



RESEARCH ARTICLE

STUDY OF IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUNG LEARNERS DURING COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The past decade has witnessed an unprecedented surge in social media usage, becoming an indispensable aspect of daily life. Whether for leisure or in response to initiatives like remote work, the Covid-19 pandemic further increased its acceptance across all age categories. The increased number of users on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, among others, coupled with increased screen time, has sparked concerns regarding their impact on mental health and overall well-being of young learners. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, this study aims to identify the concrete consequences that social media use has on people's mental health in addition to investigating possible countermeasures. The goal of this research is to examine how social media use affects young students' mental health in the context of COVID-19. This was accomplished by employing a mixed-method approach in a descriptive study that combined quantitative and qualitative data. An in-depth study of already existing researches was also done to get a better understanding about the matter. From this study, it is clear that Social media has a profound impact on young minds, altering beliefs, habits, and overall well-being. While technology provides educational benefits and connectivity, issues such as cyber bullying and high expectations have an influence on mental health. A balanced strategy is required, supporting responsible usage and establishing a good digital environment for young learners' well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health has long been a taboo topic in India, leading to stigmatization of those experiencing conditions like depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder due to lack of awareness. Thankfully, in the 21st century, there's a growing understanding of these issues. Social media, a digital platform enabling sharing of ideas and connecting with others, has played a dual role in mental health. It's helped break the silence around mental health in India, normalizing discussions and educating people. During the Covid-19 lockdown, youngsters relied heavily on social media like Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and WhatsApp for entertainment and connection. Usage surged significantly—messaging on platforms like Facebook and Instagram increased by 50% and overall app usage shot up by 70%. This increased screen time impacted users differently. Some felt anxious due to social media, while others found it a way to relax, be productive, or relieve stress. The pandemic transformed the way young people connect digitally by amplifying their reliance on online platforms. With in-person interactions restricted, virtual communication became essential, leading to a redefinition of social norms and dynamics among the youth.

This study aims to explore how social media affected young learner's mental health during this time, noting both positive and negative impacts. There has long been debate over the connection between social media use and emotional health, and the findings of recent research have been contradictory and uneven. The 'digital media harm' perspective maintained that social media use has a detrimental impact on users' mental health, but other academics contended that social media enhances the chances of making new friends, nurturing ones that already exist, and participating in online communities—all of which improve emotional wellbeing. According to recent studies, for example, a significant portion of the population used social media during the COVID-19 epidemic to obtain emotional and practical social help, and social media use was positively connected with subjective wellbeing. Numerous research have found that using social media during COVID-19 decreased stress and improved subjective satisfaction and self-rated mental health (Khodabakhsh & Ahmadi, 2021; Lee & Jang, 2022). On the other hand, heightened usage of social media within the COVID-19 pandemic has been associated worldwide with self-reported feelings of worry and depression (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Alrasheed *et al.*, 2022; Gao *et al.*, 2020).

Brailovskaia *et al.* (2022) found a relationship between COVID-19-related social media use and the psychological effects of the pandemic. Marciano *et al.* (2022) observed in a comprehensive investigation that it is unclear if consuming digital media during COVID-19 could improve or worsen psychological wellness. Further research is necessary due to the complex and nuanced relationship between social media use and mental well-being during worldwide pandemics.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The study's goals include

- To investigate how people used social media during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To evaluate how the COVID 19 period's increasing use of social media affected the mental health of young learners.
- To find out whether the various social media corporations are taking any steps to ease mental health problems that are often caused by them.
- To find solutions on how to cope with increased social media usage while keeping mental health in check.

Research Design: This study's primary objective is to shed light on the ways in which young students' increased use of social media during COVID-19 affects their mental health. This was achieved by using a mixed-method descriptive study design that combined quantitative and qualitative data. A thorough analysis of previous studies was also conducted in order to have a deeper comprehension of the subject. In order to conduct a full examination of the current literature, secondary sources such as government websites, journals, articles, and research papers on the subject are consulted. The data was quantitatively analyzed through a survey, where a questionnaire was distributed to gather information from 50 undergraduate students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Objective 1. To examine how social media was used during the COVID-19 pandemic: Social media refers to online communities and digital platforms where people may create, share, and engage with text, images, and multimedia material. It enables immediate interaction, linking people worldwide, and holds a pivotal role in disseminating information, fostering communication, and constructing online communities. During the pandemic, social media platforms served as vital sources for pandemic updates, health guidelines, and official communications. Virtual gatherings on platforms like Facebook and Zoom became essential for maintaining social ties. Additionally, social media facilitated community support initiatives, enabling assistance for vulnerable members. It served as a medium for public health campaigns, combating misinformation, and promoting responsible behavior. Amid lockdowns, platforms offered entertainment, distraction, and creative outlets. All things considered, social media has become an indispensable instrument for community resilience, information exchange, and communication in these challenging circumstances.

