

The Relationship between Social Media and Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

The goal of the study is to understand and analyze the relationship between social media and anxiety. Research done in previous years revolved around the concept of social media and overall mental health. Hence, this qualitative research particularly emphasizes on the relation between social media and anxiety. Social media platforms said to be helpful with regards to the work that can be easily done using all the information online, easy share of material and important documents, connecting with friends and family wherever and whenever. Although, there is a negative side of social media as well. Keeping the negative side and how it can lead to chances of having signs and symptoms of anxiety, following objectives were framed, first, to study the increased usage of social media's effect on anxiety. Second, to find most used platform of social media. Finally, to study about the productive usage of social media. All the objectives were studied and addressed in detailed manner in the research. There are four hypothesis which were formulated in this study, 1) there will be a negative relationship between social media and anxiety, 2) there will be negative consequences of spending most of the time on social media, 3) humans interact more with each other on social media than in real life, 4) lastly, people compare themselves with others online. These hypotheses were put forward with the help of previous review of literature and collected data by interviewing 30 participants (15 female and 15 male participants). These participants were selected based on random sampling and aged between 18-29 years. For the analysis of the data, narrative research design was used. After analysis the results, it was concluded that there is a negative relationship between social media and anxiety along with many negative consequences. These consequences majorly consist of poor sleep quality, low self-esteem, symptoms of anxiety and in some cases depression as well. Also, another main finding was that people socialize more online and compare themselves with others' life and experiences. Moreover, it is recommended that more studies should be done on the negative effects of using social media platforms to increase the awareness of mental health and its importance.

Keywords: *Social Media, Anxiety, Mental Health, Comparison*

Everyone says that human beings are the social species or animals. Well, this is very true but only to a certain point. In earlier times, an individual's end goal was used to be to get successful enough that they can spend at least their evening and night with their family in a secured and beautiful house of their own. Whereas now a days, this is not the end goal for most of us. People thrive for success and peace in their life, but they are not satisfied even after getting successful and hence, they find it hard to attain peace.

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Social Media

Social media is the one of the online wires through which people connect to each other and share thoughts and ideas visually. Thereby, it is also known as networking sites. Social media not only helps us to feel connected with one another but also makes it fun while engaging ourselves in online activities like posting pictures and videos, getting in touch with people from far away, and experiencing novelty. Following is some of the well-known examples of social media platforms: -

- Instagram
- Facebook
- WhatsApp
- LinkedIn
- Snapchat
- YouTube
- Twitter

All the above platforms have their own benefits and specialties. Although, they are very similar and share many common features. Hence, people prefer to spend time on these platforms according to their uses. Such as Instagram is mainly for posting pictures, videos, reels, and stories. Thereby, those who like to explore the world and tell their experiences to other people, spent most of their time on Instagram and earn as an influencer. On the other hand, WhatsApp and Facebook are mostly used for conversations with family and friends via individual or group chat, LinkedIn for official purposes like sending resumes for jobs and internships and similarly, for recruitment and selection. Whereas snapchat is used to clicking pictures and making videos to fill up the memories. Most importantly, YouTube is one of those essential platforms which helps an individual to learn anything anywhere like related to cooking, studies, art and many more. Lastly, twitter is generally for sharing thoughts and posts regarding world affairs.

Impact of Social Media

Social media users grew to 137 million in the year of 2022. Initially, the purpose of social media was to connect the users to one another but in a very less time, social media has multipurpose. As social media usage increased, subsequently its effect on people and their lives also increased. Everything has a positive and a negative side of it. Similarly, social media also has both positive and negative impact on a lot of areas of our life.

Positive Impact of Social Media

The positive side of social media has many benefits and fruitful outcomes in people's life. Starting with the most amazing advantage of using social media as briefly discussed above, is getting in touch with our loved ones from far away. Not only we get into touch with those we are already acquainted with but also with many strangers who eventually over the period becomes best of our friends and family. Anytime of the day we can share our picture, videos and bits and pieces of our daily life to one another, to keep them in loop.

