

## Impact of social media on the physical and mental well-being of adolescents in India

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### Abstract

The age of adolescence is full of challenges which need to be combated efficiently and the rich values, sensible attitude and reasonable preferences nourished by our culture, help this age in their struggle. Tolerance, sharing, respect, humility and integration with family and friends are the landmark elements of our cultural heritage. The social media in the form of WhatsApp, Facebook and internet browser has intruded in the way of our life so much that no aspect of emotions and expressions are untouched by it. Although, Social media has done amazingly well in reaching out to the untold realities of society but when it comes to adolescents, the consequences of exposure to avenues provided by social media have been devastating. Due to biological and mental changes the transition phase of age from childhood to adulthood i.e. adolescence, is already vulnerable to identity crisis and role conflicts. Full authority of parents over life style may not be acceptable to them; at the same time they are not mature enough to handle the outburst of excitement, fears and emotions on their own. The unhindered access to the virtual world of social media has bombarded the psychological makeup of the adolescents which caused mental as well as physical harm. This paper is an attempt to critically analyse the impact of social media on the physical and mental well-being of adolescents in India.

**Keywords:** social media, physical, mental, adolescents

### Introduction

Social Media consists of the mediated technologies that allow the user to create and share information, ideas and other forms of expression through virtual network. The most popular Social Media websites all over the world are Facebook, Google+, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and You Tube. Social Media has revolutionized the process of interaction and transformed the social relationships. New styles of communication have made all the age groups social conscious. But the Irony is, the socially conscious communities created by Social Media tends to be responsive, alert, vibrant, enthusiastic and sensitive only in their virtual society. Undoubtedly, social media has helped in producing generations which are globally oriented, more sensitive to social and civic responsibilities and respect the environmental endowments. Though, majority of the people uses the Social Media as a means of reinforcing peer networks, sharing exaggerated personal attributes and spending the leisure time online.

All the modes of communication and expression assist the society to transmit among the members, the shared values and belief system of the culture; thus nourished the cultural identity of the people. The modern science and technology has provided the generations with unique mode of communications and expressions through Social Media which had amazingly lessened the physical gaps but certainly had widened the social gaps by creating another society i.e. virtual society. Virtual society is quite insensitive to the age and status of active members and at the same time it does not apply any filters before presenting the information as normally followed in case of real society.

In real society, the values, norms, traditions and knowledge

for life is gradually forwarded to the new generations by the family, friends and educators etc. The physical and psychological compositions of the receivers are generally considered. In case of virtual society that is created by Social media, there are no filters and sensors. The avenues designed to share and create on Social Media have just bombarded the emotions of the members. The most vulnerable age group of the virtual society is adolescents. Adolescence as a period of storm and stress is characterized by intergenerational conflicts, mood swings and enthusiasm for risky behaviour (G. Stanby Hall). Accordingly to Erickson, "adolescence is the age of conflict between identity and role confusion". In case these conflicts are not resolved, serious personality disorders may occur.

The unfiltered virtual society of social media had provided so many channels to the adolescents which they certainly cannot handle efficiently. Due to the unhindered exposure to social Media, the adolescents may suffer from physical as well as mental harms. This paper has attempted to provide a rich account of instances conveying the adverse effect of Social Media on the well-being of adolescents by taking up the case of India.

### Blue Whale: The Suicide Game

Blue game is an internet game and exists in several countries. The game consists of series of tasks assigned to the player by the administrators over a period of 50 days. The final challenge of the game requires the player to commit suicide. The game of suicide has taken several teenagers into its grip all over the world. As per the BBC News report, the Blue whale challenge is invented by a student of Psychology Philipp Budeikin, who was expelled by a University. He stated that the aim of the

