The Psychological Effects of Social Media Activity on the Mental State and Self-Esteem of Users

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Quick Introduction

➔ Over two billion people use Facebook every month; this figure will continue to soar as technological advances are made
➔ The unlimited access and constant influx of online content has a direct correlation to one's well-being
   ◆ Depression
   ◆ Poor self-esteem
   ◆ High anxiety
   ◆ High body dissatisfaction
   ◆ Low self-perceived attractiveness
➔ Social media doesn't always reflect reality but it can quickly become the user's version of reality

If social media was all bad then there would be no market for it, so what's so great about it?

➔ Improve and build upon existing face to face relationships
➔ Becoming civically engaged in the world
➔ School and academic readiness
➔ Tool for help seeking
➔ Increase in mood

Two Powerful Platforms

Facebook

➔ 1.32 billion active users
➔ Founded in 2004 and owns Instagram
➔ Both visual content and written content
➔ Allows likes, comments and reactions toward all posts on their platform (just as Instagram does)

Instagram

➔ 1 billion active users (June 2018)
➔ Founded in 2010
➔ Solely an image-based form of media
➔ Hashtags allows for global sharing of a particular item and get categorized almost immediately
➔ 'Explore' page provides public posts that are based on search history which introduces the user to new content without them having to go looking for it
➔ Visual information is more easily absorbed than written information

Positive Effects of Social Media

Social Capital Offline

➔ This is found to be most effective for those who are shy and avoid face to face relationships because of it

➔ Can build and add on to existing in-person relationships

➔ Take the tools they learn from online connectedness to their relationships in the real world

➔ Connections between media usage and educational benefits
  ◆ School readiness
  ◆ Positive social behaviors
  ◆ Tolerance and knowledge
  ◆ Civic participation

Positive Effects of Social Media

Seeking Psychological Assistance

➔ Online support services can help reduce potential emasculating consequences of seeking out face to face psychological help

➔ Provides a level of confidentiality that is so often sought after in our judgmental society

➔ Can be through online friends or online professionals

➔ This method is working to meet those who need assistance halfway, as they are already on the internet so why not go to where they already are

➔ There are no geographical limitations

Positive Effects of Social Media

Increased Mood

➔ Viewing posts from friends, family and a romantic partner and leave users in a good mood

➔ There is a smaller chance of envy when one is viewing posts from loved ones; there is a shared sense of joy

➔ **Parody images** of an ordinary person side by side with a thin model shows that these idealized images of what people look like are really the minority of society
  ◆ Increases body satisfaction
  ◆ Increases mood

➔ Creates something that is more relatable to the masses

More often than not the positive psychological outcomes of social media exposure gets overshadowed by the drawbacks, however, the effects are significant.

Negative Effects of Social Media

Internet Addiction

➔ Excessive internet use can lead to internet addiction which is one of the many catalysts for psychological side effects:
   ◆ Lower levels of social skills, self-esteem and mood
   ◆ Increase in depression, body dissatisfaction, anxiety and loneliness
➔ **A 2013 Canadian study** investigated the relationship between time spent on Instagram and mental health levels:
   ◆ 16.9% of students self-rated their mental health as poor
   ◆ 26.4% reported an unmet need for mental health support
   ◆ 23.4% reported high psychological distress
   ◆ 12.5% exhibited suicidal ideation
➔ While this research is now seven years old, the figures still show a connection and the numbers will only continue to rise

Negative Effects of Social Media

A Waste of Time

➔   Research shows that those who spend time of social networking sites reported that their time was less significantly spent compared to those who did not spend time on these sites

➔   Those who reported that their time on Facebook was a waste also acknowledged the fact that they use the site multiple times throughout the day which widens the opportunity for their mood to be worsened over their time not being well spent

➔   If this occurs every day, multiple times a day then over time this will have a lasting effect on the user's mood which may cause them to slip into a more permanent depressive state

Negative Effects of Social Media

The Social Comparison Theory

➔ **The social comparison theory** is when "we compare ourselves to others as a result from an innate human need for self-evaluation"
   ◆ <u>Upperward social comparison</u> is when we compare ourselves to people that we believe are better than us
   ◆ <u>Downward social comparison</u> is when we compare ourselves to those who we believe to be below us
      ● How others present themselves online, perhaps subconsciously, causes users to believe there is something missing in their own lives
➔ Social networks are unique because it is almost always upward social comparison
➔ There is a misconception that only those with pre-existing self-esteem issues or diagnosed depression are susceptible to the consequences of social comparison
   ◆ A research study proved this is not the case and the depression experienced is independent of prior attachment anxiety or social comparison tendencies

