Social Media – Use it to Make you Feel Better

ONE of the most popular topics put up in debate competitions in recent years has revolved around the use of social media. Social media addiction has often been talked about for some years on par with addiction to intoxicating agents.

We have heard of the social media addict who consciously chose to ignore his daughter’s birthday so he would not be called away from his social media world. Or of users who create a false world around themselves and a highly sanitized image of their lives by posting photoshopped pictures. And of extreme examples where efforts to forcibly wean away users from social media platforms have outraged them to the extent of killing even their loved ones.

But talk to social media users and they will tell you of the umpteen avenues it has opened up for them. Whether it is being able to reconnect with long-lost friends, staying in touch with family, coming across job opportunities, access to information that would not have been possible otherwise, sharing experiences, and much more.

So, social media cannot be all bad then. However, too much of anything can be bad and researchers have time and again shown that.

In one of the most recent researches published in the December issue of the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, psychologist Melissa G. Hunt from the Department of Psychology in the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania has shown a causal connection between the increasing use of Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram to decreased well-being.

In a comprehensive study that Hunt and her team put together, experiments were designed to include the three platforms popular with most undergraduates; objective social media usage data was collected, automatically tracked by iPhones for active apps, not those running the background. The study that involved 143 participants was conducted over a period of three weeks tracking their mood and behaviour. Hunt and her team looked at seven outcome measures including fear of missing out, anxiety, depression, and loneliness.

Analyzing the data, Hunt was categorical that reducing the time on social media leads to significant decreases in both depression and loneliness. These effects are particularly pronounced for folks who were more depressed when they came into the study, says Hunt.

Hunt, and so have other researchers earlier, stressed that the findings do not suggest that social media usage should be stopped altogether. What she managed to show through her study was that limiting or reducing time spent on social media could not hurt and could even reduce depression and loneliness. According to Hunt, existing literature on social media seems to suggest that there is a lot of social comparison happening through the social media platforms. Everyone else’s life seems to be better than yours.

It is therefore a little ironic that reducing your use of social media actually makes you feel less lonely. It reduces opportunities for social comparison, and at the same time creates opportunities for you to spend time on things that are more likely to make you feel better about your life.

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