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IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH

A case study with students at Oulu University of Applied Sciences

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ABSTRACT

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Social media has become an integral part of human beings in the present era. It has influenced them in many ways. On the one hand, numerous benefits of social media such as online chatting, audio/video calling, opinions sharing, posting images, reading the real-time news, and advertising is attracting users rapidly. On the other hand, excessive use of social media is causing negative impacts on mental health like an increase in anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem.

The purpose of the thesis is to promote safe social and motivate students to use social media platforms in a balanced way. Many studies have shown that the balanced use of social media can help to increase the well-being of a person. The thesis intended to aware OUAS students about the positive and negative impacts of social media on their mental health to increase their focus on study, to expand their skills, and to increase productivity.

In the empirical part, a questionnaire survey was conducted in a small group of BIT and DIB students in OUAS. The objective of the survey was to know the time consumption of students by using social media and how is social media helping or affecting students. The result showed that female students are more active in social media than male. The students spend a significant amount of time on social media. While most of the students are aware of the impacts of social media on mental health, there were also some students who aren't. For the students who do not know the effects of social media on mental health, the thesis provides enough knowledge to understand the situation.

Keywords: Social Media, Mental Health, Mental Illness, Mental Disorder, Cyberbullying, Addiction, Depression, Empowerment

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	5
1.1	Research Problems.....	6
1.2	Research Methodology	6
2	CONCEPTS.....	7
2.1	Definition of social media.....	7
2.2	Definition of mental health.....	9
3	IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH	11
3.1	Positive Impacts	13
3.2	Negative Impacts.....	16
4	STUDENT AS A SUFFERER	22
5	SURVEY AND RESULTS.....	24
6	CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION	28
	REFERENCES	30
	APPENDICES.....	35

1 INTRODUCTION

With a growing development in technology, life has become more comfortable and faster. At the same time, the rise of technology has also created problems all around. Among the pool of technological discoveries, social media has become so popular nowadays that one cannot stay away from it. The invention of the smartphones has made the use of social media even prolific. According to the 2018 global reports published by 'We Are social' and 'Hootsuite,' the number of active social media users are 3.196 billion, and the number of mobile phone users is 5.135 billion at the end of January 2018 (Kemp 2018, cited 12.09.2018). This trend is changing the way of living in society: communicating, sharing and expressing ideas and availability of the products or services.

In more detail, social media has become an integral part of human beings. It has influenced them in different ways. On the one hand, the numerous benefits of the social media such as online/offline chatting, video calling, sharing thoughts, posting photos, real-time news, advertisements, and meetings, are attracting the users rapidly. On the other hand, people have become addicted to social media causing different social, physical and mental problems. "Facebook can be fun and healthy activity if users take advantage of the site to stay connected with family and old friends and to share interesting and important aspects of their lives but if it's used to see how well an acquaintance is doing financially or how happy an old friend is in his relationship – things that cause envy among users – use of the site can lead to feelings of depression," said Professor Margaret Duffy, University of Missouri (The Week 2018, cited 12.09.2018). The usage of social media can have both harmful and useful impact on mental health. Therefore, it is vital to use social media in a balanced way so that users get the full advantage of it without hampering their mental health.

This thesis focuses on the positive and negative aspects of social media on mental health with an aim to motivate users to use social media in a balanced way.

1.1 Research Problems

This research is based on the following three main questions:

1. What are the positive and negative impacts of social media on mental health?
2. How much time do the students of OUAS spend on social media?
3. Is social media helpful to the students or affecting them?

The questions mentioned above are the research problem, and thus, the research aims to find out the solution to all those issues.

1.2 Research Methodology

The thesis is divided into two parts: a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part constitutes the information regarding the effects of social media on mental health. The theoretical part also focuses on finding information about whether social media is helping or harming students. In this part, the information is based on secondary sources such as different studies conducted in the past, books, journals, google results, and statistics.

The empirical part is based on a questionnaire survey conducted among a small group of students of BIT (Business Information Technology) and DIB (Degree in International Business) in OUAS. A questionnaire was created using Google-forms and sent to the students via email and asked to give responses voluntarily. There were altogether nine questions in which eight questions were set as a compulsory question, and 1 question was placed as an open-end question. The time given for the survey was one week. At the end of the week, the total number of responses were 12. The respondents are classified by gender to compare which group are more aware of the thesis topic.

2 CONCEPTS

In this chapter, the concept of social media and mental health is explained. The meaning of social media and mental health is subjective. Therefore, the precise meaning of social media and mental health help readers to understand those terms in research and to follow it smoothly. However, the presented meaning is not the universal definition.

2.1 Definition of social media

There is no single recognized definition of social media (IIA & Jacka 2011, 27). Social media is a subjective term because its meaning varies from person to person. The definition of social media is determined based on for what purpose it is used. Now, social media have many definitions. A broader perspective is essential to understand the meaning of social media. Some of the definitions of social media are mentioned below:

According to the Cambridge Business English Dictionary (2018), social media is a form of media that allows people to communicate and share information using the Internet or mobile phones.

Social media is interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks (Wikipedia 2018, cited 26.09.2018).

Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenelein 2010, 61).

Merriam-Webster (2014) defined social media as, "forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)." (Bashir, 2017a.)

From the definitions mentioned above, the general meaning of social media can be derived as an internet-based application that allows the users to communicate in the form of text, voice or video

and share information, thoughts, and visual elements in a virtual community, privately or publicly. However, the use of social media is not only limited to communication and sharing. Now, it has been used in health, politics, economics, technology, education, entertainment and service sectors enormously.

