USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND WELLBEING AMONG USERS: LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have gathered a huge momentum ever since their inception. Simplicity of operation, real – time communication, facility to share as well as broadcast content, ease of finding like – minded people are some of their noteworthy features, because of which people from age groups are using SNSs. However, SNSs are blamed for their negative physical as well as mental effects on the users. But literature has found that conscious, moderate, and wise use of SNSs can prove to be beneficial. This paper has tried to provide a review of literature related to use of SNSs and wellbeing.

Keywords: SNSs, wellbeing

Introduction

The use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter has become an integral part of life of people all over world. The explosion in the use of social networking sites has become the most significant concern for parents. Some studies indicated negative impact of social networking use e.g. loneliness, depression, anxiety etc. Other studies have found the benefits of use of social media. There are always two sided of a coin. It depends on how do people perceive and use it. It is important to understand that social networking is not necessarily a bad. It only turns into a harmful thing when people abuse it. In fact, many researchers have found benefits of social networking sites.

In today's world connectedness and speediness through technology is possible because of social channels. Electronic media such as internet has played a vital role in transforming the world into a global village. Internet offers its users a vast array of activities like personal and professional communication, voicing opinion, entertainment, self – expression, information exchange etc. which are facilitated by online platforms like Social Networking Sites. Mainly social networking sites are developed to promote social interactions. Boyd and Ellison (2007) conceptualized social network sites as the platform which allows people to create a public or semi-public profile within a restricted system, communicate with those who they share a connection and navigate the list of people in connections made by others in that system. Social networking site is mainly used to enhance the relationships between strangers.

Humans are social animals. Being a part of one or more social groups gives us a sense of safety and belongingness. When people feel that their values and beliefs are accepted by others, they believe in those relationships whether they are virtual or face to face (Eraslan-Capan, 2016). This sense of belongingness leads to flourishing, a combination of social and emotional wellbeing. Dr. Martine Seligman (2011) who is considered as "founding father" of flourishing, explained five important factors of flourishing: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments. According to Diener et al. (2009), to flourish means "the meaning and purpose, supportive and rewarding relationships, engaged and interested, contribute to the well-being of others, competency, self-acceptance, optimism and being respected" (p. 252). Flourishing involves positive emotional, psychological, and social experiences (Liu et al., 2020).

Social networking sites help the users to connect with each other based on their shared interest and characteristics. People create virtual relationships with people who are in their contact. Social media mostly influence the lives of young adults. Most of the young adults use social media for enhancement of social connections in order to achieve a sense of belongingness. In Maslow's (1943) hierarchy model, affection and belongingness ranks on the third level (p.380). Major part of the world is now emerging out from the shadows of the pandemic, which took a toll on the physical and psychological well – being of the people and adversely affected the person – to – person interactions. SNSs provided a mechanism to stay in touch with the near and dear ones. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people of all age groups used WhatsApp to stay connected with their family and friends. People used social media sites such You Tube and Instagram for learning new things to keep them active. (Dar and Nagrath, 2022) Social media sites are not only useful for younger generation but it has been accepted by all age groups. Smart phones, availability of faster internet and social apps are used by older generation. Organisations use social networking sites such as Twitter and LinkedIn to communicate with customers and clients. Social media offers not only movies but it also provides for self-expression and learning opportunities.

This review tries to find out the relationship between flourishing (wellbeing) and use of social networking sites among internet users with the support of different research articles.

Literature review

Lee et al. (2011) while studying South Korean users noticed that time spent on SNSs does not really matter. But the size of the social network developed on SNSs and self-disclosure through SNSs were found positively related to life and well-being. Feelings of well-being are found to be correlated to what extent the users share their feelings, emotions, and thoughts.

Vallor, S. (2012) investigated the ethical significance of online friendship. This is relevant to Aristotelian theory of the good life which holds the idea that humans flourish through the complete virtue of friendship. The virtue of friendship through social media was examined by four dimensions: self-knowledge, reciprocity, empathy, and shared life. The researcher has mentioned that social support gained through social media was found more significant in the contemporary world than face to face interactions. The social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook are proved to be new sources of friendship.

Huppert and So (2013) have conducted a study on flourishing in which they have studied a sample of 43,000 collected from 22 European countries. They have identified ten dimensions of flourishing with a taxonomy of factors. Factor 1 states positive emotions, factor two includes emotional stability, vitality, optimism, resilience, and self-esteem. Factor 3 consists of engagement, competence, meaning and positive relationships.

According to Indian and Grieve (2014) though social connectedness and hope play a significant role in flourishing, some individuals experience high levels of anxiety in face-to-face interactions. While studying socially anxious and non-socially anxious people, the researchers found that Facebook served as an effective platform of social support for socially anxious people. The social support provided by Facebook helped in achieving the feeling of well-being to socially anxious people.

Similarly, Das (2014) mentioned that SNSs open opportunities to fulfill the need of social relationship and interaction by reducing the loneliness. People share their problems with others and obtain support which is beneficial for their health and wellbeing. Friends from SNSs gives life satisfaction and wellbeing as individual tries to compensate for the loss of real-life relations with their online friends.

