

Relationship between Social Media Dependence and Social Connectedness among adolescents

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ABSTRACT--The aim of the current study was to investigate the relationship between Social Media Dependence and Social Connectedness among adolescents. Sample comprised of 200 adolescents studying in VIII class were selected by using random sampling technique. Mixed method two phase design of study was employed. Two research instruments were used. For quantitative data "Adapted Internet Addiction Test" and for qualitative part semi-structured interview schedule were employed. From phase I it was concluded that 2.5% of adolescents are experiencing significant problems in their life because of their excessive usage of social media. From phase II it became clear that social media dependence fosters the sense of belongingness but excessive social media usage creates problems in the social connectedness in the real world context.

Keywords-- Social Media, Social Media Dependence, Social Connectedness.

I. INTRODUCTION

The technology has positively altered many aspects of life. The use of internet based social media have made it possible for the people to communicate speedily and making the world a smaller place than it has never been before. With the pervasiveness of smartphones, access to the social media is ever increasing. But the amount of time people are spending on these social media based platforms is more alarming. It is evident that they are so dependent on social networking tools that are leading to the emergence of new social and psychological concerns, one of which is excessive social media dependence. Nowadays it has become a common thing to witness two adolescents seated together on a bus, texting hurriedly on their social media accounts rather than talking face to face with each other. Therefore it is evident that today's young generation is not eager to direct communication, including their families. The situation is no different in India, especially with the proliferation of smartphones, the number of social media users have increased significantly. This over-reliance on social media is considered as problematic particularly for adolescents because it is a formative period of life, that's why in this phase of life its overconsumption may be more harmful than in later ages (Kaltiala - Heino, Lintonen & Rimpela, 2004). Over the top use of social media isn't always easy to recognize, especially since many of the teenagers must now be "plugged in" so much of the time, whether for school or for other reasons. But too much time spent on social media can have the potential to withhold face to face interactions, so social media dependents relinquish opportunities to socialize in real world contexts. Although a considerable amount of studies suggests that adolescents engage in social networking sites for social activities, there have been some studies that suggest the positive side of social media based platforms in providing the freedom for them to develop and maintain a sense

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of compatibility in a virtual environment as it helps them to socially engage with their peers. On the other hand, some research studies argue that too much use of social media can lead to isolation and create problems in their real life connections. In addition to this, there is an increased 'Fear of Missing out' (FOMO) at an all-time high in young ones because of social media usage. There has been growing concern from parents and educators panicking about the idea of social media dependence among adolescents because it was found to cause serious issues to the ones who are impuissant to refrain themselves from accessing social media (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Intense use of technology restricts the individual's true social environment interactions and interpersonal relations which cause the individual to move away from the real social environment. When isolated from the true social environment the individual starts to perceive himself as not being a meaningful part of his relationships. During adolescence, the individual is in search of a group or individual to whom he or she can associate or feel belonging. This is quite critical in terms of the development of the adolescent's Social Connectedness. Social Connectedness affects adolescence developmental tasks. It has been emphasized that individuals with low levels of Social Connectedness tend to be isolated from society, have problems in associating themselves or sense of belonging, have negative perceptions towards themselves and others, and have distrust. Thus, the aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship of Social Media Dependence with Social Connectedness among adolescent

Operational Definitions

Social media dependence: The Social Media Dependence can be defined as the compulsive and disproportionate use of social media. A social media dependent can be considered as one with the constant yearning to use social media unreasonably.

Social Connectedness: Social connectedness is the estimate of the degree to which adolescents feel connected to others in their social environment. It considers all aspects of social interaction including family, friends and the society. Also it is concerned with one's relationship with others.

Research Questions

Q1. What is the level of Social Media Dependence among adolescents?

Q2. What role excessive Social Media Dependence plays in the Social Connectedness of adolescents?

Objectives

The following objectives were determined:

1. To estimate the level of Social Media Dependence among adolescents.
2. To explore the role of excessive Social Media Dependence in the Social Connectedness of adolescents

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined the term 'Social Media' as a web based platform that provides opportunities for creation and exchange of User Generated Content.

