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Influence of Social Media on Psychological Distress Among Youth: A Case Study of Instagram

Abstract: *This study investigates the role of Instagram causing psychological distress among youth. Instagram is an application through which a person can share photos online and edit them by using different filters that are also available within the application. It is a social networking service that provides a platform to a person to share their images easily with their friends or followers. Understanding the impact of Instagram on youth's well-being has become a priority due to a simultaneous increase in mental health problems. The researcher applied the theory of social comparison. The researcher used the quantitative methodology to obtain results which were further analyzed statistically. Data was collected from 250 respondents using the survey as a tool for data gathering. The general findings of the study show Instagram causes psychological distress among youth. It also highlighted the kind of posts and stories that cause distress among youth.*

Key Words: Instagram, Psychological Distress, Social Media, Survey, FOMO, Social Comparison Theory

Introduction

Smartphone usage increased in the past few years, and hence the social media usage also increased in this time period. Smartphones were introduced in 2007, and till 2015 majority of the teens and adults owned their own smartphones [Smith, 2020]. According to a study by psychologist Jean Twenge at San Diego State University, the rise in depressive symptoms is directly correlated with smartphones adoption during that period even when matched year by year. (Jean M. Twenge, 2018)

Around two-thirds of the world's population is plugged into matrix [Veins, 2019]. Statistics show that till October 2019, almost 4.48 billion people were active internet users, which make a total of 58% of the total global population [Statista, 2020]. Social media is a complex industry that is multi-faceted and appeals to a greater range of cultures, groups, and personalities [Viens, 2019]. In this era of the digital world, people spend more time on the internet connecting people through social media rather than connecting in person. People interact with each other through social media platforms, and thus internet and social media have altered the way we interact with people online and offline, too [Allen, 2019]. There are different social media websites that provide their users with the opportunity to create an online identity and interact with people, including strangers, thus creating a social network that offers both positive and negative health effects [Ali et al., 2018].

Social media is full of artfully curated images of people who appear to be happy, satisfied, popular, or rich. People compare themselves with these images of others and hence get negatively affected mentally. This cause anxiety, depression, and other mental health effects and cause fear of missing out "FOMO" [Robinson, 2020]. According to the theory of social comparison, people appear to measure their experiences and abilities in contrast with others [Festinger, 1954]. For adolescents, this behavior is typically common [Myers & Crowther, 2009]. Social media's effect on mental health can differ between teenagers participating in downward comparison than those using advanced performers as a point of reference.

As in the current era, the use and influence of social media have greatly increased, researchers have begun to explore the consequences of social media on the mental health of people. Due to the simultaneous increase in mental health problems, it is important to understand social media's impact on adolescents' wellbeing [Kim, 2017]. Instagram is one of the social media applications which allows people to share pictures and edit them with filters. It allows users to post and share pictures directly with friends and followers and

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keep people engaged through different trends (Hu, Y, 2014). Many influencers are using Instagram for different purposes. Brands also use the Instagram platform with influencers to reach out to the target market. The cross-platform app reported more than 1 billion monthly active users of Instagram. There are almost 105 million Instagram users in the United States, and experts say that this figure will surpass 130 million users in 2022 (Statista, 2020). In Pakistan, there were 6124000 Instagram in November 2018; the majority of the users were men, i.e 67.4%. People aged from 18 to 24 were the largest user group (NapoleanCat, 2020).

Studies have been conducted to understand social media's negative impacts on youth. Major researches were carried out on Facebook due to its large number of users, but the least attention is being paid on Instagram, which is getting equally popular among youth and its emerging blogging trends.

Lenhart's (2010) research-based on quantitative methods conducted surveys and highlighted that 95 percent of young people consume huge number of hours on SNS and compare them and judge others on social networking sites. A large number of studies from San Deigo State University proposed that increased social media consumption and increased screen time have triggered a rise in depression and suicides among American teenagers. The study also showed that people with less screen time and more face-to-face interaction are less depressed and suicidal.

Kim et al. (2019) explored the association between the use of the Internet and the psychological well-being of adolescents. It explained that the majority of people use social media to relieve psychological problems. People who feel isolated or deprived of social interactions could grow a strong obsession for social media use, which could lead to adverse consequences in lifelike neglecting other daily actions, i.e. .work or relationships, and making them more lonely and isolated.

RSPH confirmed that social networking sites had affected the sleep pattern of users. Web overuse increases the risk of mental and health problems (Iannotti et al., 2009). Multi-tasking is a growing SNS trend, and people have several accounts on various platforms. Rosen et al (2013) showed that online multi-tasking forecasts signs of mental illness. Pricmack and Escob (2017) have shown that the number of social networking sites account is linked with anxiety rates. Studies have found that those with less social interaction suffer more from mental distress as compared to people with strong family and friends bonds (Klienberg, 2016). Seabrook, Kern, and Rickard (2016) reviewed 70 papers and identified an inverse relationship between positive online engagement on SNS and psychological distress.