Bazarova et al. (2015) stated that people use social networking sites to harbour their mental and social concerns. People prefer to share intense and less positive emotions with others on social networking sites than sharing them personally. By doing so, they feel more satisfied. They also share positive contents on all sites via status updates and posts. After receiving likes and comments from listeners they get more satisfaction. The emotions are innately linked to the wellbeing. These positive emotions act as one of the factors for flourishing in the life of people who use social networking sites.

Nyagah et al. (2015) stated that social networking sites help to improve self-esteem and psychological well-being of students. Use of SNSs give them a sense of identity and confidence. These work as a source of increasing their spirits because their online friends cheer them up. This platform is useful for those who are shy and do not have valour to face people and express their views.

Ziv and Kiassi (2016) found that use of Facebook was positively correlated with psychological well-being among those who have low resilience. Facebook use provides virtual support to those who may lack social skills required to build strong face-to-face relationships with others and confidence through traditional path of communication. This network encourages users to share their feelings and experiences with their online friends.

Yang, C. (2016) showed that Instagram interaction and browsing can help to lower the feelings of loneliness. One of the prominent psychological need of individuals is to be in touch with one's past and present contacts; as doing so helps in maintaining the relations. SNSs play a vital role in finding the people with whom one was in touch, but lost the connection because of some reasons.

Eraslan-Capan (2016) has mentioned that flourishing is a combination of emotional and social wellbeing. For flourishing, social environment and hopeful view towards future are important. In early adulthood, social connectedness and hope are important predictors of flourishing. While studying 260 university students, researcher mentioned that flourishing comprises social relations and positive personal characteristics. The social environment and relationship affect an individual's perception towards himself, others as well as future which leads to psychological wellbeing.

Joshi and Bhat (2018) conducted a study to find out a positive impact of social networking sites on youth. They found that the use of social media helps them to build a bigger social network and increased friend circle. Social media also help young adults to stay updated with current situation and gain more knowledge. The researchers found that the participants had positive perception towards social media as it enhances domains like marketing, social, health and knowledge among young adults.

While studying role of social media use in user's wellbeing, Bodhi et al. (2021) studied 206 IT professionals from India. They found that employees visit social media sites to improve their social interactions which they do not get offline or in personal lives. Use of social media sites helps in decreasing loneliness and improves psychological wellbeing of employees.

Canale et al. (2021) stated that a very recent COVID – 19 Pandemic posed a big challenge to the flourishing among population as there were restrictions on movement and face – to – face interaction. Therefore, people invariably got inclined to use the SNSs. In such testing times, the digital media offered a channel for venting out emotions and seeking support. Individuals who perceived themselves as the receivers of online support showed higher levels of positive mental health. These people also showed more prosocial behaviour.

According to Gudka et al. (2021) There are wide applications of use social media. It helps to flourish through numerous aspects of wellbeing. Therefore, research conducted on social media use have not used the term flourishing but the domains related to it. While considering wellbeing, the researchers have taken interpersonal, intrapersonal, and collective aspects of it. The researchers have found that social networking contributes to flourishing by building relationships and helps build identity.

Ashraf et al. (2021) social media platforms provide an opportunity for open learning to the students. They can interact and collaborate easily with their peers. By conducting a study on a sample of 233 Chinese students,

researchers found that this open learning via social media had a positive effect on academic performance of the students. Because of group discussions and exchange of ideas reinforced learning behaviour among the students.

Elderly people are prone to multiple challenges related to physical as well as mental health. Due to limitations on mobility, their interaction with others might get restricted. Social media may prove to be beneficial in such scenarios. Gaia et al. (2021) found that in European ageing population SNS use is positively associated with life satisfaction. SNSs help to maintain the existing connections as well as create new connections. This affects the quality of life of older people.

Dar and Nagrath (2022) stated that youngsters who opine their thoughts on social networking sites are happier. Use of social media provided a platform to advocate young people. If social media is used appropriately, it gives good outcomes. Young people can reach receptive audience and receive honest opinion from them which can be used as a roadmap to develop their creativity and ideas.

Discussion and Conclusion

Social networking sites is a new medium which connect, and bring people together. People seek advice, provide guidance by removing communication barriers across the cultures. People of all age groups use SNSs to interact with each other. This increases creativity and social network. SNSs are used to explore and learn different things, record their memories, and form groups with likeminded people. SNSs offers an access to the world where individual can express his/her feelings and views without any constraint. It serves an emotional and social support and helps to flourish in life. With the help of different research articles this study assessed the association between use of social networking sites and wellbeing among its users. Social networking sites can be a great platform for education, communication, and social support for introverts, shy, lonely, underprivileged, and ageing users when used appropriately.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study has not included the frequency of SNS use and activities users are engaged in; based on which positive and negative use of SNSs can be evaluated. Thus, quantitative research needs to be conducted to study problematic use of SNSs. Though study has included different research reviews we cannot draw conclusions of causality from our results. In order to find out real causal results, the study must be extended quantitatively. Future research should consider the difference between personality traits, gender, and age. These factors might affect expectations of the users and outcomes of emotional support gained from SNSs.

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