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How Social Media Influence Mood and Emotions

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Abstract: ***Social media has become an integral part of everyday communication, allowing people to stay connected by sharing experiences, images, and ideas across distances. While it strengthens social connections, it also influences individuals' moods and emotions in both positive and negative ways. Online interactions often lead to social comparison, the search for validation through likes and comments, and exposure to cyberbullying, all of which can affect emotional well-being. At the same time, social media can create supportive communities where individuals share advice and encouragement, helping people feel less isolated. This paper explores the dual impact of social media on mood and emotional experiences, highlighting key factors such as social comparison and online validation. Understanding these influences may help individuals develop healthier habits and more balanced use of social media.***

Keywords: Social Media, Mood and Emotions, Social Comparison, Online Validation, Cyberbullying, Online Communities.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Rise of Social Media As A Medium Of Communication

1) History Of The Rapid Rise Of Social Media Platforms

The popularity of social media platforms has skyrocketed, which drastically transformed how people communicate globally. Early social media platforms such as Friendster and MySpace emerged in the early 2000s, with Facebook launching in 2004 and rapidly accumulating millions of users following its launch.

According to Statista (2024), there are currently over 4.9 billion social media users around the globe, which represents more than 60% of the entire world population. Social media began to be integrated into daily life due to a rise in smartphone adoption and improved internet access. Subsequent to that, additional platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and LinkedIn were launched. There are many different social media platforms available today, allowing users to experience social media differently depending on which specific platform they use. Each social media platform typically attracts different demographics of users, as well as users' interests, which increases the ways users experience social media.

2) Role Of Social Media In Everyday Life

Social media serves many purposes in individuals' daily lives. It allows people to communicate, exchange information, and remain connected to each other. Users can maintain contact with their friends, family, and co-workers even if they live thousands of miles apart from each other.

Many users rely upon social media as a primary source of news or information. Users rely on social media for up-to-date information regarding current events and trends, as well as for guests they have an interest in. Additionally, businesses utilize social media as an advertising platform.

B. Mental Health Relevance

1) Initial Concerns Regarding Mental Health And Social Media Use

Prior to the popularity of Social Media, many of the concerns regarding its influence on Mental health were discussed through anecdotal evidence and research that was largely unqualified by data. Many critics pointed out that social media platforms had the potential to facilitate adverse comparisons among people and cause feelings of inferiority in users as well as isolation from others; this can be particularly pronounced among younger individuals. Studies indicated that viewing digitally curated lives and idealised content could cause a decline in Self-esteem and Body Image Issues (Vogel et al., 2014). Additionally, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation were considered to be exacerbated by the effects of cyber-bullying and harassment (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). The growing amount of social media usage has exacerbated the initial concerns regarding the implications of Social Media usage in relation to Mental Health.

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2) The Expansion Of Research Investigating

The Relationship Between Social Media Use And Mental Health Outcomes As social media's impact has expanded beyond the anecdotal level, the volume of scholarly research that has focused on examining the relationship between usage of social media and Mental Health has increased dramatically. In reviewing the current research that has been conducted, the volume of literature indicating the relationship between Social Media and Mental Health includes both positive and negative effects. For example, research has indicated that social media can be a source of support for its users, as well as build social bonds and provide negative interaction opportunities (Frison & Eggermont, 2016).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Psychological Theories On Social Behaviour

1) Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory, introduced by Leon Festinger in 1954, suggests that people naturally compare their opinions and abilities to those of others. This process helps them form their self-concept and understand their social standing. On social media, users frequently see curated images of others' lives, leading to comparisons that can be upward or downward. Upward comparisons often create feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, especially when users feel they fall short compared to those they follow. In contrast, downward comparisons can boost self-esteem by making individuals feel better than others. Research shows that frequent social comparisons on social media are linked to negative mental health outcomes like increased anxiety and depression (Vogel et al., 2014). This theory helps explain how social media interactions can affect people's views of themselves and their mental health.

2) Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, examines how people shape part of their identity through the social groups they belong to. This theory indicates that being part of a group influences self-esteem, attitudes, and behaviours. On social media, users often interact within group dynamics by identifying with particular online communities or networks. This identification can create a sense of belonging but can also result in favouritism within the group and discrimination against others.

The need to fit in with group norms can intensify feelings of inadequacy, especially if individuals believe they don’t meet their group’s standards. Research indicates that those who strongly identify with online communities may face increased social anxiety and stress, particularly if they fear being judged by their peers (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Grasping Social Identity Theory is essential for understanding the complex relationship between social media use and mental health.

