

Exploring the Impact of Excessive Social Media Use on Mental Health and Social Interaction

Ervanur Unal

ervanurunal98@gmail.com

Mustafa Yazıcı

University of Texas at Austin, USA

mustafayazici@utexas.edu

Emine Yildirim

Harmony Science Academy Pflugerville, USA

eyildirim1888@gmail.com

Asiye Akin

Harmony Science Academy Pflugerville, USA

asiyeseydaakin@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of excessive social media usage on mental health and well-being, focusing on its potential to trigger antisocial behavior, deteriorate mental health, and foster addictive tendencies. Despite the label "social," social media can diminish social interactions, contributing to feelings of loneliness and heightened social anxiety. Neurologically, the brain's reward system responds to social media interactions with dopamine release, cultivating addictive behavior, especially among young users. Studies reveal direct links between extensive social media engagement and increased anxiety and depression. The intricate relationship between dopamine, digital engagement, and mental well-being underscores the vulnerability of younger individuals. Balancing the allure of virtual connection with the risks of addiction necessitates a mindful approach to social media usage, including time limits and the pursuit of diverse offline activities. This inquiry highlights the importance of informed engagement to preserve well-being in the era of pervasive social media.

Keywords: Social Media, Mental Health, Addiction, Dopamine, Antisocial, Youth, Mindfulness, Loneliness, Well-being

Introduction

Social media has seamlessly integrated into the fabric of our daily lives, providing a platform for connection and communication. However, recent reports have raised concerns about the extent of our engagement with these digital platforms. The New York Times, for instance, highlights a worrisome trend among 13-18-year-olds, whose daily screen time has surged from an already staggering seven hours and twenty-two minutes to an astonishing eight hours and thirty-nine minutes in the past year. On the contrary, Medical News Today suggests a more modest and healthier threshold of around 30 minutes of daily social media use. The growing consensus among experts is that excessive screen time, particularly on social media, can exert a negative impact on mental health and overall well-being. In this context, this paper delves into the ramifications of spending excessive time on social media, delving into its potential to foster antisocial behavior, deteriorate mental health, and cultivate addictive tendencies.

Social Media and Antisocial Behavior

Despite the ostensibly "social" nature of these platforms, a paradox emerges: excessive indulgence in social media can make individuals less social. Emerging research underscores a correlation between heightened social media use and increased feelings of loneliness. The substitution of face-to-face interactions with virtual engagements erodes crucial social skills over time, potentially leading to heightened social anxiety. Experts at Helpguide.org shed light on the intricate hormonal dynamics at play, noting that in-person interactions are pivotal for the release of stress-alleviating hormones that contribute to feelings of happiness and well-being. Baylor Scott&White chimes in, revealing that those who allocate extensive time to social media are at least twice as likely to experience social isolation, and that these platforms gradually replace genuine interpersonal experiences.

Social Media and Addiction

A deeper exploration of the neurological underpinnings reveals a compelling aspect of human behavior. The brain's intricate reward system is hard-wired to seek out activities that trigger the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter linked to pleasure and learning. Within the realm of social media, every notification, like, share, or comment stimulates an instant surge of dopamine, akin to a pleasurable reward. JefforsonHealth elaborates on this mechanism, illustrating how the recurrent dopamine-driven rushes propel users into patterns of addictive behavior. Alarming trends are observed among younger users, with Dr. Nancy Deangelis CRNP cautioning against the risk of rewiring young brains to incessantly seek instant gratification, potentially culminating in obsessive and compulsive behaviors.

Social Media and Mental Health

The correlation between social media and mental health, particularly anxiety and depression, has garnered considerable attention. Disturbingly, certain studies imply a direct association between excessive social media usage and heightened anxiety and depression. The brain's

reward center, stimulated by social media interactions, releases dopamine, commonly referred to as the "feel-good chemical." This system, while seemingly benign, poses a challenge: the brain adapts to these surges, leading to reduced pleasure during times when users abstain from social media. The resultant dopamine deficiency during off-screen periods can precipitate anxiety and depression. The relationship between digital dopamine and mental well-being is intricate and consequential.

Conclusion

The generation most vulnerable to these dynamics is the young cohort who frequently navigate the digital landscape without a complete understanding of its implications. The consequences of such uninhibited engagement are multifold: diminished social interactions, adverse effects on mental health, and the lurking shadow of addiction. The remedy lies in moderation: embracing limits on social media time, seeking alternative activities that enrich one's life, and cultivating mindfulness about digital usage. Balancing the benefits of connection and communication with the perils of overindulgence in the digital realm is a pivotal endeavor in safeguarding our well-being in the age of social media.

References

- Moyer, Melinda Wenner. “Kids as Young as 8 Are Using Social Media More than Ever, Study Finds.” Kids as Young as 8 Are Using Social Media More Than Ever, Study Finds, The New York Times, 24 Mar. 2022, [https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/24/well/family/child-social-media-use.html#:~:text=On%20average%2C%20daily%20screen%20use,\(ages%2013%20to%2018\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/24/well/family/child-social-media-use.html#:~:text=On%20average%2C%20daily%20screen%20use,(ages%2013%20to%2018))
- Tee-Melegrito, Rachel Ann. “Social Media Breaks: Benefits and Tips to Consider.” Medical News Today, MediLexicon International, 12 May 2022, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/social-media-breaks#benefits>.
- “Why Social Media Is Making Me Anti-Social.” *Scrubbing In by BSWHealth*, Baylor Scott & White, 17 June 2017, <https://www.bswhealth.com/blog/social-media-making-anti-social#:~:text=Studies%20have%20shown%20that%20people,is%20for%20real%2Dworld%20interactions>.
- “The Social Dilemma: Social Media and Your Mental Health.” Here's How Social Media Affects Your Mental Health , McLean Hospital, 18 Jan. 2023, <https://www.mcleanhospital.org/essential/it-or-not-social-medias-affecting-your-mental-health>.
- Robinson, Lawrence. Social Media and Mental Health, HelpGuide.org, 29 Mar. 2023, <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/social-media-and-mental-health.htm#:~:text=using%20social%20media,-.Modifying%20social%20media%20use%20to%20improve%20mental%20health%20step%201,%2C%20sleep%20problems%2C%20and%20FOMO>
- Miller, Sarah. “The Addictiveness of Social Media: How Teens Get Hooked: Jefferson Health.” The Addictiveness of Social Media: How Teens Get Hooked, Jefferson Health, 2 June 2022, <https://www.jeffersonhealth.org/your-health/living-well/the-addictiveness-of-social-media-how-teens-get-hooked#:~:text=%E2%80%9CSocial%20media%20platforms%20drive%20surges,when%20gambling%20or%20using%20drugs.%E2%80%9D>.
- “There are Costs from Spending Too Much Time on Social Media” Sean Withington , Alexandra Punch, Syracuse University, October 2019. <https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/research/lerner-center/population-health-research-brief-series/article/there-are-costs-from-spending-too-much-time-on-social-media#:~:text=Excessive%20social%20media%20use%20also,ability%20to%20develop%20meaningful%20relationships>
- “Dopamine: What It Is, Function & Symptoms.” Dopamine, Cleveland Clinic, 23 Mar. 2022, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/22581-dopamine>.