

# Impact of Social Media on Wellbeing: An exploration of the Relational, Emotional and Self Representation Stressor associated with Social Media Use

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**Abstract:** *Social media has become an extension of every individual's life. Our lives have shifted from personal and social context to online context. People are not using social media for just forming connection but it has also become a platform for self-presentation and emotional refuge. It is an undeniable fact that social media has started influencing the quality of life of people by penetrating their psychosocial and personal space. The aim of this paper is put forward the research done on social media, representing how social media negatively impact the three fundamental themes of positive psychology: Relationship, positive emotions and self. This paper is compiled of research done by many scholars representing the negative impact of social media and how can these negative influences affect the overall well-being and act as a hindrance to a flourishing life.*

**Key words:** *Social media, well-being, relationship, emotional Consequences, self,*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, you tube allows individuals to engage in virtual communities and be part of global citizenship. Social media has become an integral part of day to day interaction with world around us. Facebook is one of the most popular social media platform in the world and over one billion people worldwide possess an active Facebook account. The reason for tremendous popularity of social media platforms is the scope of affordances they provide for users. Social media has presented world population with an easy and globally available platform to not only connect with one's offline network but also to make new connection. Through functions like posting and sharing the post, social information is easily distributed and stored among members on a particular social media platform.

There is no denying the fact that social media has provided us with many benefits such as connectivity to friends and family around the globe, allowing people to break down international borders and cultural barriers, giving everyone an opportunity to voice their opinion, increased opportunity of creativity and collaboration. No generation in the past has such privilege of technology and had not been connected to each other as our present generation is. But despite being connected and in constant touch with each other around the globe, our generation is becoming one of most loneliest and antisocial generation. We prefer texting over phone call, online chats over face to face communication, and the human interaction is shifting to Facebook, twitter, YouTube, Myspace from real life interaction.

We spent lots of time and effort in developing our digital identity and our digital relationships. But we may not notice how this virtual life is affecting our real life connection. We are out there on social media every single day and sharing and talking about our private lives, thoughts and emotions. There are no longer private, intimate moments as everything is out there. This constant urge to be present and maintain our virtual self is costing us, our relationships, our self-image and emotional and psychological health.

It is the objective of writing this paper to present evidence from several research conducted in different contexts to show negative effect of social media in three main categories. First, social media and its impact on relationships. For us humans the social connection and sense of belonging are very important and we yearn for these things. One of the major reason for popularity of social media is that it fosters a false sense of connection with others. Not only is that but social media is also putting lots of strain on maintenance of romantic relationship and family ties. Second category is how social media impact the emotional well-being. People try to portray their best selves and best memories on social media which makes most people think that others are having better life than themselves. The passive consumption of information on social media can cause negative affect and feeling of sadness. Third category, is how social media influence the self. People spend lots of time to maintain their virtual self. They want to put their best selves out there as they know that what they post and share would be seen and judged by many people. This puts a lot of pressure on a person and the negative comment or dislike or very few likes can ruin a person's self-esteem.

## 2. RELATIONSHIP AND MEDIA:

The relationship is one of the five elements of Seligman's PERMA model (2011) [1] for happiness and well-being. The social relationship has been considered one of the most important predictors of well-being [2], [3], [4]. This assumption supports the argument made by many previous researchers regarding the importance of group living

and interpersonal relationships [5], [6]. Many research evidence supports the idea that relationships are tied to well-being. Support from family, friends, and especially from a significant other is tied to greater well-being [7], [8], [9]. With the advancement of media technology, the way people establish new relationships and maintain old one has also changed significantly. Social media provides us immense opportunity to connect with anyone from anywhere. Social media has made the process of communication and staying in touch, very convenient and easy. Despite the popularity of social media, there is the darker side of it. Many survey research has identified links between Facebook use and decreased well-being [10], [11], [12] as well as negative experience based on unfriending and romantic relationship dissolution [13], [14], [15], [16].

### **2.1 Jealousy, Infidelity and Distrust:**

Research has shown that Facebook can have the negative impact on relationships. Recent studies have proved that Facebook can promote romantic jealousy [17], which may explain why Facebook is becoming a commonly noted source of relationship conflict in recent times [18], [19]

Muise and Desmarais (2009) [20] found evidence that increased Facebook use predicted jealousy within the relationship. To further explore their findings, the researchers conducted thematic analysis and found the themes which appeared to support that Facebook harboured negativity and enforcing jealousy. Their research showed a significant link between time spent on Facebook and jealousy related feelings. Participants reported that increase exposure to information on Facebook without proper context evoked feeling of jealousy and mistrust in their partner. The result of study showed that people felt that they can have access to information about their partner having contact with their ex partners through pictures, post and through their social media platform, this type of information create doubt about quality of their relationship, giving rise to feelings of insecurity and jealousy.