B. Framework Of Mental Health Impact

Cognitive-behavioural theories provide a solid basis for exploring how online interactions affect mental health, especially in social media settings. These theories argue that our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are linked, and that unhealthy thought patterns can result in negative emotions and actions. On social media, users often encounter curated images and stories that can distort their view of reality.

This exposure can result in cognitive distortions, like catastrophizing or overgeneralizing, causing individuals to feel like they are the only ones facing negative emotions or challenges. This can worsen feelings of isolation and inadequacy. A key cognitive-behavioural mechanism is social comparison, which can lead to jealousy, anxiety, and depression. Users often make upward comparisons, assessing themselves against those who seem more successful, attractive, or happy, which can lead to negative self-perception and lower self-esteem (Festinger, 1954). Cognitive-behavioural theories highlight cognitive restructuring, where people learn to challenge and change distorted beliefs, thereby improving their emotional well-being.

Additionally, understanding the impact of online interactions on mental health can involve reinforcement principles. Positive feedback, such as likes and comments, can enhance self-esteem and a feeling of belonging. On the other hand, negative experiences, such as cyberbullying or social exclusion, can create cognitive distortions that impact self-image and mental health (Wang et al., 2019). Recognizing these cognitive-behavioural theories is vital for creating interventions that tackle the negative mental health effects related to social media use. By emphasizing cognitive restructuring and encouraging healthy online interactions, individuals can lessen the adverse impacts on their mental health.

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III. CONNECTION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

A. Social Media And Building Connections And Communities

Social media platforms have changed how people communicate and build relationships, especially with those who are far away or hard to reach. One of the biggest benefits of social media is its ability to eliminate geographical barriers. This allows people to connect with friends, family, and even new acquaintances from around the world.

This connectivity is especially helpful for those who may feel isolated due to distance, health issues, or social anxiety. Features like instant messaging, video calls, and content sharing provide real-time interaction that fosters a sense of belonging and emotional support.

Additionally, social media plays a vital role in forming communities. Users can join groups centered on shared interests, life experiences, or challenges, helping them feel connected and understood. Platforms like Facebook groups, Twitter discussions, and Instagram communities allow people to exchange ideas, share resources, and offer encouragement. These spaces are particularly valuable for marginalized or niche groups, as they provide a safe environment to express themselves, raise awareness, and support each other.

Maintaining relationships through social media also builds emotional resilience. Regular interactions like comments, likes, and sharing personal updates help keep connections strong, even over long distances. Celebrating moments online, such as birthdays or achievements, further deepens bonds and lessens feelings of loneliness and isolation.

In conclusion, social media improves communication, supports community building, and creates a nurturing environment that positively affects mental health.

B. Self-Disclosure And Empowerment

Self-Expression And Empowerment Through Social Media

Social media offers a strong platform for individuals, especially those from marginalized communities, to express themselves, share their identities, and advocate for their rights. Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok are widely used in social movements, letting users share personal experiences that might otherwise be ignored.

For instance, movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo gained global attention by encouraging individuals to share their stories, linking personal experiences to broader social issues. This exchange empowers users to challenge stereotypes, join cultural conversations, and feel recognized and valued.

Moreover, sharing personal stories on social media is crucial for identity development and personal empowerment. Individuals can reveal their true selves and connect with others who have similar backgrounds or experiences. For marginalized groups, sharing stories of struggle and success can foster healing, unity, and support. Research shows that storytelling on social media can boost self-esteem and encourage acceptance of one's identity.

Social media also opens up discussions about important issues like race, gender, sexuality, and disability. These conversations help break down traditional stereotypes and encourage a more inclusive understanding of various experiences.

In summary, social media acts as a key tool for self-expression and empowerment, allowing individuals to share their voices, connect with others, and engage in meaningful conversations.

C. Mental Health Awareness And Support Groups

1) Platforms for Mental Health Advocacy And Peer Support

Social media has become an important tool for raising awareness about mental health and offering peer support. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter host many campaigns and communities focused on reducing the stigma attached to mental illness. Hashtags like #MentalHealthAwareness and #BreakTheStigma have sparked open discussions about mental health challenges, helping individuals feel less isolated. Connecting with others who share similar experiences provides comfort, diminishes loneliness, and fosters a sense of belonging. By sharing their experiences and information, users can advocate for mental health issues and promote better understanding within society.

