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Physiological and Psychological Impact of Media on Youngsters in India

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ABSTRACT: In media studies, mass communication, media psychology, communication theory, and sociology, media influence and the media effect are topics relating to mass media and media culture's effects on individuals' or audiences' thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Through written, televised, or spoken channels, mass media reach large audiences. Mass media's role in shaping modern culture is a central issue for the study of culture.^[1]

Media influence is the actual force exerted by a media message, resulting in either a change or reinforcement in audience or individual beliefs. Whether a media message has an effect on any of its audience members is contingent on many factors, including audience demographics and psychological characteristics. These effects can be positive or negative, abrupt or gradual, short-term or long-lasting. Not all effects result in change; some media messages reinforce an existing belief. Researchers examine an audience after media exposure for changes in cognition, belief systems, and attitudes, as well as emotional, physiological and behavioral effects.

The influences of mass media (or 'media effects') are observed in various aspects of human life, from voting behaviors^[2] to perceptions of violence,^[3] from evaluations of scientists^[4] to our understanding of others' opinions.^[5] The overall influence of mass media has changed drastically over the years, and will continue to do so as the media itself develops.^[6] In the new media environment, we have dual identities - consumers and creators. We not only obtain information through new media, but also disseminate information to wide audiences.^{[7][8][9]}

KEYWORDS: media, physiological, psychological, youngsters, India, emotion, social, identities, personalities

I. INTRODUCTION

Experts from many different fields have conducted research and debates and debating about the links between using digital media and mental health. Research suggests that mental health issues arising from social media use affect women more than men and vary according to the particular social media platform used. Psychological or behavioral dependence on social media platforms can result in significant negative functions in individuals' daily lives. Studies show there are several negative effects that social media can have on individuals' mental health and overall well-being.^{[11][12][13]} While researchers have attempted to examine why and how social media is problematic, they still struggle to develop evidence-based recommendations on how they would go about offering potential solutions to this issue. Because social media is constantly evolving, researchers also struggle with whether the disorder of problematic social media use would be considered a separate clinical entity or a manifestation of underlying psychiatric disorders. These disorders can be diagnosed when an individual engages in online content/conversations rather than pursuing other interests that occur in real life. In 2022, a case was successfully litigated that implicated a social media platform in the suicide of a teenage girl by hanging. This was the first time that any social media platform was held liable for a user's actions. While the question of what category problematic social media use falls in is still being developed and further researched, the policies and regulations of social media have already started to change. The interest now falls on implementing new laws regarding these penalties and how individuals can aim to keep their well-being safe along with the platforms that they are using, especially when it comes to privacy. While there exists no official diagnostic term or measurement, problematic social media use can be conceptualized as a non-substance-related disorder, resulting in preoccupation and compulsion to engage excessively in social media platforms despite negative consequences.^[14]

Problematic social media use is associated with mental health symptoms, such as anxiety and depression in children and young people.^[15]

A 2022 meta-analysis showed moderate and significant associations between problematic social media use in youth and increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.^[16] Another meta-analysis in 2019, investigating Facebook use and symptoms of depression, also showed an association, with a small effect size.^[17] In a 2018 systematic review and meta-analysis, problematic Facebook use was shown to have negative effects on well-being in adolescents and young adults, and psychological distress was also found with problematic use.^[18] Frequent social media use was shown in a cohort study of 15- and 16-year-olds to have an association with self-reported symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder followed up over two years.^[19]

A 2016 technological report by researchers identified benefits and concerns in adolescent mental health regarding social media use. It showed that the amount of time spent on social media is not the key factor but rather how time is spent. Declines in well-being and life satisfaction were found in older adolescents who passively consumed social media; however, these were not shown in those who were more actively engaged. The report also found a U-shaped, curvilinear relationship between the amount of time spent on digital media and with risk of depression developing, at both the low and high ends of Internet use.^[20] Through the extensive use of social media, adolescents are exposed to images of bodies that are unattainable, especially with the growing presence of photo-editing apps that allow you to alter the way that your body appears in a photo.^[22] This can, in turn, influence both the diet and exercise practices of adolescents as they try to fit the standard that their social media consumption has set for them.^[22]

