

Physical distancing overcome by social media: connecting of youth with family members through WhatsApp games to overcome depression

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: India, a land of culture, has the strongest pillar of Family as an institution. Families play a major role in the life of an Indian to overcome the stressful situation. India is currently undergoing a stressful situation, facing lockdown, maintaining physical distances to overcome Covid-19. Social Media proves to be a boon to connect family members through various applications and features during such times. **Purpose:** Lockdown has brought about isolation and passivity among the individuals. At such times, an individual may face depression and anxiety since there is nothing to do. This study highlights the use of social media to overcome physical distances during lockdown and thereby understanding the effect on Depression. **Design:** It is a descriptive research based on questionnaire as primary data. Data was collected and analysed to understand the nine different parameters of depression. The data was collected from 3 different regions from 500 respondents. The age was categorized as 15-24 and 25-34. **Findings:** It was found that people were more attached to family members when they were Motivated. But slowly they themselves were excited and took initiative to connect with family members. Different games catered to their interest of connecting with families and overcoming depression.

Keywords: Covid-19, Physical Distancing, Social Media, Youth, Family, Whatsapp, Depression

India is a land of rich cultures and values. The richness of heritage lies its roots in Family as an institution. India is well known for its joint family culture since a very long period of time. It is considered as the most important unit of social change. Family is considered important because it provides love, develops a framework of values. It helps to gain the foundation for life. Whenever an individual faces any problem in life, they turn up to their families for solutions.

COVID-19

Covid19 is an infectious disease caused by corona virus. It spreads through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person sneezes or coughs (Source: WHO). It

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Physical distancing overcome by social media: connecting of youth with family members through WhatsApp games to overcome depression

started from China and has hit all the countries. India found first affected case on 30th January 2020, a student who had travelled from Wuhan (Vara, 2020). And since then the spread continued. To control the spread of this infectious disease, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced Lockdown. Lockdown is an emergency protocol that prevents people from leaving a given area. A full lockdown will mean you must stay where you are and not exit or enter a building or the given area. This scenario usually allows for essential supplies. All non-essential activities remain shut for the entire period (Source: Business Standard, 2020, March 24). Since 24th of March India is facing physical distancing from their near and dear ones, the only means to avoid infection.

Social Media:

Social Media is an interactive computer mediated technology that helps in creating and sharing the information. WhatsApp, a social media application through which people build social relations and have real life connections (Akram & Kumar, 2017). During pandemic lockdown, people preferred to play certain games on WhatsApp to stay in touch with their friends and family members and reduce the stress of tense conversations (Source: TOI, 2020, April 6th). WhatsApp facilitates user to create groups and send message, information. In this group, there can be 256 members at a time. Family and friends' group are found in large numbers. During pandemic, WhatsApp acted more as a medium of entertainment for family members.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

- Recently a survey was conducted at the University of Sheffield and Ulster University by the psychologists, Dr. Liat Levita, to understand the effect of pandemic. They are studying the effect on subjective wellbeing, level of anxiety, depression and trauma systems among the people of age group 13-24 (Source: University News).
- Nearly 1800 students of China were screened to measure the symptoms of anxiety and depression. Corona Virus was first hit in China and the schools were closed down to avoid the spread. The high grade of depression and anxiety was seen due to no outdoor activities and socializing. Covid 19 is worsening the mental health of children as they were not mentally prepared for such pandemic. School is the only place in China where students receive mental support (Galvin, 2020).
- According to (Wang et. al, 2020), a research paper titled *Immediate Psychological Responses and Associated Factors during the Initial Stage of the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Epidemic among the General Population in China* emphasizes on the anxiety, depression and stress symptoms. They measured the psychological impact through symptoms developed, health status, people who came in contact of infected person, the increasing measures of taking safety precautions, the physical and mental illness feeling.

Very little research is available on psychological impact. In India, there is no as such research conducted. India is blessed with family culture and so this research emphasizes how pandemic has a relationship with family and thereby overcome depression.

Hypothesis:

Connecting with family on WhatsApp games has helped youth overcome depression.

Physical distancing overcome by social media: connecting of youth with family members through WhatsApp games to overcome depression

Research Design:

A research design is the arrangement of the conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to research purpose with economy in procedure (Kothari, 2007). This research is a study about how family as an agent of social institution has helped youth to connect and overcome depression. During the phase of lockdown, when youth cannot move out of house and the panic feeling all around can easily make them feel depressed.

Settings:

Cross sectional method was adopted for survey to understand the social media especially WhatsApp as a means to connect family during the epidemic. An online questionnaire was generated and passed on to the students. Further they were encouraged to share among their friends and family members.