2) Online Communities and Digital Therapy

The rise of online therapy and virtual mental health communities has greatly improved access to mental health care. Platforms like BetterHelp and Talkspace allow users to connect with licensed therapists through messaging, video calls, and live chats, making support more convenient and accessible.

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This flexibility removes common barriers to traditional therapy, such as distance and time constraints. Additionally, online communities, including forums and platforms like Reddit, offer spaces where individuals can share experiences, exchange coping strategies, and seek advice from others facing similar challenges.

These virtual environments create a sense of safety and encouragement, helping people feel more at ease discussing their mental health. Studies indicate that online therapy can be as effective as in-person treatment, making mental health support more available to a larger population.

IV. CYBERBULLYING AND ONLINE HARASSMENT

The Impact Of Adolescent Cyberbullying And Online Harassment On Body Image And Self-Esteem

Social Media has been an important factor in regards to how people view themselves in relation to others. This is especially true for adolescents, who are still developing their sense of self and self-worth. Current research suggests that adolescents are more likely to take significantly high levels of internalized idealized images encountered through social media than other age groups. The result of this prolonged exposure has negatively affected an adolescent's body image and self-esteem. Many young people compare their own bodies to filtered and curated images they see on social media sites, creating unrealistic expectations of human beings. In doing so, they may experience feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness.

For example, Perloff (2014) found that adolescent girls who used social media a lot felt less satisfied with their bodies than adolescent girls who used social media less. Those who compare themselves to others in an upward way—who try to figure out how attractive they are compared to others—will most likely have greater feelings of inadequacy and lower self-worth if they are frequently exposed to beautiful people's images on social media sites.

Social Media also has helped promote a narrow definition of beauty—one that primarily caters to thin bodies and muscular physique. As a result, adolescents who do not fit this narrow definition of beauty will have their bodies critically evaluated and experience lower self-worth than their peers.

V. SOCIAL MEDIA AND SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Link Between Social Media Overuse And Increased Anxiety/Depression

Excessive usage of social media platforms results in higher levels of anxiety and depression which affect users who spend more time on these platforms.

Research studies show that when people spend too much time on social media platforms their mental health suffers because they constantly see idealized pictures and lifestyles which are presented to them. This phenomenon fosters feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem because users compare their actual lives to the perfect online lives which they see (Vogel et al., 2014).

The addictive nature of social media platforms creates a pattern of users who exhibit compulsive behaviour toward their online activities. Users check their accounts to see whether their posts have received likes or comments or messages which creates anxiety about their social acceptance. The phenomenon known as “Fear of Missing Out” (FOMO) worsens these feelings because individuals experience anxiety about missing social gatherings or activities which their friends post about on social media (Przybylski et al., 2013). The anxiety experienced by people leads to a feeling of isolation from others because their online connections do not provide them with meaningful social contact. Research has shown that people who use social media excessively tend to experience more severe depressive symptoms. A longitudinal study found that individuals who used social media excessively were World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, more likely to report depressive symptoms over time (Keles et al., 2020). People must understand how social media affects their mental health because excessive social media usage results in serious mental health consequences which extend beyond time spent online.

VI. MENTAL HEALTH: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Social media can have negative effects on adolescents and young adults, mainly because their brains are still developing. During this stage of life, individuals are more vulnerable as they actively search for their identity, often using social media as a reference point.

The expectations created by society on these platforms can generate pressure, influencing how young people interact and present themselves. Constant exposure to carefully curated and idealized content can distort self-perception, leading to unhealthy comparisons. As a result, many individuals may feel inadequate, which can increase anxiety levels.

Research shows that teenagers who frequently use social media are at a higher risk of developing mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. The pressure to match unrealistic online lifestyles makes it difficult for adolescents to build independence and self-esteem during their developmental years.

Additionally, online interactions may appear meaningful but are often temporary and less emotionally fulfilling. The need for social validation—through likes, comments, and shares—encourages individuals to measure their self-worth based on online approval. This can lead to reduced confidence and increased emotional distress.

Therefore, it is important to understand the vulnerabilities of young people in the digital age and promote healthier online habits to protect their mental well-being.

A. Peer Pressure, Social Validation, And Identity Formation

Identity development in adolescents is strongly influenced by peer pressure and the desire for social validation. The need for acceptance often leads individuals to adapt their behaviour, opinions, or values to match those of their peers.

Social media intensifies this process by allowing users to constantly compare themselves with others and seek validation through likes, comments, and shares. As a result, many adolescents begin to measure their self-worth based on online feedback, increasing their dependence on peer approval.