challenge is to cleanse the society by pushing to suicide those he assumed as having no worth living in the society. After creating the waves of moral panic in Russia from where the challenge was started in 2013, Budeikin was arrested in 2016 and found guilty for pushing 16 teenage girls to suicide. But till that time the Blue whale phenomenon had been diverged like fire into the lives of millions of teenagers all over the world. The alarm bell of danger is ringing in India as the recent Google trends show Indians have done the highest number of searches in the world for the 'Blue Whale Game'. The first victim of Blue Whale challenge in India was the 19 years old student from Tamil Nadu, who wrote in his suicide note that the game was devastating one, once you enter it, you would be able to come out. As per the Hindustan Times Report, India is among the top countries searching for the lethal internet game, prompting authorities to issue alerts and warnings to teachers and parents while the detail of all the tasks involved in the game is still unclear but trends on Social Media indicate that the role of a pressure group which stays in touch for 50 days, keeps pushing the players to do tasks of self-mutilation. A young man in Gujarat committed suicide and a teenager in Delhi cut himself for completing the tasks of the game. The victim in Gujarat jumped off a bridge and posted a video before committing the act in which he said, he was completing the Blue whale challenge. As per Economic Times, the first case of suicide of 14 years old boy who jumped from 17<sup>th</sup> floor in Mumbai came on July 30, 2017. The challenge has claimed over 130 deaths so far. Although, Indians' Ministry of Elections and IT has directed internet platforms like goggle and Facebook to remove the links to the online game. But the main concern in this case is how the teenagers committed suicide could have gone unnoticed for their harmful, isolated and self destructive activities by their family for the period of 50 days. The unguided psychological orientations of the adolescents have taken online avenues provided by the modern science & technology as their resort to express emotions, anxieties, fears and frustrations.

They feel homely online and they asserted their feelings, abilities and talent through the platform provided by internet. This indicates that the support system provided by family in the form of attention guidance, counseling and affection might have lost its essence. At times of emotional outbreak and mental stress, the adolescents have relied upon the other easily accessible avenues available online to release their stress & claim their assertions. The easy access and lack of monitoring by the closed ones have resulted into the search for the lethal game like Blue Whale challenge. The other side of this case is the psychologically ill & stressed people are also getting opportunity to satisfy their ill evils by generating harmful stuff in virtual society without any fear of punitive consequences. But their creations are putting in danger lives of thousands of innocent adolescents. Certainly there is a need to sensitize people to use the technology for good, not to harm. At the same time, parents, guardians and teachers must be always alert and attentive for life style and behavioral changes occur in teens.

#### **You Tube: - Easy access to inappropriate stuff**

You tube is a video sharing website and has made it very easy and convenient to watch online and offline videos. Anyone

can create and upload their videos to share with the rest of the digital world. It is one of the most popular sites on the internet, with millions of visitors spent hours to watch videos. For the young generations, you tube is used to watch videos and shows, they eager to see and also use it to upload their own videos to achieve popularity and fame in the form of numbers of download, shares, likes and dislikes. According to a Survey released by Assocham, 95% of the teens aged between 13-17 years have access to internet. It is worth mentioning here that one is required to be 18 years of age to open an account on You Tube. But 76% of the children below 13 years of age surveyed here have a You Tube account. The above mentioned survey was conducted by Assocham's Social Development Foundation on 4750 families in various Indian cities in September 2017. The findings of the survey further mentioned that 76% of those below 13 used the access the You Tube daily. Although there are strict norms that prohibit kids under 13 to access YouTube but still the children have an easy access to You Tube without parental supervision. A large number of teens are becoming addicts to the use of technology and the predators who are active online are tracking down these immature minors for their easy targets. There are thousands of disturbing videos available on You Tube showing violence, sexual orientations, unsuitable humor and other problematic content that may trick adolescents and certainly incite nasty inclinations among them. A huge amount of objectionable content on You Tube is a matter of concern for all those who have made available technology to their grownups without any guidance and surveillance. The adolescents lack the ability and experience to judge the suitability of the content so they could become easy prey to the evils of social media. The exaggerated and in appropriate showcase of emotions, behaviors, physical endurance and needs just cannot be handled by the adolescents and they need to be checked for the use of You Tube to avoid adverse consequences.

