Effects of Using Social Media on Mental Health: A Systematic Review

Abhina Gaur
Assistant Professor (Guest Faculty)
S.M.M. Govt. Girls P.G. College
Bhilwara (Rajasthan)

Abstract- The advent of social media has revolutionized communication and connectivity, shaping the way people interact and share information in the contemporary world. At the same time, there is an increasing apprehension about the possible impact of these platforms on mental health. This paper aims to explore the effect of social media usage on mental health and examine the intricate relationship between the two. The study encompasses various aspects of social media, including its influence on psychological well-being, self-esteem, body image, and overall mental health. By delving into the contemporary scenario, this study sheds light on the multifaceted effects of social media on individuals' mental health, taking into account the diverse demographic and cultural backgrounds. The study also seeks to identify potential mechanisms underlying the observed effects, considering factors such as social comparison, online harassment, “fear of missing out” (FOMO), and the addictive nature of social media engagement. By examining the contemporary scenario, this study aims to address the concerns surrounding social media usage and its implications for individuals' well-being. The implications of this research could inform policymakers, mental health professionals, and individuals themselves on the potential risks and benefits of social media engagement, fostering a healthier and more informed approach to its usage.

Keywords- Social media, Loneliness, Anxiety, Depression, FOMO

INTRODUCTION
In recent years, social media has experienced rapid expansion, both in terms of quantity and quality. It has become a platform for virtual social interaction, distancing individuals from face-to-face connections and affecting their mental and physical well-being. The increased usage of social networking sites among adults has raised concerns among parents, society, and researchers, as every innovation carries both positive and negative aspects. The younger generation, being more susceptible, faces a higher risk of mental health issues. As active users of social media, they are particularly vulnerable to these problems. Understanding the link between “social media” and “mental health” is just the starting point; further exploration is needed to shed light on the underlying connections among these variables. The continuous investigation and examination of this topic cannot be overstated. Adverse effects of social media usage have long-lasting consequences, as mental health issues developed during youth can persist throughout life. Younger individuals are particularly vulnerable due to their developmental stage and increased risk of serious mental health problems. To mitigate these risks, proactive measures such as providing information and counseling sessions in schools and colleges are essential. Implementing age restrictions on social networking sites and promptly addressing any platforms that promote negative behavior, such as discrimination, violence, or racism, are necessary steps to protect mental well-being (Bashir & Bhat, 2017).

The influence of social media on young individuals has significant effects on their development and mental well-being. On one hand, it exposes them to a higher risk of online bullying, which can add to the advancement of depression. Conversely, it provides a positive influence for minority groups, enabling them to associate with others who share parallel experiences, even across geographical barriers. This highlights several important issues: the generation gap between those who embrace social media and those who don’t, and the potential for social media to serve as a protective factor for adolescents’ mental health. There is a vast opportunity to create healthcare services that were previously unimaginable. Digital platforms can facilitate the delivery of information, eliminating the need for physical visits to healthcare centers. Integrating mental health education into everyday life via social media can reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness and promote earlier intervention. Mobile applications can also provide real-time coaching and teach coping strategies during challenging periods. While cyber healthcare cannot replace face-to-face medicine entirely, it can be a valuable complement. These possibilities offer constant accessibility for patients and have the potential to be cost-effective, but it requires the confidence, foresight, and creativity of healthcare systems like the NHS to harness such a powerful resource (Lloyd, 2014).
In the last decade, the rise of online social networking has brought about notable transformations in human communication and interaction. Nonetheless, it remains uncertain whether these changes have an impact on certain fundamental aspects of human behavior and contribute to mental disorders. It is said that specific SNS activities might be linked to diminished self-esteem, particularly among children and adolescents. At the same time, other studies have presented conflicting results, indicating a positive influence of social networking on self-esteem. Consequently, the relationship between SNS usage and mental health problems remains contentious, with numerous challenges faced in conducting research on this subject (Pantic, 2014).

