



Research Paper

The Impact of Social Media on Teenagers

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Abstract;

Social Media is an electronic form of communication which enables people to share pictures, videos, ideas, interact with different people and form communities. It has today become an integral part of our lives. It has drastically evolved from its earlier form and has such a significant place in our everyday lives, that we not only devote hours scrolling and surfing, but often consciously or unconsciously develop behaviours, habits and lifestyles based on our social media interactions.

Objective: The aim of this article is to illustrate the impact of social media on teenagers by analysing their first-hand experiences, feelings and thoughts regarding the role of social media in their lives.

Methodology: The article lays emphasis on adolescents that I have interviewed over a period of two months.

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I. Introduction:

The park which was once filled with laughter and cherishable moments, the houses which were once lived among the fights and love now have been replaced by the silence of the notifications. With the evolution of technology, certain social media platforms have emerged which have a tremendous impact on humans, especially teenagers. Anything that enables a person to create and share content, i.e., social interaction, can be categorized as social media. Some of the most famous applications and websites include Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and so on. These websites are used widely across the world for various reasons and purposes and it has become the most common activity amongst teenagers in the present times. It has become a necessary activity for adults too, and many people feel that their day is incomplete if they don't scroll past their social media handles. It has made communication easier. Moreover, sharing pictures, exchanging messages and data, expressing thoughts and watching videos from all over the world, is just one click away with the use of social media. Thereby radically transforming people's lives. Not only has it become a useful platform for business but has also developed an inevitable role in personal lives. Content like reels and stories flooding social media platforms like Snapchat and Instagram is not only extremely engaging but also easy to consume due to which we mindlessly spend hours scrolling without even realizing how we are getting addicted to it. Starting our day by swiping through Instagram stories, the lingering curiosity to know the day-to-day happenings in the lives of our friends, favourite celebrities and sometimes even complete strangers, the urge to post and present our own activities as highly gratifying on social without even realizing how they made us feel in reality are some examples of behaviours that show the extent of our addiction to social media. The easy to understand and conveniently available format of content on social media, has made news and current affairs widespread and accessible to the masses. There are times when people do not have the resources or access to necessary information to demand justice, and here social media plays a crucial role. As critical information can be shared on social media and injustices can be easily brought to attention, thereby creating an accessible platform for the public to voice their opinions/issues/troubles/thoughts and seek help if necessary. On the other hand, we cannot ignore and have infinite examples of how misinformation spread on social media can have devastating effects in the lives of people and society as a whole.

Main body:

This research relates to identifying and understanding the impact of social media on adolescents in particular. The data collection method involved telephonic interviews of a sample size of 10 respondents within the age group of 13-18, over a duration of two months. The research methodology deployed is a qualitative and analytical lens of research; the method adopted to gather data was telephonic interactions with teen-agers who

are about 13-18 years of age. Ten respondents were contacted to get their perspectives and information relating to their usage of social media. The questions asked during the communication were as follows:

Q1. How much time do you spend on social media in a day?

Q2. Which app do you use the most?

Q3. What do you do on this app?

Q4. What is the impact of social media in your life?

Q5. What is the information you are gaining from social media? Do you verify it? If yes, then how?

Q6. What is the impact of social media on your mental health?

Research Questions

Why do teenagers not lessen the use of these social media apps despite being aware of its negative impact on them?

Has social media replaced newspapers and other electronic media at present times?

Hypothesis

In contemporary times, social media has been creating a negative impact as well as a positive one on the mental health of teenagers due to its vast nature and the wealth of information it provides.

The social nature and diversity of these platforms are what makes them attractive to youngsters. Social media offers platforms to the youth to build social relations with people, make new friends, find jobs and business opportunities, generate awareness about health-related issues and establish social well-being. Various studies show that prolonged use of social media can have a deteriorating effect on a teenager's mental health and can lead to problems like depression and low self-esteem. Moreover, access to social media by youth is a significant distraction and can have a pessimistic effect on them because of certain unrestricted information available on the internet. Findings also showed that over-utilization of social media by students lowers their productivity due to constant surfing on the internet which leads to physical as well as psychological problems such as mental and physical fatigue, strain, anxiety and panic. Juveniles are naive and often become victims of cyberbullying, hacking, identity thefts, phishing scams and exposure to pornographic material.

The study showed that while an average person spends about 3-4 hours on social media, there are others who exceed the average screen time. While talking to a respondent, it was noticed that she spends approximately 3 hours a day on social media, and Instagram was the most used app. She said, "You can explore many things from the ease of your home; like travel information, and various career opportunities. Despite its advantages, it has had a negative impact on my mental health because it has led to overthinking." Another respondent said that he uses Instagram for about 4-5 hours a day and gains information about new trends and general affairs around the world. It has replaced newspapers for him and his family but has had an adverse impact on his mental health. He feels depressed and drained by watching the affluent lives of other people on social media. Another user mentioned that he uses Snapchat and Instagram the most, and spends about 7-8 hours online per day. His psychological health has been negatively affected by the overuse of social media as it has disrupted his lifestyle, studies and sleeping schedule. Not only this but it has also been responsible for lowering his self-esteem too. Some of the common ways in which the excessive use of these social networking sites has impacted the teenagers' daily life is by creating an undue distraction, not letting them focus on themselves and their surroundings, as well as leading to depression for some as one's self-esteem gets lowered when they see the perfect and often fabricated materialistic lives of others portrayed on social media. These high standards of living and perfection make them feel inferior and gradually start affecting their mental health for the worse.

While most of the people describe its negative impact, there are some people who see this as a blessing in disguise. A respondent said, "I gain a lot of useful insights from these sites about new trends, health and fitness related awareness, and events. It not only lifts up my mood when I am feeling low but also makes me feel better about myself when I get comments on my posts." Another respondent said that she spends most of her time looking at news and facts that come up on social media and she verifies it through trusted sources. It has a very positive impact on her as she stays updated and can relate to people going through the same things as her. Another respondent said that it has proved to be very productive for her. During the lockdown, she was experiencing a lot of negative emotions due to the social isolation. To find a way out of this, she spent her time creating digital art and sharing it on her social media handles. The appreciation and applause that she received motivated her to devote more time in honing her artistic skills and gave her a new light of hope.

II. Conclusion

The outcomes of this research have to be seen in light of some limitations. Due to the short time period over which the research was conducted, the sample size was small; only 10 respondents could be spoken to and this restricted the study to a limited perspective as a large sample size is essential to ensure a representative distribution of population. So, the results are an outcome of the data collected in the span of time. Literature

review results may have varied if the number of responses and the time duration may change depending on various factors. Irrespective of the limitations, I feel that my conclusions and the kind of questions raised from the study are poignant to be looked at for further study. It is important to raise a new perspective in a new direction.

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