

Cyber wellness: balanced offline and online lives - the perspective of medical professionals towards new humanism

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ABSTRACT

Research on social network sites has examined how people integrate offline and online life. But there is a lack of research with a particular emphasis on their communication for better health within health-related groups. In this paper, we examine how offline ties are almost non-existent, but online ties are strong in terms of the development of new humanism and in apparent social life. All of us today have a parallel existence even in the world of health information/misinformation. This shows up as our online identity on social media sites, discussion forums, learning communities and even personal health blogs and websites. Today using social media every day has become more of a need than a choice in communication, where we are finding solutions to our health care needs in an ever-connected world. This study aims to demonstrate if it can do more harm than good, if we lose sight of the right motivations and values, and fail to create a balance between our online and offline lives from the perspective of medical professionals. The increased challenges such as cybercrimes, digital deceptions and more have its effect on cyber wellness. As we become more cyber-smart every day, we also become more cyber-endangered in living a healthy life. According to the Task Force on Cyber Wellness, cyber wellness is defined as ‘the positive well-being of Internet users and healthy cyberculture for the Internet community’. In this study, because the development of a cyber wellness culture is a complex, evolving and multi-tiered phenomenon, and the use of several theories addressing different constructs are indicated. Maslow’s Developmental Theory and Roger’s Theory of Diffusion of Innovation were the point of departure in this study. The study demonstrates how online lives of youth are moving towards an unhealthy life from the perspective of oral health medical professionals. Based on an online survey the study establishes how the majority (57%) the youth are abandoning the abstractions of structuralism and returning to performance that entails new humanism leading to healthier lives with the essence of the cyber experience that is fundamentally moral and ethically grounded in the digital space.

Keywords: *Cyber wellness, New Humanism, Digital Space, Online and Offline Lives*

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Maslow's hierarchy of needs tells us that as humans, we communicate to meet a range of different needs, both physical and social. Inclusive of this are physical needs for survival, safety and protection needs, belonging needs, self-esteem needs and self-actualization needs.

The process of adopting new innovations has been studied for over 30 years, and one of the most popular adoption models is described by Rogers in his book, *Diffusion of Innovations* (Sherry & Gibson, 2002). As expressed in this definition, innovation, communication channels, time, and social system are the four key components of the diffusion of innovations.

With the rapid spread of Globalization, Communication tools have been causing the societies to get closer to each other today overcoming the boundaries and various barriers (Nakilcioğlu, 2007: 2).¹

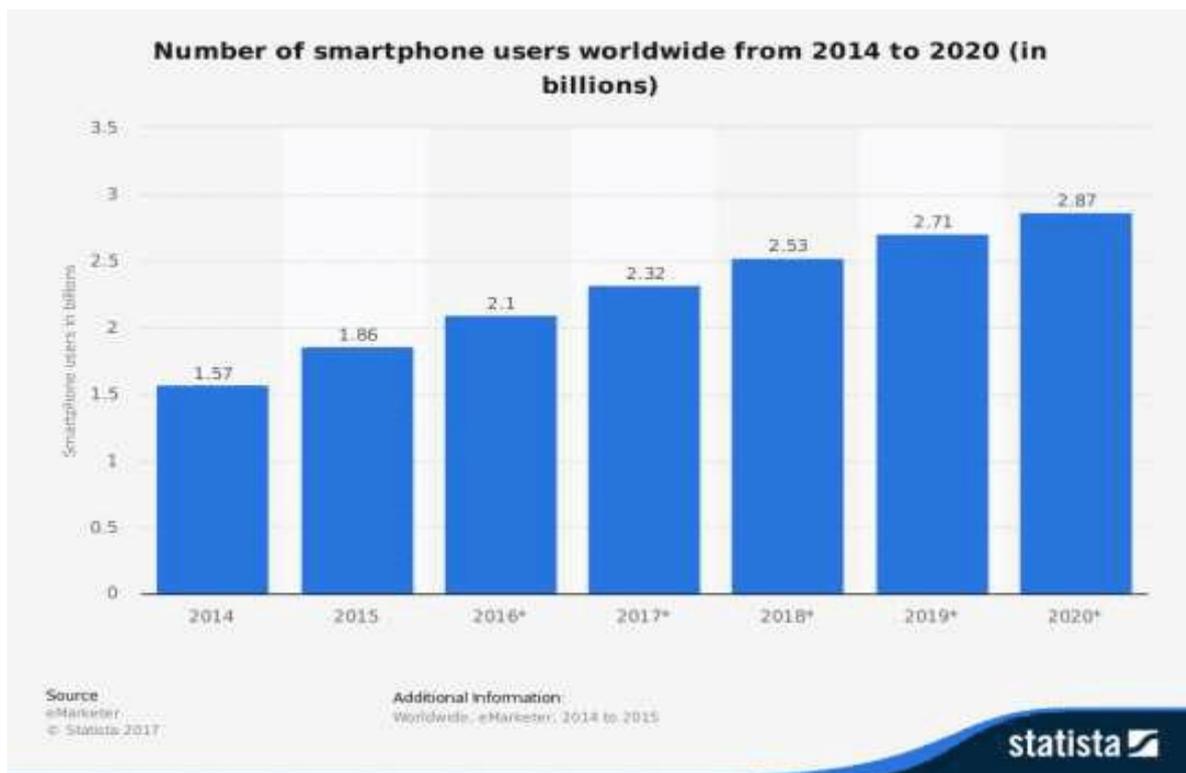
This paper aims to demonstrate how online lives of youth are moving towards an unhealthy pattern which has collateral effects on their lifestyle and ultimately the overall well-being from the perspective of oral health medical professionals and a psychology student. The excess of online presence and the issues associated are discussed below.