The pressure to follow trends and meet popular standards can force young people to present an idealized version of themselves online. However, the gap between their real identity and their online image can negatively affect their mental health.

Excessive focus on social validation is linked to higher levels of anxiety and depression, as individuals constantly seek positive responses from others. Moreover, the fear of missing out (FOMO) encourages users to stay active online and share experiences rather than fully enjoying them in real life.

This behaviour can lead to an unhealthy cycle where individuals depend on external approval for their self-worth, making it harder for them to understand and accept their true identity. Recognizing these effects is essential to support healthy identity development and psychological well-being among adolescents.

B. Parental Concerns And Role

1) Parental Awareness Of Social Media Impact

Parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's social media habits and protecting their mental health. However, despite growing research on its negative effects, many parents are still unaware of the risks associated with excessive social media use.

Often, social media is seen as a normal and harmless part of modern life, which leads to underestimating its potential dangers. While parents recognize its benefits in maintaining communication, they may overlook issues such as cyberbullying, body image concerns, and addictions

Lack of awareness can result in inadequate supervision and guidance, putting children at risk. Many parents do not actively monitor their children's online activities or engage in discussions about their experiences. Without proper guidance, young people are more likely to face problems related to social media use.

To address this, parents need to be educated about both the benefits and risks of social media. Awareness programs can help them understand how to guide their children effectively and encourage healthy digital habits.

By staying informed and involved, parents can support their children in developing resilience, critical thinking, and safer online behaviours.

2) Strategies For Managing And Monitoring Social Media Use

Proper management and monitoring of social media use are essential to help adolescents develop healthy online habits. Parents, teachers, and caregivers can adopt several strategies to reduce negative impacts.

One of the most important approaches is maintaining open communication. Parents should regularly talk to their children about their online activities, interactions, and any challenges they face. This helps build trust and allows early identification of potential problems.

Setting clear limits on screen time is another effective method. Daily or weekly restrictions can encourage teenagers to balance their online and offline lives. Parental control tools can also be used to monitor usage and ensure safe online behaviour.

Encouraging participation in offline activities such as sports, hobbies, and family interactions can reduce dependence on social media. Real-life social connections contribute to better mental health and emotional well-being.

Parents should also act as role models by demonstrating balanced use of technology. By practicing healthy digital habits themselves, they can positively influence their children's behaviour.

Finally, educating adolescents about digital literacy is essential. Teaching them to understand both the risks and benefits of social media will help them make responsible choices and maintain a healthy relationship with technology.

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VII. CULTURAL AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT

A. Cultural Variations in Social Media Use

Differences In Social Media Effects Based On Cultural Values

Cultural values shape social media platforms which create different effects on both personal users and communal groups. People from Asian countries who practice collectivist cultural traditions view social media platforms as tools that strengthen their communal and family relationships. Users in this platform environment choose to create group connections through shared activities while maintaining social ties with their group members who come from different backgrounds.

The practice of individualistic cultures which exists in the United States drives people to use social media platforms for self-promotion purposes. He found that people who use social media platforms for self-promotion purposes experience increased anxiety about their social status because they make direct comparisons to others (Schneider et al. 2016).

The different cultural systems of the two groups between the two groups determine how users use platforms while they use the platforms and how their mental health develops.

The US uses Instagram and Twitter as main platforms which people use to share their personal accomplishments and work-related achievements. The situation creates a competitive environment which makes users feel more anxious while their self-esteem decreases (Tiggemann & Slater 2014).

Social media platforms perform an essential function in social media building and activism work for most African nations. Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook played a pivotal role in the Arab Spring as they helped people organize protests and exchange news.

VIII. ROLES OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMPANIES

1) Social Responsibilities of Companies

Social media companies like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have important ethical responsibilities because they influence millions of users worldwide. One of their main duties is to ensure user safety by reducing harmful content, such as hate speech, harassment, and misinformation.

To do this, platforms need to establish effective content moderation systems and provide clear reporting mechanisms so users can report inappropriate behaviour. Maintaining straightforward privacy policies and obtaining proper user consent are also vital for building trust. Companies must make sure that user data is not misused for profit, particularly in targeted advertising, without the user's knowledge.

Furthermore, social media platforms should explain how their algorithms work and how they might affect users' mental health. Offering tools like content filters, screen time reminders, and usage controls can help users manage their online experiences.

