

A Study of Health and Technology Use: Impact of Digital Media on Mental Health

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Abstract

In the era of digitalization, digital technologies and machines surpass and change daily activities. Digitalization significantly influenced daily practice, skills, and passion, significantly to the sleep cycle and work culture. It cuts human work and lowers errors. Digital media enables social interaction in a virtual world which is user-friendly, money-saving, energy efficient, and easily accessible. Likewise, social media usage has increased for communicating, learning, collaborating, and engaging in entertainment and shopping activities. Overuse of social media is associated with low work performance and other physical and mental issues such as less healthy social relationships, sleep problems, low life satisfaction, feelings of jealousy, anxiety, and depression. This study focuses on the impact on people's health due to the unrestricted use of technology. The study analyses people's physical and mental problems in association with technology.

Keywords – Digital Media, Mental Health, Information and Technology, social media, Internet, Smartphone, Virtual World, Gaming, Entertainment

INTRODUCTION

The 21st Century is the era of Digitalization. Digital technologies and machines overtake and change day-to-day activities. Digitalization created a huge impact, from the habit, skills, and passion to the sleep cycle and work culture. It minimizes human work and reduces errors. Digital media helps to facilitate social interaction in a virtual world which is user-friendly, money-saving, energy-efficient, and easily accessible. Also, social media has been used increasingly for communicating, learning, collaborating purposes, and engaging in entertainment and shopping activities.

Overuse of social media is associated with low work performance and other physical and mental issues such as less healthy social-relationships sleep problems, low life satisfaction, feelings of jealousy, anxiety, and depression (Elphinston & Noller, 2011). Terms such as social media addiction, problematic social media use, and compulsive social media use have been used interchangeably to refer to maladaptive social media usage. (Sun, Y & Zhang, Y, 2021).

Online addictions are primarily about addictions to the internet (Grffiths, 1999). Most of those with problematic online behaviour are addicted to online content such as gambling, gaming, watching videos for entertainment, and using shopping sites to be in trends—social networks for social connection activities. Technology development has encouraged users to use digital media platforms via television, computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones, increasing the usage of SM platforms and influencing users to suffer from addiction and other mental illnesses.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

After globalization, the internet and other social connecting sites significantly impacted the communication process and marketing strategies, reduced human resources, and minimalized errors in filing and record management. Also, the intervention of Jio in the Indian telecommunication market greatly impacted the internet usage level, which induced the spill over effect on the usage of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Tinder, YouTube, Amazon, and other digital media platforms. This pop culture influenced youngsters over the decades,

making them socially connected without boundaries. Also, it acts as a bridge between the many accesses worldwide, like entertainment stratification, exploring the global market, and other commodities. These exciting features make the digital media audience addicted to those applications and influence them mentally and physically in many ways. Some audiences suffer from anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep cycle problems, and more because of the excessive usage of digital media platforms. Like pouring oil on a burning fire, the COVID-19 lockdown makes the people stay the whole day in the house, which psychologically influences them to attain mental pressure.

Further, digital platforms help them attain relief at first, overtake their precious time, and become addicted to those platforms as they depend on them. Digital platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and others helped the audience entertain themselves with fresh content instead of closed theatres and repeated content telecasted on television networks. Also, the shopping sites provided plenty of offers and reduced the time and cost. The audience mainly lost it during the actual visit. Online food booking apps used the lockdown as an advantage and grasped the significant city population in the country, which made people addicted to those sites; even after the lockdowns, most customers frequently used those apps to order their food and groceries. Even digital media platforms help the political party to sustain the ground politics in the modern era. Major parties spend more than ten millions on digital marketing and attract like-minded social media audiences without concern.

Most of the young people (41%) in Turkey reported that they find elements, such as 'inappropriate words, insults, and curses, in social media written messages' unethical (Eraslan, 2019). Another study shows that the majority of the digital media audience might exhibit aggressive tendencies when they encounter comments criticizing their values. Also, the results suggest that individuals tend to exhibit aggressive behaviour towards opposing ideas on social media tools that criticize individuals' values. Digital media users who frequently discussed their problems with friends through social media experienced higher anxiety levels than those who did not. (Davila, J et. al, 2009). The study by Michigan State University found a 70% increase in self-reported depressive symptoms among the group using social media and excessive social media using audience, leaving one prone to a higher risk of depression, anxiety, and ultimately stress.