Table 1: Classification of Social Media

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

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Source: Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)

III. SOCIAL MEDIA DEPENDENCE AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Social media dependence is defined as uncontrollable and extreme drive to use social media sites at the expense of its adverse consequences on one’s life and relationships. It refers to a situation where adolescents spend tremendous amount of time on social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Tiktok and Instagram etc.) such that it negatively affects other facets of their day to day living like social connectedness with others. Also, the comprehensive idea of social connectedness is managing the social ties people have with others, and the feeling of belongingness that results from these bonds. Hence it is an essence of human living and is vital for their welfare.

Donath and Boyd (2004) observed that online social networks may not increase the number of strong ties person may have, but may increase the weak ties a person could form.

Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) examined the adolescent’s relationships with friends, romantic partners, strangers, and their families in the context of their online communication activities and showed that adolescents are using these communication tools primarily to reinforce existing relationships, both with friends and romantic partners. Interestingly they are integrating these tools into their "offline" worlds. The study further pointed that adolescent’s online interactions with strangers, while not as common now as during the early years of the Internet, may have benefits, such as relieving social anxiety, as well as costs, such as sexual predation.

Lee (2009) studied the role of online communication in strengthening the social ties in case of adolescents and found that frequent online communication was not associated with the parent child interaction. The study further stated that regular online communication was related to cohesive friendships. Also for adolescents family interaction is a low key affair and of less importance in comparison to peer interaction. Moreover, the research

pointed out that family time displaced by online communication might have long term negative impact on the child's holistic development.

Valkenburg and Peter (2009) reviewed the previous research studies on the consequences of online communication technologies for adolescent's social connectedness and pointed out that previous studies in the 1990s suggested that online social networking use is destructive to interpersonal relationships, but the recent studies tend to report opposite effects. In the end it was stressed that online communication and online self-disclosure can stimulate adolescents' social connectedness.

Kuss and Griffiths (2011) stated that social media addiction shares a common underlying etiological framework with other substance-related and behavioral addictions. The study observed that extroverts use social networking sites for social enhancement, whereas introverts use it for social compensation, each of which appears to be related to greater social networking sites usage.

Liu, Yin and Huan (2013) conducted a study on junior high school students (N=740) from Taiwan. In the end it was concluded that the use of Facebook by students help them to build interpersonal relationship with their friends virtually while at the same time reduce the interpersonal relationship with their parents in real time.

Huang (2016) conducted a study on 1,549 adolescents from middle schools in five urban Chinese cities, of whom 90% had used social media. Using Young's classic definition of Internet addiction, 15.6% of participants were classified as social media addicts. The addicted adolescents were often self-absorbed, bored with their leisure time, and good at using manipulation through social media for impression management. Addicts experienced four major social media addiction symptoms: preoccupation, adverse consequences, alleviation of negative emotions and loss of interest in social activities. In the end it was concluded that the social media addiction and its symptoms had a significant negative impact on adolescent's academic performance and social capital.

Savci and Aysan (2017) conducted a research on 201 adolescent (101 girls, 100 boys) who use the internet, play digital games, and use the social media for at least one year, and have at least one social media account and smart phone. Their analysis showed that internet addiction, social media addiction, digital game addiction and smart phone addiction significantly predicted 25% of social connectedness. It was also established that the strongest influence in explaining social connectedness comes from internet addiction followed by social media addiction, digital game addiction, and smart phone addiction respectively.

Klinkhoff (2017) examined the possible relationship between SNS use and perceptions of social connectedness in a sample of Canadian and American adolescents. The research found that there is a non significant relationship between the amounts of time adolescents spent on SNSs for social connectedness. The ways that adolescents used SNSs (e.g., for communication or non-communication purposes) were also found to be non significant in their relation to the social connectedness.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a mixed method two phase design.

Subject

The present study comprised of 200(Males=104, Females=96) adolescents randomly selected from class VIII of government secondary schools of Mohali, Panjab.

Instrument

1. Adapted IAT (Internet Addiction Test) developed by Court (2016). Five point Likert Scale under the following scoring format was used: Never = 1, Rarely = 2, Every Once in a While = 3, Sometimes = 4, Almost Always = 5.
2. A self-designed interview schedule constructed to carry out semi-structured interviews

Research Procedure

After obtaining informed consent from the concerned schools, the study was conducted in two phases.

Phase I

The adapted IAT questionnaire was administered to all the 200 participants. All the subjects were briefed by a passage preceding the questionnaire that reminded them of their anonymity and outlining the purpose of the study. The intent was to examine the level of Social Media Dependence among adolescents. The collection and analysis of questionnaires highlighted the individuals for phase II. The data collected from the questionnaires was manually input into SPSS and analyzed using descriptive statistics analysis and frequencies analysis.