Negative Impact of Social Media

Although, there are also plenty of negative consequences of being on social media. As communication is one of the main purposes of these platforms, this is why miscommunication happens the most because of its extreme usage. Reason for miscommunication could be the limitation of understanding the voice tone of the other person when communicating something through text or message resulting in

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misunderstandings and conflicts. Another reason is missing on the feeling of being heard and understood by the reader as the listening is not present at that particular moment. This creates a lot of fights and problems eventually.

Therefore, after considering all the factors of using social media, it is convincible that these online platforms can be really helpful but at the same time it can also result in major negative outcomes.

Mental health

Mental health can be defined as an individual's overall well-being concerning, social, psychological and emotional aspect. Integration of both physical as well as mental health is important if one is looking for a healthy lifestyle. In many hospitals, clinical and health centers professionals and experts have already incorporated taking care of mental health along with physical health. Thus, finally people are developing in the field of psychology and improvement of mental health especially in India. The stigma and discrimination regarding mental health of a person is still there and it will be a long shot to cater it, but people started accepting and understanding the importance of mental health and why is it important to take care of it.

Generally, people think that mental health is something which only concerns with our psychological health. Well, mental health not only considers our psychological health but also, social, and emotional wellbeing as well. It can be said that wellbeing of our mental health can be taken care of if we focus on all those areas which deals and affect the cognition and perception.

Social Media and Mental Health

Concept of social media and mental health is well known by most of us. People generally entertain online platforms in their daily routine to get motivated by the activities and experiences of others which also helps to boost the confidence of oneself.

Although, there are a lot of reasons because of which mental health can be affected badly. From scoring less in an exam to cyber bullying, people face minor as well as major issues which often leads to mental health disorders. Besides such issues, people also go through feeling of anxiousness because of general or everyday problems. For example, feeling the pressure to fit into the online world.

Anxiety

Anxiety can be defined as persistent, excessive and intense fear regarding daily life circumstances. Also, people usually get confused between fear and anxiety and think of these terms as same. The difference between the two can be understood with the fact that fear is about a specified thing or situation, for example, fear of dogs. Whereas, feeling of anxiousness which is not really specified and is very uncertain, for example, being anxiousness when you enter your workplace but don't exactly know what the worry is about.

These social media platforms are no less than the concerns we deal with in our daily life that triggers anxiety. For instance, teenagers feel anxious when they look at their friend's enjoyment posts online on Instagram. Another very common example would be of those who are going through major transitions in their life like graduating, feels a lot of nervousness and tension when they see people having stability in their life including work-life balance.

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Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety

Generally, people ignore the signs and symptoms of anxiety probably because of two reasons, first, purely because they are not aware of this term “anxiety” and about the signs, and another reason is that they do not take it seriously and keep it very casual. Although, it is necessary to consider these factors because it can hamper the functioning of an individual with their daily routine. Hence, being aware of the indications is very important. Following is some of the symptoms of anxiety: -

- Feeling of restlessness
- Fast heartbeat
- Trembling and sweating
- Issues while sleeping
- Going through gastrointestinal difficulties
- Continuous worrying
- Feeling of helplessness
- Difficulty during socializing
- Trouble making new friends or talking to a new person.
- Uncontrollable negative thoughts

It is essential to look out for the signs and symptoms of anxiety on time because when anxiety starts interfering with the functioning of our regular behaviors and thoughts, gets excessive and irrational then it can turn into a disorder. Generalized anxiety disorder, separation anxiety disorder and specific phobias are some of the examples of anxiety disorders.