Moreover, the report, prepared by the Centre for Media and Entertainment Studies (CMES), captured the trends between April 2019-March 2020 (During the COVID lockdown) across 26 OTT platforms such as video, music, and gaming, as per the report, overall, India stood second highest with 8.43 hours of video consumption per week after the United States at 8.55 hours per week. (The Hindu Business Line, 2022). More than 70% of the users of the OTT platforms were students between the ages of 18 - 25. (Chen, 2018). The CII-BCG report titled 'Blockbuster Script for a New Decade' reveals that India had 70-80 Million paid subscribers of OTT platforms at the end of 2021, up from 14 million in 2018 and just 0.5 million in 2014-15. The sector has matured from an 'early stage' to a 'scaling stage' in the last 3-4 years (Business Today, 2022). The lockdown in India created a considerable development of online food and grocery delivery applications to attain peak growth. According to a report by Bobble AI Data Intelligence Division, Zepto witnessed a whopping 946% user growth between December 2021 and March 2022. Dunzo and Bigbasket followed it. The report also added that the users of these apps are primarily between the ages of 25- 35. On top of the list, most ordered items are milk, cooking oil, sugar, curd, ice, bread, onion, cakes, flour, and potato chips - they cannot wait for more than 10 minutes (Business Insider India, May 2022). These are the main reasons to study the influence of digital platforms and their consequences on the addictive audience. In significant cases, the addiction to digital media created a negative impact, like mental illness, obesity, sleeping disorders, depression, anxiety, and more.

DATA ANALYSIS

Digital media plays an essential role in this modern era. It creates a significant impact on the users—both positively and negatively. The following are some of the categories of digital media in which users use digital media widely.

(i) Entertainment:

Entertainment is a part of human activities. It refreshes the individual's mind and keeps the mental health well. Entertainment helps any individual to escape from stressful and hectic reality. Movies, Television, Books, and Games have previously been used for entertainment. After the evolution of digital media, all these entertainment activities became virtual. According to the American author Anthony Jay Robbins, "We are not in an information age; we are in an entertainment age." Digital Entertainment can be classified into three categories, which are,

1. Gaming
2. Movies, E-books & TV/Web Series
3. Gambling sites and Apps

1. Gaming:

Gaming is one of the most important parts of entertainment on digital platforms. Computers, Laptops, Mobile phones, Gaming stations, and VR stations are some of the gadgets used for Gaming on digital platforms. Video games like the Grand Theft Auto series, augmented games like Pokémon Go, Virtual games like Beat Saber, and role-playing games like Cyberpunk are some examples of Digital games. Gaming is a kind of addictive entertainment media. Lee et.al (2007) reported that Role-playing game users showed significantly higher internet addiction scores than web board and sports game users. The game has been connected with interpersonal relationship patterns. He also suggested that the users of some game genres have unique psychological addiction that is different from others. Addiction will affect the real world when it becomes a habit. Addictive but not engagement tendencies harmed the academic performance of primary school children (Skoric et al., 2009). Smyth (2007) reported that the MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) Players have a greater enjoyment of the game and interest in continuing to play the game—however, people who are playing for more hours reported worse health and sleep quality. Apart from addiction, Gaming creates aggressive behavioural thoughts in the players. Ivory and Sriram (2007) suggested that technological advancement in video games increased participants' sense of presence, involvement, and physiological and self-reported arousal. It also quotes some tentative evidence that violent game content increased players' state hostility. Videogame users with social phobia or similar anxiety may create an avatar that reflects their ideal self (Lemenager et al., 2013). It is held as a more accurate representation of the self that is unconstrained by perceived physical world limitations and inadequacies, and poor self-concept clarity facilitates this process. As such, users may increasingly identify with their avatar as a more authentic representation of themselves and consequently be progressively reliant on their virtual world alter ego to compensate for physical world shortcomings.

2. Movies, & TV/Web Series:

Movies, Books, and Television series have been habitual entertainment for decades. However, when these come in virtual space, it creates different effects. Watching theatrical movies and television series have replaced OTT (Over The Top) platforms. OTT platforms are giving huge space for advancement technologically; it is easily accessible and carriable, and they have many choices and sources. Specifically, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the usage of OTT becomes huge. According to the Media and Entertainment Industry Indian Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), OTT platforms have spotted a 30% increase in paid subscribers from 22.2 million to 29 million during the pandemic. Producing more innovative stories has contributed to popularising a specific habit of viewing among audiences– 'binge-watching' (Anindita Chattopadhyay, 2020). Generally, audiences prefer to watch entertainment programs on OTT platforms, especially web series, as these web series create and generate curiosity, ultimately leading to "Binge-watching (Koravi, 2019). It shows that the majority of youth are psychologically affected by web series. Web series are not only changing their behaviour towards aggressive but also changing their language, and language is the most crucial part of any culture.

3. Gambling websites & App:

Gambling or Betting has primarily been banned in countries like India because of mental addiction and financial loss. Applications like Dream 11 and PointsBet allow players to gamble legally. Unlike Physical gambling, virtual gambling gives much more advantages. Studies have also found higher rates of health and mental health comorbidities, including smoking and alcohol consumption, substance abuse or dependence, and mood disorders among Internet as compared to non-Internet gamblers (Gainsbury et al., 2015). The study also shows that Internet gambling frequency was significantly associated with poor physical and mental health. Moreover, it has proved that Internet problem gamblers have higher rates of usage of drugs and alcohol than non-problem gamblers. Gamblers who engage in online and offline modes appear to have the most significant risks of harm, likely related to their greater overall gambling involvement (McBride J, Derevensky J, 2009).

