

Impact of Excessive Use of Social Media on Teenagers

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ABSTRACT

In this era of electronic gadgets and social networking it is becoming extremely difficult to monitor children activities online. Time spent on the laptops and smartphones are increasing as children are compulsorily asked to have such electronic devices for their studies. It has become difficult for parents to keep a check on whether the child is being productive or just scrolling through their Social Media handles. Teenagers now a day have an account on at least one or more social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat or Instagram. Prolonged hours on the screen may not only result in physiological disorders like obesity, head and back aches but may lead to psychological disorders like depression, anxiety, etc. too. Social media has a strong impact in teenagers' lives today. They are influenced by the virtual world and accept it as the reality. Teenagers want to be more socially connected online than in reality. There is seen an increase in cyber juvenile delinquencies in the recent years. Teenagers especially are seen to be the victims of cybercrimes such as cyber bullying. From being victims to committing the crimes themselves, teenagers need to be made aware and be educated about the cybercrimes. A need to create awareness among the parents, teachers and students is the need of the hour.

Keywords: Social media, social networks, teenagers, digital devices, electronic devices, online teaching, physiological disorders, psychological disorders,

Introduction:

Social media is becoming increasingly popular these days especially among teenagers. After the pandemic it has become extremely difficult for parents and teachers to detach the learners from digital devices. Assignments, projects, group discussions, every aspect is now dependent on these devices. Methods of teaching have also been impacted by this online-offline learning scenario. Blended learning, flipped learning, brainstorming, independent learning, etcetera, all these modern teaching learning methods are directly or indirectly linked to the use of digital devices. The compulsion made by the schools for the learners to own laptops, computers, or at least a smartphone has resulted in the rise as well as the excessive usage of such devices.

As the youngsters have become possessors of the laptops and smartphones, they now have an easy access to social media and social networking sites. Social media is platform for making and sharing contents in a creative way. The content that is shared can be anything from teaching to bake a cake to

teaching to drive a car, it can be a vlog sharing the experiences one had while visiting a city to reviewing food of a restaurant. Bloggers, vloggers, influencers are all just a click away based on your liking and interests.

Social Networking Sites (SNS) are a platform where one can connect to likeminded people. These are spaces which bring people together virtually. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and WhatsApp are some of the most common social networks that have become household names. These days it has become increasingly difficult to have control over children not to have accounts on these social media handles. These handles are quite unsafe for the children in many ways. Children especially must be monitored while accessing these social media handles.

Discussion:

Teenagers now a day are compulsorily asked to use digital devices to manifest learning outcomes.

Parents give in to the situation as it is the need of the hour. They cannot oppose the use of these devices as these digital devices have evidently become an inevitable part of the learning process. After the COVID-19 outbreak schools switched from offline to online mode of learning. Now the scenario has changed in such a way that the schools even after resuming their offline classes resort to a sudden switch in the mode whenever needed. For instance, recently the schools had to extend their winter vacation due to the District Magistrate's order as there was a drop in the temperature in most of the northern states of India, and the situation was considered unfit for the children to step out in the cold wave. This scenario is not unusual as the schools face this challenge every year. Mostly the schools have to extend their summer and winter break and remain shut every year due to the heat wave/cold wave. They have to cut short the syllabus to just squeeze in and finish the portion in time. This time the schools after reviewing the condition immediately circulated notices for the online mode of learning. As the children could not visit schools, so the school was brought to their home. How can parents combat such situations? They have to provide their wards with the electronic devices. This gives the children an opportunity to possess and use the devices for long hours. Students especially teenagers bluff their parents into believing that they are involved into school work but many a times they are just scrolling through their social media handles. It becomes exceedingly difficult for the parents to monitor their activities.

Narula (2022) in her article, "How Does Excessive Use of Electronic Devices Affect the Mental Health of Kids?" Written for NDTV, states that the screen time spend by the child per day negatively impacts the health of the child. Screen time is the time spent on the electronic devices such as television, laptop, mobile phone, tablet, etc. It is unanimously believed that the increased screen time results in various physical and psychological disorders.

Mosely Aris (2021) in her blog written for Valleywise Health, has says that prolonged screen time can lead to obesity, chronic back and neck problems, sleep problems and anxiety. Apart from these physical

ailments, it is also mentioned that the child can also get lower test scores. It may lead in lower attention and concentration span.

Researchers have found that excessive screen time or time spent on the electronic devices do have physiological as well as psychological disorders in adults as well as children. Everyone wants to be an influencer these days. Quick fame and easy money is an attraction. It becomes difficult to decipher the truth behind these Instagram reels and Tiktok videos. There has been many a case where while making such videos for mere social media to get likes and shares people have lost their lives. A tik-toker named Siya Kakkar died by suicide and nobody could understand the reason for this big step taken by her. Although there could be other reasons but it is thought that she was in depression. Huge number of followers and demand for content sometimes put a lot of pressure on people.

