

Social Media Usage and Psychosomatic Issues in South Asia: An Appraisal of Youth in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Social media is playing both positive and negative role on the mental health of individuals. The core objective of the study was in twofold i.e. to investigate the relationship between social media, loneliness and depression among youth and to analyze the magnitude of effect of loneliness, depression and social media usage among youth. A cross sectional study was conducted on the students of three renown public universities of Southern Punjab, Pakistan and N=384 respondents were approached through simple random sampling technique. Data was collected through questionnaire based four distinct parts i.e. socio-demographic profile, UCLA loneliness scale by Russel, Peplau and Ferguson (1978), Young Internet Addiction Test Short Form (YIAT-SF) by Young (1998) and items of depression were retrieved from Symptom Check List (SCL-90-R) by Derogatis (1977). Data was analyzed through Statistical Package for social sciences SPSS-21 version. Basic profile of the respondents was demonstrated through frequency and percentage while relationship and magnitude of effect of loneliness, depression and social media usage was analyzed through Pearson correlation coefficient $P < 0.01 < 0.05$ and linear regression analysis. Findings of the study showed a positive significant relationship between depression and social media and little significant relationship between loneliness and social media. While depression was highly effected by social media usage and loneliness was little affected through social media usage. This study concluded that social media not only give benefits to people but also produce loneliness and severe depression among youth.

Keywords: Depression, Social Media, Youth, Loneliness & Fear of missing out.

Introduction

Human beings are social animals; social relations make people enable to get engaged in companionships with other people. People feel loneliness when does not enjoy the desired level of associations (Demir & Kutlu, 2016) which direct them to feel unhappy especially during span of youth. (Teppers et al.2014).

Massive literature Doane and Thurston (2014), Zhang et al. (2014) and Turkmen (2016) guided that loneliness is directly linked to stress, depression, and sense of confusion, self-perception and social phobias. Can say that people who feel loneliness might have poor ability of making social relations. Hence, loneliness can be deliberated as unwanted individualization. In simple words, if people are exposed to loneliness in the absence of their will. That solitude will be called loneliness. Prior study conducted on the students to demonstrate the relationship between loneliness and depression showed a moderate relationship between said constructs i.e. depression and loneliness (Demir & Kutlu, 2016). Depression is a condition having the symptoms of worthless, downfall, distrust, unimportance and sorrow. Prior literature indicated that loneliness is the key predictor of depression among people but depression does not predict increased loneliness (Liu, Gou & Zou, 2016).

The settings for this phenomenon is laid in perceived social isolation in order to observe self-satisfaction foresight in which individual keep them at distance from their social companions notwithstanding of their certainty that reason for social distancing is attachable to others and it is also beyond self-control (Park et al. 2013). This reinforced loneliness led people accompanied by sense of worthless, stress, glumness, anxiety and it lowers the self-esteem. In this way, people represent dispositional propensity which stimulate neurobiological and behavioral settings supporting to a state of low frame of mind and repugnance to social activity (Kool et al. 2013). The use of social media is one the technique selected by people to overwhelmed their loneliness. Though, use of social media brings a lot of benefits but higher frequency of using social media turns into addiction just like other addictions (Batigun & Kilic, 2011). This addiction harms their quality of life and increase sense of aggression and result into various behavioral problems in routine lives. Among these behavioral problems depression is highly linked with social media use. Prior research put forwarded that there is reciprocal relationship between social media usage and depression among youth (Ceyhan & Ceyhan, 2011). Similarly, Barry et al. (2017) stated that fear of missing out is newer concept in youth based studies, which demonstrate the reason for using social media excessively, according to no more fear of missing out concept; people use social media not to contact people but to avoid and overcome their loneliness. For such people especially youth viewing the posts of others may think their social media experiences by way of negative and might also have later negative impacts. On contrast those people who have limited social media contacts and accounts have limited depressive loneliness symptoms (Woods & Scott, 2016).

In Pakistan, about 37 million people use social media and about 34 percent of the whole population suffering from mental disorders like Depression and loneliness which implicated in 90% of the suicides (Pakistan today, 2020; Digital Pakistan, 2020). There is an overwhelming need to address this issue and make interventions to fight this condition. Prior studies in Pakistan are conducted by Hassan and Husain (2020) to determine the depression and anxiety levels in

Social Media Usage and Psychosomatic Issues in South Asia: An Appraisal of Youth in Pakistan

Pakistani population but there is paucity of literature determine relationship between depression, loneliness and social media usage. Henceforth, this study fills the literature gap in this regard and is fruitful for researchers, scholars and health care practitioners giving treatment of depression and working on the mental health of youth as it highlights the hidden factor leading to severe depression and loneliness among youth in the universities of Southern Punjab.