Instagram users who partake in looking for social media status and compare themselves to others tend to have an increase in negative various psychological effects including body image issues and eating disorders.^[23] 52% of girls ages 13 to 14 with a social media account were very likely to have eating disorders like skipping a meal or overexercising.^[24] These various studies found that teenage girls who viewed their retouched photo and compared that to their untouched photo directly harmed their body image.^[23] Although this happens amongst various age groups and genders it was found that this tends to have a greater effect on the younger age group of women.^[23] Addictive social media use will look much like that of any other substance use disorder, including mood modification, salience, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse. In the digital age, it is common for adolescents to use their smartphones for entertainment purposes, education, news, and managing their daily life. Therefore, adolescents are further at risk for developing addictive behaviors and habits. Many medical experts have looked at the survey and come up with a clear conclusion, saying that teenagers' excessive smartphone use has an impact on their behavior and even their mental health.^[27] If the excessive use of social media and the platforms encompassed therein have proven to cause mental health issues, eating disorders, and lowered self-esteem, and the use of such media has been shown to be addictive in some form or another, medically there should be an avenue to treat the use or excessive use of the media platforms. For example, a study involving 157 online learners showed that, on average, learners on massive open online courses spend half of their online time on YouTube and social media, and less than 2% of visited websites accounted for nearly 80% of their online time.^[28] The excessive use is causing underlying health conditions that in themselves are treatable, but if these issues stem from the use of social media platforms, the addictive nature of these platforms should be addressed in a way to reduce or eradicate the health-related or mental related effects resulting. More studies need to be done, more funding has to be provided, and the addiction to such platforms should be seen as a true addiction and treated as such, and not simply discarded as a millennial issue.^[29] Social media allows users to openly share their feelings, values, relationships, and thoughts. With the platform social media provides, users, can freely express their emotions. However, social media may also be a platform for discrimination and cyberbullying.^[30] There is also a strong positive correlation between social anxiety and social media usage, and in particular between cyberostracism and social media disorder.^[31] The defining feature of social anxiety disorder, also called social phobia, is intense anxiety or fear of being judged, negatively evaluated, or rejected in a social or performance situation.^{[32][33][34][35]} Many users with mental illnesses, such as social anxiety, go to the internet as an escape from reality, so they often withdraw from in-person communication and feel most comfortable with online communication. People usually act differently on social media than they do in person, resulting in many activities and social groups being different when using social media.^[36] The pros and cons of social media are heavily debated; although using social media can satisfy personal communication needs, those who use them at higher rates are shown to have higher levels of psychological distress.^[37]

II.DISCUSSION

There are many ways that an addiction to social media can be expressed in individuals. According to clinical psychologist there are five potential factors that indicate a person's dependence to social media:^[75]

1. Mood swings: a person uses social media to regulate his or her mood, or as a means of escaping real world conflicts
2. Relevance: social media starts to dominate a person's thoughts at the expense of other activities
3. Tolerance: a person increases their time spent on social media to experience previously associated feelings they had while using social media;
4. Withdrawal: when a person can not access social media their sleeping or eating habits change or signs of depression or anxiety can become present.
5. Conflicts in real life: when social media is used excessively, it can affect real-life relationships with family and friends.

In addition Griffiths further explains that someone is addicted to social media if their behavior fulfills any of these six criteria:^[41]

1. Salience: social media becomes the most important part of someone's life;
2. Mood modification: a person uses social media as a means of escape because it makes them feel "high", "buzzed", or "numb";
3. Tolerance: a person gradually increases their time spent on social media to maintain that escapist feeling;
4. Withdrawal: unpleasant feelings or physical sensations when the person is unable to use social media or does not have access to it;
5. Conflict: social media use causes conflict in interpersonal dynamics, loses desire to participate in other activities, and becomes pervasive;
6. Relapse: the tendency for previously affected individuals to revert to previous patterns of excessive social media use.

He continues to add that excessive use of an activity, like social media, does not directly equate with addiction because there are other factors that could lead to someone's social media addiction including personality traits and pre-existing tendencies.^[41]

There are three types of general models people might have that can lead to addictive social media use:^[76]

1. Cognitive-behavioral model – People increase their use of social media when they are in unfamiliar environments or awkward situations;
2. Social skill model – People pull out their phones and use social media when they prefer virtual communication as opposed to face-to-face interactions because they lack self-presentation skills;
3. Socio-cognitive model – This person uses social media because they love the feeling of people liking and commenting on their photos and tagging them in pictures. They are attracted to the positive outcomes they receive on social media.