Understanding Social Media Influence on Young Learners Social media significantly influences young learners by shaping perceptions, behaviors, and social interactions.

As a ubiquitous presence, it impacts self-esteem, body image, and lifestyle choices. While offering educational benefits and connectivity, it poses risks such as cyber-bullying and misinformation. Social media cultivates digital skills but requires guidance to navigate its complexities responsibly. Striking a balance is crucial to harness its positive aspects while mitigating potential drawbacks, ensuring young learners benefit from a digitally connected world. Facebook stated that as a result, chatting on its platforms—WhatsApp, Instagram, and Messenger—rose by more than 50%. In just the past six months, group calls have surged 1,000%, but consumers are using all of these applications for 70% longer. Research on the long-running controversy between social media use and mental health has yielded contradictory and unclear findings. The 'digital media harm' perspective maintained that social media use has a detrimental impact on users' mental health, but other academics contended that social media enhances the chances of making new friends, nurturing ones that already exist, and participating in online communities—all of which improve emotional wellbeing. Recent studies, for example, found that during the COVID-19 epidemic, social media use was positively connected with subjective wellbeing and that many people used it as a source of both emotional and practical social support. Numerous research have found that using social media during COVID-19 decreased stress and improved subjective satisfaction and self-rated mental health (Khodabakhsh & Ahmadi, 2021; Lee & Jang, 2022). On the other hand, heightened usage of social media within the COVID-19 pandemic has been associated worldwide with self-reported feelings of worry and depression (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Alrasheed *et al.*, 2022; Gao *et al.*, 2020). Brailovskaia *et al.* (2022) found a relationship between COVID-19-related social media use and the psychological effects of the pandemic. Marciano *et al.* (2022) observed in a comprehensive investigation that it is unclear if consuming digital media during COVID-19 could improve or worsen psychological wellness. Further research is necessary due to the complex and nuanced relationship between social media use and mental well-being during worldwide pandemics.

Positive Impact of Social Media: Social media, a lifeline for students, offered connectivity, educational resources, and mental health support, fostering positive impacts during the pandemic. Some of them are mentioned below-

Educational Resources: Social media facilitated the dissemination of educational content, with platforms like YouTube offering tutorials and live sessions, aiding young adults in continued learning during lockdowns. With traditional learning disrupted, these platforms became educational hubs, offering a plethora of tutorials and live sessions. The accessibility of diverse content allowed young adults to pursue continued learning, making social media an indispensable tool for education during the challenging times of lockdowns and restrictions.

Increase in productivity: During the lockdown, when people had time to spend on themselves, social media encouraged them to try their hands on activities they otherwise did not have time for like yoga, cooking, painting, etc. Many people also started small businesses during the lockdown.

Connection: 60% of the world uses social media for communication.

During the lockdown, when family members were separated from each other and people could not meet each other in person, social media connected everyone- whether they were in different hemispheres or different districts. It gave people a sense of comfort to be able to talk to friends and family in times of distress.

Connecting people in need: During the peak of the deadly second wave in India, as the health infrastructure crumbled under the weight of about 3 lakh cases daily, social media came to the rescue when the citizens asked and offered assistance. It became a humanitarian platform where people could arrange for resources like hospital beds and oxygen cylinders. According to an analysis by Twitter, the number of covid-related tweets increased by 600% during April-May in 2021 in India.

Acknowledging mental health: A study showing that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a noticeable increase in psychological expressions was published in the Journal of Medical Internet Research. This indicates that a greater number of people are communicating their feelings and getting assistance from others. Studies show that 40.5% people are paying more attention to their mental health after the lockdown and about 42% have reported receiving increased support from their family members. Thus, the stigma around mental health is decreasing on a drastic level. Support groups on platforms like facebook, twitter allows youngsters to discuss mental health, share coping mechanisms, and offer support during a time of heightened stress and uncertainty.

