

Assessing Youth Dependency on Social Media: An Analytical Study

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ABSTRACT

The pervasive influence of social media on contemporary youth has sparked considerable academic interest, particularly in understanding the extent and implications of their dependency on these platforms. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors contributing to youth dependency on social media, with a focus on the psychological and social consequences of this phenomenon. Through a critical review of existing literature, the research identifies key issues such as social comparison, smartphone addiction, and the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) as significant contributors to the increasing reliance on social media among young individuals. The findings reveal a complex interplay between social media use and the mental health of youth, suggesting that while social media offers benefits such as connectivity and access to information, it also poses risks related to psychological well-being and social behavior. The paper concludes with recommendations for fostering responsible social media use, emphasizing the need for strategies that mitigate the negative impacts while leveraging the positive potential of these platforms. This study contributes to the broader discourse on digital media and youth, offering insights that are pertinent for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals in addressing the challenges posed by social media dependency.

Keywords: Social Media, Youth, Dependency, Addiction, Smartphone

INTRODUCTION

Social media is no longer foreign in the eyes of the majority, as individuals are being driven to embrace ways of life as a result of technological advancements. According to Akram and Kumar (2017), people use social media to develop social networks or connections with those who hold common interests, hobbies, experiences, or genuine ties. Therefore, it is relatively simpler to form connections with others due to shared interests. However, there are generational differences on the utilization and dependency of social media. The utilization of social media by the youth as accessibility, affordability, and widespread Internet access make it simpler for them to access social media platforms without limitation (Al-Samarraie et. al., 2021). For this study, the spotlight will be on impact of social media on youth.

The term 'youth' is classified by the World Health Organization as a group of individuals aged 15 to 24 years old (World Health Organization, 2022). Additionally, it is realistic to assume that the majority of youths own a smartphone, which will inevitably lead to social media usage. As a consequence, even if it is not for personal use, youths are becoming increasingly dependent on social media. They also utilize social media to engage with each other for purposes of education or work. Over time, they will become increasingly dependent on social media, which may also lead to social media addiction (Amat & Yap, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media is a vast social network comprising of applications such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, and other communication platforms that rely on the Internet for access (Nazir et. al., 2020). In the context of the target audience for this study, as social media plays a significant part in the lives. The challenges of social media might be presented in different ways.

One of the challenges of social media is the issue of digital footprint. By doing anything online or leaving their imprint on a computer system, users leave a trail of digital footprints or impressions especially when they utilize social media. The majority, if not all, of this activity may be traced and tracked, and it is also vulnerable to data theft (Shimonski et. al., 2015). It is identified as a challenge when it comes to social media because digital footprints include personal information published on the internet, sites accessed, videos, and photos uploaded. According to Ericksen (2018), users are not aware of the severity of these digital footprints that can even jeopardize their future, as schools and employers take note of the candidates' digital footprints in both approaches which are the present and the future. As a consequence, anything unethical in an individual's digital footprints has the possibility to detriment their life and future.

Furthermore, cyberbullying is another social media concern that has a significant impact on users. Cyberbullying is described as the act of harassment, humiliation, or intimidation committed online or via a digital platform. It is considered a challenge of social media because it causes alarming effects towards the victims that must be paid attention to because it is a type of bullying that is typically hidden from adults which results to academic failure, high dropout rates, physical violence, and suicide (Johnson, et al., 2016). This dishonorable act is committed by bullies behind a screen which not only affects the victims physically, such as fatigue and poor appetite, but also mentally such as depression and anxiety. The worst part regarding this form of bullying is that it can occur anytime and anywhere on social media, regardless of the situation.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the effects of youth towards social media?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To study the effects of youth towards social media.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Social comparison

Previous studies revealed that social comparison could be a further issue associated with social media use for youth. In a broader sense, the social comparison theory claims that the youths compare themselves to everyone else to gauge their development and position in various spheres of life. According to Fardouly (2018), making comparisons to those who are perceived as superior to oneself can have detrimental effects on one's personal wellbeing. The author additionally pointed out that users' psychological well-being may be affected by the time they devote to social media and by engaging in online comparisons with peers. These outcomes highlight the significance of social media interactions because of their link to psychological distress. Berryman (2018) is another author who has argued that utilizing social media for self-analysis and negative social judgement can have long-term detrimental mental consequences.

Social media is to showcase or display the things that you love, be it through video or photo. Young people's experiences on social media tend to be filtered through idealised versions of such people's lives. This might cause people to constantly evaluate where they stand in relation to their peers and the people they look up to in the public eye. To further acknowledge the writings of Berryman (2018), the self-esteem and sense of value

of youth can suffer if they engage in excessive social comparison. Feelings of inadequacy, along with the accompanying uneasiness and self-doubt, can result from engaging in constant comparison with others.

Another article on this subject raised the possibility of social comparison because of youth's use of social media. According to Hassim (2020), despite feeling compelled to conform to the norms, some of them attempt to become better versions of themselves by evaluating shortcomings that others have pointed out. In the same journal article, the authors used both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate how youths utilize Instagram for social comparison, and one of the findings demonstrates that 51% of respondents were inspired to make positive changes in their lives because of analyzing their posts and obtaining comments from their postings on the social media platform. When random Instagram users respond to the post with support for personal development, the postings are much more beneficial to the youth. The authors demonstrated that social comparison could have both positive and negative effects on youths' use of social media.

