

Social Media Influence on Youth during COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Today's youth are dependent in terms of education and economics but independent in terms of consumption and spending their free time. Social media become a more efficient way of spending free time among youth right from the start of the coronavirus. In the current pandemic situation, usage of social media is important for the younger generation since that provides a bigger platform for them to discuss, analyze, and present certain information that is of national importance. The purpose of this study is to understand the analyze the social media influence on the youth during COVID-19. The research method used in the study is literature survey research which provides a description and critical evaluation of the work related to the research problem prevailing with the influence of social media on youth. There is an urgent need for young people to be better supported in their engagement with social media during this COVID-19 pandemic situation. Strategic reinforcement strategies are required to reduce the amount of time spent on social media. Healthy minds progress in healthy physique. Public awareness campaigns can provide education on the impact of problematic use of social media and promote healthy behaviours. Streamlining the use of social media platforms must be given due recognition as time spent on such a platform could be diverted on productivity improvement processes. Well well-defined lifestyle with a cutting-edge information technology mix would be clearly made known to the younger generation of the Sultanate of Oman.

Key Terms: Social Media, Youth, COVID-19, Information Technology, Lifestyle

INTRODUCTION

Social media is becoming more and more popular day by day and become the integral to young people life. Using social media web sites is of the most common routine activity of today's youth. The growth of social networking technology has been exponential in recent years (Al-Hinai, et al., 2015). Social networking sites focus on building social relations among people by allowing them to share information including photos, videos, personal interests, and activities, use blogging to express their views and so on (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Social media networks appear to be the most ideal environments in which constant updates, multithreading, and opportunities for virtual sharing are possible. According to Downes (2005), social networks are the conjunction of personal ties that are combined with a set of relations. People can express their daily thoughts, discuss these thoughts, and come up with new ideas on social networks. Also, they can share various photographs and videos in addition to their personal details, look for the job even, they can find one, and they experience the real world within the virtual environment. This, day by day, draws all the attention to this field and forms a new conceptual frame for the renewed virtual world. A considerable number of social communication networks have nowadays emerged (Çam & Isbulan, 2012; Murray, 2008). The wide usage of technology such as the Internet can bring many educational and self-development opportunities to users, especially young individuals (Donner & Walton, 2013). For young users, these technologies open a new world of knowledge and information. However, it is also argued that such a virtual space could diverge,

young users, especially teenagers, from the learning of ethical behaviors in real life (Davis, 1976).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The growth of Internet use and the recent developments in the telecommunications industry has brought many changes and challenges to societies (Bernard & Walter, 2012). Nowadays, wireless internet enabled people to use the internet and communicate with each other wherever they are whenever they want. One of the most noticeable developments is the dramatic use of social networking media (Al-Hinai, et al., 2015). With the increasing accessibility of social networking sites using wireless internet and mobile devices it became easier and faster for users to create a profile and join social networking sites and start making friends (Young, 2013). Social networking platform is a unique one because it combines both different methods of communication and different kinds of content (chats, video, visual images, audio), which gives this technology a distinctive entity compared to traditional technologies. The examination of behavioral assumptions as a foundation of teenagers' choices can provide an interesting insight into how people interact with social networking sites (DiMaggio, et al., 2001).

A survey was done by Oxygen Media and Lightspeed Research Center among girls (aged 18 to 34) and they found out that 34% of the participants confessed that they log in Facebook as soon as they wake up every morning whereas 39% identify themselves as Facebook addicts (Abhijit, 2011). Specialists remarked that the desire for being on social networks is superior to the desires for sleep and rest, pointing to a social disaster, and they discussed social media addiction is more harmful than smoking and drug-addiction (The Telegraph, 2012). Studies showed that over 21 million teenagers have access to and actively used the internet on a daily or regular basis globally approximately 85 percent (Al-Hinai, et al., 2015; Donner J. and Walton M., 2013).

Çam & Isbulan (2012) summarized the condition as involving excessive mental preoccupation with social media through the Internet, coupled with repetitive thoughts of limiting or controlling this use and a subsequent failure to prevent access. Excessive mental preoccupation with the internet usage for social media, repetitive thoughts about limiting or controlling the use, failure to prevent the desire for access, continuation of using the internet though functionality being ruined at various levels, spending more and more time on the internet, craving for using the net when no access is available are the remarkable problems with the internet usage. Through this fast growth and unlimited features, social networking sites open to teenagers' wide horizons of virtual expression, freedom, and connectivity. Yet these same features can also bring many social challenges for society, parents, and teenagers themselves (Al Hinai, et al., 2015). Also, indirectly the youths were forced to get involved in social media due to peer pressure than real desire and later they become addict.