Different researches have been conducted on effects of social media on the well-being of people have yielded diverse results, in many cases highlighting the negative impacts of social media. Yet, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no work to date has studied the correlation between Instagram use and psychological distress in Pakistan.

The present study had four main objectives one was to identify how Instagram cause psychological distress and also the association between the screen time of Instagram and the psychological distress. One of the objectives was to examine what kind of Instagram posts and stories cause distress psychologically and lastly, how Instagram cause FOMO. The present study achieved its objectives, and the hypothesis given is proved statistically by evaluating the data. The studies have provided the results that show Instagram is causing psychological stress among the youth. It has also highlighted the posts and stories that trigger psychological distress.

Hypothesis

H: Instagram is causing psychological distress among youth.

H: Instagram is not causing psychological distress among youth.

Research Questions

- How Instagram is creating psychological distress among youth?
- How is screen time correlated to distress among youth?
- How Instagram is creating FOMO (fear of missing out) among youth?
- How FOMO cause psychological distress among youth?

Methodology

The researcher used quantitative methodology for this purpose. The close-ended (quantitative) survey was used as a tool for data gathering. Universe or population represents the whole unit group and is the main

subject of every analysis. Population or universe, depending upon the intent of the research, can be individual in the world, particular geographical location, or unique ethnic or economic community. In this study researcher selected Lahore as an area, and the population were the youth of Lahore. The researcher collected samples from Lahore Pakistan as Lahore is a populous city of Pakistan and also it is a multi-cultural city. The purposive sampling technique was carried out to explore the fact, which is a form of non-probability sampling. People only having Instagram account were selected for this purpose. The researcher selected two variables for the study Social media as the independent variable and Psychological Distress as the dependent variable

Findings and Results

The study explored the role of Instagram causing psychological stress among youth. 250 respondents filled the survey from Lahore. The study explored how Instagram is causing psychological stress and also FOMO.

Screen Time

Questions regarding different aspects of Instagram were asked. Respondents were asked to answer how many times they spend on Instagram in a day. A large number of respondents (38.8%) showed that the majority of them use Instagram for 1 hour. 29.2% of the respondents use Instagram for more than 3 hours a day. While 22.8% have screen time of 2 hours and only 9.2 of the respondents, show Instagram screen time usage for 3 hours. The majority with screen time of one hour were not much-affected People with 2 hours and more than 3 hours screen time faced depression the most.

Table 1. Screen Time Correlation with Psychological Distress

	1 hour	2 hours	3 hours	More than 3 hours	
Anxiety	2	5	1	4	12
Depression	18	33	4	23	78
Self Esteem	7	2	2	6	17
Eating Disorder	0	0	2	1	3
Sleeping disorder	17	4	5	20	46
It has not affected me	53	13	9	19	94
Total	97	57	23	73	250

Social Comparison

Keeping social comparison theory in mind, different questions were asked in order to know how people compare themselves on Instagram and how it has an impact on them. 61.6 percent of the respondents post on Instagram for self-satisfaction and while the rest of the respondents post on Instagram for others' like and comments. The majority of the respondent i.e. 48.4%, never deleted a post after not getting many likes and comments. 30.8% rarely deleted a post for this purpose. 14.8% of respondents said they sometimes delete the post after not getting enough appreciation from others, while 4.4% often remove the post and 1.6% always remove their post when they don't get likes or comments from others. According to the data, a significant number of respondents, i.e., 36.6 %, do not feel insecure regarding their lifestyle when they see others lifestyles on Instagram, while 30.4% of the respondents feel insecure about their life style and 6.8% and 3.6% feel insecure often and always respectively after comparing themselves on Instagram with others. According to the research, 44 % of the respondents often feel insecure about their looks, highlighting how social comparison theory is implements on Instagram. In this context social comparison theory explains (Festinger, 1954), people tend to compare themselves to others to assess their opinion and abilities.

Table 2

Psychological Distress	Frequency	Percent
Anxiety	12	4.8
Depression	78	31.2
Self Esteem	17	6.8
Valid	3	1.2
Eating Disorder	46	18.4
Sleeping Disorder	94	37.6
It has not affected me.	250	100.0

Instagram and Psychological Distress

Social media is a place where one can talk about anything it has given humans total freedom of speech in this context; 32% of the respondents often express themselves on Instagram without worrying about others. 26% of the respondents said that they always truly express themselves on Instagram. While 13.2 and 13.6% said that they sometimes or rarely express themselves without worrying, whereas only 14.4% never express themselves on Instagram without worrying about what others think. Comparison ultimately affects one mood; thus majority of the respondents said that their mood is often affected by Instagram.

