

Role of Technology and Social Media in Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Mental health is a crucial aspect of one's overall wellbeing, and its neglect can result in severe consequences. Despite this, mental health often goes unnoticed and unaddressed in many cases. This is era of technology. We cannot think life without technology i.e. cell phone, smart phone and laptop, Bluetooth etc. we can do everything on cell phone like shopping, watching movie, listening song, talking to friends and relatives, buying tickets of train, airplane etc, interacting with people on social media by Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, WhatsApp. Social media and text messaging have become an integral part of how individuals interact with their social groups. Technologies have both positive and negative consequences on our mental health. With the use of new technology, mental health professionals can provide effective, accessible, and personalized treatment options to patients, irrespective of their location, social status, or financial standing. Through technology people can access to mental health services, particularly for people who live in remote or underserved areas. Tele-therapy involves providing mental health services remotely via videoconferencing or phone. There are some mental health apps such as Talkspace, Improving thinking skill app, Self-management app, Skill training app DotCom Therapy etc. that help people with thinking and memory skills and help connect people to health care professional or counselor. On the other hand, increased use of technology can have a potentially detrimental mental health impact on people in area of reduced social skills, increased cyber bullying, and isolation, depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances and obesity. Many studies have observed that more time spent on social media sites i.e. Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Facebook, are associated with an increased risk of loneliness and depression. When people spend more time on social media and video games, they become isolated, depressed and more aggressive. In conclusion it can be said that use of technology affects our mental health both positively and negatively.

Keywords: Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Telegram, Mental Health

Mental health is a crucial aspect of one's overall wellbeing, and its neglect can result in severe consequences. Despite this, mental health often goes unnoticed and unaddressed in many cases. The stigma surrounding mental health, coupled with inadequate resources, makes it challenging for individuals to seek treatment. Mental health refers to behavioral, emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It is all about how we feel, think and behave. It allows people to use their abilities, be productive, make decisions, and play an active role in their communities. It can affect our daily life,

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relationships, and even physical health. According to World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. It also includes a person's ability to enjoy life- to attain a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience.

According to the World Health Organization, the prevalence of mental health problems is increasing at the rate of 13% per year (WHO, 2022). Anxiety and Depression are the most common mental health issue, affecting 264 million and 280 million people worldwide, respectively (Hull,2022; Searing 2022). According to Global Burden of Disease study, around 200 million people in India were suffering from mental illness in 2017 and about half of them suffer from anxiety and depressive disorders (Sagar et al., 2020).

This is era of technology. Technology has become an inseparable part of our daily life. We cannot think life without technology i.e. cell phone, smart phone and laptop, Bluetooth etc. we can do everything on cell phone like shopping, watching movie, listening song, talking to friends and relatives, buying tickets of train, aeroplane etc, interacting with people on social media by Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, WhatsApp. Social media and text messaging have become an integral part of how individuals interact with their social groups. For many teenager and young adults, text messaging and social media communication is now more likely than in-person interaction. Technological and social media advances have emerged a “constant checker”, a constant checker is a person who constantly almost, obsessively, checks their emails, text, and social media accounts. Stress levels among constant checkers are considerably higher than they are among people who do not engage with technology and social media a frequently.

Digital technology can be a potential bridge to reduce the treatment gap for mental disorders (Johnson et al; 2022). Technologies have both positive and negative consequences on our mental health.

Aim of this paper is to see the role of technology in mental health. This is a concept paper purely descriptive and analytical in nature based on secondary data taken from various articles and websites.

