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“Social Media and Its Mental Affects”

Audience: Social media users and creators

Purpose: to shed light on big reasons why mental illnesses are climbing among the younger generations and persuade social media creators to help fix the problem

Genre: Academic Argument

Social media can be looked at in a multitude of ways. It can bring people together who may have never met each other due to their physical locations. It can help keep certain areas of interest alive helping you easily find people interested in the same thing as you with the aid of joining groups. It helps amazing stories spread like wildfires and brings hard to talk about topics that need to be talked about into the spotlight. It can create movements and so many positive things. You know what else social media is capable of? Seriously harming one's mental health and skewing their perception of their own body. You may ask how something with so many positive outcomes is also capable of tearing down a person and making them completely question everything they do. With social media allowing everything to be so accessible it gives you the opportunity to compare yourself to all the people that fit into the current “beauty standards”. Not to mention those people you are idolizing most likely are hiding under several filters and touch ups. This creates a false sense of reality which leads people to comparing themselves to someone who seems to be living their best life, but on reality, social media is just a high light reel. Psychologists have been fascinated with the affects that social media has on one's

mental health ever since it has worked its way into people's everyday lives. Social media has more negative effects on one's mental health than positive.

Shelly Grabe , L. Monique Ward , Janet Shibley Hyde, the authors of "The Role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women" (2008) did a meta-analysis to compare different studies and see whether or not they found the same results. Before researching the topic at hand, they already knew that "Approximately 50% of girls and undergraduate women report being dissatisfied with their bodies" (Grabe, Ward, Shibley, 2008). This number alone goes to show a nationwide epidemic that is only growing. They were in search for what causes this number to be so high. They gathered all their research by looking at experimental research and correlational research of others, finding that constantly being exposed to those who fall under the "ideal body type" creates issues with one's own body image causing body dissatisfaction (Grabe, Ward, Shibley, 2008). It is inevitable to compare yourself to others, especially when they are seemingly perfect. You shortly start to envy them and wonder why you cannot look the same. This leads young, impressionable people to try and find a "quick fix", leading them to unhealthy diets, excessive workouts and overall, an unsustainable way of living. Not shockingly, eating disorders were also a common outcome of the daily comparisons. The authors end the article talking about new policies adopted in some countries banning the use of super-thin models (Grabe, Ward, Shibley, 2008). Not only does that method give people a better sense of reality but it helps a lot with their own view on themselves by healthier more natural bodies and beauty being represented.

"Every (Insta)gram counts?" an article written by Jan-Phillip Stein, Elena Krause and Peter Ohler focuses more on how social media affects one's well-being rather than their body-image. A multitude of studies have proven that social media and body dissatisfaction have a very

strong positive correlation, but what about their mental health? In this article they brought attention to the social comparison theory which is when “people process an innate tendency to evaluate their identity, appearance and beliefs by comparing themselves to others around them” (Stein, Krause, Ohler 2021). This commonly used theory leads people to a severe mental decline. Many studies of the effects of mental health and social media have suggested that it can seriously cause a decline in one’s overall well-being (Stein, Krause, Ohler 2021). If the evidence is supported by a multitude of studies proving the serious mental effects why haven’t the people in charge of social media done something about it? This question enrages those that truly care about the adolescent population. One thing that not all may realize is that yes, this is only mainly affecting the younger generations now, but if it is not fixed, it will affect every generation to follow. And if nothing is done, the effects will only get worse.

Recently published in The New York Times, “When Social Media is Really Problematic for Adolescents”, By Perri Klass (2019), focused on a term coined as “media contagion”. This is the phenomena that can lead to things such as mental illnesses becoming a trend (Klass 2019). Proven in a study that was done and “Showed a suicide bump among 10- to 19-year-olds at the time of the release of the Netflix series ‘13 Reasons Why’; the study shows association, not causation” (Klass 2019). This horrific occurrence goes to show how media contagion can really affect people. Talking about one’s mental struggles is a lot less taboo than it was say a century ago. Many look at this as an amazing thing because it is now getting the attention it deserves, but what people don’t realize is that it is a double edged sword. Being more open about their struggles on social media subconsciously leads to a domino effect on their followers sometimes sending them down the same dark hole. Adolescence is a time in which you are discovering yourself and want to fit in.

Instagram, which is ran by the same creators of Facebook, is the most used social media platform among teens, it is known that “more than 40% of Instagram’s users are 22 years old and younger, and about 22 million log onto Instagram in the U.S. each day” (Wells, Hortwitz, Seetharaman, 2021). About a month ago an employee of Facebook released company documents showing that Facebook knows Instagram is toxic for teen girls. An article published by the Wall Street Journal by Georgia Wells, Jeff Horwitz and Deepa Seetharaman dove head into this topic. They found that Facebook is well aware of this problem, yet to the public they deny it. The CEO Mark Zuckerberg stated that “The research we’ve seen is that using social apps to connect with other people can have positive-mental health benefits” (Wells, Hortwitz, Seetharaman, 2021). According to the files released this is far from the truth. Facebook does do intensive research regarding how Instagram affects teens mental health, but the results are the opposite of what the CEO claims. In the leaked documents, which included charts Facebook put together from their intensive research, it was shown that “the perfect image, feeling attractive, and having money are the most likely to have started on Instagram...one in five teens say that Instagram makes them feel worse about themselves...teens who struggle with mental health say Instagram makes it worse. (Wells, Hortwitz, Seetharaman, 2021). It is almost like we have seen this scenario go down before, cigarettes (Wells, Hortwitz, Seetharaman, 2021). Large cigarette companies one told there was benefits to smoking. Years down the line we found out, with much evidence, that that is exactly opposite from the truth, and we now consider them “cancer sticks”.

A study was done by two professors to not only focus on the negative impacts of social media but to also look at social media as a more positive thing. They found that unlike any other way, social media helps bring people together and raise awareness among society (Siddiqui, Singh, 2014). As for teen specifically, they found that social media helps them to build social

networks, build better connections than they would with the people in their hometown and allows them access to information they need to answer important questions (Siddiqui, Singh, 2014). All of these are valid points, but they fail to acknowledge the other side. For example, although social media does allow access to answer questions a teen would stray away from asking those around them, the chance of the answer being reliable are often low. And although it may help them make social connections, they are only seeing what others choose to let them see, so they may be exposing themselves to very dangerous individuals at times or even to child predators posing as teens.

A trend has shown teens mental health declining over the years and right along with that social media is becoming more and more used. As a society we need to all acknowledge how bad social media really is for us and all agree that all it is is simply a highlight reel. More preventative measures need to be taken, like teaching people at a young age how to navigate social media and what to be aware of and look out for. The lack of prevention over the years has led directly to this sudden decline in the overall well-being of teens today.

## Works Cited

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