There have been insane challenges on Tiktok which teenagers try to take up without giving it a thought proving these children to be foolhardy. Challenges such as licking a toilet seat during COVID-19 resulted one to be infected by it, climbing on tall stacks of milk crates, face wax challenge, etc are a trend. There has been a 'blackout challenge' which is doing rounds on the TikTok since the year 2018. Lately, this challenge has resulted in a number of deaths of children where they have to hold the breath until one passes out. A Bloomberg Businessweek (November, 2022) report linked at least 15 deaths in teenagers 12 and under to the challenge in the last 18 months and another five deaths in children aged 13 and 14.

Teenagers are most likely to be addicted and influenced to social media as they are more impulsive and revolting. They are under the peer pressure more than in any other phase of their lives. Also, at this age teens consider their parents to be indifferent and do not like the involvement of their parents in their lives hence they are able to connect to a virtual companion and lay their trust in them.

There may be an adverse psychological effect of excessive usage of social media especially in children such as self-isolation, depression, anxiety, self-

esteem, emotional imbalance, etc. Researchers should take up further studies to find out the impact of excessive usage of social media on children.

Apart from the above mentioned impacts, there is a need to be utmost careful while allowing the teenagers to use social media as they many a time tend to indulge into cyber crimes knowingly or unknowingly. The accessibility and the ease of connectedness make it tempting to fall into such crimes. It will be quite difficult to arrange for a revolver and kill somebody but to share someone's private image is just a click away. Sharing obscene and objectionable videos and images is absolutely normal or better put doable these days. There had been a case recently where teenagers had formed a boys group called 'Locker Room' and had shared objectionable pictures of their female classmates. A police case was registered when they were exposed.

Cyber bullying is one of the most common crimes done online. Children are bullied by the means of social media. According to Wikipedia, teenagers are mostly the ones who are the victims. "Cyberbullying is bullying with the use of digital technologies. It can take place on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones. It is repeated behavior, aimed at scaring, angering or shaming those who are targeted. For example, spreading lies about or posting embarrassing photos or videos of someone on social media, sending hurtful, abusive or threatening messages, images or videos via messaging platforms or impersonating someone and sending mean messages to others on their behalf or through fake accounts.", (Cyberbullying: What Is It and How to Stop It, n.d.)

There is definitely a need for addressing such crimes. These cyber crimes affect children mentally, physically and emotionally as well. As the same article mentions that children might lose their sleep, have headaches, be depressed, anxious or even feel useless, stupid or incompetent. Also, children might themselves get involved in such cyber crimes. Youngsters who are caught for cyber crimes mostly do not know that they have committed a crime. This means that they are unaware about the cyber crimes and cyber laws.

They can hardly differentiate between ethical and unethical cyber activities.

"As per 2014 NCRB study, 143 people who were arrested for cyber crime were below the age of 18 years, Major types of reported cyber crimes include — Cyber Defamation, Cyber Stalking, Email hacking, Vishing/Phishing, Mobile crimes, Hacking/Defacement of Websites, DATA Theft and E-Frauds amongst others.", states Business Standard (August,2015).

Therefore parents, teachers and society as a whole should be alert and must understand that teenagers might not just be a prey and is the victim but can become juvenile delinquents as well. There is a need for great caution and precautions.

Need For Monitoring Teenagers

- Chance of sharing personal information to unknown people is extremely high.
- Odds of being negatively influenced by the content creators in order to match up to them or the group.
- High chance of developing physiological disorders.
- Possibility for developing psychological disorders due peer-pressure.
- Probability of distancing oneself from the real world and getting completely absorbed by the virtual world.
- Developing addiction of such sites.
- Believing the virtual world to be real and the only truth.
- Disruption in the curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- Cyber juvenile delinquencies – digital piracy, cyber bullying, sexting, hacking, sharing pornographic content, etc.

Measures to be Taken

- Counseling children and parents.
- Monitoring the time for such activities by parents as well as the schools.
- Encouraging them for doing more physical activities.

- Creating awareness about the laws against cybercrime.
- Developing empathy among the teenagers.
- Making them participate in the social activities so that they are more involved in the real world rather than the virtual world.
- Using methods like brainstorming and creative thinking so that they are not always dependent on the digital devices.

Conclusion:

This era is definitely an era of digitalization but we must encourage our children to learn the difference between a real and a virtual world. Social media makes one social but not really. Children must understand that there is an underlying lie that is exhibited on these social media. The way these influencers look, talk, work, is all edited which is impossible in the real world. In reality there are no retakes or edits.

Evidently excess of anything is bad. And the social media obsession leads to addiction of gadgets which keeps our children glued to the screen. Clearly, this is not good for the physical as well as mental development of children. There cannot be an argument about physical activities being better than just sitting in front of a screen.

These social media handles are definitely a great way to connect to people but we must show utmost care while using them as they are highly addictive and if used excessively it may result in people losing their reasoning ability and develop many psychological disorders. It also affects the physical well being of the users. Children must be encouraged to enhance their thinking ability and their creativity must be brushed up so that they do not always run to the rescue of their laptops and smartphones. Reduced usage of digital devices would surely result in the reduced access of social media.



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