Communication

The scientific literature clearly states that, we as a species possess socially gated brains that help us navigate successfully in the socio-cultural society along with other socially adept individuals by a continuous exchange of information. Nothing, including the basis of our foundation which includes reading and mathematics could be learnt in isolation. These skills emerge in the context of early adult child interactions that feed communication skills. A number of scholars urge practitioners to teach reading by enriching language learning which in itself is rooted in early social interactions. Social interactions are the currency of our species. As Michael Tomasello of Duke University argues, we are the ultra-human species.²

However, our need for human social interaction is very rapidly being replaced by non-human social technological apps. Our digital footprint has drastically risen since the introduction of modern smartphones in 2007 and digital tablets in 2010. In 2017, children 2- to 8-years-old were using screen media for almost 3 hours a day, including 1 hour with mobile devices, the older crowd of teens are clocking in at about 9 hours per day. Clocking at about 7-10 discretionary waking hours per day, these numbers represent a worrying and staggering entrance of technology into the daily activities of children, leaving little sparse time for face-to-face interactions.

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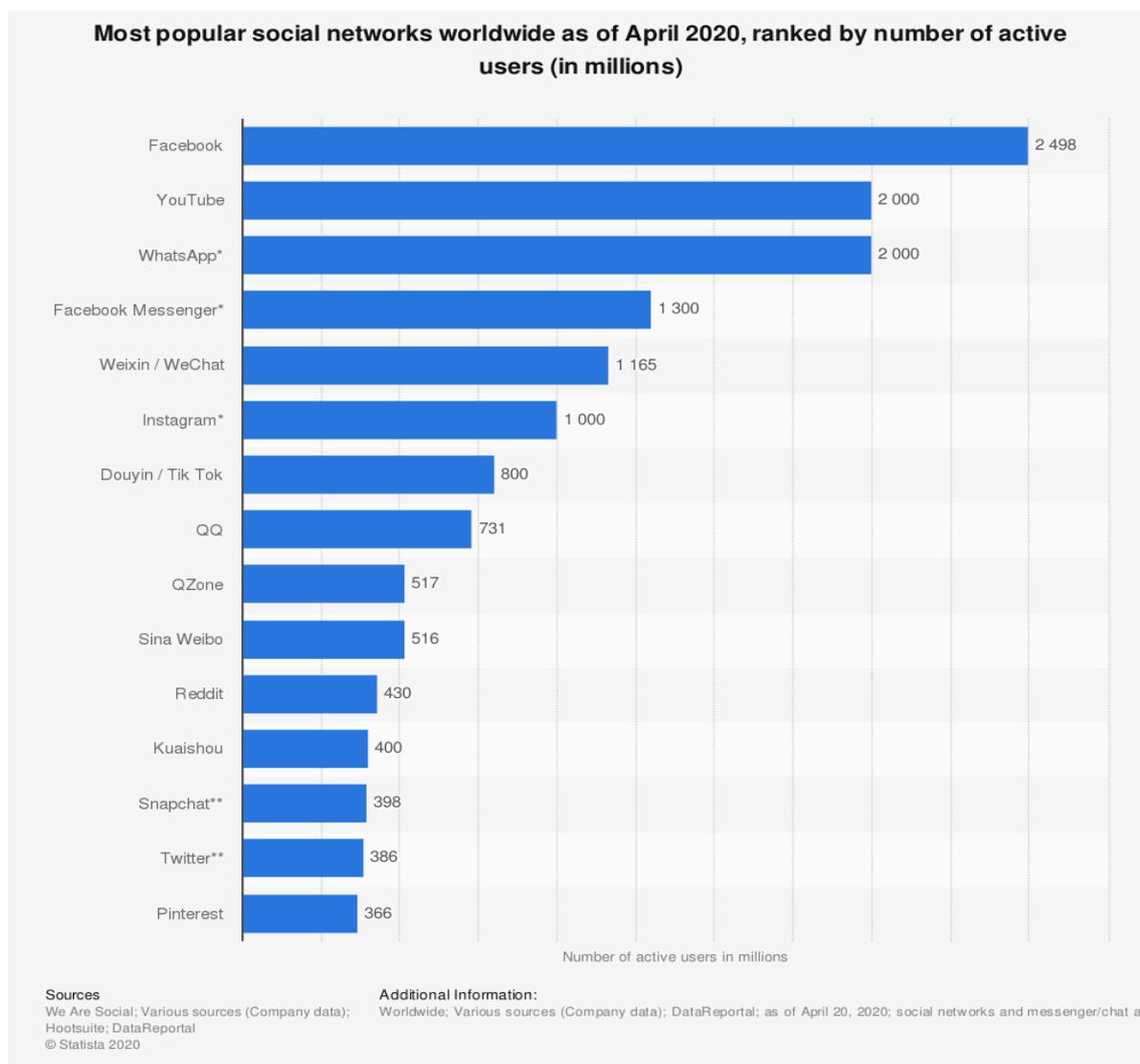


Social media apps offer a platform for human communication where random exchanging and discussion is essential and a norm surpassing the time and space limitation. This environment, which develops a unique cultural world, has become the driving force of the emergence of new social and individual forms of relations, new identities and the emergence of a new global cultural environment.

Apps

