Chapter 23
Addiction to Social Media:
A Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Researchers over the last decade have drawn attention to a new trend in social media use which has been described by some psychologists as social media addiction. Social media addictive behaviour is defined as an excess usage of social networks for entertainment, communication, and expression. The excessive usage of social media is damaging for the user's mental wellbeing as it leads to irritability, tension, unease, and many other ailments. Even though social media usage was already rising globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has made users use it more recurrently and often in new ways to bond with others. Social media has allowed people to work without any hindrance in the pandemic, but some users have resorted to its excess use. This chapter provides an important perspective on the rising use of social media across the world. This chapter also provides guidelines on how to reduce the use of social media and use it when required.

INTRODUCTION

The impact of social media applications on human contact in contemporary society has been revolutionary, leading to considerable transformations in our social attachments and interactions (Amin & Khan, 2020; Beig& Khan, 2018; Saqib & Amin, 2021; Saqib & Amin, 2023). The platforms above have experienced significant growth on a global scale, with estimates suggesting that the number of users will increase to almost 4.4 billion by 2025, compared to 3.6 billion in 2020 (Statista, 2021a). The observed

expansion can be ascribed to the heightened affordability and availability of mobile technology and internet connectivity (Statista, 2021a). India is a notable example of this phenomenon, as seen by its over 300 million Facebook members in 2020 and its global leadership in mobile application downloads. Prominent applications such as TikTok and WhatsApp have garnered significant popularity within the Indian market (Statista, 2021b). In addition, it is noteworthy that the average duration of time spent by an internet user in India on social media platforms has exceeded three hours per day (Statista, 2021b).

Current scholarly investigations have indicated that the excessive utilisation of social media platforms can be classified as an addictive pattern of behaviour (Al-Samarraie et al., 2021; Csibi et al., 2018; David & Warrier, 2021; Saqib & Amin, 2023). This behaviour is characterised by individuals devoting significant amounts of time to these networks, resulting in a reliance on them for entertainment, interactivity, and self-expression (Arora et al., 2020; Dhir et al., 2018; Saqib & Amin, 2021; van den Eijnden et al., 2016). The extensive utilisation of social media has negatively affected mental well-being. It has been observed to disrupt sleep patterns and contribute to many psychological issues, such as irritability, tension, anxiety, sadness, diminished self-esteem, and impaired attentiveness (Arora et al., 2020). The prevalence of social media was already increasing worldwide, but the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this phenomenon, resulting in more frequent and diverse usage patterns for interpersonal communication (Arora et al., 2020; David & Warrier, 2021). The topic of social media addiction has garnered significant attention from researchers (van den Eijnden et al., 2016), and its impact has been further intensified across various age groups due to the pandemic (Arora et al., 2020; Saqib & Amin, 2021).

Notwithstanding these apprehensions, social media has also been lauded as a crucial resource during the epidemic, facilitating the dissemination of health-related information and providing a means of amusement (Merchant & Lurie, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital platforms have been crucial in distributing information, providing health guidance, providing psychological support, and enhancing connectedness (Merchant & Lurie, 2020). In addition, using social media platforms has allowed governments to assess public sentiments, perspectives, and emotional responses towards the ongoing epidemic (Zhu et al., 2020). Singh et al. (2020) assert that these networks have played a crucial role in facilitating professional and academic activities amidst the demanding circumstances. Providing essential resources has been vital in promoting mental well-being (Singh et al., 2020; Saqib & Amin, 2021).

Additionally, healthcare professionals and scientists have found them to be a helpful asset in addressing the challenges posed by the epidemic (The Economic Times, 2020). The escalation in social media usage has been observed due to the pandemic and subsequent implementation of lockdown measures, indicating a collective response from the worldwide population (Singh et al., 2020). Implementing social distancing measures has resulted in a significant reliance on social media platforms, which have become a crucial psychological resource for individuals in meeting their social interaction and coping needs (Singh et al., 2020). The addiction to social media has been further strengthened through continuous utilisation for obtaining pandemic-related information (Kashif et al., 2020). According to a study by Arora et al. (2020), individuals in India who often used social media during the COVID-19 pandemic exhibited a higher vulnerability to experiencing unpleasant emotions. Additionally, Singh et al. (2020) reported that 87% of Indians reported a 75% rise in time spent on social networking platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook.

Although social media has played a beneficial role in the crisis, several scholars have suggested that the utilisation of social media during the epidemic has resulted in heightened stress levels among individuals (Saqib & Amin, 2021; Zhao & Zhou, 2020). According to Zhao and Zhou (2021), using social media platforms might engender feelings of isolation and the apprehension of being excluded from so-

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