According to the report published by Statista (September 2018), the most popular social media platforms are shown in figure 1 below:

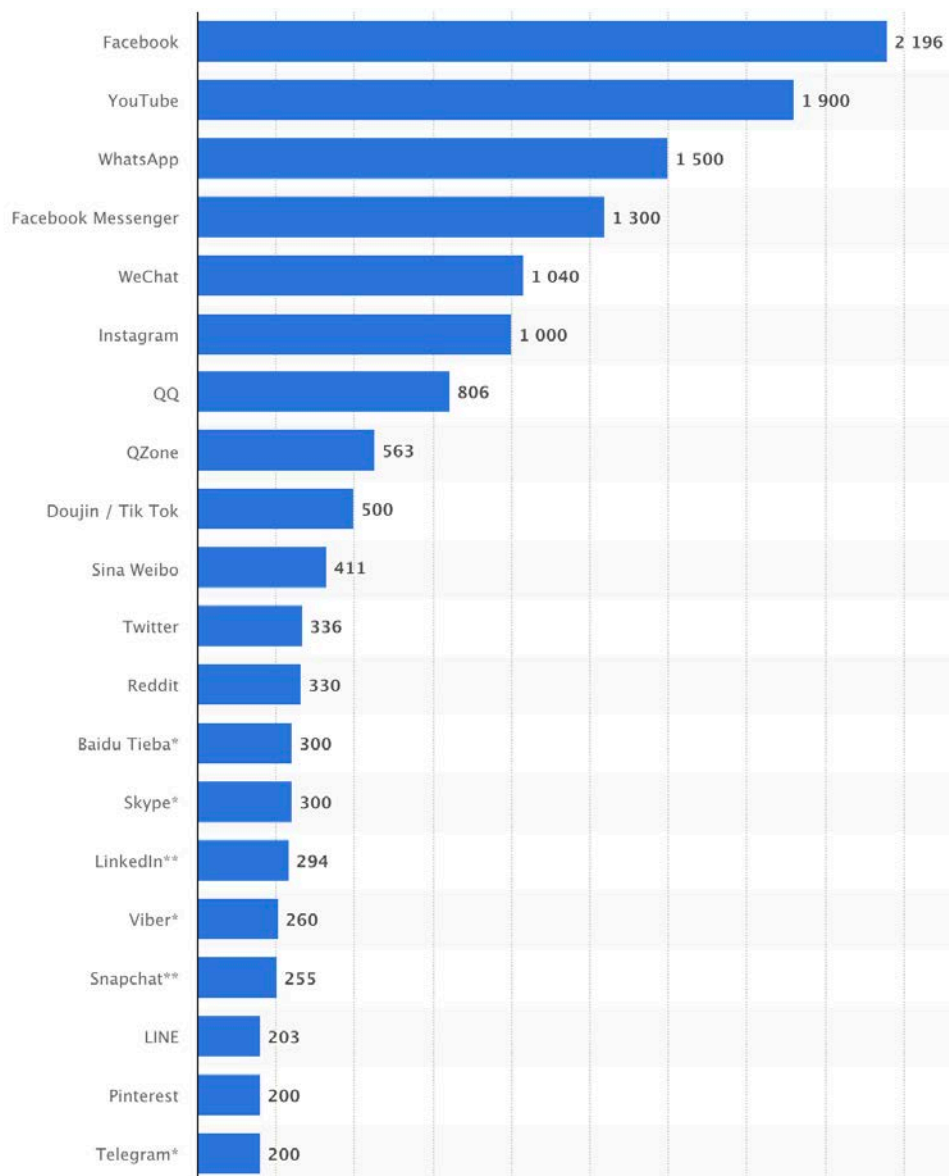


FIGURE 1. Showing the number of social media users worldwide (in millions)

The figure 1 above shows that Facebook is the leading social media site with 2.196 million users followed by YouTube (1.900 million), WhatsApp (1.500 million), Facebook messenger (1.300 million) simultaneously and the list goes on. In general, the reasons to use social media are to stay in touch with friends or families, to share photos and videos, to stay updated with news and current issues, to fulfill the spare time, to share opinions, for networking and marketing, and to meet new people.

2.2 Definition of mental health

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community (World Health Organization 2014a, 12).

Mental health is an integral and essential part of overall health. It can be defined in three ways: the absence of disease, a state in which the organism allows the full performance of its function, a state of balance between one's physical and social environment. Each of these three definitions depends on the basic needs, such as food, shelter, survival, protection, society, support and freedom from pain, environmental hazards, stress and from any part of exploitation. (Bhugra, Till & Sartorius 2013, cited 27.09.2018)

Based on the above two definitions, it can be said that mental health is a state of well-being and an ability to realize and utilize one's potential to live a normal life. However, there are numerous arguments in finding the universal meaning of mental health. For instance, people are used to hearing 'mental health' as a euphemism for a 'mental illness.' In more detail, the perception of society is different based on the culture, geography, and religion. In some societies, the term 'mental illness' is taken as a negative and an embarrassing term. People mock at patient having a mental illness. In this situation, the victimized person to hide their illness from society or for fear of being teased uses the term 'mental health' to describe 'mental illness.' Some societies perceive 'mental health' as a polite and positive term than a 'mental illness.' Here, the definitions of mental health and mental illness cannot be differentiated. (Cattan & Tilford, 2006, chapter 2.)