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic especially, the engagement in social media and the prevalence of mental health issues among college students have risen considerably. Unwarranted or challenging social media use during this time is interrelated to worsening the mental state of individuals. Yet, this negative impact can be mitigated through “dialectical thinking”, “optimism”, “mindfulness”, and “cognitive reappraisal”. While social media usage has surged across various demographics, college students have been particularly affected. As the pandemic led to integrating internet usage as a nonnegotiable, people, especially students and workforce encountered both good as well as negative online experiences influenced by various factors. COVID-19 acts as an amplifier, intensifying the correlation between use of social media and psychological health (Haddad et al., 2021).

The pervasive presence of online social media in our daily lives has led to discussions of anxieties about its disadvantageous effects on the mental state of young people. Keles et al. (2020) emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between different terms used to describe this complicated relationship between them, highlighting the need for objective research to uncover correlations rather than relying solely on socially assumed truths. They focused on the lack of conclusive evidence for causation and underscores the correlational nature of the relationship. The key findings of the included studies revealed that various aspects of social media exposure, including “time spent”, “activity”, “investment”, and “addiction”, were connected with mental health problems like “depression”, “anxiety”, and “psychological distress”. The study acknowledges the complexity of these relationships.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Coyne et al. (2020) found that spending more time on social media do not have a link to amplified mental health issues when analysed at the individual level over an 8-year period. Between-subject analyses showed a moderate relationship between social media usage and anxiety and depression, with some variations based on gender. However, within-person, cross-lagged estimates revealed no associations between social media usage and mental health over the same timeframe. The study highlights the importance of distinguishing between between-person and within-person analyses, as they provide insights into different processes and research question. The development of depression and anxiety is complex and influenced by various factors, including individual characteristics and situational elements such as stress and traumatic experiences.

O’Reilly (2020) tried to understand the viewpoints of youths and mental health professionals on social media's impact on mental health. Adolescents distanced themselves from negative impacts but expressed concern for others based on media headlines rather than personal experiences. Mental health practitioners echoed some negative views but acknowledged potential benefits. Blanket restrictions on social media use may infringe upon adolescents' rights and underestimate their digital literacy. Social media and the Internet offer valuable information, self-support resources, and improved communication between adolescents and practitioners. Integrating digital platforms into mental health services can enhance engagement and early detection of issues like depression. It is essential to remain open-minded and guide families through the complexities of social media's influence on mental health.

The use of digital technologies has become widespread among young people, starting from a young age. Children in the US shows an average of 42 minutes per day using screen media before they even turn two years old. As they grow older, they become fully engrossed in a digital world. A significant majority of adolescents, around 95%, have access to smartphones, and 88% have access to desktops or laptops at home. The prevalence of online activity has increased over the years, with almost half of US adolescents reporting being online almost constantly. While this media environment brings about various challenges and risks to youth mental health, it also presents numerous benefits and opportunities. Future studies should incorporate experimental and longitudinal approaches, including direct observation of adolescents' social media pages. As new media continues to expand its presence, it is necessary to develop evidence-based approaches to endorse healthy use of digital media like social media platforms among young people and effectively apply these tools for mental health check and involvement (Nesi, 2020).

In the past twenty years, Facebook has shown addition of personalized feeds, the expansion of its user base worldwide, the dominance of video based content, mobile usage increase, and a lot more introductions. However, it is challenging
to determine the specific impact of these features on mental health. It cannot determine whether prolonged experience with the platform amplifies or lessens these effects. The fundamental aspects of social media platforms, such as Facebook, have remained constant over time. These platforms primarily serve as online forums where individuals share personal information and connect with family and friends. Social comparisons, triggered by easily accessible and curated content, play a significant role in the potential impact on mental health. It is also to be noted that the technological advancements made by Facebook and similar platforms in recent years might have intensified rather than diminished their effects. The direct delivery of relevant social network information through news feeds, enriched content with videos, and the widespread use of smartphones could make these platforms even more engaging and potentially worsen mental health outcomes. The study by Braghieri et al. (2022), which analyzed the involvement of Facebook in US colleges, found undesirable impact on students’ mental state, primarily driven by unfavorable social comparisons.