Facebook, what used to be the leading figure of social media applications, has now in some sort been overthrown by Instagram. Instagram was launched in 2010 on iOS, and an Android-friendly version came through by 2012. Instagram, though has happened to win several 'best mobile application awards', was declared the 'Worst for Young Mental Health', in a study conducted in the UK by the Royal Society of Mental Health. Millions of people put up 'stories' on Instagram every day, elaborating on how they were 'triggered' by an occurrence that may have taken place that day. What they do not realise, is the gravity of that word. A trigger in psychology is a stimulus such as a smell, sound, or sight that triggers feelings of trauma. People typically use this term when describing posttraumatic stress (PTSD). However, Instagram unfortunately, is just the tip of the iceberg. Cinemas and theatres in India were officially bid goodbye to in 2020, due to the global pandemic. Their true demise, however, took place when applications like Netflix, Hotstar, Amazon Prime, etc. were launched in our country. More than 1500 shows and 4000 movies are available on Netflix alone. What we don't take into consideration, is that a wide range of users (of a wide range of ages & sensitivities), have access to all of the said available data. Netflix is showcasing content that romanticises violence, rape & suicide- making it extremely inappropriate for any audience- not even just a younger one.

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Addiction, Risks, Harms

The results of neurological and psychiatric tests on social media users show that similar biological and psychological symptoms of alcohol, cigarette and drug addicts are seen in active social media users. (Andreassen et al)³

Social media addiction can be viewed as one form of Internet addiction, where individuals exhibit a compulsion to use social media to excess (Griffiths, 2000; Starcevic, 2013)⁴. Studies have shown that the symptoms of social media addiction can be manifested in mood, cognition, physical and emotional reactions, and interpersonal and psychological problems (Balakrishnan & Shamim, 2013⁴;) ⁵ (Błachnio, Przepiorka, Senol-Durak, Durak, & Sherstyuk, 2017)⁶. It has been reported that social media addiction affects approximately 12% of users across social networking sites (Alabi, 2012; Wolniczak et al., 2013; Wu, Cheung, Ku, & Hung, 2013)⁷.