Based on the writings of the journal article by Hassim (2020), it also believe that social comparison, when handled in a positive and constructive manner, may also be seen in a favourable light. A person's desire to better themselves through comparison to others is understandable. The successes of others might motivate the youth to work towards their own goals and improve their performance. Observing the success of others can serve as an inspirational guidepost and motivate people to realise their own goals. Therefore, it is believe that it depends on the mindset of the youth themselves. When it comes to topics that interest them, like health-related content and culinary recipes, for instance, young people might depend heavily on social media as a source of relevant information and inspiration.

Social media and smartphone addiction

According to a journal article by Kurniawati (2018) which focuses on teenagers' dependency on social media, it was reported that 22.3 million Indonesians between the ages of 20 and 24 have access to the Internet, which is ultimately linked to the usage of social media. The close link between the Internet and various forms of social media leads to this argument. Another study was also stated in the same journal article, concerning 2,252 students located in the United States of America, where the results indicated that youth prefer to communicate on their devices versus in-person conversations. The author also noted that users of social media can experience both benefits and drawbacks from it.

Based on the study done by Griffiths and Kuss (2017), they also discussed regarding smartphone addiction whereby dependence on social media can be related to the utilization of mobile phones. It was also stated that the usage of social media is a widespread activity on smartphones whereby a percentage of 80% of social media is utilized through portable technologies. In proportion to the findings of the discussion, smartphone addiction is indicated to be a contributing factor towards the dependence of social media. Due to their smartphone and social media consumption, the authors also indicate that youths nowadays may be more susceptible to evolving dependent symptoms, but levels of social media addiction seem to vary between generations. Addicts who stop using social media and their smartphones face negative psychological effects, which frequently prompts them to resume using their smartphones and social media, a condition called as relapse.

Another research was also done about social media and smartphone addiction, whereby with this occurrence, the use of this medium has become a subject of recent concern, leading numerous scholars from all over the globe to undertake research in the field from a communicative and social point of view. According to Faudzi (2019), the phenomena can have an impact on social media users in Malaysia just like it can anywhere else on the globe. For instance, using social media to obsessively monitor other people's regular updates or postings for hours at a time is one way to illustrate social media and smartphone addiction.

From my perspective as a part of this age group, this rings quite true; not only do young people these days love their smartphones, but even the elderly do, too. To further acknowledge the writings of Griffiths and Kuss (2017), it is inevitable that people who own smartphones will be dependent on social media because

smartphones come with applications, and the major reason for buying one is to access social media applications. With their stimulating materials and instant feedback mechanisms, social media applications can be enticing as they provide frequent updates, likes, and comments. Also, it is agreeable that the previous study's author mentioned that there appears to be a disparity between generations in how dependent individuals are on social media. People in a more senior age bracket may be less likely to spend a lot of time on social media platforms and develop a strong dependence on them than younger people who may have grown up with smartphones and social media.

Fear of missing out (FOMO)

According to a journal article which focuses on the fear of missing out, the authors mentioned that social media sites heighten the likelihood of stress for some people since they enable users to share their life updates with one another and observe what everyone else is doing in real time. This stress could emerge as a fear of missing out, which is a particular form of anxiety and it depends on a person's level of social media use or other character traits (Barry & Wong, 2020). The authors additionally carried out the study with 419 individuals of various age cohorts, ranging from 14 to 47 years old, and discovered that there were no significant disparities between age cohorts in terms of the fear of missing out phenomenon. According to the authors, the fear of missing out depends on the extent to which users are dependent on social media, as it may be especially problematic for those who are heavily engaged with social media.

According to another journal article by Kennedy (2019) which also touched on the same topic, whereby fear of missing out can lead to emotions of isolation, which can lead to reduced levels of satisfaction, more signals that people believe life is unfair, and more emotions relating to victimization. As a response, the author stated that some youths monitor their social media pages up to once every 15 minutes, and their anxiousness levels rise when they are unable to do so. In another journal article, Fox and Moreland (2015) discovered, through interviews with young adults, that social media frequently felt obligatory and more like a job. The respondents from homogeneous groups reported that they adhere to certain social media platforms because their peers do, and that they feel pressured to remain updated and respond to avoid conflict, rather than using social media for a social purpose.

In relation to the previous studies by the authors, it is agreeable that the fear of missing out, especially in today's society, is a real and potentially anxiety-inducing phenomenon that is mostly connected to social media as it revolves around almost everyone's lives. Platforms for social media provide real-time updates on the lives and events of others. Youth may feel compelled to frequently check social media to avoid missing out on exciting occasions, events, or opportunities. Worries about isolation or disconnecting from peers are what drive the fear of missing out, as I also personally believe that no one likes to feel left out. Therefore, this inevitably leads to youth being dependent on social media to constantly stay in the loop and ensure they do not miss out on anything.

CONCLUSION

This study helps to explore social media and youth which is not only visible in today's society but also supported by various past studies by multiple authors. For the research objective, which is to study the effects of youth towards social media, it is managed to conclude that they are vary in terms of effect of the youth towards social media. This statement can be backed up by the three main points namely social comparison, social media and smartphone addiction, as well as fear of missing out.

We have to acknowledge that youth will keep depending on social media as the world continues to develop and become more technologically advanced. After reviewing the past literature of authors from different years and perspectives, it is recommended that the benefits of social media should be explored more, as it is inevitable to avoid utilizing social media for youth or any age group. Using social media in a positive and responsible manner can have a number of advantages. One of the advantages is that social media platforms can be used to share information, news, and opinions. They can help broadcast vital messages, create

awareness about various issues, and mobilize communities for good change when used appropriately. We can help disseminate information, promote social causes, and encourage educated debates by using social media responsibly.

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