RATIONALE

Young people are in conversation and communication with their peer groups using a wide variety of different media and media devices every day. 10 years ago, young people may have only been in touch with friends and peer-groups when hanging out at school or meeting up in town. Now young people can be touched through instant messaging, social networks, online games, and many other tools. Young people are growing up in a constantly connected society (Shabir, et al., 2014). As per recent statistics by Napoleon Cat (2020) about Sultanate of Oman found that there were 2.65 of million Facebook users which accounted for 50% of its entire population, 1.36 million of Instagram users which accounted for 25.9% of its entire population, 8.49 Lakhs of Messenger users which accounted for 16.1% of its entire population. 5.34 Lakhs of LinkedIn users accounted for 10.1% of its entire population. The recent data released by the National Centre of Statistics and Information; it is stated that the Sultanate had a total of 46.7% youth in the age group 18 to 30 years (Oman Observer, 2018). The most important thing to be noticed is that among social

media users, young people were the largest user group.

According to a report by the National Centre of Statistics and Information (NCSI), most Omanis spend more than six hours daily on social media and WhatsApp is the most common social media apps.. When we compare this with the world average of 3 hours daily. NCSI survey conducted last year was mainly focused on the behavior of Omanis on social media. The data showed that 94% of Omanis own or use social media accounts. The most common is WhatsApp, which is used by 93% of social media users which is followed by YouTube with 71% social media users and Instagram with 50%. The survey indicated that the average daily use of social media was at least six hours per day and that the most frequent use of social media happens in the late evening (8:00 pm to 12:00 am). The results of the survey also revealed that on average, the Omani citizen has up to three accounts on different social networking sites (Times of Oman, 2019). Looking at the average human life expectancy of 77 years and assuming people start using it from 10 years old, on average a person may spend around 16 years of his life in social media. This dramatic growth in the use of social networking media will bring with it several influences on the social system in Oman (Al-Hinai, et al., 2015). The excessive usage of social media has become a growing phenomenon and a controversial issue. People have become addicted to various social media platforms. Social networking can impact users physically, psychologically, attitudinally, and/or socially (Andreassen, et al, 2012).

MATERIALS & METHOD

Social media could be able to impact youth's life in positive and negative ways. Social media might sometimes seem like just a new set of cool tools for involving young people and the emergence of social media potentially huge impact than that. The purpose of this research is as follows.

1. To understand the analyze the social media influence on the youth during COVID-19
2. To analyze the impact and role of social media on youth's mental health
3. To discuss the probable health issues, arising out of excessive use of social media

The paper is built on the analysis and synthesis of scientific literature which enables us to describe the phenomenon of youth and social media. Influence of social media related literature was collected from various books, journals, online databases, and other web resources.

DISCUSSION

Social media became part and parcel of youth life during this COVID-19 pandemic period. Social media impacts upon young people who are growing up in an age where media is not about broadcast content from the TV but is about interactivity, multimedia, and multi-tasking. And it impacts upon organizations who need to remain relevant to a new generation, and who find their own work and structures being changed by changing communication tools and patterns of communications (Anthony, 2009). Social media's impact on youths globally on both ends good and bad and it is applicable to Omani youth as well. Omani youth also influenced by social media which has enhanced the exposure of the people and create more awareness among youth. Studies suggest that the youth population is more involved in social media than other walks of life (Shabir, et al., 2014).

Many social networks have emerged nowadays, and they reshape people's communication, interaction, cooperation and even their learning process (Çam & Isbulan, 2012). Murray (2008) argued that social networks and software in today's societies have changed both the way people communicate with each other and knowledge-sharing. To give an example of this issue, the time that the users spend on social networks has now been two to three folds higher than that when such networks have emerged. Many people of all ages participate in social networks with different aims and the number of users who attend on-line social

networks is continuously increasing every day.

Furthermore, social networking sites give youngsters the opportunity to express themselves with almost no limits. Unlike traditional media such as newspapers, social networking sites allow youth to express their daily lives. Youth can communicate with people who have the same interest. This gives them a chance to meet people and make new friends, even when friendships are very doubtful, not reliable, and dangerous. In short, youngsters like to have more ways to express themselves without fear of prejudice, and social networking sites give them just that (Young, 2013).

Scientific evidence suggests that heavy usage of social network sites can lead to symptoms of substance-related addictions including salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, relapse, and problems with behavioral addictions (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Numerous studies have identified linkages between social media use and negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, compulsive behavior, and narcissism around the world (Strickland, 2014, Andreassen, et al, 2012, Al-Hinai, et al., 2015). Several studies have found an association between social media use and depression, anxiety, sleep problems, eating issues, eye strain, social withdrawal or lack of sleep, increased suicide risk and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (Palyan, 2019, Shabir, et al., 2014, Rohilla & Kumar, 2015). The dramatic growth in the use of social networking media will bring with it several influences on the social system in Oman and mainly in youth.

