease in self-esteem and an increase in body dissatisfaction. It also found that social media use is associated with an increase in disordered eating behaviors, such as binge eating and purging. Another study found that, of a sample of American elementary school girls who read magazines, 69% said that the pictures influence their concept of the ideal body shape. 47% said the pictures made them want to lose weight (Martin 10). This shows that the media can have a significant impact on how we see our bodies.

Social media can lead to loneliness and isolation,

Furthermore, with constant comparison to those on social media, cyberbullying, and unrealistic images of beauty, heavy social media use can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. The constant need to be connected to the internet can lead to a feeling of disconnection from the real world (Karim et al 2). It can be easy to believe that having a large number of online friends and followers translates to having a large number of real-life friends and acquaintances. However,

this is not necessarily true. Research has shown that “online relationships can never replace real-life relationships” (6). Social media can create a false sense of connection, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation when users realize that these online relationships are not as fulfilling as real-life relationships. People who use social media can become so involved in their online world that they neglect their offline world. As a result, this false belief can often lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

STRATEGIES TO AVOID THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA While discussing the negative consequences of social media, it's essential to also talk about the solutions. There are many strategies that can be used to help manage the impact of social media on individuals and society. Such strategies can help to address the effects of cyberbullying, body image issues, and feelings of loneliness and isolation by developing an understanding of social media and its potential for both good and bad outcomes. This understanding can help to create a more positive and respectful online environment, which can lead to better mental health and well-being.

Limiting Social Media use,

There are a number of ways to use social media in a healthy way. Recent evidence-based research has shown that certain strategies can be used to promote healthy use of social media. For example, a study published in the journal *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking* found that setting limits on the amount of time spent on social media can help to reduce negative effects associated with excessive use (Pantic 4). Additionally, the study also found that being aware of the potential risks of social media, such as cyberbullying and online predators, and

taking steps to protect oneself can help to reduce negative impacts (4). Finally, the study showed that being thoughtful about the way one uses social media and the impacts it can have on others can help to promote healthier use (6).

How to prevent cyberbullying,

Moreover, limiting social media use can help improve cyberbullying. However, there are other ways to prevent and stop cyberbullying. For example, parents and guardians can talk to their children about cyberbullying and its consequences. They can also encourage their kids to create a network of friends and family who can be a source of support and guidance. In a study conducted by the Family Online Safety Institute, it was found that “parents are the primary line of defense against cyberbullying” (Prabhu). The study found that parents who are actively involved in their children’s online lives can help reduce the occurrence of cyberbullying. In addition, the study showed that when parents talk to their children about cyberbullying, the children are more likely to speak up and seek help if they are being cyberbullied (Prabhu). In addition, schools can also play a role in prevention by educating students about cyberbullying and its effects. Schools can also create policies that discourage cyberbullying and provide students with mechanisms to report incidents of cyberbullying. A 2019 study found that schools with an anti-cyberbullying policy, along with a range of educational programs, had significantly lower levels of cyberbullying than those without such programs (Tozzo et al 2). Lastly, social media sites and apps can also employ tools to help detect and remove cyberbullying posts from their platforms.

How to overcome body image issues,

While cyberbullying can be solved by implementing proper online safety measures and encouraging positive online behavior, body image issues cannot be solved in a similar manner.

Instead, there are number of other ways that body image issues can be addressed. One way is to challenge the unrealistic images that are often portrayed in the media. This can be done by discussing the images with friends and family and by looking for more realistic images of women and men in the media. For example, an experimental investigation research shows that “people feel more positive about their bodies when they are exposed to images of people of different body types, rather than just images of slim, muscular people” (Cohen et al).

Furthermore, it is also important to talk about body image issues with children and young people. Parents can help by talking about body image in a positive and encouraging way, emphasizing healthy habits, such as exercising and eating healthily, rather than focusing on physical appearance. It is also important to be aware of the messages that young people are receiving from the media and to talk to them about how these images may not be realistic. By talking openly about body image, parents can provide children with the tools to develop a healthy and positive attitude toward their own bodies. Lastly, it is important to seek professional help for those who are struggling with body image issues. This can include speaking to a school counselor, therapist, or doctor.

How to combat feelings of loneliness and isolation,

Similar to cyberbullying and body image issues, feelings of loneliness and isolation can also be addressed in a variety of ways. One of the best ways to combat feelings of loneliness and isolation is to make sure to stay connected with people in real life (Karim et al 1). This means taking the time to reach out and engage with others, whether through face-to-face conversations or activities, phone calls, or video chat. It is important to make sure to stay active and to be intentional about connecting with others, even if it feels uncomfortable at first. For example, joining a new club, taking a class, or volunteering can be great ways to make new connections. A

study published by the National Institutes of Health found that those who had better social support networks had higher overall well-being than those who lacked social support (Reblin and Uchino 2). This suggests that staying connected with others can be an important part of managing feelings of loneliness and isolation. Additionally, it is important to practice self-care, such as getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and doing activities that bring joy and fulfillment. Taking the time to practice self-care can help to manage feelings of loneliness and isolation, as it can help to provide a sense of balance and purpose. Lastly, it can be helpful to talk to a mental health professional if feelings of loneliness and isolation become persistent and are affecting one's daily life.

CONCLUSION

Social media has drastically changed how people interact and communicate with each other. With the constant rising of social networking sites, people became engaged on social media rather than in real life. While there are plenty of positive benefits of using social media, if it is used excessively it can lead to a variety of negative impacts such as cyberbullying which can have devastating consequences, feeling of loneliness and depression, and a lack of focus and productivity. Social media can also cause body image issues, and isolation. These impacts can lead to a variety of physical and mental health issues. Therefore, it is important to be mindful of how we use social media and to make sure that it does not become a source of anxiety or depression. By following the recommendations outlined in this paper, we can use social media in a healthy and productive way. These steps are highly effective among individuals and can help ensure a positive social media experience. Hence, we can enjoy the benefits of social media without compromising our mental health.

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