Objectives of the study

Following are the study objectives;

1. To investigate the socio-economic status, demographic characteristics of the respondents.
2. To demonstrate the relationship between loneliness, depression and social media usage among youth.
3. To analyze the magnitude of effect of relationship between loneliness, depression and social media usage among youth.

Literature review

In the modern world, people are rapidly attracting towards advance technologies and are more interesting in connecting people all around the world digitally. According to Beyens, Frison and Eggermont (2016) stated that in the area of behavioral research fear of missing out is referred as a motivation to get engaged in activities of social media while Przbylski et al. (2013) described fear of missing out in terms of wish to remain in contact with what other people are doing. Prior studies of Beyens et al. (2016) directed that fear of missing out are highly associated with excessive usage of social media to get rid of perceived isolation and to get popular on social media. As period of youth age span highly the span of connectedness with others and in the present time young people are probably make their contacts on social media.

Furthermore, Woods and Scott (2016) demonstrated that emotional investment in social media indicates higher grief among youth with limited social media use. Use of social media and other technologies have been found to link with mood disorders in young people. Henceforth, for some young people social media can be associated with depression particularly for who are intentionally using social media in order to overcome their fear of missing out (Rosen et al., 2013). Depression is one of the leading psychological disorders of present time. According to World health organization (2016) about 350 million people are affected by depression in all over the world. It is basically common emotional reaction over routine hardships; depression becomes dangerous health problem particularly when deep depression feelings and symptoms are showed for a longer period of time. As it a general mental disorder and effect individual's routine

activities and skills i.e. critical thinking, feelings, appetite changes, sleep quality and woolliness in articulating feelings and movements and results into loneliness (Kircaburun, 2016).

H1. Social media usage is positively associated with depression among youth.

Loneliness is defined as sense of perceived isolation and being worthless both loneliness and depression assessed as depressive symptomatology and major psychological distress in synergistic manner among youth. Loneliness and depression are the leading cause of health problems and severe loneliness and depression sometimes results into suicide (Cacioppo et al. (2010) and Domenech-Abella et al. (2017). Massive literature of social media depression and loneliness has been noticed which showed that loneliness increases the tendency of using social media and social media later gets toward depression among users. Loneliness is perceived as practice linked with augmented functional decline and better transience in youth (Isik, Basogul & Yildirim (2020). Demir and Kutlu (2016) because the relationship between loneliness and depression can be discussed by social media usage. Sense of loneliness develops due to unwanted individualization or perceived social isolation (Weiss, 1973). Lonely people are those who are not successful in achieving desired level of relations. Individual who experience deep sense of loneliness tend to seek different mechanisms to avoid that unwanted situation and to compensate their loneliness (Teppers et al. 2014).

H2. Social media usage is positively associated with loneliness among youth.

H3. There is a significant effect of social media on loneliness among youth.

H4. There is significant effect of social media on depression among youth.

Material and methods

The study was carried out to examine the relationship between loneliness, depression and social media usage in terms of fear of missing out among youth. It was also aimed to investigate the most effective predictor of depression and loneliness related with social media usage. Among all public universities of Southern Punjab 3 renowned and highly populated universities i.e. The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan, Ghazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan and Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan were selected for the present study.

Procedure

Targeted population of the study was the enrolled students of universities in Southern Punjab. Those students who enrolled in BS, Masters, M. Phil. and PhD or above, who were enrolled in their universities for the next one month were targeted in their classrooms. As the population of the study was known, researcher used Krejcie and Morgan table (1970) for sample size determination prior used by Ashraf et al. (2020) and the sample was N= 384. Students were approached in their respective universities and before data collection respondents were explained the study objective and they signed the inform consent Performa. In inform consent

Social Media Usage and Psychosomatic Issues in South Asia: An Appraisal of Youth in Pakistan

Performa students were ensured about the confidentiality of their personal information and they were independent of leaving the research at any stage of data collection. After completing all the formalities students who were interested in participation of the study were approached through simple random sampling technique prior used by Ashraf et al. (2019).