The influence of social media on psychological well-being has been a subject of concern among parents, advocates, and policymakers. There is assumption that social media use may have negative effects, including increased suicidality, loneliness, and decreased empathy. However, other studies contradict these findings, stating that social media can be beneficial for certain individuals. To investigate this further, Berryman et al. (2018) analyzed 467 young adults, examining their social media usage, the importance they placed on social media in their lives, and their inclination to involve in “vaguebooking” (posting vague but distressing messages for attention) and the results revealed that social media usage did not predict impaired mental health. However, vaguebooking was found to be associated with suicidal thoughts, indicating it could serve as a cautionary sign for severe matters. The study also found that the way of use is of greater importance than the amount of time spent online, when it comes to analyzing social media usage. Perceived parent-child conflict and the need for belonging were identified as strong predictors of mental health problems, while perceived social support was found to be a protective factor.

The surge in social media usage has raised concerns about its influence on individuals’ mental well-being. Drawing from various fields of research, the study by Ostic et al. (2021) takes a comprehensive approach by examining different factors that mediate this relationship, such as different types of “social capital” (i.e., “bonding” and “bridging”), “social isolation”, and addiction to smartphones. The results reveal a general constructive but secondary effect of social media usage on mental well-being, primarily driven by the encouraging impact of “bonding” and “bridging” social capital. However, negative effects were also observed through addiction to digital media and self-social exclusion. Thus, this study provides evidence that while there are some negative indirect impacts, the overall impact of social media usage on psychological well-being is positive.

Social media has emerged as a crucial aspect of modern society, exerting a significant influence on individuals in numerous ways. On one hand, social media platforms attract users with their features such as online chatting, video calls, reviews sharing, photo uploads, and access to real-time news and advertising. However, the excessive and unbalanced use of social media has been linked to adverse effects on mental health. Tariq & Mishra (2019) did a study in an effort to promote responsible and safe usage of social media, particularly among students. It is known that using social media in a mindful and moderate manner can contribute to an individual's overall well-being. By educating students about these effects, the study seeks to enhance their focus on academic pursuits, skill development, and productivity. The study comprised of a survey, distributed via email, WhatsApp, and Facebook, aimed to assess students' time spent on social media and how it influenced their well-being. The findings revealed that male students exhibited higher levels of activity on social media compared to their female counterparts. It was observed that students dedicated a significant amount of time to social media platforms. While most students were aware of the potential negative consequences, there were some who lacked understanding.

Lee et al. (2014) delved into the effects of social media usage on mental well-being, body image, self-esteem, and cultural disparities. Two groups, consisting of Americans and Koreans, participated in an online survey and the outcomes revealed significant correlations between social media usage and body satisfaction. Specifically, utilizing social media for body image information yielded a negative connotation with “body satisfaction” in both countries. However, in Korea, engaging in self-status seeking activities related to body image on social media positively influenced body satisfaction. Still, high levels of body satisfaction were linked to increased psychological well-being for both groups. The role of self-esteem in enhancing psychological well-being was more pronounced among Americans than Koreans. The findings revealed a similarity between the United States and Korea concerning the detrimental impact of social media on body image. While Americans were less susceptible to external influences, Koreans sought validation from others regarding their body image.

Sharma et al. (2020) tried to investigate the effect of social media on mental health. To achieve this, a systematic search was conducted across multiple databases from 1991 to February 2020. The review suggests that the debate surrounding
the impact of social media on mental health will persist until a greater number of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are conducted, considering various variables across different age groups. While social media does offer certain benefits, the increased accessibility and advancements in technology have also led to a greater number of negative effects. Therefore, an inclusive knowledge of the effects of social media requires further investigation through rigorous research methodologies.