Positive effects of technology on mental health:

There are many traditional methods to help people with a mental health problem such as medication, counselling, cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), exercise and a healthy diet. Now there are many new technologies that are used in the mental health field in treating mental health problems. Mobile devices like cell phones, smart phones and tablets are giving the public, doctors and researcher new ways access help, monitor progress and increase understanding of mental well-being. With the use of new technology, mental health professionals can provide effective, accessible, and personalized treatment options to patients, irrespective of their location, social status, or financial standing. Through technology people can access to mental health services, particularly for people who live in remote or underserved areas. Tele-therapy, which involves providing mental health services remotely via videoconferencing or phone, has become increasingly popular in recent years. Tele-therapy can be beneficial for mental health treatment because it reduces costs of services and improves access to services for those who cannot see a mental health professional in person. Tele-therapy has become increasingly popular in light of the

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COVID-19 pandemic. Social media technology offers great educational benefits with its ability to reach a vast audience instantaneously. Patients and families use social media to connect with health care providers and to seek medical advice.

Increasing use of the internet and digital platforms in this decade provide significant opportunities to address a population's unmet mental health needs (Naslund et al., 2017). Digital technologies can provide a crucial platform for mental healthcare in India. Technologies are making easier for health care professional to collect wellness data and provide mental health support. New technology can also be packaged into an extremely sophisticated app for smartphones or tablets. There are currently over ten thousand mobile apps devoted to mental health, with many focused on mindfulness, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. Mental health apps allow people who are hesitant to seek face-to-face services find help, often anonymously. Some allow doctors and mental health professionals to monitor progress and treatment adherence. Some of the digital apps that are being explored to improve mental health include tele-psychiatry, tele-consultation, mental health apps and games, digital assessment, digital therapeutic approaches, virtual training and clinical support, personal health trackers, social media websites, online peer support forums, meditation and mental wellness apps and many more (Roland et al. 2020). Calm is a meditation and mindfulness app that offers a variety of guided meditations, breathing exercises, and sleep stories to help people reduce stress, improve sleep, and manage anxiety. Happify is a gamified mental health app that uses positive psychology techniques to help people increase their happiness and resilience. Happify offers a variety of games and activities that are designed to teach people positive thinking skills.

Mental health apps such as Talkspace, Improving thinking skill app, Self-management app, Skill training app, DotCom Therapy etc. that help people with thinking and memory skills and help connect people to health care professional or counselor. Apps may be able to predict high stress situations, based on location, time, activity (e.g. purchasing of alcohol) and nearby presence of high-risk people. The technology could then send calming messages to patients, automatically alert carers and even automatically administer medicines (Morries, 2007).

Cell phones, email, and social media platforms provide connectivity, allowing individuals to maintain connections with loved ones, colleagues, and friends across distances. This increased sense of connectedness can alleviate loneliness and isolation, contributing to positive mental health outcomes (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Online there are many articles, forums and online communities like self- help group, increase awareness and de-stigmatize mental health concerns and learn about mental health issues (Wang et al.,2012).

Mental health conditions can be diagnosed and treated through teleconferencing aids as well. Technology is advancing day by day. Mobile-based artificial intelligence are developing AI powered Chatbots therapy applications that use evidence-based techniques, such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), to provide early intervention to support mental health and emotional well- being challenges. These chatbots employ Natural Language Processing (NLP) to understand and respond to user inputs. They're designed to offer immediate emotional support, especially during off-hours when a therapist might not be available. This type of mental health technology is particularly useful for people who may be hesitant to engage in traditional therapy.

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Virtual Reality technology, used in therapy, immerses patients in a controlled, three-dimensional environment. It provides a unique platform for exposure therapy, especially in treating phobias and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Another use of technology to treat mental illness is Gamification. In 2020, the FDA approved EndeavorRX, a game designed for kids ages 8 to 12 who have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The game challenges players to focus on multiple tasks, targeting the symptoms of ADHD in an engaging way. The game serves as both a diagnostic tool and a treatment method (Gupta, 2023).

As the internet-based interventions provide greater accessibility, acceptability, low cost, anonymity, and flexibility, they are increasingly utilized to make mental health services accessible worldwide (Wallin et al., 2016; Lal & Adair, 2014). Such interventions have been used to serve a wide range of functions such as screening, symptoms identification, self-care, improving help seeking attitude, and prevention and treatment of mental health concerns (Mehrotra & Tripathi, 2018; Olff, 2015).