Measures

Data was collected through questionnaire based on four parts. In the first section, respondents were asked to provide the information of socio-economic status, demographic characteristics i.e. age, gender, marital status, level of education and place of residence. In the second section, respondents reported their responses of UCLA loneliness scale by (Russel, Peplau & Ferguson, 1978). This scale was unidimensional scale based on 20 items. Items of 1,4,5,6,9,10,15,16,19 and 20 were reverse scored. Higher score indicated higher loneliness. The Cronbach Alpha value of this scale was $\alpha = 0.96$. The third section was consist of Young Internet Addiction Test Short Form (YIAT-SF) by Young (1998) was used. This scale was consisting of 12 items. Explanatory and conformity factor analysis showed that YIAT-SF was a single factor structure for youth and teenagers. The Cronbach alpha value of this scale was $\alpha = 0.93$. In the fourth section, respondents reported their social media usage through Symptom Check List (SCL-90-R) by Derogatis (1977) this scale was consist of 90 items with nine different dimensions. Among these dimensions, items of depression were adopted. Reliability and validity of the scale items indicated that this tool was appropriate for university sample. All the responses were categorized into 5-point Likert scale 1= strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree and 5= strongly agree.

Analytical strategy

For coding, recoding and generalizability researcher used statistical package for social sciences version 21 (SPSS-21). Basic profile, socio-economic status and demographic characteristics were analyzed through frequency and percentage. Furthermore, Pearson correlation coefficient was applied on the independent and dependent variables i.e. loneliness, depression and social media usage and linear regression model was used to determine the magnitude of effect of independent and dependent variable.

Statistical analysis

Table no. 1. Distribution of the Respondents with respect to their Socio-economic Status, Demographic Characteristics and Social Media Usage Habit

Sr. No.	Items	Categories	F(%)
1	Age	18-24	89(23.1)
		25-30	77(20)
		31-36	139(36.1)
		>36	79(20.5)
2	Gender	Male	182(47.3)
		Female	202(52.6)
3	Level of education	B.S.	186(48.4)
		Masters	59(15.3)
		M.Phil.	98(25.5)
		Above	41(10.6)
4	Place of residence	Rural	282(73.4)
		Urban	102(26.5)
5	Marital status	Married	81(21)
		Single	303(78.9)
6	Preferred social media applications	WhatsApp	139(36.1)
		Facebook	85(22.1)
		Instagram	90(23.4)
		Twitter	49(12.7)
		Other	21(5.4)
7	Time spent on social media	1-4 hour	87(22.6)
		5-8 hour	126(32.8)
		8-12 hour	95(24.7)
		>12 hour	76(19.7)

N=384, f=frequency, %= percentage

Table no. 1 shows that distribution of the respondents with respect to socio-demographic profile of the respondents. Majority of the respondents (n=89, 23.1%) were the age of 18-24 year, about (n=77, 20%) were the age of 25-30 year, (n=139; 36.1%) were the age span of 31-36 year old and (n=79; 20.5%) were the age of >36 year old. When they were asked about their gender, majority of the respondents (n=182; 47.3%) were the male and (n=202; 52.6%) were females. Among all the respondents (n=186; 48.4%) were the students of B.S., (n=59; 15.3%) were the students of Masters, (n=98; 25.5%) were doing M.Phil. and (n=41; 10.6%) were the students of PhD or other. About (n= 282; 73.4%) were from rural area and (n=102; 26.5%) were from urban area. Overwhelming of the respondents (n=303; 78.9%) were single and (n=81; 21%) were married. In the

Social Media Usage and Psychosomatic Issues in South Asia: An Appraisal of Youth in Pakistan

social media preferred applications, majority of the respondents (n=139; 136%) were the users of WhatsApp, (n=85; 22.1%) were the users of Facebook, (n=90; 23.4%) were the users of Instagram, (n= 49; 12.7%) were the users of Twitter and (n=21; 5.4%) were the user of other social media applications. When they were inquired about hours of using social media (n=87; 22.6%) were using 1-4 hour per day, (n=126; 32.8%) were using social media 5-8 hour per day, (n=95; 24.7%) were using social media 8-12 hour per day and (n=76; 19.7%) were using social media >12hour per day.

Correlation matrix

H1. Social media usage is positively associated with depression among youth.

H2. Social media usage is positively associated with loneliness among youth.