Furthermore, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is a state of healthy mind. If the mind is unhealthy, outcomes are a mental illness and a mental disorder where the

mental illness refers to depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and the mental disorder refers to an alcohol and drug addiction including the mental illness. However, people living with a mental disorder can also achieve good levels of well-being – living a satisfying, meaningful, contributing life despite pain and distress. (2014b,12.) Therefore, mental health is not just the absence of mental disorder. It is a broader term that represents both the mental disorder and the mental illness as its determinant factors.

In this thesis, mental health is presented as a state of healthy mind. The thesis focuses on social media as a determinant factor that influences the mental health positively and negatively resulting in either a mental disorder or a mental health promoter.

3 IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH

The evolution of the social media is in peak conquering the world's population into it. Based on the facts and figures published by Statista (2018), 71.8% of the world population use some form of social network in 2018. It is expected to rise to 72.4 % by 2019. The present life of the people is deeply connected with social media. Being social has become the necessity of the world right now. With the development of smartphones, the use of social media has become even prolific. People like to communicate with their friends, families, relatives, and strangers, like their status, pictures, and videos, raise voice against the rising issues such as gender inequality, racism and spend time surfing latest news, discoveries and information through social media. Teenagers even spend time on social media playing games and finding dating partners. The multifunctional behavior is the cause people are attracted to using social media.

Moreover, the relation of a human being with social media is indivisible at present. Right now, an unborn child is being socialized online and being liked and commented on (Halpert, TEDx Talks, 9.10.2015). It has become essential for people to be active in social media. Since morning to evening, people are busy updating their day and activities. This shows the power of social media and how deeply it is rooted in our life. Nonetheless, it has become even more essential to get likes and comments on our posts on social media. There has been ranking: one with more likes treated as high profile and few likes as low profile. Also, people are free to comment on someone's post easily. All of such practices is changing our lives for forever.

Similarly, when people treat social media as part of their life and use it all the time, it has some impact on their health. Since social media engages communication and interaction, it requires a lot of brain activities than physical. As a result, the effect is seen on the mental health of people in recent time. In the article "effect of social media on mental health," it is said that excessive use of social media creates the imbalance. The report also mentioned that social media phenomenon is new which present clear benefits but also has an effect on the well-being and mental health of its users. Further, Connection between social media and its undesirable outcomes like an increase in anxiety, stress, depression, and loneliness raises alarms among younger generations. (Bashir, 2017b.)

Figure 2 shown below published is by The Economist (18th May 2017), shows the impact of four popular social media (Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter) on the mental health:

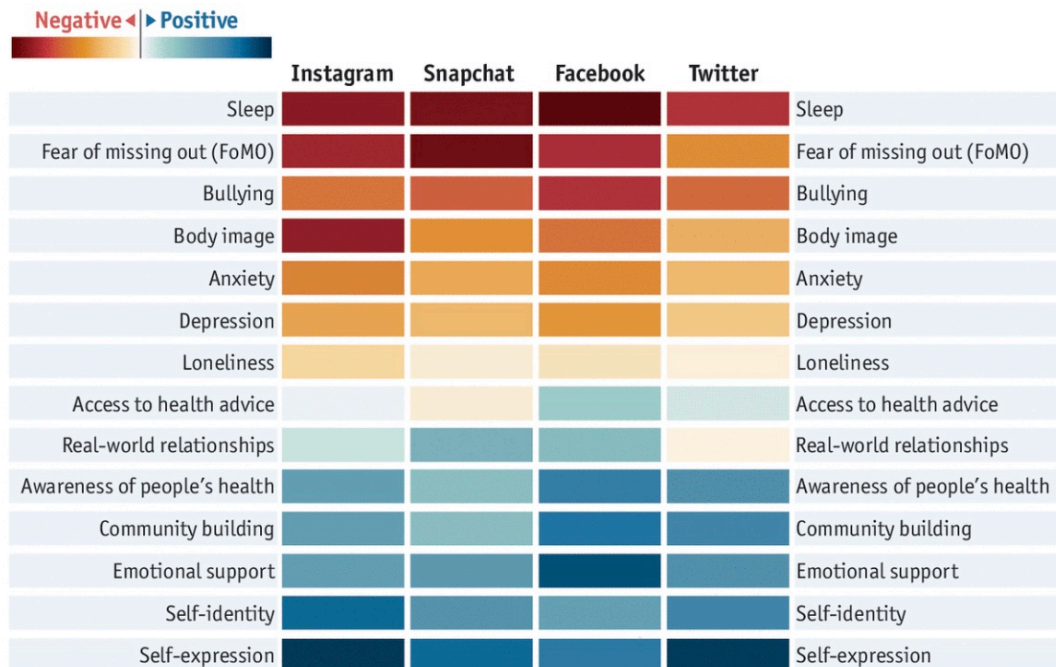


FIGURE 2. showing the effect of social media on the mental health of 14 to 24 years age group

In figure 2, the age group of 14 to 24 were selected for the survey. The results are shown in figure 2. The chart shows the positive and negative effect of social media (Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter) on mental health. Positive results such as access to health advice, real-world relationships, awareness of people's health, community building, emotional support, self-identity, and self-expression are shown with a blue color: light blue as least contribution and dark blue as a higher contribution. Negative effects such as sleep disorder, Fear of Missing out (FoMo), bullying, body image, anxiety, depression, and loneliness are shown with yellow and red color: light yellow as least contribution and dark red as a higher contribution. All four social media mentioned in the chart has some role in all the positive and negative effects on mental health. For instance, Instagram has a higher role in body image, anxiety and loneliness, Snapchat has a higher role in FoMo, and Facebook has a higher contribution in sleeping disorder, bullying, anxiety, and depression whereas Twitter has significantly less role in all negative impacts than other three media simultaneously. On the other side, Instagram has a higher contribution to self-expression and self-identity, Facebook has a higher involvement in emotional support, community building, awareness

of people's health and access to health advice, Twitter plays a more significant role in self-expressing and community building and Snapchat has a higher role in building a relationship with the real world.

