

“Compulsive use of social networking sites and mental health: Signs and symptoms and stress management techniques”

By

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Abstract

Social networking sites allows people to be more connected than ever before. According to Social media infographic statistics 2022, around the world, there are 4.88 billion internet users now, which equates to almost 62% of the world's population. People started using social networking sites for every purpose from starting their day, learning, business, marketing, work, entertainment, and to stay connected with friends and family. The usage of social networking sites has become blood and bones. Though it has many advantages it creates stress to people who over uses it. This article is about the compulsive and abnormal usage of social networking sites and its consequences in mental health. The clinical disorders related to overuse of social networking sites, research findings and stress management techniques are included.

Keywords: Social media, Social networking sites, Mental health, Counselling and therapy, Stress management, Treatment.

Introduction

Most of the people engage in constant use of internet, doom-scrolling, gaming or any other technological use which are named as addictive behaviours but not all of them fall under significant health consequences. But a small proportion of people develop distress, serious mental disorders, physical diseases, impaired functioning due to these addictive behaviours.

“Social networking sites are defined as websites that allows members to construct a public or semi-public profile and formally articulate their relationship to other users in a way that is visible to anyone who is accessing their file”-Hutchinson(2008). The role of social media and internet in lives of people have drastically increased in a decade. People started using it for both professional and personal lives. From everyday activities, shopping, entertainment, business, earning everything can be done with internet and social networking sites. It started from showing the personal and professional achievements to market or the society. WHO defines social media addiction as an “addictive behaviour that is overly concerned about social media, driven by an urge to uncontrollably log on to social media and devote unlimited time to it which affects other spheres of life”.

Compulsive use is defined as a mental state which prevents the users from being media-free, and an urge to constantly use it. The compulsion seems to be similar to that of a compulsion to consume or use a substance or a drug and people suffer when they couldn't get

it. Though there are ongoing debates as to confirm both technological addiction is the same as other addictions but it is clear that compulsive use of social media alters the behaviour of the person. It interferes with the daily life, it provides rewards – both social interaction and any kind of substance usage causes the brain to get excited and it releases dopamine and activate the reward pathways. To experience the activation people compulsively uses social media. It alters the brain, increases the impulsivity and affect the mood.

This article is about the compulsive use of social networking sites and its consequences on mental health, signs and symptoms of social media addiction. This article also provides proven and clinically practiced stress management techniques for adults as addictive behaviour is been linked to underlying stress of an individual.

Compulsive use of social networking sites and mental health

Addiction means “enslaved by” in Latin. Compulsive use is one of the major sign of addiction. Addiction exerts a very powerful influence on the brain that manifests in three major ways:

1. Craving for the object (compulsive use of social networks, doom scrolling).
2. Loss of control over its usage (spending too much time than intended).
3. Continuing the involvement with it by ignoring its negative consequences.

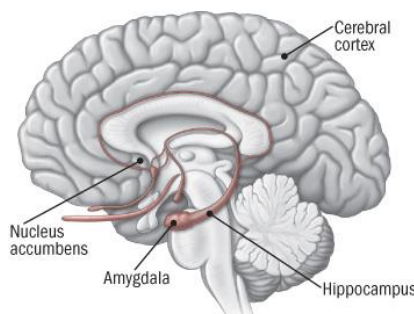
Experts for many years talked only about alcohol addiction, tobacco addiction, smoking addiction and drug addiction. Now due to the advancements in the Neuroimaging techniques and numerous research on addictive behaviours they found that social media, gambling, gaming, shopping and sex addiction have the same effects as other addictions.

Experts recognize addiction as a chronic disease unlike any other diseases which changes brain structure and its function. These happens because the brain undergoes a series of changes. The changes are as follows:

1. The Pleasure Principle
2. Learning process
3. Development of tolerance
4. Compulsive behaviour

Pleasure principle:

Our brain registers all pleasures in the same way whether it is a reward we get or a drug we consume. The neurotransmitter “Dopamine” is responsible for pleasure, hence it is called as the pleasure centre of the brain. Taking the same drug in different methods or doing the same activity differently gives the pleasure. Hence we repeatedly do the same activity to feel the pleasure it gives us.



(Brain's reward centre)

The learning process:

The Dopamine also plays a role in memory and learning. It merges with another neurotransmitter “glutamate” responsible for reward related learning. This process plays a vital role in sustaining life because it links activities related to survival. Addictive activities activates the same circuit. This process makes us to involve in the same actions repeatedly.

Development of Tolerance:

Over a period of time, the brain gets adapted to the actions we take and it provides less pleasure for the same activity. As a result of these adaptations dopamine has less impact on brain’s reward centre, the desired activity gives no longer the same effect. Hence it is called as “Tolerance”.

Compulsive behaviour:

At this stage the pleasure associated with the activity or a drug gets reduced or subsides but the memory of the desired effect wants to be recreated, intense craving for the activity starts and to satisfy the craving the person continues the same activity hence becomes addicted.

Signs and symptoms of social media addiction

These includes,
Compulsive behaviour
Lack of control
Reduced concentration
Memory disturbances
Anger outbursts
Self-harm behaviours.
Problem with relationships
Issues with managing time
Reduced work productivity
Leads to poor handling of finance
Feeling restless, anxious and irritated when not able to use social networks
Neglecting offline relationships.
Procrastination
Too much spending of money for it (subscriptions)
Decreased physical activity
Comorbid conditions such as anxiety disorder, mood disorder eating disorder.

Stress management techniques

Distress is found to be the most common reason for any kind of addiction. Stress has become a natural part of our everyday lives. And it is an important physiological response which prepares us for risky life situations. Stress has both short and long-term impact. Anxiety, palpitations, shortness of breath, headache can be impacts of short-term stress and long-term stress can cause serious mental and physical health damage.

These stress management techniques can give us temporary relief and can be done with little efforts where ever we are and can be implemented in lifestyle.

1. Identify the stressors and triggers.
2. Taking deep breaths

3. Mindful walking
4. Journaling
5. Practicing guided imagery.
6. Progressive muscle relaxation
7. Aromatherapy
8. Meditation
9. Venting out
10. Exposure response prevention
11. Behavior modification
12. Physical exercise
13. Art therapy
14. Focusing on improved self talk
15. Expressing Gratitude
16. Lifestyle modifications.
17. Social support.

Conclusion

The compulsive use of social media has short term and long term effects on our lives both physically and mentally. And it has the ability to create damages to interpersonal relationships as well. Hence the stress management techniques are discussed as a remedy finding stress as a major cause of addictive behaviours.

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