Table no. 2 Relationship between Loneliness, Depression and Social Media usage in terms of Fear of Missing Out among Youth

Variables	1	2	3	4
Social Media	r	1	.274**	.396**
	p		.000	.000
Loneliness	r		1	.351**
	p			.000
Depression	R			1
	P			

n=384, p<0.01 r=correlation coefficient

Table no.2 shows the relationship between loneliness, depression and social media. There is little significant relationship between social media and loneliness (r= .274, p<0.01) while a positive significant relationship was found in social media and depression (r=.396, p<0.01) furthermore, there is also a linear relationship between loneliness and depression (r=.351, p<0.01) among youth.

Regression model

H3. There is a significant effect of social media on loneliness among youth.

H4. There is significant effect of social media on depression among youth.

Table no. 3 Magnitude of Effect of Loneliness, Depression and Social Media Usage in terms of Fear of Missing Out among Youth

Independent Variable	Loneliness		Depression	
	B	SE	B	SE
Social Media Usage	.931	.072	1.000	.000

R	.543 ^a	1.000 ^a
R ²	.297	1.000
ΔR^2	.295	1.000

n=384, SE= standard error, β = Beta, $p^{**}<0.01<0.05^{***}$

Table no. 3 shows the results of magnitude of effect of independent e.g. Social media usage and dependent variables e.g. loneliness and depression. The value of $R = .543^a$ and $R^2 = .297$ show that social media have about 29.7% influenced the loneliness and the values of $R = 1.000^a$ and $R^2 = 1.000$ show that social media has 100% influence on increasing depression among youth.

Discussion

World's population is getting old speedily; Depression is one of the common public health problems now days in all over the world. It affects about 7% of the whole population of the world. For example, loneliness decreases the overall wellbeing of people and a significant connection was found between loneliness and depression. The core objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between loneliness, depression and social media usage. Furthermore, this study was aimed to investigate the most effective consequence of social media usage i.e. depression or loneliness. Findings from Pearson correlation coefficient showed that there was little significant relationship between social media and loneliness ($r = .274, p < 0.01$) while a positive significant relationship was found in social media and depression ($r = .396, p < 0.01$) furthermore, there was also a linear relationship between loneliness and depression ($r = .351, p < 0.01$) among youth. These findings were consistent with findings of Demir and Kutlu (2016) because the relationship between loneliness and depression can be discussed by social media usage. Sense of loneliness develops due to unwanted individualization or perceived social isolation (Weiss, 1973). Lonely people are those who are not successful in achieving desired level of relations. People who experience deep sense of loneliness tend to seek different mechanisms to avoid that unwanted situation and to compensate their loneliness (Teppers et al. 2014). Likewise, scholars and researchers also mentioned that limiting social media usage can decrease depression among people and findings of our study showed that depression is completely influenced by social media usage. Social media usage and dependent variables e.g. loneliness and depression. In regression model, the value of $R = .543^a$ and $R^2 = .297$ show that social media have about 29.7% influenced the loneliness and the values of $R = 1.000^a$ and $R^2 = 1.000$ show that social media has 100% influence on increasing depression among youth. It means that where social media is eliminating loneliness it increases the risk of depressive disorders among users. These findings are consistent with the findings of an experimental study conducted by Hunt et al. (2018) which discovered that limiting social media usage had significant positive impact on mental health of the users in terms of decreased depression. Additionally, fear of missing out is really a new concept in youth based research. It seemed quite similar in present sample for accepting social media usage of youth. Particularly, fear of missing out is relevant to youth's social media concerns and is related with loneliness and depression (Barry et al. 2017).

Social Media Usage and Psychosomatic Issues in South Asia: An Appraisal of Youth in Pakistan

Conclusion

At the end, researcher concluded this study with this statement that social media usage has both positive and negative ends. People who are experiencing unwanted level of desired relations tend to start using social media to overcome their loneliness and excessive usage of social media later becomes the reason for increasing depression level among them which consequence into mental health problems.

Limitation of the study

This study is limited to the population of public universities of Southern Punjab, Pakistan. Depression and loneliness was analyzed only through social media usage other domains like socio-economic status and family environment was not analyzed. These findings cannot be generalized on the whole population because of cultural context and individual differences.

Future directions

This study was limited to the social media usage in producing loneliness and depression among youth of Public universities in Southern Punjab, Pakistan. There are many future directions for further research. These research findings certainly bear duplication with a different populace. The research should be also duplicated with a broader annexation of social media boards comprising other apps especially dating applications may have fruitful avenue of research particularly for people of youth. Further research also incentivizes follow up partaking to decrease wear and tear.

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Social Media Usage and Psychosomatic Issues in South Asia: An Appraisal of Youth in Pakistan

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