Thus, social media has been identified as both beneficial and damaging to people's mental health because of the nature of its content and the way people perceive it. Some argue that social media can have a positive impact on the mental health through increased support which brings a sense of hope, companionship, and motivation to the patients who have a mental disorder. Other studies suggest a link between social media and mental health promotes psychological distress. (Nasuland 2014, 1.)

In the following chapter, the impact of social media is divided into two categories: Positive impacts and negative impacts.

3.1 Positive Impacts

Social media isn't inherently bad for mental health; it can be positive and uplifting too. In a study conducted by the University of Melbourne and the Monash University, 70 studies were reviewed where, the result showed that the social media could be useful for connecting with others and provide unique mental support for people with anxieties (Medicalxpress 2016, Cited 29.10.2018). In another study conducted by Michigan State University, it was found that when participants are more active in social media like Facebook, they give advice, show empathy or support in some way which ultimately increases their well-being as compared to passive users (Kogan 2018, Cited 30.10.2018). Here, passive users refer to those who scroll the social media pages without any specific purpose. Now, the social media bridges the space between communities all around the globe through which people are sharing their inspiring stories, motivating to live a happy life, promoting peace and supporting under challenging times.

Ms. Devon who is a writer spends most of her time visiting schools and talking to young people about her experience. In an interview, she said, "I have found social media to be a wonderful place to connect with like-minded individuals. It's nice to know there are people out there who understand, and who offer encouraging words when needed." (Nichol 2018, Cited 30.10.2018.)

Some of the benefits of social media on mental health are discussed below briefly:

a) Mental health support

Social media can provide mental health support. "It has immediacy for getting support when we need it most, and there's nobody around, or nobody we feel we can go to with our problems (a common experience among people with mental health issues is one of the feelings: burden to others)", said Katie Sutton who is the student Nursing Times editor for Mental Health branch. In her blog she gave an example of a nurse-maiden, Sally-Ann who posted on Twitter at 11:20 pm as follow:

"My daughter is having a severe panic attack, we r using a paper bag, but I can't seem to settle her? She is so scared it's horrible any advice?"

The tweet above got the attention of the several nurses offering advice and retweeting it. Sally-Ann twitted after 20 minutes saying her daughter is feeling better and thanked all the suggestions she received. (Sutton 2013, Cited 26.10.2018.)

Nowadays not all people use social media as a platform to connect with friends and relatives, but there are also many professionals who are giving advice and suggestion to the needy people through it. In the case of mental health, people who suffer from some mental health issues such as anxiety, and depression, some find it difficult to share their problems with the real people around them. In such cases, social media plays a supportive role to connect such a person to seek help from different health professionals or people with similar experiences virtually. For instance, Elefriends is a social platform managed by the mental health charity (Mind) which provides urgent help on the mental health issues. There are also numerous community pages or groups in Facebook run by mental health professionals to support mental health issues and to increase awareness. Instagram offers support and helps when type '#depressed' in a search box. However, the user should also be responsible for choosing the appropriate platforms to share their issues because social media is also a place where online bullying happens all the time.

In a new survey supported by Hopelab and Well Being Trust, it demonstrated that social media is an integral part of young people's lives and that large number of teens and adults experiencing moderate to severe symptoms of depression turn to the internet for help. The

survey report even alerted telling young people who have symptoms of depression to stay off the social media may not always be wise; for some, it may cut off a critical lifeline, a connection to advice, information, inspiration, and support. (Miller 2018, Cited 26.10.2018.)

b) Personal Empowerment

Social media provide a range of benefits and opportunities to empower people in a variety of ways. It plays the role of a creator, curator, and spectator. In more detail, through social media, an individual can create their profile showing their best quality, share the profile with billions of audiences from around the world and seek for the right opportunity. The social media is a place of knowledge from where people can learn the skills they are interested in, read and follow the inspiring stories of a successful personality, get motivated and develop as a confident person.

Further, in a blog written by Tazi, she mentioned an Australian model who quitted using social media by describing them inauthentic and pointless. However, Tazi was not convinced with that action and the reason she gave describing social media as meaningless. Instead, Tazi said, "social media offers representation unheard of in mainstream media." (Tazi 2015, Cited 3.11.2018.) Social media is accessible to everyone around the world. The role of social media on social reformation is incomparable. Through social media bad practices are shared, listened and got helped. It has become a place to shout out. Today, the third gender are using social media to connect people like them in next corner of the world, and fat girls are inspiring others to wear whatever they want freely, black men and women are speaking about racial injustices, and disadvantaged people are motivating others through their work despite physical weakness. Such activities in social media are empowering people in different parts of the world and make them feel that they are not alone.