Many studies on social media usage and mental health have shown that the prolonged use of social media such as Facebook is positively associated with mental health problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression and negatively associated with long-term well-being

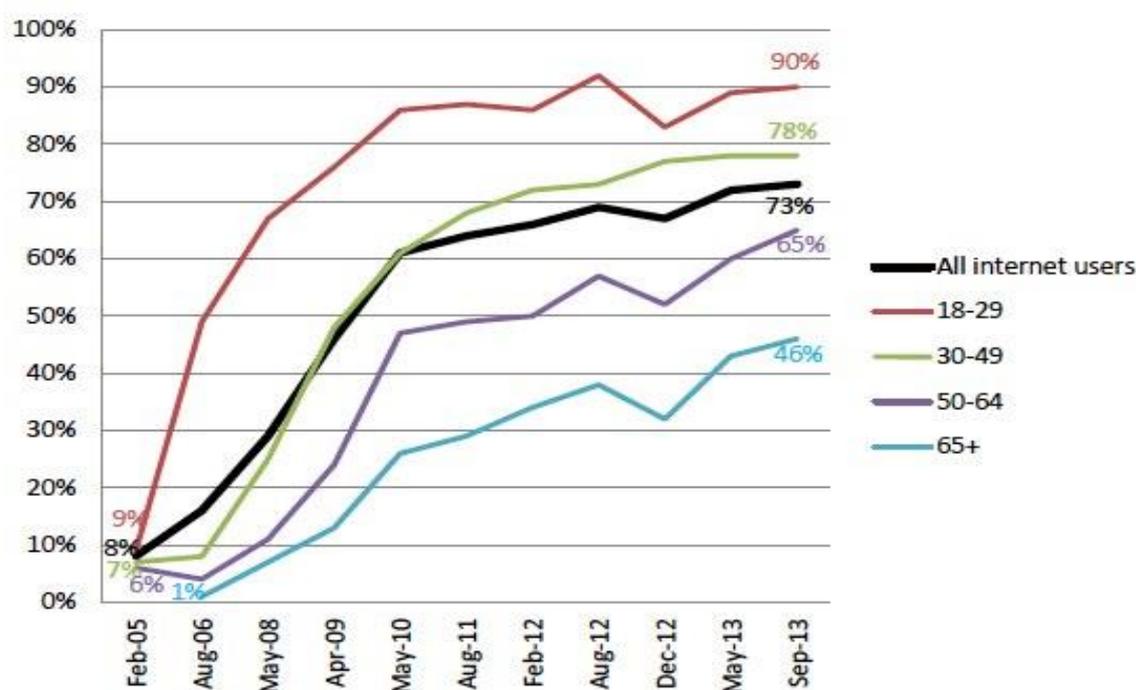
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(Eraslan-Capan, 2015; Hong, Huang, Lin & Chiu, 2014; Malik & Khan, 2015; Marino et al., 2017; Pantic, 2014; Shakya & Christakis, 2017; Toker & Baturay, 2016)⁸. For example, the time spent on social media was positively related to depressive symptoms among high school students in Central Serbia (Pantic et al., 2012)⁹ and among young adults in the United States (Lin et al., 2016). Furthermore, certain categories of social media use have been shown to be associated with reduced academic performance (Al-Menayes, 2014, 2015)¹⁰; (Junco, 2012.)¹¹

Importantly, frequent social media usage does not necessarily indicate social media addiction (Griffiths, 2010)¹² and therefore does not always have negative implications for individuals' mental health (e.g., Jelenchick, Eickhoff, & Moreno, 2013)¹³ or academic performance (Pasek & Hargittai, 2009).¹⁴ A key distinction between normal over-engagement in social media that may be occasionally experienced by many and social media addiction is that the latter is associated with unfavorable consequences when online social networking becomes uncontrollable and compulsive (Andreassen, 2015).¹⁵

Social networking site use by age group, 2005-2013

% of internet users in each age group who use social networking sites, over time



Source: Latest data from Pew Research Center's Internet Project Library Survey, July 18 – September 30, 2013. N=5,112 internet users ages 18+. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. The margin of error for results based on internet users is +/- 1.6 percentage points.