Instagram is a photo-sharing app in which different people from different lifestyles and professions etc. post stuff to highlight their success and to gain followers. 27.2% of the respondents rarely felt the pressure to fit into a certain image to get accepted in a society that they rarely felt pressure regarding this while 26.4% often felt the pressure while only 4% respondents said that they always felt the pressure to fit into a certain image. The majority of the respondent's, i.e., 34%, showed that the Instagram posts of others influence the way they feel about themselves. 29.2% said that Instagram posts have never influenced them regarding this issue. 22% said they are rarely get influenced by Instagram post and feel different about themselves, whereas only 4% said that Instagram influence the way they feel about themselves.

156 out of 250 respondents responded they had faced mental health issue due to Instagram, while 94 respondents said they did not have any effect on their mental health. The majority, with 31.2%, faced depression. 18.4 faced sleeping disorders, 6.8% had self-esteem issues, and 1.2 said they had eating disorders.

Collectively 37.6% said they had no effect of Instagram on their mental health. Instagram has different bloggers active on Instagram; thus, a question regarding what kind of posts and stories distress people was asked. 30% of the respondents said extravagant marriage and events posts and stories cause psychological distress. 26.8% of respondents said that the psychological distress is caused by lifestyle bloggers' posts and stories. The distressing feeling caused by these posts has different time to subside for different people. 9.2% believe psychological distress is caused by food. 32% of respondents said that they feel psychological stress subside within an hour. 22.4% said the feeling never goes. 8.8% of respondents said that the feeling subsides in a day, whereas 7.6 said the feeling of distress goes within seconds. After being distressed by these posts, 30% never closed Instagram to relax. 29.2% of the respondents rarely closed the Instagram application when they felt psychologically distressed, while a close percentage of 28.4% of the respondents closed the application when they get distressed. 9.6% often closes the application, whereas only 2.8% always closes the application. Why people do not close the Instagram application can be easily identified with the next question asked by the researcher. A significant number of respondents (36.4%) said that closing the Instagram application rarely soothes the feeling of distress. 25% said it never happens that closing the Instagram application helps in soothing the psychological distress felt.

FOMO and Instagram

Fear of missing out is also an issue which people face on social media. The majority of the respondents (32.8%) sometimes feel missed out after watching other stories and posts while 13.2% often feel missed out while only 3.2% of respondents always feel missed out. 28.8% of the respondents said that the feeling of being missed out subsides within an hour. 15.6% of the respondents were of the opinion that the feeling subsides in a day. 19.2 said the feeling never subsides, while 6% said feeling subsides within some seconds.

When people were asked whether Instagram has an impact on their live, we got mixed responses. The majority of the respondent's i.e., 33.2% said that rarely Instagram impacts their lives. 20% of the respondents said it never impacts on lives, and 20% also said that it often affects their lives. 22% of the respondents believe that it sometimes impacts one's life, while 4.4% said it always has an impact.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale has been widely used in assessing psychological distress among general and clinical populations from different cultural backgrounds. Total six questions were asked regarding nervousness, hopelessness, restlessness, worthless feeling, sad feeling and everything was an effort. While keeping mean value in mind majority of people felt everything is an effort; thus, they feel there is no outcome they want in the end. And on the second number they felt restless within last 30 days before they took survey.

Testing Hypothesis

As mentioned before the Hypothesis was suggested as “Instagram is causing psychological distress among youth.”

Pearson test was applied to test the hypothesis the results refer to significant evidence for approving the hypothesis. As results were in favor of the hypothesis, it means the hypothesis was approved and identifies that Instagram is causing psychological distress among youth.

Correlations

Table 3

		Impact of Instagram	Instagram Affect Mental Health
Impact of Instagram	Pearson Correlation	1	.392**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
Instagram affect mental health	Pearson Correlation	.392**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Summary Conclusion

The study explored the role of Instagram in causing psychological stress among youth. The main inspiration behind this research was the observation of the researcher that Instagram is getting popular day by day, and many people are following different people other than their peer group, including different bloggers and pages. The study proposed one hypothesis that Instagram is causing psychological distress among youth as people tend to compare themselves with others. Social comparison theory was applied to the study which highlights how people compare themselves and get psychological distress. It highlighted how different posts and stories from different pages and bloggers influence them, and they feel distressed.

The researcher provided the theoretical and operational definitions of the main core words which have been applied in the existing research. The researcher executed the proper methodology in order to achieve the objectives of the study and answer all the research questions.

To obtain data, quantitative methodology was applied. Survey was used as a tool of data gathering. Questionnaire had 26 questions, including the demographics. Purposive sampling technique was used for data collection and to carry out research at a particular time. Data from 250 respondents were gathered from Lahore. The sample was youth and had both male and female respondents. Researcher applied Pearson test in order to test the hypothesis and to evaluate data. The results are presented through graphs and tables, and further interpretation is also given.

The present study achieved its objectives, and the hypothesis given is proved statistically by evaluating the data. The studies have provided the results that show Instagram is causing psychological stress among the youth. It has also highlighted the posts and stories that trigger psychological distress.

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