By meeting these responsibilities, social media companies can create a safer and healthier digital space that prioritizes user well-being and encourages responsible interactions.

2) Use Of Algorithms To Control Harmful Content

Social media platforms are increasingly using algorithms to detect and limit harmful content, including cyberbullying. These algorithms analyse user-generated content in real time and identify posts that may contain abusive or threatening language.

Technologies like Natural Language Processing (NLP) help identify offensive words, threats, or personal attacks. Algorithms also track user behaviour, such as multiple reports against a specific account, to spot potential risks.

Once harmful content is found, it can be automatically removed or reviewed by human moderators. Some platforms also warn users before they post harmful content, promoting more responsible behaviour.

Modern algorithms are becoming more advanced by understanding context, not just keywords. For instance, sentiment analysis can determine the tone of a message, allowing for better identification of subtle forms of harassment. These developments aim to create safer online spaces and reduce instances of cyberbullying.

A. Online Boundaries And Conscious Consumption

1) Strategies To Reduce Negative Effects: Digital Detox And Time Limits

Digital detox and limiting social media usage are effective ways to lessen its negative impact. A digital detox means taking a break from digital devices, especially social media, to reconnect with the real world and focus on personal well-being.

Research shows that even short breaks from social media can lower anxiety and improve overall life satisfaction. Spending more time offline encourages healthier habits and better mental health.

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Another helpful approach is setting time limits for social media use. Many platforms offer features that allow users to track and restrict their screen time. By establishing daily limits, individuals can avoid excessive use and reduce compulsive behaviour.
Studies suggest that spending less time on social media can lead to improved mood and lower levels of depression. Together, these strategies help individuals control their usage and support better mental well-being.

2) Mindful Use Of Social Media For Mental Well-Being

Practicing mindful social media use can significantly benefit mental health. Mindfulness encourages users to engage with social media consciously rather than automatically. It involves being aware of one's emotions and reactions while using these platforms.
One effective strategy is to curate a positive social media feed by following accounts that promote motivation, self-acceptance, and mental health awareness. Exposure to negative or unrealistic content can increase feelings of anxiety and inadequacy; thus, filtering content is crucial. Another approach is to take regular breaks and reflect on emotional responses during usage. Setting boundaries, such as social media-free times, can lower stress and promote healthier routines. By using social media mindfully, individuals can create a more positive and meaningful online experience that supports their mental well-being.

B. Role Of Governments And Mental Health Organizations

1) Policy Recommendations For Mental Health Protection

To protect mental health in the digital age, several policy measures should be put in place. First, stricter age restrictions are necessary to prevent young children from accessing social media without parental supervision.
Social media platforms should also be required to provide mental health resources, such as links to counseling services, helplines, and educational content. Additionally, platforms must ensure transparency in their algorithms so users understand how content is selected and how it may influence their mental health. Regular assessments of social media's psychological impact should be conducted and shared with the public and regulatory authorities. These policies can help create a safer online environment that prioritizes mental health and user protection.

2) National And International Efforts To Regulate Social Media

Governments and international organizations are increasingly working to regulate social media due to growing concerns about online safety and mental health. In the United States, laws like the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) aim to protect children under 13 by requiring parental consent for data collection. Similarly, the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) strengthens user privacy rights. At the global level, the European Union has implemented the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which ensures strict data protection and gives users rights over their personal information, including access and deletion.
Countries like the United Kingdom are also introducing laws such as the Online Safety Bill to hold platforms accountable for user safety. These national and international efforts show a growing recognition of the need for stronger regulation to make social media safer and more responsible.