Physical and mental changing habits

Another major downside to the dark world of social media is the projectile growth of consumerism and hence Capitalism. Now while this could be argued to have helped the growth of trade and the economy in general, it comes at the expense of physical and mental well-being. While a few of the 'trends' such as the ALS Bucket Challenge were meant to create awareness, most of the trends operate with a social disregard to health in general.

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A study has indicated that perceived usefulness of a food blogger's recommendation had a significant effect towards the consumer's intention to follow the recommendation. This in turn leads to unmonitored and most of the time, unhealthy eating habits which runs on a loop. This motivates the unwarranted consumerism.

Social media has now become a significant factor in the body image of young men and women (Perloff, 2014: 363)¹⁶. Individual's efforts to create virtual self-events like increasing the number of followers, fame, self-esteem and showing body are idolized in social media. This has caused a massive surge in the cases of anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

If there are concerns about the people, particularly the teenagers, who in their growing phase miss out on adequate nutritional supply thus leading to detrimental effects on growth, there is also the other spectrum. The number of people across a wide spectrum being affected by obesity and early-onset of diabetes grows continually every year. The teenage and young-adults group of individuals are affected even psychologically because of it. The body shaming and other forms of bullying that these individuals face has adverse psychological and sociological effects on them prompting to extreme measure like self-harm, isolation and suicide as an extreme step.

Instagrammers surveyed from many generations say they use the platform multiple times per day

Ages 18-24	Ages 25-34	Ages 35-44	Ages 45-54	Ages 55+
67%	60%	49%	43%	31%

Source: Facebook

Disorders

Narcissism, which we can also associate with the concept of arrogance, points to the problematic situation of mythological character, lover of self, falling in love with his own image. Narcissism culture is spreading in media and popular culture and consumption culture forced by media. Culture spreading through mass media shines beauty, currency and fame, and constructs these values as objects of worship (Alanka and Cezik, 2016: 550)¹⁷. Narcissists believe that, they are much better than others in terms of status, intelligence, creativity and beauty, and see themselves as special, prior and unique although they are not so. Continuous search for fame and desire to be famous are typical characteristics of the narcissist. People with a large number of followers are named as social media celebrities and phenomena.

Another uncommon cluster B personality disorder, Histrionic Personality Disorder:

Histrionic personality disorder involves symptoms such as expressing excessive emotions, being provocative and seeking an excessive amount of attention in ordinary social situations. Together with narcissistic and borderline personality disorders, histrionic personality disorder is classified in DSM-V as a Cluster B personality disorder. It typically begins in early adulthood and someone with the disorder presents symptoms in a variety of contexts such as at hanging out with friends, while at work, in public or on social media.

Social media might worsen histrionic personality disorder by heightening opportunities to express symptoms of the disorder such as seeking attention, being easily influenced or

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considering relationships to be more intimate than they are. Here are potential ways that social media can be destructive for people with the disorder. Social media can make people feel happy and rewarded when they receive attention (e.g., likes or retweets), but sad and dejected when they do not. This can promote a sense of feeling uncomfortable when one is not the centre of attention and doing more dramatic things to try and win back that attention. People with histrionic disorder might find it difficult to cope with rejection or negative reinforcement from social media, and therefore it might be helpful to limit their social media use or opt for platforms with a minimal psychological reward system built into them.

Social media gives people a false sense of reality in which relationships can appear more emotionally intimate than they actually, which can heighten the symptom of histrionic personality disorder concerning the illusion of intimacy. Friendships based on social media are not the same as friendships in real life. This does not mean that they are less important friendships, but friendships developed through social media are at risk of existing in a sense of faked intimacy. For people with histrionic personality disorder, friendships that exist within social media can be confusing and unhelpful in presenting an illusion of intimacy that confirms rather than challenges one of the disorder's key symptoms.

MENSTRUAL CYCLE & EFFECTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

A study was conducted by Su Jin Nam and Chiyong Cha¹⁸, which examined the effects of social-media-based support on premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and physical activity among female South Korean university students.