Rationale of The Study

The focus of the study is on the relationship between two variables, independent variable which is social media and anxiety as a dependent variable. Social media and challenges that people face on these social media sites can have greater impact on their physical, emotional and mental health. Therefore, for the overall wellbeing of an individual it is important to consider all these aspects of human’ wellness. Considering the same, this research aims at finding all those consequences and impacts that can lead to possibilities of having anxiety issues. Participants were interviewed for the collection and analysis of the data. Also, analysis and evaluation of the in-depth study is done using narrative research design. Lastly, main motivation of this study is to emphasize on the direct relationship between social media and anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To understand the relationship between social media and anxiety.

Objective

- To study the impact of increased usage of social media on anxiety.
- To find the most used online platform.
- To find productive uses of social media.

Hypothesis

- There will be a negative relationship between social media and anxiety.
- There will be negative consequences of spending a lot of time on social media.
- People interact more on social media than in real life.

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- There is increased comparison on social media for one's experiences.

Variables

For the research, two variables were considered namely, social media and anxiety. Social media is the term used to define multiple online platforms through which people connect, work, and enjoy their leisure time. On the other hand, anxiety can be defined as the persistence and continuous feelings of worry, tension, and nervousness regarding day-to-day uncertain activities. Here, social media is the independent variable which causes its effect on anxiety, playing the role of dependent variable.

Independent Variable: Social Media

Dependent Variable: Anxiety

Research design

The research design used for this study is narrative research design. Narrative research design is used to study the relationship between the two variables usage of social media and how it related to anxiety as narrative research design gives rich and in-depth analysis of the variables which are being studied. Researchers who use narrative research, aim to examine the experiences of the population. This research is generally done with the small sample size, as to get the clear and wider picture of their experiences. Moreover, narrative research design is used when the study is based on qualitative research and helps ease the process of interpreting the analysis.

Instrument used

The tool used in the present study to get the responses from the participants was the interview questionnaire which was framed consulting with the professors at Amity University, Noida. Questions were framed keeping in mind both the variables, social and anxiety as social media can be challenging and threatening and how it relates with anxiety. In the interview questionnaire, there were total 12 questions that are required to be answered to understand the relationship between social media and anxiety. The participants are supposed to answer to these questions without any boundation. Also, this interview questionnaire was framed for people of age 18-29 years. The purpose of this questionnaire is to get more inputs for further understanding.

Procedure

The semi-structured interview questions were used to ask the questions from the participants. There was no time limit which is why participants had a lot of time to think and answer for as long as they wished to. While the participants were answering to the questions, there responses were noted down. They were ensured that their responses and personal details will be confidential and only be used for the research purposes only.

The data was collected by noting down all the responses of the participants on the printed questionnaire by the researcher. As it was an interview questionnaire, that is why there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. Also, participants were informed that this is qualitative research which is why no scores were given to them for their responses. After taking all the interviews, the participants were thanked for their participation, time, and effort.

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Sample

Description of sample: For the research, the sample consisted of people who aged between the age range of 18-19 years. Narrative research design has been taken for the purpose of interpreting the results which is why small sample size was aimed. The sample size of this research comprises of 30 participants with the equal distribution of males and females' participants that is, 15 males and 15 females.

Selection of sample: Random selection method of sampling has been done to collect and formulate the data. In random sampling method, each person gets equal chances of being selected for the research. The age range, which is 18-29 years, considered based on 2022, survey report of age range of people who uses social media platforms the most. It has been ensured that the participant voluntarily participated in the research and gave their consent beforehand.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Participant who are between the age range of 18-29 years.
- Participant who uses at least 1 social media platform.
- Participant who are from India.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Participant who are not between the age range of 18-29 years.
- Participant who does not use any social media platform.
- Participant who are not from India.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The aim of the study is to understand the relationship between social media and anxiety. Social media can be defined as the umbrella term for the multiple entertainment platforms which serves their own specific objectives and goals.