IX. CONCLUSION

A. Recap Of Key Findings

Positive And Negative Impacts Of Social Media On Mental Health

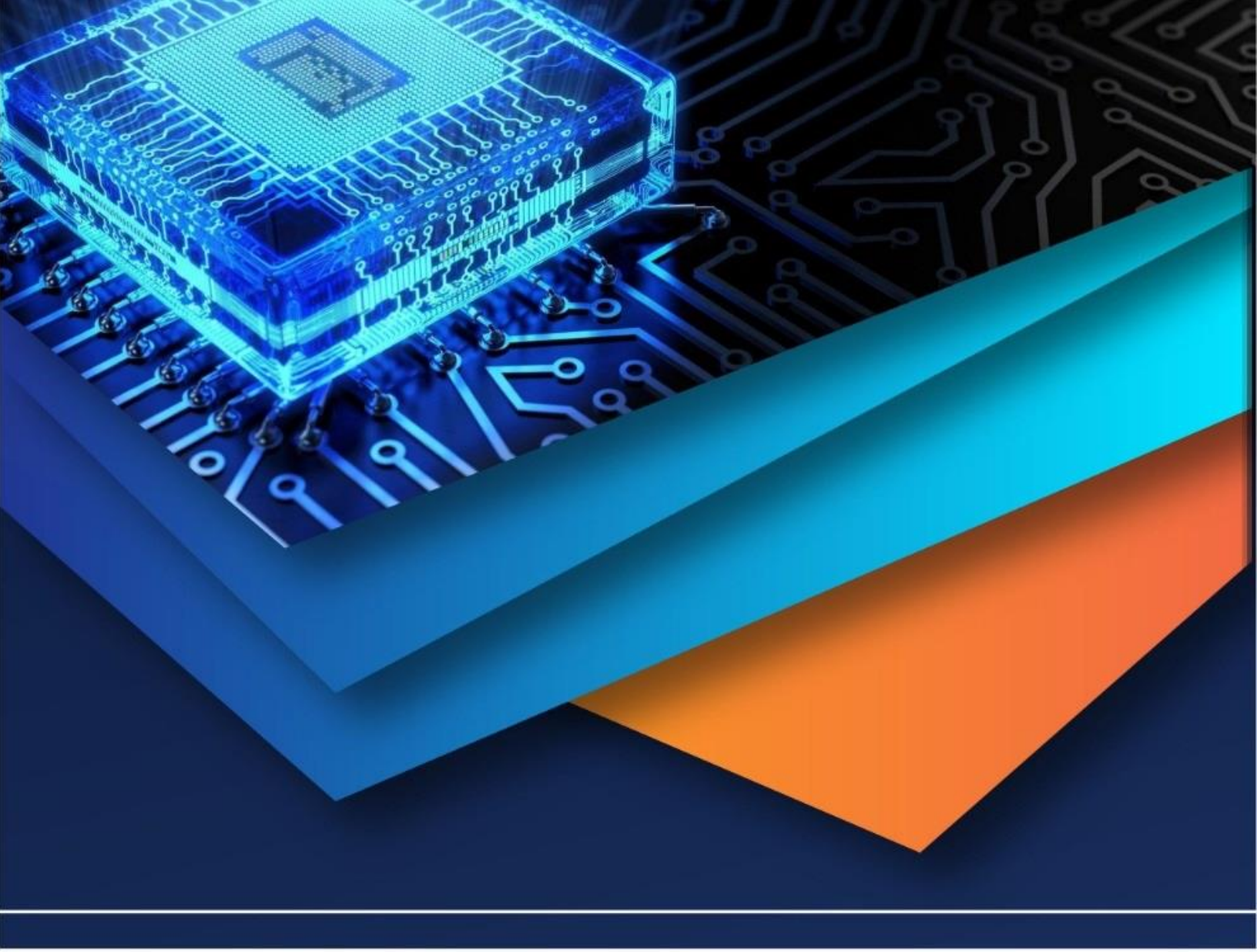
Social media affects mental health through its dual nature which produces both beneficial and harmful effects. The positive aspects of social media networks enable people to establish connections and develop communities which help them maintain contact with their distant family members and friends. Social media platforms enable users to express themselves while they empower marginalized communities to share their personal experiences and support social justice initiatives. Social media platforms provide resources and online communities with peer support groups which help people maintain their mental health. Social media platforms create major mental health problems which keep increasing in severity. The way people compare themselves to others creates a social comparison phenomenon which causes adolescents to experience feelings of inadequacy and diminished self-worth. The display of perfect body types and ideal lifestyles forces people to develop incorrect body image judgments which lead to anxiety and depression problems. The process of cyberbullying creates severe harmful effects which cause psychological suffering and emotional distress to many people who use it. People who use social media excessively will develop an addiction which forces them to compulsively check their notifications while they experience a constant Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) which leads to increased anxiety and social disruptions and sleep disturbances. People should use social media platforms because they provide essential connection opportunities but they should develop safe usage methods which will protect their mental wellbeing.

B. Responsible Usage and Future Directions

Social media requires a balanced approach that allows individuals to benefit from its advantages while minimizing its risks. Promoting awareness, responsible usage, and digital well-being practices is essential. Future research should focus on developing strategies to reduce harmful effects and enhance the positive impact of social media. With proper regulation and mindful usage, social media can become a more supportive and healthy environment for users.

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