Negative effects of technology on mental health:

On the other hand, increased use of technology can have a potentially detrimental mental health impact on people in area of reduced social skills, increased cyber bullying, and isolation, depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances and obesity. Social media which can be defined as “a group of Internet based application that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content,” has become an integral component of connecting with friends and family, sharing personal content, and obtaining news and entertainment (Shubrahmanyam et al., 2008).

Smartphones offer far more possibilities than simply calling and texting; they enable playing videogames, music and videos, geolocation, making payments, access to the internet, news and social media and taking photos and videos almost anywhere. However, a large body of recent research shows that intense smartphone use is related to poor mental health. Convergence evidence has shown its associations with greater anxiety, depression, stress and poor sleep quality and well-being (Elhai et al., 2017).

Spending more time on social media can have a major impact on an individual's well-being and satisfaction. Many studies have observed that more time spent on social media sites i.e. Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Facebook, are associated with an increased risk of loneliness and depression. Research indicates that users of social media compare their happiness and popularity to that of their friends and this can lead to more social dissatisfaction, unhappiness, decreased self-esteem, feeling of inadequacy and distorted perception of reality (Vogel et al., 2014). When people spend more time on social media and video games, they become isolated, depressed and more aggressive. There are several studies that suggest higher level of screen use is associated with reduced physical activity, increased risk of depression, and lower well-being. Use of technology can lead to an increase in cyber-bullying and online harassment, which can harm mental health. Victims of online abuse may experience anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal (Weissberg, 2023).

Digital platform of mental health during COVID 19:

Impact of COVID -19 on mental health had been tremendous. With the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, demand for mental health services had increased tremendously. Many people including children suffered from anxiety and depression during COVID 19 lockdown. Due

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to increased household responsibilities and domestic violence, women also suffered from depression and anxiety issues during COVID-19 lockdown (Wadhwa, 2021).

The Government of India launched “Mental Health and Normalcy Augmentation System (MANAS)”, a national platform to enhance mental wellbeing of the Indian citizens in 2012. Karnataka government launched an online portal “e-Manas: Karnataka Mental Healthcare Management System” for the purpose of delivering mental health services across the state in 2020. It is the first of its kind in India. Atmiyata intervention has been implemented in one of the rural areas of Maharashtra, India. Atmiyata intervention also utilizes digital tools such as low-cost mobile phones and Atmiyata app. The app can be used by illiterates. The programme also promotes e-Learning via community-based films. To deal with the rising mental health burden among children, in 2021 the Government of Rajasthan in collaboration with Save the Children has launched a dedicated helpline for children called “Ummeed (hope)” (Save the Children). The helpline can be accessed by using the toll-free number 0141-4932233.

TalktoAngel is a Delhi-based online platform. It provides a wide range of services including individual counseling, couple counseling, corporate wellness program, tele-consultation for medication management etc. The Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) launched a tele-counselling initiative, DELHI CARES, for school students who have been under mental stress due to COVID-19. Mann Mela is India’s first digital museum aimed at addressing mental health issues faced by the youth of India (Sangath 2021b). Mann Mela describes mental health stories from young people in the age group 18-35 years from across India (Mann Mela 2021). Your DOST is a Bengaluru based online counseling platform launched in the year 2014 that connects people to counselors & psychologists for personal, professional and academic guidance. Muskurayega India (India will smile) is a tele-counselling initiative by NSS, Uttar Pradesh in collaboration with UNICEF, Uttar Pradesh and Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI)(UNICEF 2020). Under this initiative, mental health counselors provide tele-counselling support to students and general public.

In conclusion it can be said that use of technology affects our mental health both positively and negatively. We should take maximum benefits of technology to improve our mental health while minimizing its negative effects on mental health.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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