Mod (2010) [21] conducted a qualitative study to understand the effect Facebook ritual have on offline relationship. The study concluded that Facebook design and features can emotionally impact its user and the way relationship is presented online can intensify feelings of possession and jealousy in an intimate relationship. For example, some participants reported that they were highly jealous and upset of their current partner having pictures and post of their ex-partner on their timeline. Still being friend with their ex-partner on social media was also reported as one of the reason of inducing jealousy and mistrust in a romantic relationship [21].

Persch (2009) [22] has suggested in one of her media article that Facebook has tendency to bring out jealousy and suspicion in romantic relationships.

Participant also reported a feeling of mistrust about their current romantic partner on the basis of things on their social media platforms [23].

Valenzuela et al. (2014) conducted research, which showed negative correlation between SNS and marriage quality and happiness and positive correlation between SNS and experiencing troubled relationship and thoughts of divorce [24].

### **2.2 Surveillance:**

Social media provides very easy and accessible way to stay informed about what is happening in other's lives. People use social media to gather information about their romantic partner and friends. Tokunga (2011) [25] identify four characteristics of Social media that promote interpersonal electronic surveillance (IES) of romantic partner. First information is easily available. Second, information is available in various media forms such as messages, photos, post, likes and tagging etc. Third, social media platforms allow archiving of profile information. Fourth, one can visit the social media platforms of others without their knowledge and target may never know they are under surveillance from their partner.

Furthermore even after the relationship is terminated, Facebook can enable unhealthy surveillance of ex-partner, making it hard to emotionally recover from the loss of the relationship [19], [26], [15].

Recent evidence support the assumption that social media facilitate connection between ex partners after break up [15], [26], [27] and maintaining connection to ex-partner by monitoring their online presence increase negative affect and delays recovery [15], [28], [29].

Some research has pointed out that Facebook have potential to facilitate behaviour of obsessive relational intrusion- the unwanted pursuit of intimate relationship, especially with ex-partner [30].

The use of constant surveillance to monitor a partner can negatively impact the relationship [31], [25]. Elphinston and Noller's (2011) [31] study proposed "...young people's levels of Facebook intrusion can impact their romantic relationships negatively" (p. 634).

### **2.3 Relationship Maintenance:**

Apart from social media's negative effect on romantic relationships, studies have shown the interaction with family and friends have also been affected by technology. Participant in a study on the negative side of Facebook reported how social media interaction changed offline socializing because people are too preoccupied with constantly documenting and uploading their every moment on social media platforms [23]

This study by Fox and Moreland [23] also showed that no doubt Facebook makes relationship maintenance convenient but its perceived accessibility and visibility of these interactions to the social network increases expectation. If romantic partner's Facebook use or expectations are not compatible, this creates conflict and makes relationship maintenance burdensome.

Participants reported that maintenance of family ties on social media was becoming a source of interpersonal conflict. They reported having face to face arguments with relatives for not friending them or defriending them on social media. Such is the scale of strife than participants felt a lot of pressure from friends, family, and romantic partners to constantly engage in relationship maintenance on their social media page through images, wall posts and tagging etc. at all times. The expectation that user will respond quickly to messages and posts, create lots of conflict in real face to face interpersonal relationship over digital media interaction [23].

Tokunga (2011) [25] concluded that online behaviour like removing of identity tags from pictures and posts can also strain relationship offline.

All these studies put pressure on the fact that social media is putting too much pressure and too little authenticity and is acting as a barrier in developing positive relationships.

### **3. EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA:**

The research has wondered what role positive emotions plays in the factors that allow individual, communities and society to flourish.

Positive emotions are the experience of positive moods and feelings which are uplifting. Positive emotions serve as a proof of flourishing and optimal wellbeing in a people's lives. The moments which are filled with positive emotions such as joy, happiness, hope, confidence, love- are the moments in which the negative emotions such as anxiety, envy, sadness, and anger has no place.

The overall balance of people's positive and negative emotions has been shown to predict their judgments of subjective well-being [32].

Positive emotions increase physical health, foster trust, and compassion. They act as a buffer against stress and negative emotions.

With emergence and success of social media technology, a significant part of people's life has been relocated to an online context. Due to this fact, the effect of social media on the emotional health of people cannot be ignored. Research has done to study how social media evoke negative emotions and put barriers from feeling positive emotions. Social media users have reported feeling low, depressed and a decrease in positive emotions immediately after using various social media [12].

Social media provides opportunity for people to put their lives information out there through post, images, videos chat etc. It keeps people updated about what is going on in others' lives through variety of post and images, and this passive consumption of news is one of the main activity people engage in [33]. By consuming other people's information such as vacation photos, was shown to evoke feeling of envy, which negatively affects life satisfaction [34].

Another research has indicated that exposure to positive posts on Facebook can cause a feeling of envy and lead to depression [35], [36] and reduce well-being over time [12], [37]

The consumption of social news on Facebook can cause social overload [38], an overoptimistic perception towards others' lives [11] and a decrease in life satisfaction [12]

Research by Haferkamp and Kramer (2011) [39] and Chou and Edge (2012) [11] demonstrated that People engage in the various manner of social comparison through social media. People compare their lives with others, which result in the feeling of jealousy and dissatisfaction.