Procedure:

Indian Government had recommended the public to minimize face-to-face interaction, isolate themselves at home. So, the potential respondents were electronically invited by existing study respondents. They completed the questionnaires in English through an online survey platform ('Google forms'). Data collection took place over 3 days from (25 April to 28 April 2020).

Survey Development:

The structured questionnaire consisted of questions that covered several aspects like Demographic details, different social media applications used to connect with family members, various games played among the family members and lastly the depression terms from DASS-21 were taken.

The questionnaire included understanding of youth and family bonding with the parameters like connecting with the family, taking initiative to connect, looking forward to connect, friends and calmness, desire to connect, motivation through connection, enthusiasm through connection, feeling of worthiness, adding meaning to life.

Family Bonding through Social Media:

A pool of 9 items with Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.893$) referring to the feelings of youth while connecting with family members was used to assess the participants perception to overcome depression during the lockdown phase. Respondents had to rate their agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree). The alpha value above 0.8 is considered as a good scale (Crotina, 1993).

Table 1 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.893	9

Participants:

According to National Youth Policy of 2014, the age prescribed for youth is 15-29, but while drafting the report, they had taken age 35 in to consideration. Supporting to this, the following research had age group as 15-24 and 25-34. Out of 500 respondents, 200 (40%)

Physical distancing overcome by social media: connecting of youth with family members through WhatsApp games to overcome depression

had personally experienced a feeling of depression. 220 respondents were from the age group of 15-24 while 280 respondents were in the age group of 25-34.

Analysis:

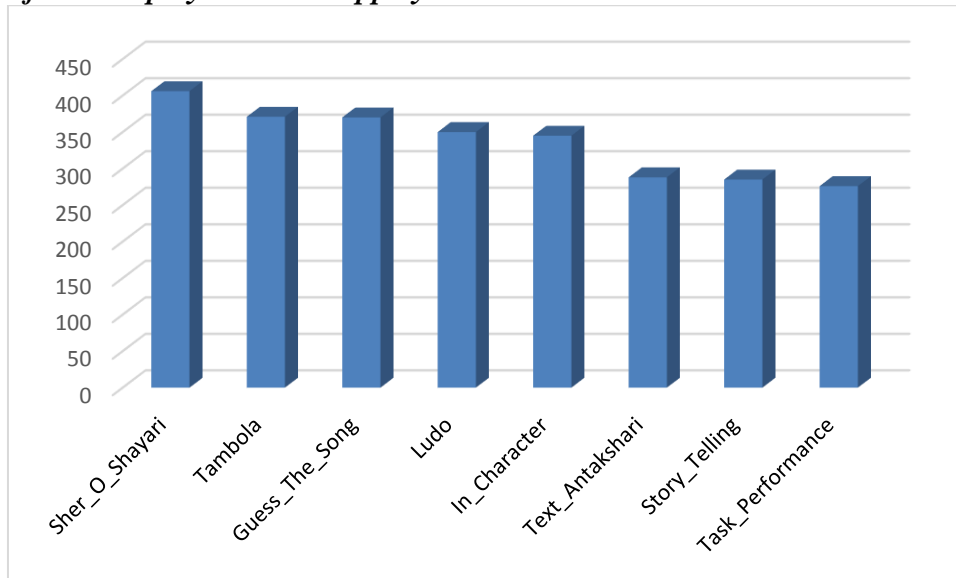
The 500 close ended responses were collected from 3 different areas. Mumbai, Kalyan-Dombivli and Bhiwandi. These were the three regions who had faced major infection of Coronavirus.

Table 2 Region wise collection of data

Region-wise Demographics			
Region	Age		Total
	15-24	25-34	
Mumbai	85	100	185
Kalyan-Dombivli	70	100	170
Bhiwandi	65	80	145
Total	220	280	500

The above table shows the region wise collection of data from the 3 regions. 180 (37%) data was collected from Mumbai, 170 (34%) from Kalyan-Dombivli and 29% from Bhiwandi.

Games preferred to play on WhatsApp by Youth:



Sher-O-Shayari, the game where the comments are passed through poems was the most preferred one by youth. 81.2% of the youth voted for this game. **Tambola**, a family housie game was played through WhatsApp by 74.2%. This game created an interest in youth to join with family members during lockdown. Eventually when they developed the habit of connecting with the family members, they enjoyed other games like **Guess the song** with 74% of the youth, Ludo (70%), In-character (65%), Text-Antakshari (57.6%), Story-Telling (57%), Task-Performance (55.2%).