The founder and executive director of MEDIAGIRLS, Michelle Cove said, "I so appreciate seeing teen girls using YouTube to help other girls, lift their spirit, and be authentic. I have seen so many girls on YouTube performing in poetry slams, competing in fierce dancing competitions, creating PSAs, teaching tutorials and more. There are so many incredible role models." Likewise, Elizabeth Banks is an American Actress who created "WhoHaha" channel in YouTube with an aim to make the audiences laugh until they pee. In an interview with CBS news, she said that women's voices are being oppressed which bugs me a lot.

She continued saying, "I think there's a way to be supportive, creative and positive online and that's what I'm trying to put into the world, and I know YouTube shares that goal." (Park 2017, Cited 03.11.2018.)

Similarly, "Black Girl Magic" is a concept created by CaShawn Thompson in 2013 to celebrate the beauty, power, and resilience of black women. 'Black Girl Magic' is a term used to illustrate the universal awesomeness of black women. Since then, the moment started to take over social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook with #BlackGirlMagic. (Wilson 2016, Cited 03.11.2018.)

In this way, considering the benefits that social media platforms are offering, it is a beautiful gift of technology in the modern era. Social media is a voice for voiceless, face for faceless and oxygen for breathless. Through social media, people with mental health issues are getting support, help, and inspiration. For developing and under-developed country where the mental health services are marginalized, people are learning about their mental health issues with the help of social media platforms. In some way, social media platforms are promoting good mental health to make a better world.

3.2 Negative Impacts

Before the invention of social media, bad practices still occurred in places, but now the ratio has increased incredibly. Such bad practices used to have an impact on the specific locations, but now the effect is global. Because of the freedom and an ineffective restrictions policy, people are also misusing social media platforms resulting in negative impacts on the mental health such as cyberbullying and suicide, increase in anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression.

In the United States, Ashwanty Davis killed herself after a video of her in a schoolyard fight went viral on the app Musical.ly. Davis was only ten years old. Less than a week later, Rosalie Avila who was a 13 years old teen hung herself after receiving abusive online messages. Similarly, on December 31st, a popular YouTuber Logan Paul posted a video making fun of the body of a man who hung himself in Japan's Akutagawa forest. (Christ, 2018.) These examples are the results of the negative impacts of social media. There are many similar examples throughout the world.

Some of the significant negative impacts of social media on mental health are discussed below:

a) Cyberbullying

Bullying is any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) toward youth by another youth or group of youths, who are not siblings or current dating partners, involving an observed or perceived power imbalance (CDC, 2018, Cited:13.10.2018). Online bullying allows perpetrators the powerful advantage of anonymity. When afforded the ability to hide behind a computer screen, perpetrators act without regard for the consequences and feel less accountability and guilt for their actions (Moreno & Strasburger 2014a, 55). The worst of cyberbullying is it can happen anytime, anywhere publicly or privately. This kind of cruel practices in social media has a direct impact on the psychological health of a targeted person which can lead to the wrong decision of committing suicide in the worst situation.

In detail, one study surveyed college students on how often they had experienced electronic bullying behaviors and found that 38% knew someone who had been cyberbullied, 21.9% had been cyberbullied, 8.6% had acted as a cyberbully (Moreno & Strasburger 2014b, 56 & 57). Cyberbullying causes the feeling of loneliness, low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, increase social anxiety and depression. Likewise, emotional distress, anger, sadness, detachment, externalized hostility, and delinquency is also the symptoms seen in cyberbullied person. The popular social media platform such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are where cyberbullying is widely practiced.

For instance, Amanda Todd, 15 years old, was a Canadian teen who posted a video on YouTube sharing her experiences on bullying both online and in school. In the video, she told a story of how she suffered from the depression and anxiety with the series of white cards. She had to change the school multiple times, but the bullying continued. After posting the video on YouTube, she committed suicide in 2012. That incident got the attention of the news media globally. (NG, 2012a, Cited 13.10.2018.)

"We typically, as a school district, don't talk about such deaths, but with the family's endorsement we did choose to do so because it is important to point out the dangers associated with social media and cyber-bullying", Quinton, spokeswoman for the Coquitlam School District, said (NG, 2012b, Cited 13.10.2018).

In a 2018 summit on cyberbullying prevention hosted by the Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention, first lady of the US, Melania Trump pointed out that social media is an inevitable part of our daily lives in today's global society which can be beneficial but also harmful if misused. She addressed many children and adults are being the victim of cyberbullying, and now it's time to commit ourselves to teach practicing safe social media use for the better future generation. Melania Trump also introduced "BE BEST" campaign launched in May 2018 which will focus on three main pillars: Well-being, social media use and opioid abuse. (Bennett & Klein 2018, Cited 26.10.2018.)

b) Social media Addiction

The problem of social media addiction has become a global problem in the present era. Social media platforms are like galaxy; every day we learn a little more about it, and every day it moves a bit further away (Jacobson 2009, 13). Social media were developed to provide a platform for communication in its initial stage. Now they offer so many features that it has become difficult to stay away from them. In one way or other, people are connected to social media. The excessive use of social media in today's society has created a new problem: the problem of addiction. Social media addiction is becoming very serious and has equated with addictions to hard drugs like heroin and crack cocaine (Woods 2014, Cited 15.10.2018).

Furthermore, research has found out that certain activities in social media such as texting and getting a reply, getting likes, notifications and positive comments, releases a chemical 'dopamine' produced by the brain which is very addictive. Dopamine is the same chemical that makes feel good when we smoke, drink and gamble. So, social media give the same level of pleasure as drugs and gambling that keep users to involve in social media activities again and again. This is why the object of addiction becomes more important to an addict than anything in their lives. (C. Nakaya 2015, 13 & 14.) Such addiction has a direct effect on mental health. Addicts have low self-esteem, feeling of envy, anxiety, sleeping disorder and in the worst situation, they commit a crime. There are a lot of horrible incidents around the world because of social media addiction.