Remote Work and Skill Development: Platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn facilitated discussions around remote work trends and provided resources for skill development, aiding young adults in adapting to changes in the job market.

Negative Impact of Social Media

Spread of false information: False information increases anxiety by fostering a sense of fear and uncertainty and spreading more quickly than the virus itself. For instance, the circulation of fake messages on WhatsApp about a lockdown stirred anxiety among users, illustrating the detrimental impact of false information on public well-being.

Information overload: According to the article "The Psychology of Uncertainty: How to Cope with COVID-19 Anxiety," extensive exposure to news, as indicated by longstanding research, can lead to heightened fear. Continuous exposure to doomsday headlines adversely affects an individual's mental well-being.

Body Dysmorphia Disorder and insecurities: Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is a specific mental health condition where individuals obsess over an imagined or minor physical flaw. During the initial week of lockdown, Hammerkopf Consumer Survey reported an 87% surge in users. The rise in social media usage contributed to increased body insecurity as individuals compared themselves to influencers' seemingly 'perfect' appearances, seeking validation online. Moreover, prolonged periods at home intensified anxiety, subsequently exacerbating symptoms of Body Dysmorphic Disorder. Idealized body images promoted on social media can lead to body dissatisfaction and contribute to

the development of eating disorders or negative self-perception.

Social Comparison Pressure: Excessive social media use exposes young learners to unrealistic standards, fostering feelings of inadequacy as they compare their lives to make-believe online portrayals.

Cyber-bullying Concerns: Online platforms can be breeding grounds for cyber-bullying, adversely affecting mental well-being and self-esteem among young users.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): Constant exposure to others' seemingly exciting lives can induce FOMO, contributing to anxiety and a sense of exclusion among young learners.

Sleeping deprivation: Prolonged screen time, especially before bedtime, can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to fatigue and negatively impacting the mental health of young learners. The urge to check social media before sleeping might be too hard for us to resist. According to studies, 70% of people use social media after going to bed, and nearly 15% of them do so for an hour or longer every night. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a lot of lifestyle changes, which in turn caused mental health issues. Around 4 in 10 people reported trouble sleeping during the pandemic. Sleep deprivation is proven to exacerbate symptoms of mental health. In a local survey conducted, it was found out that 47.4% of the users feel that their sleep has been affected due to the lockdown.

Addiction and Distraction: Excessive use of social media may contribute to addiction, hindering academic performance and reducing focus on real-life activities.

Validation Seeking: Seeking approval and validation through likes and comments can create dependency, affecting self-worth when online responses don't meet expectations.

Anxiety and Depression Risk: The constant pressure to conform to online norms and the fear of judgment can contribute to heightened levels of anxiety and an increased risk of depression among young learners.

Objective 2. To assess the impact of young learners' increased use of social media on their mental health during the COVID-19 period: Some findings from local surveys and other resources were studied in depth to come to the conclusion that usage of social media has increased after the pandemic to an enormous level and this upsurge has had a detrimental effect on the mental health of young learners. Questions related to social media usage pre and post-COVID 19 lockdown were recorded. These included questions about the following

- Time spent on apps pre, during, and post-pandemic
- Was social media considered an authentic news source?
- How mental health was affected because of social media was also documented.

Indicators of mental health used (in the questionnaire) were

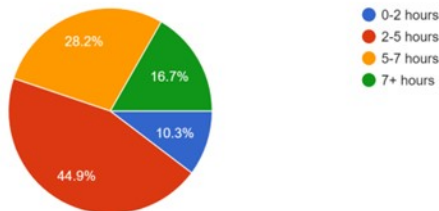
- Did Social media induce panic or was it resourceful
- Productivity
- Change in the sleep cycle

- Influence of social media on decision making

RESULTS

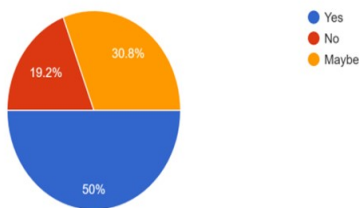
During lockdown: 10.3% of respondents spent 0-2 hours on social media apps. 49.9% respondents spent 2-5 hours on social media apps.