The transition from normal to problematic social media use occurs when a person relies on it to relieve stress, loneliness, depression, or provide continuous rewards.^[77] No established treatments exist, but from research from the related entity of Internet addiction disorder, treatments have been considered, with further research needed.^[42] Screen time recommendations for children and families have been developed by the Academy of Pediatrics.^{[78][79]}

Possible therapeutic interventions published by researchers include:

- Self-help interventions, including application-specific timers;
- Cognitive behavioral therapy; and
- Organizational and schooling support.^[80]

Possible treatment for social anxiety disorder includes cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) as well. CBT helps victims of social anxiety to improve their ways of thinking, behaving, and reacting to stressful situations. Withal, most CBT is held in a group format to help improve social skills.^[81]

Medications have not been shown to be effective in randomized, controlled trials for the related conditions of Internet addiction disorder or gaming disorder.^[80]

III.RESULTS

"These days we know that the media and body image are closely related. Particularly, the body image advertising portrays affects our body image. Of course, many other things influence our body image: parenting, education, intimate relationships, and so on. The popular media does have a big impact, though"^[4] This is because thousands of advertisements contain messages about physical attractiveness and beauty, examples of which include commercials for clothes, cosmetics, weight reduction, and physical fitness.^[5] Researchers have conducted studies in an attempt to see if such advertisements have effects on teenage body image, and what those effects might be.^[1] The way beauty is portrayed in the media tends to cause dissatisfaction and negative thoughts about ourselves when those results are not achieved. Sociocultural standards of feminine beauty are presented in almost all forms of popular media that are bombarding women with these unrealistic images that portray what is considered to be the "ideal body" within this society. Such standards of beauty are unattainable for most women; The majority of the models displayed on television and in advertisements are well below what is considered healthy body weight. Mass media's use of such unrealistic models sends an implicit message that for a woman to be considered beautiful, she must be unhealthy. The mindset that a person can never be "too rich or too thin" is prevalent in society, and this makes it difficult for women and girls to achieve any level of contentment with their physical appearance. There has been a plethora of research to indicate that women are negatively affected by constant exposure to models that fulfill the unrealistic media ideal of beauty.⁷⁰

Social comparison theory helps to explain why people are comparing themselves to what they see around them. This is largely seen through the comparison of oneself to what is seen in the media. Comparison to attractive targets is “contributing to the internalization of a ‘thin’ ideal and mediates the effects of media on body dissatisfaction”. Low self-esteem that stems from teenage advertising can have detrimental effects on teenagers. Seventy-five percent of young women with low self-esteem report engaging in negative activities such as “cutting, bullying, smoking, or drinking when feeling bad about themselves”.⁷¹

Teen promiscuity is another possible effect of low self-esteem.^[20]

People fail to recognize that photo-shop is widely used on models in magazines and in advertisements which gives an unrealistic expectation. An online survey in 2010 consisting of 100 girls aged 13–17 was conducted by Girl Scouts. What they found was that 9 out of 10 girls felt pressure from the fashion and media industries to be skinny. More than 60% compared themselves to fashion models, and 46% believed that the ideal body image is portrayed in fashion magazines and referred to the girls in the magazines as who they strive to look like.

Unfortunately, thin-idealized bodies are attributed with self-control, success, and discipline, and therefore proclaimed as being desirable and socially valued. “Being slim means resisting the temptations that surround consumers in countries of overabundance and wealth”⁷²

Students are more connected than ever before through social media, especially during these difficult times, when they are physically distanced from their family, friends, and peers. While social media provides many benefits, such as giving students the chance to express themselves creatively, learning opportunities, and the chance to connect with others, social media can also have a negative impact on students, both physically and mentally. It is easy to become addicted, and research shows that students who spend too much time on social media can suffer from poor sleep, eye fatigue, negative body image, depression, anxiety, cyberbullying, and more.⁷³

The negative impact of social media on students

Poor sleep, eye fatigue, and physical inactivity

Social media can be incredibly addictive — we all know what it feels like to tell ourselves we’ll only check our notifications, and before we know it, we’ve been mindlessly scrolling for hours. Using devices can have an especially detrimental effect if done near bedtime, as the blue light emanating from our devices tricks our bodies into thinking it’s still daylight outside, which upsets our natural rhythms. We also blink less when looking at devices, which, in combination with blue light, can lead to eye fatigue and strain.⁷⁴

Worsens mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression

Facebook has been studying the effect that Instagram has on its younger users and has uncovered some alarming findings, as revealed by the Wall Street Journal. Facebook’s full research slide decks are available through their newsroom.

Their research shows that:

- Most users wished Instagram “had given them better control of what they saw and helped them connect with people who had had a similar experience.”
- “1 in 3 teen girls blame Instagram for making their body image issues and problematic social media use worse.”
- Users were more likely to think that “Instagram made problematic use worse, followed by social comparison, body image, FOMO (fear of missing out), sleep issues, SSI, and anxiety.”⁷⁵

To help promote better mental health, the company is testing hiding likes and has enabled the “all caught up” message to help limit scrolling by telling users they have seen all the content from the accounts they follow. Others have suggested further improvements, like calling attention to cosmetically altered photos.