The outcome of social media usage largely depends on how individuals choose to utilize these platforms. Interestingly, data reveals that passive usage is more prevalent than active engagement, indicating that many people are not making optimal use of social media. The mission statement of Facebook, which aims to foster community building and bring people closer, mirrors the latent capacity of social media to enhance social capital. The effect of social media on mental health depends on whether the usage is “active” or “passive”, unless signs of addiction or cyberbullying are present. Active engagement with social media platforms can foster a sense of connection, leading to positive influences on mental well-being. Conversely, passive use of social media, particularly when it produces feelings of jealousy or inferiority and not social integration, is undesirably related with mental health (Verduyn et al., 2021).

The impact of frequent social media use on mental health differs between genders. In the case of girls, the harmful effects primarily stem from cyberbullying and disruptions in sleep, with physical activity playing a lesser role. Cyberbullying and inadequate sleep were found to strongly influence the relationship between regular social media use and psychological distress, general fulfillment, and happiness scores amid girls. Conversely, boys showed a weaker relationship between social media use and psychological distress, with cyberbullying, sleep, and physical activity accounting for only a small portion of the effect. Well-being indicators, such as happiness and life satisfaction, were unaffected by social media frequency in boys, possibly due to their positive relationship with physical activity. Therefore, interventions aimed at promoting mental health should focus on preventing cyberbullying, enhancing resilience, and ensuring sufficient sleep and physical activity in young people, rather than solely reducing social media use (Viner et al., 2019).

Wang et al. (2017) investigated the mental effects of sharing and observing “selfies” and “groupies” on social media platforms and the findings revealed that frequent viewing of selfies was shown to be linked with a reduction in self-esteem and life satisfaction, whereas frequent viewing of groupies led to an increase in these aspects. However, the act of posting selfies or groupies did not appear to have any significant influence on self-esteem or life satisfaction. The study also discovered that individuals with a higher need for popularity were more susceptible to the negative impact of selfie viewing on self-esteem and life satisfaction compared to those with a lower need for popularity. The results indicated that self-esteem played a mediating role in the relationship between selfie viewing and life satisfaction. Regular exposure to selfies on social media seemed to foster feelings of loneliness, resulting in lower self-esteem and life satisfaction. Additionally, the social comparison theory suggests that viewing selfies on social media prompts individuals to make upward social comparisons, which can adversely affect their psychological well-being. They also found that individuals who frequently viewed groupies experienced higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction. This could be attributed to a sense of community fostered by viewing groupies that include oneself. The study emphasized the significance of self-esteem as a mediator between groupie viewing and life satisfaction.

CONCLUSION
The analysis of existing literature and research studies has revealed a complex relationship between “social media usage” and “psychological well-being”. While social media platforms offer numerous benefits in terms of communication and information sharing, they also present potential risks to individuals' mental health. The findings indicate that disproportionate consumption of social media may attribute to various mental health issues like bigger levels of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and decreased self-esteem. Factors such as social comparison, online harassment, “fear of missing out” (FOMO), and addiction are the potential mechanisms underlying these negative effects. Additionally, the pressure to present an idealized self-image and the constant exposure to carefully curated content on social media can impact individuals' body image and contribute to body dissatisfaction.

However, it is essential to recognize that the relationship between “social media” and “mental health” is not entirely negative. Social media can be a tool to provide opportunities for social support, online communities, and access to mental health resources. Positive aspects such as self-expression, identity formation, and social connection have also been observed. To alleviate the potential adverse impact of social media on mental health, individuals, policymakers, and mental health professionals should adopt a balanced and mindful approach. This includes promoting digital literacy and critical thinking skills, encouraging healthy online behaviors, and fostering open conversations about mental health in the digital age. Interventions and strategies aimed at reducing social media addiction, promoting self-care, and enhancing resilience can be beneficial. Future research needs to continue the exploration of the nuances of this
relationship, considering cultural, demographic, and contextual factors. By acknowledging the complexities involved, individuals and society can navigate the digital landscape in a way that promotes well-being and resilience while harnessing the prospective advantages of social media platforms.

REFERENCES:


