Impact of Social Media on Personality Development

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ABSTRACT: The aim of the study is to examine the impact of social media on personality development of adolescents and to identify social media factors that influence personality development. A qualitative approach has been adopted in order fully explore the subject matter without any constraints. Data was collected using only peer reviewed Journal Articles and articles from book sections. The grounded theory method was used to reach the conclusion. The findings show that use of social media is extreme in adolescents as they use not only for socializing, but also for communication, entertainment, and all the other activities. The four main social media factors that influence personality development include (i) Culture of Popularity, (ii) Unreal Standards of Appearance, (iii) Approval Seeking Behavior, and (iv) Prevalence of Depression and Anxiety. The research has two main limitations. The first limitation is that the study does not make use of primary data in forms of interviews or observation but it was made sure that only primary sources are used. Secondly, the use of qualitative approach which increases researcher bias. The findings of this study can be used to minimize the negative effects of social media on the personality development of adolescents through educational and intervention plans. The findings show that social media has an adverse effect on the personality development of adolescents. The study specifically identifies the four personality factors that are altered by the excessive use of social media. These findings can be used to develop interventions to minimize this negative impact on adolescents.

KEYWORDS: Behavior, Culture of popularity, Facebook and Anxiety.

1   INTRODUCTION

Internet and other forms of media are now deeply integrated in our daily lives and adolescents are deeply connected with this new media as they were born in a time when technology is at its peak and available for all to use. A study was conducted in the developed countries and it was found that adolescents spent most of their time using new media as compared to any other activity, second only to sleeping [9]. New media is an important part of the daily lives of adolescents and they constantly connect their offline lives with online presence and make use of multiple sources (smartphones, laptops, ipad, etc.) to stay in touch with their social networks, especially facebook and twitter.

Constant communication is the main motivation behind obsession with new media [20]. The use of new media is not limited to the internet as adolescents can be seen using multiple media simultaneously rather than taking turns [13]. Adolescents are constantly using new media for homework, socialization, and entertainment. Thus, it can be said that they are under heavy influence of social media.

1.1   ADOLESCENTS: SOCIAL AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

An important development factor during adolescents is that children become more self-conscious and become increasingly concerned about who they are. They are old enough to understand the concept of society and placing themselves in the society while maintaining their individuality at the same time. They also go through significant bodily

changes which lead to the development of self-concept. Thus, self-esteem is an important concern in people of this age because they not see themselves fit for the society or may find incongruence in their real self and ideal self.

According to Erik Erikson's Stages of Development, during adolescence, teens may face much psychological discomfort as they go through "identity crisis" [7]. He proposes that during this stage, teens' battle between identity and identity confusion as they struggle to identify personality characteristics that are unique to them [7]. Failing to develop a suitable identity can cause much distress and also have a negative impact on their social functioning in later years. The main characteristics of Adolescent years include:

1.1.1 IDENTITY ACHIEVE:

The individuals successfully develop their identity and show personality features like high motivation, self-esteem, and achievement [11].

1.1.2 MORATORIUM:

These individuals are who are in the process of seeking their true identity and spend most of their time contemplating what they should commit to in life. This process can prove to be very anxiety-provoking [11].

1.1.3 FORECLOSURE:

These types of individuals are usually conformists and authoritarian. They also seek aspiration change and have little anxiety compared to moratorium [11].

1.1.4 DIFFUSION:

Individuals falling in this category have low self-esteem and autonomy. Their identity is weak and diffused [11]. They are also easily pushed in to doing things as they don't feel strongly about anything.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative research is "any kind of research that produces findings not arrive at by means of statistical procedure or other means of quantification" [12]. It is one of the oldest methods of conducting a scientific research and its main focus on explaining a given social phenomenon in detail. According to Patton and Cochran , "qualitative research is characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspects of social life, and its methods which (in general) generate words, rather than numbers, as data"[16]. In simple words, qualitative research is used when the data is such that it cannot be interpreted numerically and requires descriptive understanding and explanation of a given concept. The method is often used when human variables like behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, etc. are measured which cannot be quantitatively analyzed.

2.1 INTERVIEWS

It is one of the most common methods of data collection in qualitative research as it allows the researcher to get firsthand information about the topic [5]. It is an ideal way to obtain opinions of people and also gives an opportunity to identify factors that had not been taken in to consideration earlier [4]. Interviews may be semi-structured or in-depth and may be conducted face-to-face, online, or through telephone.

2.2 FOCUS GROUPS AND GROUP DISCUSSION

If the study is being conducted on a given focus group, a number of participants can be interviewed in groups through group discussions [8]. These sessions are interactive and participants are allowed to oppose or support a given topic and present their personal views [14]. However, it must be made sure that participants that are shy also participate in the discussion so that no one is left out [14].

2.3 OBSERVATION

This method is used when data is collected when behavior in natural environment is required. For instance, when interviewed, people may say something that they wouldn't do in real life just to seek social approval or because they don't want to seem "socially irresponsible". However, when observed in natural life, the behavior is completely authentic. The data may be collected using a video recorder or placing the researcher in the natural environment and taking notes of events as they unfold [18].
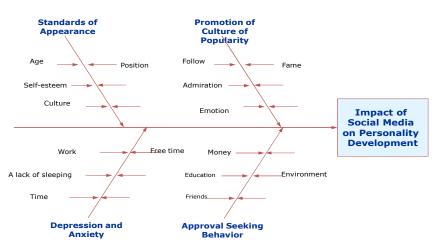
3 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of classifying raw data in a way that is makes sense and answers the research question. In qualitative research, an important part of data analysis is to interpret the information collected from different sources and giving it meaning. For the present research, data was collected using peer-reviewed journal articles and articles from books. The grounded theory approach is used since the theory is developed from the data collected making it an inductive approach. Moreover, the subject matter is such that is requires subjective interpretation of the data collected.