Phase II

On the basis of Phase I, 5 individuals (3 males, 2 females) were identified who scored highly on the adapted internet addiction test. These participants took part in semi-structured interviews.

V. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Results analysis of the collected data was performed using the statistics program SPSS.

Table 1: Level of Social Media Dependence

Score/Points	Level of Social Media Dependence	Interpretation
0-30	Normal	It is very rare for this individual to experience any difficulties with their social media usage.
31-49	Mild	Average social media user, the individual has control over social media usage
50-79	Moderate	Frequent problems due to social media usage
80-100	Excessive	Significant problems due to over reliance on social media

Table 2: Distribution of Level of Social Media Dependence in adolescents (N=200)

Level of Internet Dependence	Frequency	percent
Normal	41	20.5
Mild	57	28.5
Moderate	97	48.5
Excessive	5	2.5

From the table 2, it can be concluded that 2.5% of adolescents are experiencing significant problems in their life because of their excessive usage of social media. 48.5% of adolescents reported experiencing occasional or frequent problems because of moderate level of Social Media Dependence. 28.5% of adolescents may use social media a bit too long at times, but they have control over their usage. 20.5% of adolescents report that it is very rare for social media dependence to have any negative impact on their life.

Phase II of the study explored the role of excessive social media dependence on the social connectedness of adolescents. On the basis of quantitative data results, 5 adolescents (3 males and 2 females) were interviewed for qualitative data. The qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis:-

(A). Theme 1: Sense of Belongingness

Q.1. What role social media dependence played in promoting social connectedness?

Most of the respondents stated that they often interact with friends using Social networking sites like facebook, instagram, whatsapp and snapchat etc. They further reported that social media helped them to connect with their peers, at anywhere, anytime, even after school. In this sense it can be perceived that they visualize social media as positive means for social interactions.

Student “A” summarizes as follows, “All my friends have accounts on facebook so I created my profile. This helped me in getting touch with them, we joke and spend time. Initially, I got quite a lot of enjoyment seeing each other’s post, but then I became quite needy of it”.

Student “B” stated "I like to make new friends and chat with my classmates.”

Student “C” had the following idea. “I think to be on social media is fashionable and trending. I felt really sort of left out when I didn’t have any updates regarding my friends life but not anymore”.

The student “D” said “It’s awesome; you can connect to all your friends new and old ones, it’s really great. You can keep in touch with people”.

The student says "E" answered, “I like to hang out on social media sites to sneak a peek on what happens in the life of my loved ones including my family and friends”.

(B). Theme 2: Managing Relationships

Q.2. what role social media dependence play in maintaining relationships?

Most of the respondents answer reflected that in their attempt to stimulate ties in the digital platforms had adversely affected their offline relationships.

Student “A” stated the following, “I have so many friends online but still I feel lonely and isolated”.

Student “B” said, “Recently I had a fight with my friend regarding some post. That person even blocked me. Obviously, our equation in real life is not the same before”.

Student “C” had the following confession, “I used to spend quality time with my friends. But nowadays I like to watch stories, videos and posts of my friends on social media. All the time I had the fear of missing out some important update”.

Student “D” answered, “I like to use social media a lot rather than talking with my parents and meeting with my friends”.

Student “E” stated, “One of my close friend celebrated her birthday and posted pictures on social media. I felt left out because she did not invited me. I am still wandering why I wasn’t invited. It really hurts”.

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The primary motive of the present study was to estimate the level of social media dependence among adolescents. In addition to this, the study also explored the social connectedness of adolescents who exhibits excessive social media dependence. In addition to this, the present study. The results revealed that out of the sample, 2.5% of the adolescents were suffering from excessive social media dependence. Besides this, majority of the adolescents were experiencing moderate level of social media dependence. In addition to this, the results of the qualitative data indicated that excessive social media dependents tend to perceive that its usage increase their social connectedness in a positive way as it is very interactive. But when it comes on maintaining relationships they reported that instead of spending quality time with their family they tend to ignore face to face interactions and choose to confine themselves into the virtual world. That is their excessive social media dependence is creating problems in their social connectedness in the real life settings.

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