How much time did you spend on social media apps during the lockdown?
78 responses



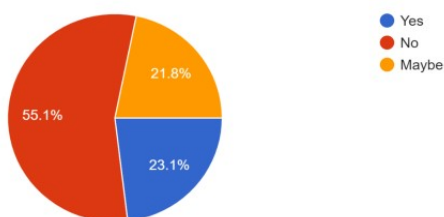
28.2% of respondents spent 5-7 hours on social media apps. 16.7% of respondents spent 7+ hours on social media apps. 95.9% of the respondents use Whatsapp and 89% of the respondents use Instagram which were found to be the most used apps in this study. Of all the respondents, 47.4% said that social media interfered with their ability to sleep.

Were any of the above mentioned apps an authentic source of news for you during the lockdown?
78 responses



50% of the total respondents considered social media an authentic source of news during the pandemic. 19.2% did not consider it an authentic source of news while 30.8% somewhat relied on it for news.

Did social media increase your productivity during the pandemic?
78 responses



Of all respondents, 55.1% said social media did not boost their productivity. Social media enhanced productivity, according to 23.1% of all respondents. According to 21.8% of all respondents, social media may have contributed to their higher productivity (i.e., social media may have had a role in their increase in productivity, but other factors may have also played a role).

Objective 3. To find out whether the various social media corporations are taking any steps to ease mental health problems that are often caused by them: Everything has been altered as a result of the coronavirus epidemic, and well-known social media sites like Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat are attempting to emphasise the value of mental health.

While there are benefits to using social media, there are drawbacks as well, such as online harassment, abuse, and trolling, among other issues.

- The highly famous social media platform Snapchat has launched "Here for You" in India in collaboration with the Manas Foundation and Mariwala Health Initiative. The goal of this initiative is to offer in-app support to Snapchat users in India who could be going through an emotional or mental health crisis.
- Facebook-owned Instagram, which boasts 117 million daily active users in India, has introduced several well-being features to counteract online harassment. These features include the ability to hide potentially offensive comments, which automatically hides comments that are similar to others that have been reported, as well as tools to help users manage their activities and time spent on social media, such as "Time Spent" and "Daily Reminder."
- In an effort to encourage users to participate in conversations about mental health, prominent microblogging site Twitter has now included a special emoji on the hashtag #MentalHealth. To raise awareness of mental health issues, the firm works with mental health organisations in India and other countries.
- To find solutions on how to cope with increased social media usage while keeping mental health in check.

Being a part of the 21st century, completely eliminating social media use is challenging, but these online platforms can be used strategically. Here are some suggestions:

Effective Time Management: Recognize the purpose behind using social media and develop a strategy to stay focused. Utilize tools that offer insights into app activity, set daily time limits, adjust notification settings, and monitor online time.

Curate Your Feed: Consciously follow channels that promote positivity, share knowledge, and enhance creative skills. Filter content to maintain a positive mindset, such as following news channels and art pages.

Utilize Social Support: Leverage websites providing support through social media channels, offering anonymous forums and resources for online therapy sessions. Save and share these resources to help those in need.

Create Mental Health Awareness: Utilise social media to advocate for mental health concerns and to encourage others to follow suit. Make a difference in the stigma associated with mental health by speaking up on internet forums.

Showcase Creativity: Utilize online platforms to exhibit talents, boosting morale, and enhancing productivity. Some creators have turned entrepreneurs, showcasing the positive potential of social media.

Detox When Necessary: Opt for social media detox when overwhelming. Connect with nature through activities like yoga, meditation, or walks. Prioritize mental and physical well-being by engaging in hobbies like journaling, dancing, or running.

CONCLUSION

Pandemics, epidemics, and public health catastrophes always result in high levels of stress, anxiety, and worry across global communities, especially those that are susceptible to viral

attacks. The covid 19 epidemic was one such disaster that devastated the planet. We've learned a lot over the last two years. We've learned our lessons, and as a society, we're moving forward with caution. There is ample evidence from qualitative findings of existing studies that social media has both beneficial and negative effects on one's mental health. Though social media has greatly contributed to people's recent increased open-mindedness, there is still a stigma associated with mental health issues and anxiety disorders. Social media has a profound effect on developing brains, changing behaviors, attitudes, and well-being. While technology provides educational benefits and connectivity, issues such as cyberbullying and high expectations have an influence on mental health. A balanced strategy is required, supporting responsible usage and establishing a good digital environment for young learners' well-being. To improve the positive influence of social media on young learners, stress digital literacy education, critical thinking skills, and responsible online behavior. Create a positive digital environment by collaborating with educators, parents, and platforms. Encourage good content creation on social media platforms, building a culture of empathy and well-being.

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