4 FINDINGS

The aim of the research was to examine the impact of social media on personality development of adolescents. Adolescence is the age of rapid growth both in terms of physicality and intellectuality. Both girls and boys develop physical features that give them a sense of identity [7]. Moreover, at an intellectual level, teens begin to wonder who they really are and where do they belong. The third type of development, which takes place in this age, is the building of social relationships. Because adolescence is such a delicate stage, individuals are easily influenced by others and may go out of their way to impress others.

5 SOCIAL MEDIA FACTORS AFFECTING ADOLESCENT PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

Fig.1. *Social Media Factors Affecting Adolescent Personality Developmentand its relation to four independent variables*

5.1 THE GOAL OF IMPACT SOCIAL MEDIA ON PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

Because the goal of the excessive use of social media by the young generation, it is impossible to keep adolescents from using it. Due to this use, the four personality factors that are affected by excessive use of social media include: Need for popularity to feel good about self [1], unreal standards of appearance [21], approval seeking behavior [6], and increasing depression and anxiety [12].

5.2 FACTOR1: PROMOTING OF SEEKING BEHAVIOUR

It must be noted that the main reason behind social networking sites is usually to extend the actual self out to the world and reach out to the society and not to promote anonymity [6]. Another factor hidden behind this vast use and obsession with social networking is to seek approval of others and gain popularity [3].Many users of social media are obsessed with constant updating and sharing in order to gain more likes and popularity among friends [6]. Not getting the expected feedback from "friends" can result in low self-esteem [19].

5.3 FACTOR2: INCREASING DEPRESSING AND ANXIETY

It has been found that increasing use of social media also leads to depression, anxiety, and stress in adolescents [12]. A number of studies have found a correlation between heavy use of facebook and emotional distress [17]. There are a number of reason why this is so. Firstly, the "friendships" on social networking sites are superficial and not real. Mostly people have friends on their list that they have never really met or interacted with in real life [2]. When people see on their newsfeeds how happy their "friends" are as they constantly upload pictures and statuses, they begin to feel unhappy with their life [19]. This leads to depression and anxiety as the person starts feeling like a "loner" with no active social life.

5.4 FACTOR3: UNREAL STANDARDS FOR APPEARANCE

The concept of social media popularity is well understood by anyone who uses social networking sites and thus, to gain popularity, people may go out of their way to impress others [21]. Adolescents are increasingly becoming materialists and fake on their social networking site. For instance, taking a perfect profile picture is very important for the youngsters in order to get more likes and comments from their friends [12]. Girls as young as 12 are posting suggestive pictures just to get likes while young boys are obsessed with posting pictures of their abs. Recently a 12 year old "selfie addict" attempted suicide after taking 200 pictures as none of them were "good enough" for him to be his display [15]. In order to seem attractive, people use different photo enhancing software to achieve the look of perfectionism. Seeing perfect pictures of their friends, individuals feel dissatisfied with their own appearance and make efforts to achieve an unreal standard of appearance [10].

5.5 FACTOR4: CULTURE OF POPULARITY

Social networking sites have been a popular Internet trend for the past many years. People are constantly in touch with their friends through social media and it is the dominant form of communication [1]. One major part of social networking sites is of profiles. Individuals spend much time creating profiles that are "cool" to maintain a certain social standard [12]. It has been found that these profiles and friends that people have are used to judge an individual.

Factors that decide social and physical attractiveness of a person include other attractive friends that the individual has, other people's comments on a person's wall, photo, or any other post, and the community association that a person has [4].

6   RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of the research is that it only makes use of secondary data and archival research to reach conclusions. It is thus suggested that use of primary data is made in any future research conducted on the subject matter. Another limitation of the study is that it makes use of qualitative research. While this approach allows the researcher to take in to consideration extraneous factors that might influence result and have a broader view, it is subjective in nature and it requires the researcher to use personal interpretation of data to reach conclusion. However, efforts were made to keep the research subjective by making use of primary researches only and deriving conclusions from the data collected without any extended explanation.

7   PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The four factors identified in the research that influence personality development in adolescents have many practical implications. Since the research proves that using social network sites is having a negative impact on the personality development of the adolescents, efforts should be made to minimize these consequences. Each factor mentioned can be further studied in detail to understand how the negative impact of social media can be reduced. For instance, efforts can be made to educate parents and school authorities about how social networking is leading to the culture of "popularity" based on materialism and giving way to unreal standards of appearance. Parents and teachers can then begin moral education of

children from an early age to help them realize that appearance is not everything as there other aspects of personality, intelligence, and good nature of a person, which should be used, judge a person.

Similarly, adolescents should be encouraged to spend more time outdoors in recreational activities to promote a healthy development. The feelings of loneliness arise in adolescents who spend several hours on social networking sites waiting for someone to communicate with them and brooding over the active lives of others. Efforts can be made on a national level to reduce the prevalence of depression and anxiety among youngsters. Furthermore, efforts can be made to identify a healthy way of using new media and introducing educational programs regarding responsible use of new media.

8   CONCLUSION

Based on the review of the literature presented above and the findings, it can be concluded that social media is having a significant impact on the personality development of adolescents. The new media is not only promoting false standards of friendship and popularity, but it also having a negative impact on the mental health of the users. Excessive use of social media is very harmful for adolescents because it is the age where identity of an individual develops and if these unreal standards of appearance are bombarded on the young mind, it can have a catastrophic effect on the entire Millennial Generation in the long run.

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