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Social Media: Useful or Harmful?

Throughout the last decade, social media has rapidly grown to now taking up a huge percentage of our day to day lives. Whether it be taking a picture of your food, voicing your thoughts and feelings in front of thousands of people via a tweet, or perhaps even building your online brand in order to make a profit off of your Instagram profile, the internet can satisfy all types of needs. Our tiny screens offer a plethora of options easily tailored to whatever we might like to use these devices for. But where do we cross the line between abundance and addiction? It's easy to focus on the positive aspects of social media when it has been a convenience for some that use it allowing them to communicate with someone on a different continent, or when it opens doors for younger generations allowing them to achieve what no generation before them has, like becoming famous for talking to a camera about your feelings. However, to avoid being consumed by social media, we must acknowledge the negative aspects of it such as social media use being heavily addictive and dangerous to adolescents and young adults, leading to depression, anxiety, or possibly even social isolation. As tough as a pill as it may be to swallow, social media is a harmful tool that when not used properly can ruin your life.

When people think of the word addiction, the first thing that comes to mind might not be the term "social media". Most associate addiction with things like alcohol, cigarettes, or heavier drugs. But the truth is an addiction can be overindulgence in any substance, thing, or activity. This means that you can become addicted to things like people, working, or even social media. Too much of anything is never a good thing, so why are certain addictions normalized in today's society? Well, simple. To overindulge in something like social media isn't as dangerous as overindulging in a serious drug like cocaine or heroin. You can't technically overdose on social media, and it is certainly possible for someone to be very active on social media yet still live a perfectly normal life. If that is true, then why is it important for people to understand that however normalized social media is, it can still be as dangerous as an addiction to drugs? As stated by Silvia Casale, Laura Rugai, and Giulia Fioravanti, "(Social Networking Sites) use may be addictive because some individuals experience symptoms similar to those experienced by those who suffer from other forms of addiction." These symptoms may include mood modification, salience, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse (Casale, Rugai & Fioravanti, 2018). This is when social media use becomes extremely problematic. It is through the problematic use of social media that other psychopathological problems can be brought about (Medrano & Rosales, 2018). Some of the common risk factors may be avoidant and anxious attachment orientation, identity styles, and impulsivity (Casale, Rugai & Fioravanti, 2018). In 2018 a study explored the role of positive metacognitions in explaining the association between the fear of missing out and social media addiction. It was found both in men and women fear of missing out and self-presentational skills were both directly and indirectly associated with social media problematic use through the mediation of positive metacognitions (Casale, Rugai & Fioravanti, 2018). This not only is proof of how social media addiction can have a negative impact on our lives but also how addictive it is to maintain a constant "connection" to what

everyone else is doing which can set off difficult cognitive and negative emotional states that force people to continue using social media in an attempt to control their mental state. Unfortunately, that is not something that can be easily regulated, and if not well managed could lead to more serious psychopathological problems like depression or anxiety.

As happy as some might try to make themselves seem on the internet, the alarming truth is that the constant use of social media may actually be linked to increased rate of depression and social isolation. As Alexandra Hamlet, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute, states “The less you are connected with human beings in a deep, empathic way, the less you’re really getting the benefits of a social interaction... The more superficial it is, the less likely it’s going to cause you to feel connected, which is something we all need.” Without proper interaction, people may be left socially unsatisfied in turn leaving them socially isolated and more at risk for depression (Miller, 2018). In addition, although feeling like a mindless task, scrolling through news feeds or looking photographs of friends may actually be harmful to your mental state of mind. In 2018, a study among 125 students revealed that there was a positive relationship between passive social media use and some depressive symptoms, such as depressed mood or feeling inferior (Aalbers, 2018). These results showcase the negative outcomes of problematic social media use and the addiction of wanting to maintain that constant connection to what everyone else is doing. However, like most other addictions, it may seem to some that life would be unbearable with social media

Considering 92% of all teens and young adults own a smartphone, it would be safe to assume that most people would argue that social media has had a positive effect on their life (Miller, 2018). And they wouldn’t be entirely wrong for saying so. Seeing as social media now serves as a news source for some, a means of communicating for others, and way of expressing one’s self to the world, it isn’t difficult to see how the internet has changed some lives for the better. There is nothing inherently wrong with the use of social media. However, most users spend nearly half their day just online. According to a study by market research group Nielsen, “American adults spend more than 11 hours per day watching, reading, listening to or simply interacting with media...” It is at this point, where people cannot tell the difference between simply using social media and overindulging in it, that social media use becomes problematic and a danger to one’s mental well-being.

Drawing the line between usefulness and harmfulness can be a difficult task. Most people already have a hard time determining what is good for their own health. So no, social media use is not bad. However, if not managed properly it can be very dangerous to one’s psyche. But it doesn’t mean that we have to stop using it altogether. We simply need to regulate it. Perhaps spending less time looking at our screens and more time interacting with the world might even be enjoyable. However, when even the president of your country is an avid Twitter user, that might just be a tad difficult. But we can always keep trying.