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The Effect of Social Media on Gen Z's Mental Health

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Abstract

This internship project is being completed with a public health focus based on addressing mental health concerns with social media and Gen Z. The setting that I will be using will be our college campus so that I can collect raw data from people that are a part of this generation. I will be giving out anonymous paper surveys so that A&T students can record their honest answers. The issue is that social media is very prevalent in our world today and with pros there comes cons that can take an effect on someone's mental health. With this project there is an opportunity to collect raw data and use the results to create ways for people to have positive social media use that promotes healthy mental states. This is useful for younger generations to navigate through social media and make good decisions while using social media apps. There will be an examination of the effects of social media, and the well-being of Gen Z. involve comparing existing research with real world behaviors to better understand patterns related to anxiety, depression, and self-esteem. This project is important because it supports public health efforts to improve mental health outcomes and raise awareness about social media influences on wellbeing.

Keywords

Social Media; Public Health; Gen Z; Mental Health.

Introduction

How Gen Z's mental health is impacted by social media. People born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s of Generation Z, social media is a major part of their daily lives. Gen Z has always lived in a world

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where there are platforms at their fingertips, including Instagram and TikTok, Snapchat and Twitter. But in the past, older generations lacked these features. These platforms make people move through new paths of interaction, sharing their ideas and saying what they want. But as society's use of media gets wider and further popular, concerns have grown about how it affects mental health. We know for sure that social media might in fact exacerbate anxiety, hopelessness, low self-image (or even lower self-confidence) and concerns over body image issues. In a healthy sense, it also provides you with support or a sense of community. This study examines both positive and negative effects of social media on Gen Z, as well as their psychological reasons as well as for the social media effect and how to use social media responsibly.

Results

Digital Life and Gen Z. Gen Z has been called Generation Z, which is the first generation to be very digital [1]. A lot of teenagers and young adults use their phones and social media to communicate, socialize and express themselves. More than 95 per cent of teens utilize YouTube and nearly 70 per cent of them use Instagram and Snapchat every day according to the Pew Research Center [2]. As a result of this consistent exposure, social media isn't just a time-spinning pastime; it alters kids' self-perception and outlook on life. Adolescence is an important time for children develop a sense of self, and social media makes this worse by encouraging endless comparison and feedback.

How you think about yourself and how you feel about others. In this regard of how social media affects self-esteem, social media has become one of the greatest concerns for people of all ages. We constantly compare our lives with others' well crafted, edited versions of our own online lives. They can also make people feel inadequate [3]. Gen Z's are still trying to figure out who they are, so being up to date with filtered images and idealistic standards all day is very bad. A study by Perloff [4], showed that sites such as Instagram have the potential to increase body dissatisfaction, especially for young people, in particular girls. Some platforms promote body acceptance, but unrealistic beauty standards get more light, and individuals tend to have a tougher time finding ways to feel good about themselves.

Fear of Missing Out, anxiety, and depression. However, excessive social media use is also associated with increased levels of anxiety and sadness. While statistics reveal that using social media passively, via excessive scrolling without engagement, amplifies these symptoms over time [5]. Another major reason is fear of missing out (FOMO). When people see others regularly posting about social activities or accomplishments, they may feel excluded or left behind. This usually leads people to be more on social media, and it can create stress and anxiety.

Discussion

Among the major challenges for Gen Z is cyberbullying. Unlike conventional bullying, it can occur at any time and typically involves more people. This means that it is more difficult for victims to flee or recover as a result. Researchers have found that cyberbullying can result in sadness, emotional discomfort, and suicidal ideation [6]. Since social media blur the line between school and personal life, victims may feel as if there is no safe place to avoid harassment. The Value of Social Media. Even if social media has issues, it's not all bad. So that when used in a considered way it is very beneficial. Many young people turn to social media to seek people who have been through the same things and share the same interest. For

example, LGBTQ+ adolescents can often access online communities that serve their well-being that they struggle to find in person [2]. These are spaces where individuals find acceptance, support and belonging. And social media has also helped make mental health more widely talked about. On social media sites, people can read about anxiety, depression and therapy from influencers and groups, which can make them want (and are prone to) wanting treatment. Social media also allows people to exercise their creativity, learn something new, and demonstrate their talent. Used in moderation, TikTok and YouTube are two of those platforms that can help people express themselves and to develop as people.

Social media impairs our brain's reward center. The notifications, likes and comments release dopamine and make users want to be in the app again (Turel & Qahri-Saremi). This may lead to addictive behaviors—something like addiction, which will never be solved by any normal way of living. Late-night social media also can make your mind too active and interrupt the sleep cycle if we use it late at night. Levenson et al [7], say that not getting enough sleep can make anxiety and depression worse.

There are a range of ways through which you can gain positive affordances if and when social media does not get the bad side effects. Time limitation, awareness of social media usage, and purposeful use are just some options to avoid the bad effects. More than scrolling through your feed, being active, such as commenting or networking with friends, may prove to be better than being stuck to your phone too much. Education is also key, like teaching more about digital literacy so people can understand how social media is set in place to grab people's attention and alter their behavior. It's also important to get people to focus on activities outside of the home: hobbies, exercise, the opportunity to be around other people.

Conclusion

Maintaining a balance between online vs. real life experiences can benefit your overall mental health. In conclusion, social media has shaped Generation Z experiences significantly. People need a purpose outside of social media, be creative, learn new things. At the same time, it can bring on issues like worry, depression, and comparing oneself to others. Social media impact on individual user behavior is significant. Gen Z can learn a new way of using social media rather than one damaging its well-being simply by learning what social media does and encouraging healthy behaviors.

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