Following are the objectives of the study:

- **To study the impact of increased usage of social media on anxiety.**

It is very evident and well known by each one of us who uses social media platforms that these online entertainment platforms can have great impact on ourselves. It can be either in a positive way or in a negative way. After collecting the data including interviewing the participants and studying previous years review of literature, one can confidently say that when an individual uses their social media account in problematic manner then it leads to higher chances of showing anxiety symptoms. In one review of literature which was done by Liu in 2023 only, he concluded positive correlation between overuse of social media platforms and anxiety.

- **To find the most used online platform.**

After analysis each of the responses, it was formulated that most used platforms are Instagram for the purpose of scrolling reels and looking out for other people experiences and another one is YouTube, majorly to improve lifestyle skills or for general entertainment. These following responses support the same, "I check my notifications quite often especially Instagram notifications.", "One influencer Kritika Khurana, was impacted by her experiences which I see on YouTube, on how I view my life, could have been more fun and less restrictive."

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- **To find productive uses of social media.**

Along with the negative side of the social media, some respondents also mentioned the uses of social media which are productive in nature. These are some of the responses supporting the statement, “There are a lot of changes after introducing myself to social media. Both positive and negative. I'm more addicted to the gadget now and has made me lazier. I ignore my important daily tasks a lot and consequences are either they get cancelled or delayed. But also, I've come across what's happening in the world. Before social media I had a limited view of the world but afterwards made me reach sections I never experienced and explored.”, “Future seems really bright as it keeps people connected to each other if used in right way. And if not, then it can lead to many serious cases especially deteriorating people's mental health.”, “I'll try to get away from these accounts so that I can actually see the future. Although, WhatsApp on the other hand is really helpful for work purpose.”, “One day I found someone's wallet with personal ID and documents so I put that on social media and found the owner, so I think social media can be really helpful as well sometimes but not always, it should be used for side entertainment not as one of the priorities that people think it is.” Moreover, in one study done by Deloatch et al. (2017), they studied if seeking support from people online would help the students in reduction of their anxiety and after the results, it was observed that from people's support student's anxiety reduced.

With the above statements, responses, and findings of the review of literature, the objectives of the study have been successfully met.

Coming to the hypothesis of this research which are as follows: -

- **There will be a negative relationship between social media and anxiety.**

The aim of the study was to understand the relationship between social media and anxiety and hence, it was hypothesized that there will be negative relationship between the two. After the data collection and formulating the findings of review of literature, the negative relationship can be seen. These are some of the responses in which it is evident that there's negative relation between social media and anxiety, “Well, for me personally I have possible every notification ‘on’ in my phone so I must be checking my phone every 10 minutes or so.”, “I interact more with people online than in real life. I believe there is a fine line between how you talk to people online, where you can just change your replies or just react with emojis instead. I feel talking to people in real life is kind off draining for me because it takes too many efforts and attention.”, “Yes, I compare very much, feels like I don't have even 1% of what people have, like friends, fun events, etc.” In a study done by Kingsbury and Coplan in 2016, they studied how ambiguous interpretation of messages by individuals lead to heightened social anxiety.

- **There will be negative consequences of spending a lot of time on social media.**

While interviewing most of them mentioned the negative consequences of spending time on social media ranging from disrupted sleep schedule to continuously comparing oneself with others. Following is some of the responses to support the statement, “Yeah, sometimes I do compare my life experiences with people online because you see the happy side of someone's life over social media, and I start to wonder why I can't experience that in my life.”, “I regret so much of being on Instagram and YouTube for so long.”, “There is a constant feeling of comparing yourself with the people over social media.”. In research by Woods and Scott in 2016, they concluded that social media usage leads to poor sleep quality, anxiety and depression symptoms and also low self-esteem. Thereby, there are negative consequences of increase usage of social media.

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- **People interact more on social media than in real life.**

People were interviewed then one of the questions was “do you interact more with people in real life as compared to online?” and the responses were in lines with the question. Some of them are, “For recent 2 to 3 years, I’ve been interacting with people mostly online as compared to real life., “No, because I feel more comfortable this way.”, “Umm, I think more on social media because I’m not a big fan of meeting and interacting with people.”, “No, I feel nervous and don’t really know the reason as well.” Hence, people do interact online more than in real life.