Negative Effects of Social Media

Body Image

➔ The social comparison theory in conjunction with online interactions is typically synonymous with body image
➔ The image-based format of Instagram is the perfect storm to evoke feelings of body dissatisfaction
    ◆ Editing begins to play a major role and users (more often it is female users) manipulate pictures they post of themselves which causes those viewing it to turn inward and think poorly of themselves
    ◆ Fitness accounts or celebrities like the Kardashians all have appearance based accounts

➔ Thin-ideal images and athletic-ideal images lead to body dissatisfaction rather than muscular-ideal images
    ◆ Society holds a stigma that everyone should look like a Victoria Secret model so when users go on Instagram, it seems as if this body type makes up the majority of society when in reality that is the minority of society

Role of Gender

➔ Social media outlets are made up by a majority of girls
   ◆ **A 2015 study** found that sites like Instagram and Facebook are "being used by 90% of young American women aged 19-29 years"
   ◆ Multiple studies have shown that girls are more active on social media than boys
➔ The high activity of females on social networking sites opens the door for more psychological symptoms
   ◆ In an **Australian study**, where gender was used as a mediator, "females expressed the highest rates of depressive symptoms"
   ◆ Often a result of body image and body dissatisfaction
➔ There is a positive to this …
   ◆ Girls are typically more active help-seekers compared to boys because of the stigma surrounding males and the idea that if they ask for mental help they are not masculine

Generational Age Gap

➔ A **2015 study** shows that 90% of emerging adults (18-29) are frequent users of social media
➔ However, they are more likely to use Instagram several times a day as opposed to Facebook
   ◆ 51% of emerging adults reported using Facebook multiple times a day and 78% reported using Instagram in a similar manner
   ◆ These figures are supported by the fact that Facebook was founded six years earlier than Instagram, so this category of emerging adults were still too young to be on such sites
➔ The insecurities that adolescents experience in their younger years while trying to figure out who they are heightened by a never-ending cycle of media comparison

Social Media and its Psychological Effects

By Means of Age

➔ Specialists have found that "among those who experience a lifetime of mental health difficulties, the first episode or symptoms often occur by the age of fourteen"
  ◆ "With the rapid advance of information and communication technology, the number of children and adolescents using [social networking sites] will increase as well"
➔ This figure of fourteen years old can drop to an even younger age through marketing to young children
➔ "Young children learn best by interaction with other humans, not by interacting with screens"

➔ Bringing screens and technology into the lives of younger and younger children is altering the way the future generations will learn

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The Importance of Media Literacy

➔ "With the advent of the internet and social media, it is now possible to provide education opportunities that offer a radically different approach from the "factory model" of education in closed classrooms"
   ◆ This also calls for a change in curriculum that is moving with the times of technology
➔ The ideal media literate student is aware of the effects the internet has on individuals
   ◆ "Strengthening skills to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and participate with information [that] are critically important in a world where information is easily available"
➔ While this method is not directly connected to the psychological effects of social media, "understanding the practice of media provides students with better tools for critical thinking and for understanding the different motives, purposes, and uses of media"
   ◆ These skills can be applied to any form of media
➔ Perhaps it would be beneficial to specifically highlight the fact "that social networks present what are, in many respects, shallow and unrealistic portrayals of reality"
   ◆ It would be most proactive to display these guidelines and cautionary facts on an internet browsing site that is frequented by adolescents so they are forced to absorb the information

Media Outreach

➔ Parents have the greatest amount of interaction with their children; there should be mental health training provided to them so they have the information to identify potential symptoms or changed behavior related to psychological distress
  ◆ It would then be up to the parents to have those conversations with their children to make the use of social media safer and more enjoyable
➔ Some health organizations have taken to social media to deliver "health programs and services, education, research, intervention, and even treatment"
  ◆ It's ironic to say that social media causes mental health issues but mental health issues can be the reason that people use it; to receive assistance
➔ This method will help social work professionals and psychologists to reach out to those affected by the consequences of social media exposure and cater to a larger audience

In Conclusion ...

→ At the turn of the century the internet exploded and four years later Facebook took it to the next level
   ◆ Since then, social networking has only grown and will continue to do so as our society becomes more and more reliant on technology
→ However, the public must be aware of the consequences of too much technology
   ◆ Catalysts such as internet addiction or overexposure to unrealistic forms of reality can lead to social comparison and self-rated attractiveness
   ◆ Lower levels of social skills, self-esteem and mood and an increase in depression, body dissatisfaction, anxiety and loneliness
→ But, these effects are not one sided
   ◆ Unlimited access to information, positive social improvements offline and assisting in adolescents in finding their unique identity
→ Being informed and aware of the ramifications of too much social media use is the most important part of being media literate especially in a society that is so highly saturated in media

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