(ii) Shopping:

Shopping is a vital and mandatory part of the human lifestyle. According to Simone de Beauvoir, Buying is a profound pleasure. It means shopping is not just a purchasing of goods and materials. It is much more than that. Generally, shopping is a way of addiction for some people. Nevertheless, when it comes to Digital, the possibility of getting addicted is higher. Higher risks, like financial risks, product performance risks, psychological risks, time loss risks, privacy security risks, and source risks, are some of the risks in online shopping. (Sajid Nazir Wani, 2013). Online shopping websites like Amazon and Flipkart give a wide range of product choices, making the user decide whatever they want. Without spending much energy or money, the user can visit shops easily. Most importantly, no social pressure exists in online shopping, like offline shopping. So, users will take their own time without fearing judgment. However, technologies like Online Shopping Recommendations Mechanisms (OREM) use the weakness of users to make them addicted to it by providing notifications and ads on products. The Online Shopping Recommendations Mechanisms had a more significant effect on the high-reactance group of participants than on the low-reactance group (Soon Jae Kwon.,2010). When a user feels bored, the user can check these online shopping applications or websites, which will create possessions and enjoyment in the online shopping process. Online shopping behaviour has been classified as emotional online shopping and comparative online shopping. The main psychological factors that cause these two phenomena are their negative psychological factors, negative psychological factors related to commodities, and negative psychological factors related to the negative social consumption concept. (Zhang Zhong Yang, 2019).

(ii) Social Connection:

A human being is a social animal, meaning social connection is vital for every individual. Social connections have developed over a while along with the development of Technology, from postal letters, landline phones, mobile phones, Internet to social media. Social connections have developed a lot. Currently, social media is ruling the world. Social media like Facebook and Instagram top the list. Social media is so into one individual's life. This results in America; adolescents aged 13 to 18 spend less time in person than on social media (Twenge et al., 2019). So people are having social interaction problems, which result in Loneliness and stress. 3.5 billion People use the Smartphone, one of the finest evolutions of social connection gadgets. Smartphone use may diminish the emotional benefits of on-going social interactions by preventing us from giving our full attention to friends and family in our immediate social environment (Kushlev, Kostadin, 2019). The Homenet study reported that using the Internet for as little as three hours a week increased depression and reduced 'social support. The studies identified that the impact of social media on children and young people was greatest on mental health, specifically in the areas of self-esteem and well-being, with related issues around cyber bullying and 'Facebook Depression' (Deborah Richards, 2015).

One of the adverse effects of social media is that it makes people addicted. People spend lots of time on social networking sites, which can divert their concentration and focus from a particular task (Shabnoor Siddiqui, 2016). Apart from this, Social media allows different lifestyle in the virtual world as the user wish. No individual wishes to post ashamed content on social media. Users post fake or unreal events to portray themselves as a socially strong personality in the virtual world. These platforms also allow other users to comment or give feedback by the options 'Like, Dislike, Comment and more'. Positive comments and likes lead to a positive impact on active users.

At the same time, disliking or criticising negative comments creates a negative impact. Such criticism can, of course, be harmful. Once a scientific reputation has been tainted, it can be hard to restore confidence. Another big psychological issue caused by social media is the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). FOMO is the primary type of problematic attachment to social media. It is associated with various negative life experiences and feelings, such as a lack of sleep, reduced life competency, emotional tension, adverse effects on physical well-being, anxiety, and a lack of emotional control (Aarif Alutaybi, 2020).

CONCLUSION

In the age of information and Technology, It is impossible to control the impact of Digital Media on society. Digital media has become part of the daily activities. It has many positives like ease of accessibility, availability of an enormous number of sources, compact and powerful gadgets and more. However, It also harms society. Understandably, digital media brings users into the virtual world by neglecting the physical real world. So physical activities are enormously reduced, which causes problems in physical health. Apart from that, it creates a significant impact on the mental health of the users. From the discussion, it is clearly understood that digital media creates many psychological issues. Digital media in entertainment creates addiction, binge-watching temptation, aggressive behavioural thoughts, and the urge to smoke drugs or alcohol consumption. Digital media in Shopping also creates addiction, Fear of risks, and harmful social Consumption. Digital Media in Social Connectivity creates Loneliness, depression, lack of social skills, Fear of cyberbullying, and FOMO, which creates negative life experiences and feelings, such as a lack of sleep, reduced life competency, emotional tension, adverse effects on physical well-being, anxiety, and a lack of emotional control.

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