In a review of Facebook's effects, Psychologist Beth Anderson and Colleagues [40] argues that using the network can quickly become addictive, which comes with a nagging sense of negativity, leading us to the resentment of the network for some of the same reasons we joined it, to begin with.

### **4. SOCIAL MEDIA AND SELF:**

Positive psychology focuses on knowing one's own strength and exercising them in the day to day life. Positive psychology motivates people to use their strength to enhance self-concept and promote resilience.

Self-concept and related self-beliefs constructs affect how healthy, normal and exceptional individual get most of life. Positive regard for self is considered by many an essential for achieving mental health [41], [42], [43]. Self-acceptance is one of the main components of psychological well-being model of Carol Ryff [44].

J. D. Brown [45] emphasized that there is a basic need for humans to feel good about themselves and suggested that it is universal across all culture and times regardless of the different method used to achieve this. Development of self is not an individual process but intertwined with culture and social relations. According to process defines by Coppersmith (1967) [46] 'positive self-evaluation and positive self-appraisal arise from thinking, viewing, judging and deciding and then global self-esteem is constructed from the specific evaluation of self-worth in a bottom-up process [47], [48].

According to Leon Festinger's [49] Theory of Social Comparison, one's feeling of Self-worth and self-confidence is based largely on social comparison. People judge a lot of what they do or how they feel about themselves on what they see around them.

In day to day interaction, people are given many opportunities to learn about other's opinion, abilities, and lives. This kind of social comparative information serves multitude of purpose, including Self- evaluation [49], self-enhancement [50], [51]) and self-improvement [52].

Social media offers a platform, which provides people opportunity to put their best self out there and get plenty of opportunity for social comparison as well.

Exposure to social media which emphasize appearance, such as Instagram, has been linked to the disturbing concept about body image [53]. The image-driven nature of Instagram forces people to put only the positive aspect of one's life [54]. Research has shown that people who follow strangers on Instagram indulge in negative social comparison which leads to feeling sad/depressed. The study suggests that following stranger leads to or reinforce already present negative feelings about oneself by triggering negative social comparison [34],[39].

Through social media we have an urge to learn about other people and want others to learn about us—but through that very learning process, we may start to resent both others' lives and the image of ourselves that we feel we need to continuously maintain. (Anderson et al, 2012)[40].

People believe that other social media users are having better lives than themselves triggering negative self-image and feeling of depression [11]. Supporting this evidence, Many study in offline context has suggested that exposure to upward social comparison can increase negative affect and deflate self-views [55], [56], [57], [58], [59], [60].

Studies have also shown that people who engage in social comparison on social media seemed to have reported greater depressive symptoms [61] and see their current self as being more discrepant from their ideal self [39], which leads to reduce in well-being [62], [63].

Vogel et al (2014) [64] showed that participants with more exposure to social media tended to evaluate themselves more poorly. The result of this study also showed a positive correlation between Facebook use and upward social comparison which in turn led to lower self-esteem.

A study of the University of Salford in 2013, [65] reported that 505 of 298 participants, said that use of social media like Facebook and Twitter makes their lives worse. The participant reported suffering lower self-esteem when they compare their own achievement with their online friends.

People use social media for self-representation and socialization both, so the role social media play in the development of self and its maintenance is a significant one.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

As social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter has deeply penetrated the lives of people and the personal as well as the social context is gradually relocating to online context, the influence of this technology driven world cannot be denied on the society.

People are using social media as a mental and emotional refuge. People spend a major amount of their time hooked to screens going through their social media profiles and completely excluded from the world around them. This paper has reviewed the research done in the area to understand the negative impact of this social media obsession on Emotions, Relationship and Self Development of an individual. Social media cause envy, jealousy, alienation from real life relationship, upward social comparison causing negative self-image and all this lead to decrease in self-esteem and overall subjective well-being.

As Seligman (1995) [66] has mentioned the self-esteem is by-product which represents how well one is doing in his life. Keys (2002) [67] argues that mental health is not the absence of mental illness rather mental health is "Separate dimension of Positive Feelings and Functioning". Flourishing Individuals have a combination of high level of Emotional, Social and Psychological well-being. But if we look at the review of research done above in this paper, we can notice that how social media use can act as a barrier to a Flourishing life by negatively impacting the emotional, social and psychological aspect of one's life.

The technology driven environment demands that we work in the area to develop how social media be used in the development of positive psychology. How can media be used to enhance human flourishing and how to design social media platforms keeping in mind the framework of positive psychology.

As an individual who spends lots of time on social media herself, I would like to understand how can this platform which consumes the major portion of an individual's time be used to enhance the human virtues and strengths rather than acting as a hindrance to the positive development.

The Future of Positive Psychology research is combined to Positive Media Psychology because we cannot understand the human happiness without giving regard to media and technologies we interact with on constant basis.

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