For example, Sushma Goswani was a 24-year-old Indian woman, who committed suicide by hanging herself from a ceiling fan in 2014 after her parents restricted to use Facebook.

On the suicidal note she wrote, "Is Facebook so bad? I cannot stay in a home with such restrictions as I can't live without Facebook". (Dua, 2014, Cited 15.10.2018.)

Similarly, Larry Carlat used to be a married editor of a popular men's magazine, but he became addicted to Twitter. He used to tweet 20 to 30 times a day, seven days a week. After tweeting for over three years, he had 25,000 followers. However, he lost his job, got divorced and faced financial difficulties. Later in 2011, he decided to quit Twitter. (Carlat 2011, Cited 15.10.2018.)

c) Depression, Anxiety and low self-esteem

Depression is a common mental disorder that causes people to experience depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feeling of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy and poor concentration (Mental Health Foundation 2018, Cited 22.10.2018). Likewise, Anxiety is a type of fear usually associated with the thought of a threat or something going wrong in the future but can also arise from something happening right now (Mental Health Foundation 2018, Cited 22.10.2018). The relationship between depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem are inter-related. They can happen at any time, anywhere and from anything. Recently, excessive use of social media is found to be an essential cause of depression and anxiety.

In a survey conducted by Dr. Heather Cleland Woods at Glasgow University, 467 teenagers were questioned on their overall and night-time social media use. The result revealed that overall social media use, night-time specific use and emotional investment all had a significant impact on quality of sleep linked with the higher level of depression and anxiety. Similarly, a study of 700 secondary school students in Ottawa found that those who use social network sites have poor mental health three times more than those who don't use them. (Levy 2015, Cited 22.10.2018.)

The causes of depression and anxiety among people are varied depending on the perception of the people towards social media. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is one of the reasons people use social media nowadays. FOMO means fear of missing out among the group of friends, families and specific unions. It is also a fear of being unnoticed. FOMO keep users coming back to social media repeatedly that might even lead to addiction and then to depression. Checking messages frequently even when there are no messages,

keeping an eye on the notification bar all the time are the symptoms of FOMO. In a TEDx Talks with Bailey Parnell, she said that we ignore simple things such as chatting, tagging, checking notification, and taking selfies in social media because these activities are fun to us, but the problem is such actions are repetitive. "When a micro-moment happens over, and over time, that's when we have a macro problem," she continued. (Parnell 2017, Cited 22.10.2018.) Here, she refers to the macro problem as depression.

According to WHO report (2018), Depression is a common mental disorder with more than 300 million people affected worldwide. When the depression is at its worst situation, it can lead to suicide. In the same report, it is also said that suicide is the second leading cause of death in 15-29-year-olds and every year about 800,000 people die due to suicide. Depressed people have a certain level of anxiety disorder and low self-esteem as well. The causes of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem via social media can be online harassment, blackmailing, inappropriate texts or visuals, addiction to the likes and comments and comparison with friends having a better life. In the past few years, scholars have carried out various empirical studies investigating the causations and consequences of depression in the context of the use of social media: intensity of social media use, online communication, and online threats. In a study conducted by Lin et al. (2016), it was found that social media use was significantly associated with depression. In a similar kind of survey by Scherr and Brunet (2017), the result showed depressive users are likely to spend more time on Facebook. (Dhir 2018, 144.)

In another perspective, comparing with friends in social media is also the rising cause of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. In recent time, the impossible standard is set much closer to home, not by celebrities and models but by classmates and friends. These standards for some have become a nightmare because when people see their friend on the social media more beautiful than them and lots of people praising their beauty, people feel that they are not as attractive as their friends. It creates a problem of body shaming. Another aspect of social media is the highlight reels. It means showing the best and most enviable moments while concealing the efforts and common element of ordinary life — these highlight reels of someone nearby cause low self-esteem to many people. The result is people try to avoid being social in real life.

Therefore, the relationship between depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem is closely related. Depression can cause stress and low self-esteem, anxiety can lead to depression and low self-esteem and vice-versa.

4 STUDENT AS A SUFFERER

In the report “Students’ Online Usage: Global Market Trends Report” published by Monica Vannozzi and Laura Bridgestock in 2013, a total of 918 surveys were completed at QS World Grad School Tour events held in 26 countries across Europe, Asia, Latin America, North America, and Africa. The report focused on internet usage trends of current and prospective students worldwide covering mainly three areas: Time spent online, Internet device usage, Global social network preferences. The findings on Time Spent Online and Social Networks from the report are presented below:

- Time Spent Online
 - Time spent online per day by students of all age groups are 0-3 hours.
 - Older respondents are more likely to spend 5+ hours online in a day.
 - Those students who are interested in engineering & technology reported to spend 5+ hours online per day.
 - In Latin America and Africa, respondents are more likely to report 5+ hours online in a day.
- Social Networks
 - In all-region (Europe, Asia, Latin America, North America, Africa), more than 50% students are reported to use five key networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Pinterest all the time.
 - The primary motivation for social media usage in all region is to stay up to date. However, in Latin America, students use social media because of their interest.
 - Younger students are motivated by an opportunity to express and older students by chance to stay connected.