#### **Goggle Browser:- Overdose of information**

Goggle is a search engine on internet where the answer to all your queries is just a click away. Goggle has really lubricated the access to information but it has made people to have the memory of how and where to find the information rather than recalling the information. It is alarming as far as the development of skills of storage, retrieval and comprehension of information among the teenagers is concerned. Instead of going through process of inquiry and in depth grasp over concepts, teenagers have started now looking for quick answers to their curiosities and rely the information very easily without evaluating it. This tendency can seriously damage the capacity of concentration and contemplation among the adolescents. Adolescence is a phase of rapid growth and development with lots of unexpected physical, physiological and behavioral changes. During the transitional stage from puberty to legal adulthood, they used to go through lot of conflicts, confusions and stress which need to be satiated by the attention and guidance of teachers, family and friends. But in the digital world, the psychological and emotional quest of the adolescents is found to be majorly satisfied by the online good man i.e. Google+. As per The Hindu Report (24 Aug 2013), India is world's third largest

internet user after U.S. and China, and its user are significantly younger than those of other economics. (Global Digital Measurement and Analytics Firm, Comsoore Report). Besides hampering the memory skills of adolescence, the exposure to pornography through Google is hindering the development of healthy sexuality attitudes and social realities. The availability of pornographic content to younger children is dismantling the barriers that channel sexuality into family life. As per India Today Group Report published on 7 September 2017, a new smut video is created in India every forty minutes and Kerala tops the list in uploading such content while Haryana leads in viewing it on mobile. There are no specific statistics available disclosing the exact figures on watching of porn by the adolescents but as per ASSOCHAM survey 95% of the teens aged 13 to 17 years of age, access the internet. Although the survey was done in Urban Areas but still unattended access to internet is alarming. The teens can access porn even in case they spell any words wrong on URL. The Google search has become addiction to the teens and the establishment of an internet de-addiction centre in south Delhi by a NGO is proving the distressing situation. As per another survey, published in Times of India on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2017, 68% youngsters of age group of 12-18 years assumed smart phone as their most important gadget and 59% of them access internet through 3G/4G connection on their smart phone. So if the internet is available with ease to the youngsters who lack the ability to judge the suitability of the content they are being exposed to, there would be certainly devastating consequences on their psychological, emotional and sexual orientations.

#### **Facebook: a rivalry for digital social acceptance**

Facebook is one of the most popular social networking website that allows the registered users to create their profile, upload pictures and videos, send messages and stay in touch with family, friends and colleagues all over the world. As per McAfee Report by India Facts on 14 November 2014, Facebook is the most popular site among the teens. The report further mentioned that the youth often over share their personal information, get familiarize with the virtual world and most of the times their trust turn into nightmare. Majority of the youth interact online with the people they don't know in person. The charm of uploading pictures and videos for fame has transformed into a pathological addiction among the grownups.

Facebook is responsible for pushing the youth towards complete lack of socialization and the obsession for updates on Facebook is their new social reality. The adolescents are distracted by this online culture from indoor and outdoor games, conversation with family and other activities of self-development. Stress, irritation, restlessness and withdrawal are the common features of the Facebook addicted teens. Uday Foundation, the NGO which has come up with India first Internet De-addiction centre reported cases where the children found suffering from aggression and low academic performance due to the addiction to the Internet. The NGO further mentioned is an article to Times of India that Internet addiction is similar to addiction disorders concerning drugs or alcohol. Experts of the NGO said that adolescents delay in their emotional and social development because they spend so much time in the virtual world.

Facebook is fertilizing the *Culture of Pretense* where the users prefer to show off their activities to attain attention and fame rather than indulging in real life activities. The appetite for digital social acceptance is ruining the essence of social relationships.

#### **WhatsApp: -online castle for teens**

WhatsApp messenger is an application with the help of which the subscribers can stay connected with the other invited subscribers anytime and anywhere in the world. Pictures, messages, videos and other information can be shared with just one click. It is one of the most popular social networking sites. According to the research from PEW Research Centre (www. Business of apps com /Sep 16, 2015) India is among the fastest growing smart phone adopters globally, with 70% of the youth is spending more than five hours on the internet per week. WhatsApp is the second highest ranked favorite social app with 72% following, while Facebook continuously enjoying the first rank.