- **There is increased comparison on social media for one’s experiences.**

People who start to compare themselves it gets really threatening for their mental health and overall wellbeing. During the interview, there were people in greater number who couldn’t help but compare themselves with people online. The question which was asked from them regarding this hypothesis was “Do you try to compare yourself your life experiences with people online?”, responses of the same are as follows, “Yes, very much, feels like I don’t have even 1% of what they have, like friends, fun events, etc.”, “Yeah, sometimes I do compare my life experiences with people online because you see the happy side of someone’s life over social media, and I start to wonder why I can’t experience that in my life.”, “I will feel bad if I see anyone’s good experiences, I have no idea why though.

Maybe because I’ve always stayed at home and never really got the chance to go outside and have fun like others.”, “I do not try to compare life experiences, but I do think how they are so pretty and I’m not.”, “Yes, I do in terms of standard of living.”, “Sometimes I do, but I know it’s very negative, but I can’t help it.”, “Yeah, like a lot because regardless of how much you can ignore it you can never stop comparing yourself and especially me.” By this it can be analysed that there is so much comparison between human beings on social media.

Following are the findings of review of literature which supports the objectives and hypothesis of the study:

- Deng and jiang (2023) found out that virtual images aka VI images significantly increase anxiety of users as compared to the human images, HI images.
- Lyngdoh et al. (2023) concluded that people get more anxious and isolated when they think they are missing out on social media, when accounts are not used.
- Reich et al. (2023) examined that when people couldn’t enable like button, they got more anxious.
- Brailovskaia et al. (2022) assessed how during the time of covid-19, people felt more burdened and anxious because of social media
- Lopes et al. (2022) studied that problematic usage of social media leads to symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- Primack et al. (2017) aimed to study if the anxiety increases with the number of social media platforms. It was concluded that those who used 7-11 platforms were more anxious than those with 0-2 social media platforms.

Lastly, considering the demographic details of the participants including gender, age, and location. No such differences were noticed in the responses. Everyone had similar point of views to one another. Majority of the sample size supported the hypotheses and hence, all the hypotheses have been addressed. Moreover, objectives of the study also successfully studied.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study is to understand the relationship between social media and anxiety. For the study, 30 participants were interviewed for the qualitative research purpose. It was made sure before the conduction of interview started that they give consent for the interview and participating willingly. In this research, two variables were studied, social media and anxiety. There are multiple social media platforms which affects one's mental health and hence, this study specifically aimed to analyse the relation of social media with anxiety which can be defined as constant worry or nervousness related to everyday life problems. After analysing the responses and the findings of review of literature using narrative research design, it is concluded that there is a negative relationship between social media and anxiety.

There was total of 3 objectives in this study. First, to study the impact of increased usage of social media on anxiety. Second, to find the most used online platform. Last, to find productive uses of social media. All three of these objectives were successfully studied and incorporated in this study. Similarly, the four hypotheses of the study were also addressed, there is a negative relationship between social media and anxiety, there are negative consequences of spending a lot of time on social media, people do interact more on social media than in real life and finally there is increased comparison on social media for one's experiences.

Future Implications:

- Interview can happen in a more formal setting instead of crowded areas for rich data collection.
- More studies should emphasize on the negative consequences of usage of social media as the purpose of spreading awareness regarding wellness of mental health.
- Future study on specific social media platform can be helpful to gain some to the point information regarding a particular app.

Limitations:

- Majority of the time interview was done in crowded places; hence, it was hindering the process.
- There were quite less number of review of literature before the pandemic, COVID-19 on the topic social media and anxiety.
- Couldn't find much review of literature related to only anxiety as one of the mental health problems and social media as another variable.

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Conflict of Interest

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