From the report “Students’ Online Usage: Global Market Trends Report” it is clear that among the world’s population, students are the highest number of social media users. Social media has been beneficial to the students in higher education primarily for new students who are in their first year at University. For new students, making friends, partying, to stay in touch, joining different groups, working in a team project and communication are the primary motivating factors to use social media. Another prospect can be the use of smartphones among the students. Students are always

carrying smartphones wherever they go, take pictures or videos and share them through social media platforms. However, students are also the group most affected negatively by social media usage. The practice of bullying and harassment widely exist around Schools and Campuses.

Thus, in one-way, social media is helping students cope with the stresses in life. In another way, it is also acting as a stress generator. Balanced use of social media can help to increase productivity, focus on the study, and give/get support for the students.

5 SURVEY AND RESULTS

A questionnaire survey was conducted with a small group of students from BIT and DIB in OUAS. There were altogether nine questions in which eight questions were qualitative, and one was quantitative. The questionnaire was created using Google-forms and sent to the student's email for the responses. A time of 1 week was given to respond to the survey. There was a total of 12 responses. Since the total respondents are only 12, the sample size is 12. The answers were taken as a sample to study the knowledge of students on the impacts of social media on mental health. The survey questions can be found in Appendix 1.

Furthermore, the results of all the nine questions are presented briefly with the help of data and figures below:

Question 1: The first question was asked with an aim to know the gender of respondents.

The results showed that majority of the respondents were female students. The number of female respondents was 9 and Male were 3.

Question 2: The second question was about choosing a favorite social media platform.

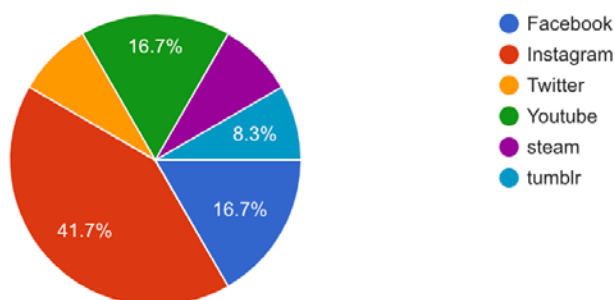


FIGURE 3. Showing percentage of respondents on choosing favorite social media platform

Based on the results, the most favorite social media platform was found to be Instagram. Facebook and YouTube were favorited equally. Some of the students also mentioned Tumblr and Steam as their preferred social media platform.

Question 3: The third question was about daily time consumption using social media platforms.

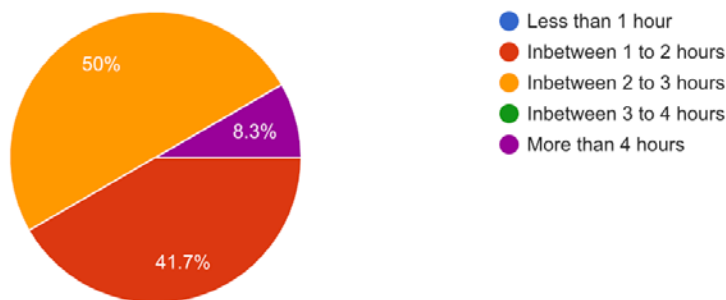


FIGURE 4. Showing percentage of daily time consumption on using social media platforms

It was found that most of the students spend 2 to 3 hours on using social media platforms in a day. Some of the respondents even use social media for more than 4 hours a day. There are none of the respondents who use social media platforms for less than an hour. This result shows that the engagement of the students in social media is very active.

Question 4: The fourth question was asked on the purposes of using social media.

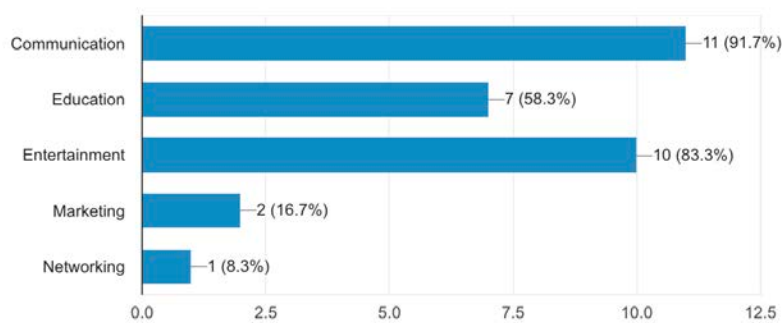


FIGURE 5. Showing percentage of respondents on different purposes of using social media.

The main purpose of the students to use social media platforms was found to be communication. Entertainment comes after that. Furthermore, some students are also using social media for education and marketing purposes. Networking is the least priority for the respondents.

Question 5: The fifth question was about whether the students have provided help to others on mental health issues via social media platforms.

10 out of 12 respondents had provided help on mental health issues on social media. The help such as motivating others, supporting, and sharing their knowledge and experiences are provided by the respondent students.

Question 6: The sixth question was asked if any of the respondents have ever faced any mental trouble while using social media.

Fortunately, most of the students answered that they had not faced any kind of mental problems via social media. However, some of the students confessed that they had suffered mental trouble such as harassment while using social media platforms.

Question 7: The seventh question asked students their opinions on whether using social media platforms can help to increase the well-being of a person.