Educators and parents need to be mindful of the effects social media can have on the children in their care. OnGuard, part of the Netsweeper platform, can filter and block harmful content on social media websites, and alerts educators to students who are engaging with harmful content online.⁷⁶

IV.CONCLUSIONS

Recent Common Sense Media research shows that media use by teens (ages 8–12 years) and teens (ages 13–18 years) rose faster in the two years since the COVID-19 pandemic than the four years before. The research found 8- to 12-year-olds spend an average of five and a half hours a day on screens and consuming media. That rate climbs to over eight and a half hours a day for teens.

Among teens, 79% said they use social media and online videos at least once a week, and 32% of these said they "wouldn't want to live without" YouTube. And nearly two-thirds (65%) of teens said they watch TV, 64% watch online videos and 43% play games on a smartphone or tablet every day.⁷⁷

Digital media use can:

- Expose users to new ideas and information.
- Raise awareness of current events and issues.
- Promote community participation.
- Help students work with others on assignments and projects.

Digital media use also has social benefits that:

- Allow families and friends to stay in touch, no matter where they live.
- Enhance access to valuable support networks, especially for people with illnesses or disabilities.
- Help promote wellness and healthy behaviors, such as how to quit smoking or how to eat healthy.

Overuse of digital media may place your children at risk of:

- Not enough sleep. Media use can interfere with sleep. Children and teens who have too much media exposure or who have a TV, computer, or mobile device in their bedroom fall asleep later at night and sleep less. Even babies can be overstimulated by screens and miss the sleep they need to grow. Exposure to light (particularly blue light) and stimulating content from screens can delay or disrupt sleep and have a negative effect on school.
- Obesity. Excessive screen use and having a TV in the bedroom can increase the risk of obesity. Watching TV for more than 1.5 hours daily is a risk factor for obesity for children 4 through 9 years of age. Teens who watch more than 5 hours of TV per day are 5 times more likely to have over-weight than teens who watch 0 to 2 hours. Food advertising and snacking while watching TV can promote obesity. Also, children who overuse media are less apt to be active with healthy, physical play.⁷⁸
- Delays in learning & social skills. When infants or preschoolers watch too much TV, they may show delays in attention, thinking, language and social skills. One reason for this could be that they don't interact as much with their parents and family members. Parents who keep the TV on or spend excess time on their own digital media miss precious opportunities to interact with their children and help them learn.
- Negative effect on school performance. Children and teens often use entertainment media at the same time that they're doing other things, such as homework. Such multitasking can have a negative effect on how well they do in school.
- Behavior problems. Violent content on TV and screens can contribute to behavior problems in children, either because they are scared and confused by what they see or they try to mimic on-screen characters.
- Problematic internet use. Children who spend too much time using online media can be at risk for a type of addictive behavior called problematic internet use. Heavy video gamers are at risk for Internet gaming disorder. They spend most of their free time online and show less interest in offline or real-life relationships. There may be increased risks for depression at both the high and low ends of Internet use.

- Risky behaviors. Teens' displays on social media often show risky behaviors, such as substance use, sexual behaviors, self-injury, or eating disorders. Exposure of teens through media to alcohol, tobacco use, or sexual behaviors is linked to engaging in these behaviors earlier.
- Sexting, loss of privacy & predators. Sexting is the sending or receiving of sexually explicit images, videos, or text messages using a smartphone, computer, tablet, video game or digital camera. About 19% of youth have sent a sexual photo to someone else. Teens need to know that once content is shared with others, they may not be able to delete it completely. Kids may also not use privacy settings. Sex offenders may use social networking, chat rooms, e-mail and online games to contact and exploit children.
- Cyberbullying. Children and teens online can be victims of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can lead to short- and long-term negative social, academic, and health issues for both the bully and target. Fortunately, programs to help prevent bullying may reduce cyberbullying.⁷⁹

Children today are growing up in a time of highly personalized media use experiences. It's smart to develop a customized media use plan for your children. This helps your kids avoid overusing media by balancing it with other healthy activities.

A media plan should consider each child's age, health, personality and developmental stage. Remember, all children and teens need adequate sleep (8–12 hours each night, depending on age), physical activity (1 hour a day) and time away from media. Create a customized plan for your family with our interactive Family Media Use Plan. Developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), this tool works with your family's values and busy life.⁸⁰

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