The WhatsApp messenger culture is emerged in India like the culture of Macdonald and has changed completely the face of social networking. It has revolutionized the idea of sharing of messages and people prefer sending messages through WhatsApp rather than having personal conversation. The main reason behind the preferential use of WhatsApp is that the user only has to buy an internet plan and then may go ahead for sharing the messages free of cost globally. To stay updated and connected on WhatsApp 24\*7 is the new trend, commonly found in all age groups but when it comes to grownups; they are certainly at risk for several physical and mental disorders. India is the biggest market for WhatsApp which had 160 million active users in the country in November 2016, as per the research available by Mashable (mashable.com). The research further mentioned that besides sharing messages, WhatsApp is continuously being used for spreading fake information and videos. When the teenagers came into contact with unsuitable and fake content shared on WhatsApp, the chances of negative influence exerted by the content is increased. The teenagers usually don't check the validity of the content and may form false perception. Besides effecting the perceptions and psychological orientations, the WhatsApp had exaggerated the quest for status updates by putting latest selfie as their Display Picture (DP). The teens have got too much carried away by the charm of selfie that they did not bother the situations in which they take their pictures. Recently a group of students went for NCC camp in Bangalore. When the group was busy in clicking their selfie in the pond one of their friend was struggling for life and ultimately drowned. They did not notice at all and the incidence got captured in the camera. The groups of boys were too much involved in striking poses, that they did not notice the absence of their friend. The selfie culture has made the teenagers crazy and it is reflected in the above mentioned case reported by Dainik Bhaskar in 27 September 2017 issue. WhatsApp has badly affected the structure of language also and many abbreviations and new words have been emerged that are specifically used by the digital world only. This type of language is harmful for the children and teenagers as they are yet to achieve full development of literary skills. WhatsApp is frequently used for sharing fake videos, videos

showing violence and inappropriate humor, which only earn profit for the network providers. The teenagers are not only wasting time but also losing the significance of outdoor activities. The overuse of gadgets may result in mental complications and sleeping disorders for the adolescents. Nearly 66% of the teenagers used to postpone their bedtime to chat with their friends as came out in Survey in Delhi by the Department of Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences, Fortis Healthcare. This forces one in three teens to sleep for less than five hours a day, as reported by Fortis. The disturbed sleep pattern may further cause depression and reduction in concentration.

All of the above mentioned instances are indicating how technology has taken over the physical and mental well being of our grownups. Technology itself is not faulty but the use of the technology driven gadgets by the immature ones without supervision and control can be destructive.

The age of adolescence is meant to conquer over the various physical, mental and emotional challenges. Before entering into the age of legal adulthood, a strong base of industrious perception, focused attitude and stabilized emotional quotient is essential. Certainly the virtual world is intruding in the ways to optimum physical, mental and social development of the adolescents.

Now a day's technology is assumed as the indispensable tool for the school premises and the parents too at home make available all the gadgets to the children for the sake of digital awareness. Sometimes the working parents got too much occupied in their own schedule that they provide the children all the stuff which can keep children occupied.

Here it's very important to mention the Quotes of World's Technology Giants regarding exposure of children and grownups to technology.

*We limit how much technology our kids use at home. Technology can wait. We did not let our kids use cell phone until they turned 14.*

#### **Bill Gates**

We don't allow the iPad in the home. We think it's too dangerous for our children. The platforms provided by iPads are very hard to resist and are very addictive.

#### **Steve Jobs**

*There is no rush for the children to start brushing upon their keyboard prowess. It is super easy, like learning to use toothpaste. I reject the notion of need of technology aids in school.*

#### **Alan Eagle**

##### **(Google Executive)**

As per New York Times, most of the technology Chief Executives and venture capitalists strictly limit their children's screen time and often banning gadgets or allocating ascetic time limits.

Here we can mention the philosophy of Waldorf School in Silicon Valley (USA) where children of tech honchos are studying. The school is completely free of any technology aids and relies completely on chalk and board. The school focuses

on physical activity and creative tasks in the real world rather than virtual.

It is an urgent need that we plan the introduction and use of technology by our grownups. Technology can wait and we should let our teens attain full physical and social development. Further, when they start the use of gadgets, supervision and control by the parents and teachers is perquisite.

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