IMPLICATION

Young people are turning to online networks to participate in a wide range of public activities. On the friendship-driven side, youth see online spaces and communications media as mechanisms to hang out with their friends. On the interest driven side, youth turn to networked publics to connect with like-minded peers who share knowledge and expertise that may not be available to them locally. By engaging with communities of expertise online in more geeked-out practices, youth are exposed to new standards and norms for participation in specialized communities and through. Further, the ability for many youths to be in constant private contact with their peers strengthens the force of peer-based learning, and it can weaken adult participation in these peer environments (Ito, et al., 2009).

Now in the age of the pandemic the rate of using social media has been increasing among the youth. The research studies show that around 68% increase in the usage of social media during lockdown period. Most of their time, the youth spend time on mobile phones which is predominantly using social media (Times of Oman, 2018). Omani youth spend more than six hours daily on social media, on average, the Omani citizen has up to three accounts on different social networking sites. This dramatic growth in the use of social networking media will bring with it several influences on the social system in Oman. The excessive usage of social media has become a growing phenomenon and a controversial issue. People have become addicted to various social media platforms, social networking can impact users physically, psychologically, attitudinally, and/or socially (Times of Oman, 2019).

Social media is a favorite form of media. it is a useful tool for youth so its use is essential to get information and knowledge when youth going to connect the social media should keep in mind that basic purpose to usage and always remember that they are going to share the information or links are not only for their gratification and interest but also for all their contacts and friends community, so be carefully utilize with social responsibility, ethically, religiously and politically appropriate links should be share (Shabir, et al., 2014). The challenges associated with social media may be especially risky for young people who are already experiencing mental health difficulties, as suggested by the bidirectional relationship between use of electronic media and decrease in psychological well-being (Twenge, et al., 2018).

Commenting on the growing use of social media, Omani influencer Muhammad Al-Hinai told that (Times of Oman, 2018) “social media has grown rapidly in Oman because people want to keep up with what is

going on at any given moment. Earlier, people used WhatsApp to get most of their information but now Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are a lot more popular. Twitter usage has become routine nowadays because everyone wants to keep up with what is happening”. Nowadays, the young population lives in an extended youth. They become dependent in terms of education and economics but independent in terms of consumption and spending their free time. These challenges become more critical when one knows that most users of social networking media are youth population.

With the unknowns of social media effects still substantially outnumbering the knowns, it is critical that independent scientists, policymakers, and industry researchers cooperate more closely. Most importantly, social media companies must support independent research by sharing granular user engagement data and participating in large-scale team-based open science. Only then will we truly unravel the complex constellations of effects shaping young people in the digital age (Orben, et al., 2019).

We believe that if our efforts to shape new media literacy are keyed to the meaningful contexts of youth participation, then there is an opportunity for productive adult engagement. Youth are developing new forms of media literacy that are keyed to new media and youth-centered social and cultural worlds (Ito, et al., 2009). Given the importance of engaging youth in mitigating potential harms from social media, a prohibitionist approach would be counterproductive. Indeed, for adolescents today, who have not known a world without social media, digital interactions are the norm, and the potential benefits of online access to productive mental health information (Abi-Jaoude, et al., 2020)

However, today’s youth could benefit from proven individual and systemic interventions to help them navigate the challenges brought about by use of smartphones and social media, protect themselves from harm and use social media in a manner that safeguards their mental health, against a background of policy initiatives aimed at addressing the social, environmental, and economic factors that underpin family well-being and nurture youth resilience (Abi-Jaoude, et al., 2020 & World Mental Health Day, 2019). Youth might be encouraged to inform their peers that they are limiting their social media use. Talking with youth about alternative ways to connect, including meeting in person or even talking directly by phone, could help with strategies to fill the social media gap, reinforced by discussion of evidence that in-person interaction may protect mental health (Abi-Jaoude, et al., 2020).

Awareness is a must for the younger generation on the use of social media platforms. The regulative authorities would get a broader picture of the importance of awareness to be created on the use of social media and about the ways and means to be used for creating awareness. At the system level, university and community-based programs can institute limits on social media use, along the lines of those that have recently been shown to have a positive effect on healthy behaviours (Strieter, et al., 2019). More broadly, public awareness campaigns can provide education on the impact of problematic use of social media and promote healthy behaviours in this regard. Various social media platforms have placed bans and restrictions on content related to self-harm (Marchant, et al., 2017).

One of the strategic directions of Oman Vision 2040 is the national talent with dynamic capabilities and skills that are competitive locally and internationally. There is a huge scope to utilize the young Omani talents on nation-building. Healthy minds progress in healthy physique. The youth should avoid excessive use of social media. They should be balanced in their life and give proper time to the co-curricular activities in their daily life routine (Shabir, et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

Usage of social media is important for the younger generation since that provides a bigger platform for them to discuss, analyze, and present certain information that is of national importance. At the same, it should not

take their precious time on just discussing certain issues that make a lesser contribution to their career development. Labor Productivity improvement has been the core in the vision 2040 of the Sultanate of Oman. Streamlining the use of social media platforms must be given due recognition as time spent on such a platform could be diverted on productivity improvement processes.

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