Physical distancing overcome by social media: connecting of youth with family members through WhatsApp games to overcome depression

Preliminary Analysis:

As they had not been validated yet, exploratory factor analyses (EFA) with principal axis factoring and promax rotation were led to extract the factors of the feelings of youth while connecting with family members scale. For this, sphericity was checked using Bartlett's test and adequacy of sampling using the Keiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure.

Table 4 KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.858
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2554.565
	df	36
	Sig.	.000

According to rule of thumb, KMO value above 0.8 indicates the sampling is adequate. According to table 2, the KMO value is 0.858 and the significance value 0.000 which is less than 0.05. Therefore, it is concluded that the sampling of 500 respondents was adequate for the study.

Table 5 Factor loadings for exploratory factor analyses (EFA) with principal axis factoring

	Factor Loading
Positive_Feeling	.775
Initiative_to_Connect	.730
Looked_Forward_to_Connect	.890
Connecting_Calmness	.845
Strong_Desire_Connect	.804
Motivated	.946
Enthusiastic_Connecting	.730
Worthy_Feeling	.702
Meaning_to_Life	.892

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

According to rule of thumb, all the factors in the table fall above the value of 0.7, the variables are considered for the further study to understand to role of games to overcome depression.

Descriptive statistics were performed on the variables of family connection to overcome depression and then ranked according to their mean values.

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Motivated	4.17	1.130
Positive_Feeling	4.16	1.032
Initiative_to_Connect	4.00	1.106
Looked_Forward_to_Connect	4.00	1.073
Meaning_to_Life	3.97	1.080
Connecting_Calmness	3.96	1.228
Worthy_Feeling	3.81	1.066
Enthusiastic_Connecting	3.79	1.039
Strong_Desire_Connect	3.71	1.244

Physical distancing overcome by social media: connecting of youth with family members through WhatsApp games to overcome depression

Feeling Motivated has highest mean value of 4.17 and standard deviation of 1.130, followed by Positive feeling with mean score of 4.16 and standard deviation of 1.032. The youth felt motivated and developed a positive feeling after connecting to family.

There can be a plausible explanation that after feeling *Motivated* and developing a *Positive Feeling* of connecting with family, the youth took an *Initiative to Connect* with the family members and friends and they *Looked Forward to Connect*. The connection not only added a *Meaning to Their Life* but also brought *Calmness* after going through stress and panic of corona virus. This generated a *Worthy Feeling* for themselves when they were feeling low. A feeling of worthiness for self, created *Enthusiastic Connecting* through other modes of connections like video calls which showed they had a *Strong Desire to Connect*.

To further analyse each of the variable, significance analysis through Chi Square was performed on each of the variable. Chi Square will describe about how each of the aspect is related to overcome depression.

Table 7 Chi Square Results

Variables	Value	df	Sign
Motivated	414.940	3	0.000
Positive_Feeling	204.080	3	0.000
Initiative_to_Connect	292.900	3	0.000
Looked_Forward_to_Connect	273.740	3	0.000
Connecting_Calmness	274.580	3	0.000
Strong_Desire_Connect	135.740	3	0.000
Enthusiastic_Connecting	234.340	3	0.000
Worthy_Feeling	334.700	3	0.000
Meaning_to_Life	254.260	3	0.000

According to table 5, youth felt **Motivated** after connecting to family was valued at 414.940 followed by **Worthy Feeling** 334.700. All the variables have significance value of 0.000 which is less than p value of 0.05.

This accepts the hypothesis that connecting with family on WhatsApp games has helped youth overcome depression.

CONCLUSION

Social media has taken away from us the joy of living with family. We are connected to each other with a distance. The youth of age 15-34 is occupied either in education or professional development of individual. Therefore, they don't find time to connect with family members. Fortunately, COVID-19 brought in the phase of lockdown from March 18th. The educational institutions were closed down, the offices were also at a halt. The means of entertainment for the youth were also locked down by the government to avoid the spread of the disease. At such times, when youth is asked to stay home for days together, they kept on over-thinking about the disease. As per the conversation with students, over-thinking brought in them a sort of Depression. Then this GenY connected to their friends and family members through different social media applications like Video Conferencing, sending messages, calling them personally. Playing games was an indirect medium of connecting with family members of all age group. Connecting with the family for the day through different games kept them motivated and connected. This was the phase when they understood the importance of

Physical distancing overcome by social media: connecting of youth with family members through WhatsApp games to overcome depression

relations, family members, friends. This connection has added altogether a different meaning to their life.

LIMITATIONS

This study is focused only on youth. Similar studies can be carried out on people of old age. There are many interior regions who might have different ways of connecting with family members to overcome depression. That study needs to be highlighted. The study can also be conducted through time-series of lockdown period. Since depression is a major health problem which can affect all ages.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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