This quasi-experimental study with an equivalent-control-group pretest–posttest design randomly assigned 64 female students with PMS to the experimental or control group. The experimental group received social-media-based support through a smartphone application, text messaging, and e-mail for one menstrual cycle between September and December, 2016. Descriptive and inferential statistics included a Chi-square test and independent and paired t-tests. It concluded that Female university students with PMS experienced decreased premenstrual symptoms and increased physical activity with social-media-based support, which could be an efficacious, accessible, and widely available nursing intervention to manage PMS and physical activity.

Colin Sumpter and Belen Torondel³ stated in their systematic review of the health and social management of menstrual hygiene management that social media does tend to have a detrimental effect on the menstrual cycle in the long run, and also on its regularity.

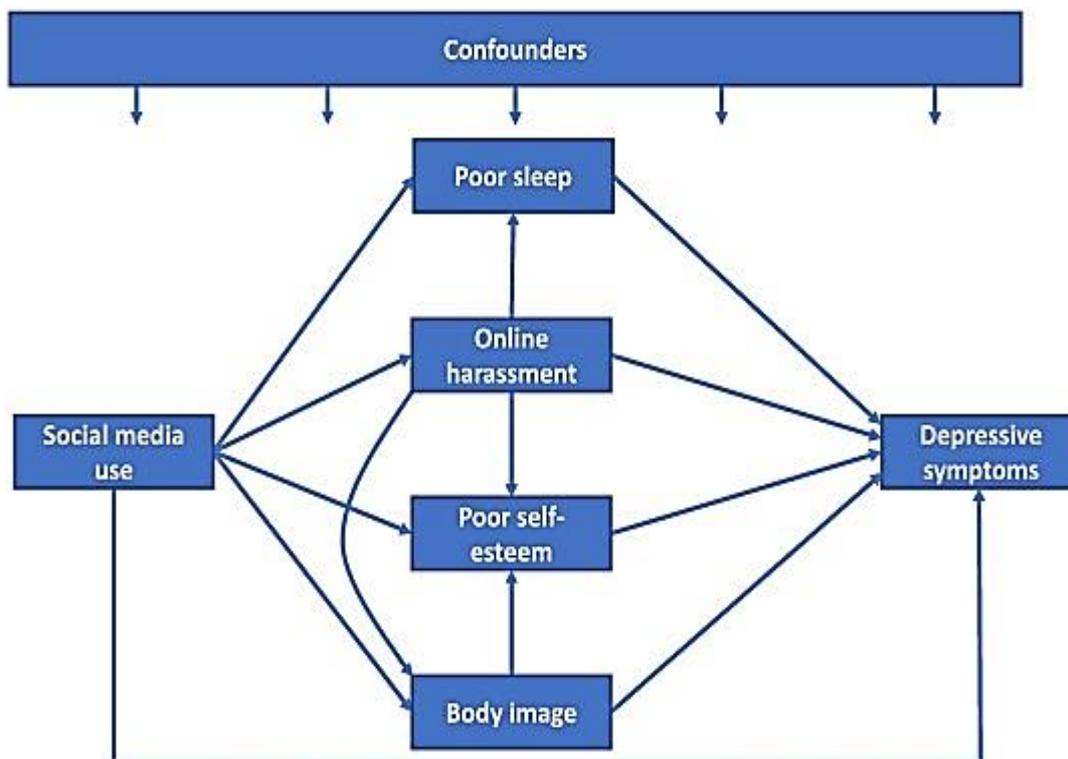
Speaking of the menstrual cycle, we must also throw light upon the portrayal of menstruation in media. Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and so on, has enabled conversations which contrast with existing patriarchal gender norms to an unprecedented degree. Whereas previously there was a lack of spaces, physical and virtual, to express any feelings on menstruation, presently, one can readily access support on online feminist communities. Furthermore, the recent wave of body-positive campaigns has significantly helped in the push towards normalising menstruation in the public. #Periodtalk, #Livetweetyourperiod, #AMAMU, #JustATampon, #HappytoBleed are just a few examples of trending conversations designed to challenge stigmas and shaming through its open access forums.

