

Expository Essay About Social Media and Mental Health

The advancements of technology have brought upon many positive and negative effects on society. The most recent technology provides easier access to our everyday needs such as the way we purchase products and the way we communicate with one another. The most considerable way people gain access to these technological advancements is through cell phones, which have become almost essential in modern day life. The possibilities of what a person can do on a cell phone are endless. Teenagers especially, can spend hours scrolling through social media. This can eventually become unhealthy depending on the amount of hours spent and how they are spent. Teenagers who spend more time on social media are more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression.

There have been countless research studies conducted in the hopes of finally finding an answer to the question of whether or not social media increases mental health issues in adolescents. After all the studies planned and executed by professionals all around the world, the link between social media and mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression is undeniable. The more profound issue of strong correlation between social media and mental health is analyzed in this essay.

The rise of social media use in the past decade is evident, considering the fact that it has become more accessible to anyone with internet and a smart screen. According to J. Clement from Statista, the number one business data platform, “the number of worldwide social media users reached 35 billion in April 2019. The author points out how the amount of people using social media is a strong sign of the important role it plays in our daily lives. Another recent report demonstrates that “younger audiences were more likely to use social networks than older g

enerations" (Clement). In other words, most of the data accumulated is related to adolescents since they are the ones who are involved with these websites and apps the most.

As the use of social media increased, so did depression among adolescents. According to the US News and World Report, "A study published this month in the Journal of Abnormal Psychology finds that over the past decade the number of youths with mental health disorders has more than doubled... There was a survey conducted with responses from more than 200,000 youth ages 12 to 17 between 2005 to 2017.. For youth, major depression increased 52 percent from 2005 to 2017 - from 8.7 percent to 13.2 percent" (U.S. News). There is a serious rise in depression among teenagers found in results from the Journal of Abnormal Psychology, which was published by the American Psychological Association: the leading scientific and professional organization that represents psychology in the US. These two statistics are not merely a coincidence since the increase in depression occurred in tandem with the rise in smartphone use. As more and more adolescents get a smartphone, the access to social media becomes easier.

Many studies have found that the more time a teenager spends on social media, the higher the risk they are to suffer from anxiety and depression. For example, a four year study conducted by Elroy Boers, Mohammad H. Afzali and Nicola Newton all PhD holders, found that for every increased hour spent on social media, adolescents showed an increase in depressive symptoms. Similarly, Ariel Shensa, a statistician at the center for research media states that, "several studies found that users may develop addictive or problematic levels of social media use, which have been associated with increased anxiety and depression" (shensa). Statistically speaking, the numbers are there and the evidence seems solid that while teenagers spend more time on social media, their levels of anxiety and depression increase. The reason for this is that increased time on social media can lead to increased levels of anxiety and depression.

lead to social media addiction, self-esteem issues, sleep deprivation, poor academic performance, etc, which will essentially lead to depression and anxiety in adolescents.

Social media addiction can be one of the negative outcomes from being on social media for an unhealthy amount of time. People may start feeling like it is a must to constantly check all of their social platforms and may begin to excessively use it. A study conducted by Ariel Shenshaw showed final results that “membership in the Wired cluster was most strongly associated with elevated symptoms of both depression and anxiety. This finding suggests that high volumesocial media use occurring in tandem with high levels of problematic use and high emotionalconnection to social media is most concerning”. This simply means that people with a higher emotional connecti on to social media are associated with higher symptoms of both depressionand anxiety.

Another way that social media can impact the mental health of adolescents may not be so obvious at first. According to The Child Mind Institute, “one of the most common contributors to depression in teenagers is sleep deprivation, which can be caused, or exacerbated, by social media” (Miller). Teenagers can stay up late scrolling on Instagram, watching just 1 more Youtube video which then turns into 20, or simply gossiping with their friends on Snapchat until 2am. Constantly staying up late at night can lead to problems falling asleep. “Research shows that 60percent of adolescents are looking at their phones in the last hour before sleep, and that they‘get on average an hour less sleep than their peers who don't use their phones before bed. Blue.light from electronic screens interferes with falling asleep” (Miller). Not getting enough sleep on a day-to-day basis can cause sleep deprivation among teenagers, and they may not even realize it.

Spending more time on social media can cause a drop in the academic performance of a student. For instance, a study conducted by Yubo Hou proves that academic performance is negatively

ely associated with the excessive use of social media. Some of their speculations as to 'why they go' of these results are that more time spent on social media may mean less time spent 'on studying. They believe that social media addiction may "interfere with students' work by distracting them and making them unable to stay focused. Research has shown that multitasking has negative effects on the performance of specific tasks" (Hou). Getting low 'grades in school can negatively affect students by making them sad and leaving them feeling unworthy. If a student is constantly getting bad grades due to the excessive use of social media, they can begin to experience depressive symptoms which will only spiral from there.

Along with the adoption of social media came a new form of bullying - cyberbullying. This new form of bullying is not only more efficient for the bully, but also makes almost everyone even more susceptible to their torment. On social media it is easier to find people and make fun of them. One bad picture of someone can be posted to a page with a lot of followers and boom, in a matter of seconds the picture goes viral. Katie Hurley, a licensed therapist says that, "teen girls in particular are at risk of cyberbullying through use of social media.. Cyberbullying is associated with depression, anxiety, and an elevated risk of suicidal thoughts" (Hurley). 'Teenagers who are being cyber bullied feel like they have no place to escape. Their bully can harass them at any time because of how easy it has become to access anybody on the internet. 'The feelings that are being provoked by the bully lead to depression and potentially suicidal thoughts. Wondering when their bully will target them next can make adolescents anxious and live in constant fear.

Some people may argue that perhaps social media doesn't cause depression and anxiety, but instead teens who feel symptoms of these mental health issues may go on social media as a way of reaching out. Although this does seem like a good point, upon further investigation, studies found that social media actually causes the exact opposite reaction. Dr. Graham, an 'expert in psycho

logy, claims that “it's easy to see how technology use can take the place of more traditional social interaction and provide 2 yardstick for one's popularity - or more significantly, one's feelings of loneliness and alienation” (Graham). In this article, he explains how lonely adolescents seek social interactions on social media with what he refers to as "FOMO" (fear of missing out). He further explains that social media actually creates social anxiety if a lonely person uses it to make themselves feel more popular if they don't receive the desired amount of likes. This occurs when the person isn't receiving as much validation in numerical likes or interactions; it worsens their feeling of alienation. Dr. Graham also points out that social media can be the cause of loneliness, but it is not always the lonely person seeking social media for validation (Graham).

A majority of the studies conducted on social media and mental health had their limitations. Even the studies conducted by the most qualified experts had their limits. For instance, some were over a short period of time which may not give the best results. Other studies had results that were not strong enough to prove anything. The reason for this is because the research on social media and its effects on mental health are in their early stages due to the fact that social media is a new concept that has emerged in the past 10-

15 years. Many of the studies conducted concluded that there was definitely a correlation between more time spent on social media and an increased likelihood of anxiety and depression, but there was no definite evidence to prove that social media was the source of the problem.

Even with the small amount of research connecting social media to depression and anxiety, the results were alarming. It seems more than a coincidence that the sudden rise in depression and anxiety among adolescents happened in alignment with the increase in social media use. There shouldn't have to be exact numbers or a lengthy study to tell us what is already clear to the eye.

Teens who spend more time on social media are more likely to experience self esteem issues, sleep deprivation and other contributing factors to depression and anxiety.

Until studies firmly prove that the excessive use of social media can lead to mental health issues, it is better to take precautions when it comes to the time spent on the internet.

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