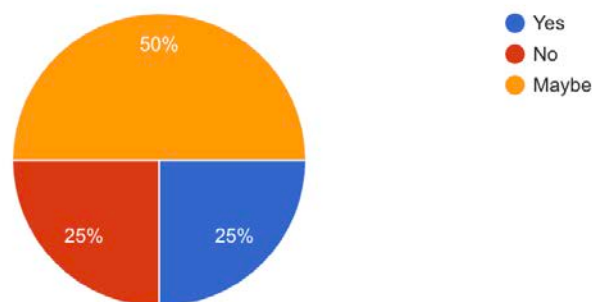


FIGURE 6. Showing percentage of respondents on whether social media can boost well-being

The results were mixed. 50% of the students couldn't decide whether the use of social media can boost their well-being or not. 25% of the respondents replied that the use of social media could raise the welfare of a person. The other 25% strongly responded that using social media doesn't help in increasing the well-being of a person.

Question 8: The eighth question was on how aware the respondents are about negative consequences of using social media on their mental health.

Ten respondents replied saying they are aware of the negative impacts of social media on their mental health. The remaining two replied they have no idea about effects of social media use on their mental health.

Question 9: The last question was an open-end question asking respondents opinions on the usage of social media and mental health.

Only one of the respondents expressed her opinion as follow:

"Finding support online can help a lot and finding people whom you can relate to makes you feel less alone, whatever your situation is."

6 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

There are both kinds of the effect of using social media on mental health: positive and negative. The purpose of this thesis was to motivate the OUAS students to use social media platforms in a balanced way. Using social media in a balanced way fosters the well-being of a person.

It was essential to aware the OUAS students about the possible positive and negative impacts of social media on their mental health. Before that, it was also vital to understand the knowledge of OUAS students about the effects of social media on mental health. Therefore, the survey was conducted in a small group of BIT and DIB students. The sample size was only 12. Since, the number of respondents is very low, general perception should not be made on the result. Based on the questions asked to the students, the result showed that female students are more active in social media than male students. The favorite social media platform for most of the students are found to be Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, Tumblr, and Steam simultaneously. Few students have provided help to others suffering from mental problems. However, there were also students who had mental illness while using social media platforms. Majority of the students are aware of the negative consequences of social media. Only a few students are still unaware of the impacts of social media on their mental health.

Considering those students who don't have any idea on the effects of social media on their mental health, the thesis provides them with enough information on the bright and dark side of social media. Based on the research part, the positive impacts of social media can be personal empowerment, the basis for mental health support, and feeling of belongingness. The negative effects are cyberbullying, social media addiction, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. The thesis intended always to promote positive aspects of social media on mental health. The students who do not know social media usage effects, this thesis can be a package which encourages them to use social media safely and productively. For students who are already aware of the impacts of social media on their mental health, this thesis can broaden their knowledge to farthest.

The thesis objective of the thesis was to find a solution to the following three questions:

1. What are the positive and negative impacts of social media on mental health?
2. How much time do the students of OUAS spend on social media?
3. Is social media helpful to the students or affecting them?

The objective is fulfilled. The positive and negative impacts of social media on mental health are mentioned and explained in the research part. In the empirical part, survey was conducted in a small group of BIT and DIB students. Since, total number of respondents were only 12, general assumption and comparison cannot be made. Among 12 respondents, the daily average spending time on social media was 2 hours. While using social media, the purpose of the respondents was communication, entertainment, education, marketing, and networking respectively. On regarding whether social media is helpful or not to the students, the opinions are diverse. Through social media, some students have even provided mental health support whereas others yet don't know to help and to get help.

Before researching on the topic, the researcher thought there could be many positive aspects of social media on mental health. However, after research, the perception has changed and found different. Along with the positive aspects of social media on mental health, there are numerous negative consequences. Now, the challenge to the users of social media is to practice safe social. To practice safe social, enough knowledge on choosing the right social media platform, their purpose of using social media, privacy laws, limitations of social media sites, and social skills are keys. However, the lack of education on social media usage and its consequences is making the situation complicated every day increasing the number of mental health patients. The development and invention of new social media platforms are emerging like a mushroom. The life is more and more depending on social media. If this trend and the current situation continues, the future is beyond the expectation: chaotic.

Hence, the practice of safe social and balance use of social media should be encouraged among the students. Good practices in social media can boost good mental health, productivity, and reduces mental illness. This thesis is a small effort on educating students about the impacts of social media on their mental health.

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APPENDICES

Survey

This survey is only for the students at OUAS.

* Required

1. Gender: *

Mark only one oval.

- Male
 Female
 Prefer not to say

2. Which is your favorite social media platform? *

Mark only one oval.

- Facebook
 Instagram
 Twitter
 Youtube
 Other: _____

3. On average, how much time do you spend daily using social media platforms? *

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 1 hour
 Inbetween 1 to 2 hours
 Inbetween 2 to 3 hours
 Inbetween 3 to 4 hours
 More than 4 hours

4. What is your purpose of using social media platforms? (You can choose more than one option.) *

Check all that apply.

- Communication
 Education
 Entertainment
 Marketing
 Other: _____

5. Have you ever provided help to anyone through any social media platforms? (for example, motivated someone, shared your knowledge regarding mental health issues) *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

6. **6. Have you ever faced any trouble when using social media platforms? (for example, 'harassment') ***

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

7. **7. Do you think using social media platforms help to increase in well-being? (for example, 'provide mental health support') ***

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Maybe

8. **8. Are you aware of the negative impacts of social media on the mental health? (for example, increase in anxiety, depression & low self-esteem) ***

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

9. **9. Would you like to say anything related to social media usage and well-being of a person? (share your stories if you feel comfortable)**