Effect of changing lifestyle on dopamine levels

According to the hypothesis of incompleteness, individuals who do not provide enough satisfaction with natural awards (water, food, sexuality) are directed towards the items and behaviors that stimulate the reward mechanism (Bozkurt et al., 2013: 240)¹⁹. The most important chemical that drives the prize mechanism is dopamine. People in the world have found themselves in this dopamine cycle, with or without awareness. Figures like heart, thumb, etc. which have no meaning in daily life are triggering some chemicals in human brain and people are made to feel happy with these figures. Although there are age-limits established by law for harmful habits such as alcohol, gambling and smoking in almost all countries in the World, none of them have age restriction for any technological device (Kotler, 2017).²⁰

There is a large increase in dopamine levels when the indication is seen. The dopamine disappears quickly after the mental sensation is experienced. Then the brain starts searching for dopamine again, the individual repeatedly feels request of looking at the phone screen. And should the expected reward not be received, dopamine activity drops, sending a negative feedback signal to the relevant parts of the brain, weakening the positive association (Haynes, 2018)²¹

Studies with altered tryptophan levels show conclusively that such alterations can change both mood and feelings and/or behavior related to irritability and aggression. The most plausible explanation for this is that serotonin does have a direct effect on mood, irritability and aggression. The relationship works in two different directions, with lowered serotonin resulting in more negative mood and/or behavior while increased serotonin levels have the opposite effect. The effects on mood and aggression seem to be independent, but this issue has not been studied directly and this conclusion must remain tentative.



Source: E Clinical Medicine

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New humanism

The word Humanism is derived from the Latin concept humanities which refer to friendly behaviors and good attitude towards the others without distinction. It is characterized by personal principles and beliefs towards his/her duties and responsibilities when dealing with the others, especially those in need. The humanistic characters include honesty, empathy compassion, altruism, and care of patients with respect to their dignity and beliefs. It is a philosophical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively.

The intensive use of social media is damaging to the social functioning of the individual and society in some areas. A study describes, grounded in clinicians' experiences of integrating humanism within their workplace settings, a set of relationship-centred attitudes and behaviours that foster and identify humanism in interactions with patients, colleagues, learners and the self.

The existing healthcare system does not take into consideration the effect of Internet on the wellness of an individual as a major entity. However, changing times require holistic and modern approach. An anthropological approach which, among others, takes into account the human being's specific nature (Spijk 2015)²². The problems concerning flows of information between modules of the system, decision making, risk and knowledge management are the standard topics in social and economic cybernetics (Bar-Yam 2006²³; Engemann and Miller 2015²⁴; Lin et al. 2014²⁵; Sanchez et al. 2015²⁶; Val et al. 2014²⁷; Yager 2015²⁸) and can be easily adapted to health care.

AutoML also is capable of processing a significant amount of data, identifying the important features, and extracting pattern for modeling which are more accurate and work faster than classic models. All of these characteristics are important in diagnosis of mental health problems which require precise prediction in a real-time manner on social media.

The hypothetical health care system, proposed in Bielecki and Stocki 2010 and analyzed in Bielecki and Nieszporska 2016²⁹, can ensure realization of the drawbacks of the existing system.

Nevertheless, it seems that in recent years the awareness of necessity of starting discussion about a philosophical basis of health care systems increases (Oduncu 2012³⁰; Simonstein 2012)³¹. Even in the theoretical studies (Badcott and Leget 2013³²; Delmar 2013³³; Solbakk 2014³⁴; Spielthener 2015³⁵; Stabell and Naden 2006³⁶) the philosophical basis is chosen arbitrarily without profound justification.

It is not our aim to offer a formulated, so-called "rigorous approach" or prescribed method, but one strategy that may be useful in navigating the increasingly vast and complex store and network of information found through social media.³⁷ The medical organizations could employ experts with good humanistic knowledge, skills, and experience in the interpersonal skills to qualitatively evaluate professionalism and humanism among medical students who will be the future doctors ultimately.

CONCLUSION

The youth in particular need to abandon the abstractions of structuralism and return to performance and mindfulness that entails new humanism leading to healthier lives with the

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essence of the cyber experience that is fundamentally moral and ethically grounded in the digital space. The medical professionals need to have an open approach to adapting holistic and humanistic methods in understanding and treating conditions that arise because of cyber issues.

Online lives of youth can move towards a better healthy life from the perspective of health medical professionals, due to the access to health information in terms of credibility, accuracy and evolving of a new humanism.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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