Online Communication in the Digital Age
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Lecture – 48
Perils and Pitfalls of Online Communication- Part II

Good morning, dear friends and welcome to this module. In the previous module, we had discussed how surveillance and misinformation might compromise the privacy of individuals in digital communication. However, privacy concerns are not the only pitfalls of modern online communication. New media including social networks and online content plays a significant role in the development of adolescents and young persons. It influences their communication, social interactions and information consumption, shaping their perceptions and behaviours not only about the world but also about themselves.

Adolescent Development

- New media highlights a more active and interactive media use in adolescents due to the technologically advanced mobility of new media devices. (Sundar, 2008)*

- Adolescents seem most susceptible when it comes to media's impact because of their developmental stage in which parental mediation strategies are less effective than with younger children and peers becoming more important (Cantor & Wilson, 2003)**.

*Sundar, S. S. (2008). Self as source: Agency and customization in interactive media. In E. Konijn, S. Utz, M. Tanis, & S. Barnes (Eds.), Mediated interpersonal communication (pp. 58–74). New York, NY: Routledge

*Cantor, J., & Wilson, B. J. (2003). Media and violence: Intervention strategies for reducing aggression. Media Psychology, 5, 363–403.

Source: https://www.bath.ac.uk

New media highlights a more active and interactive media use in adolescents due to the technologically advanced mobility of different devices easily available and under use nowadays. Adolescents seem more susceptible when it comes to media's impact because they are still in a developmental stage in which parental mediation strategies are less effective than they might have been with younger children and their peers become more important for them.

During the critical period of adolescent development, individuals often experience imaginary audience, a cognitive distortion where they believe that others are constantly

focused on their actions and behaviours as if they are under constant scrutiny and evaluation.

Imaginary Audience*

- The concept of "imaginary audience" refers to the adolescent's belief that he or she is continuously watched and evaluated by others.
- New media technology allows substantiating such an audience on social media platforms by creating their personal profile on social networking sites like Facebook, enhancing this status by posting updates, sharing information, and seeking followers.
- Subsequently, the adolescent may bathe in their self-created celebrity status while receiving "likes" on Facebook or by adding new "fans."

Source: https://smhsponyexpress.org
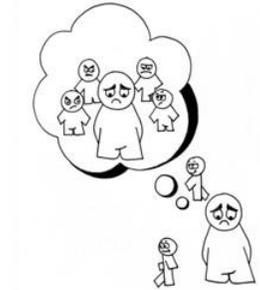
*Konijn, E. A., Veldhuis, J., Plaisier, X. S., Spekman, M., & den Hamer, A. (2015). Adolescent development and psychological mechanisms in interactive media use. The handbook of the psychology of communication technology, 332-364.

The concept of imaginary audience refers to the belief amongst the adolescents that one is continuously being watched or evaluated by the other people online as well as offline. New media technology allows substantiating such an audience on social media platforms by creating their personal profiles on different social networking sites like Facebook etc., enhancing their status by posting updates, sharing information, seeking followers etc. Subsequently, the adolescent may bathe in their self-created celebrity status while receiving likes on Facebook or by adding new friends. The opposite situation impacts them in a negative manner.

This imaginary audience perception often intertwines with the personal fable phenomenon. The personal fable is a belief that adolescents hold where they perceive themselves as unique and invulnerable assuming that no one else can truly understand their experiences. Both of these cognitive distortions can significantly influence an adolescent self-perception and decision making.

Personal Fable

- Related to the imaginary audience, an adolescent believes that he or she is highly special and unique (Martin & Sokol, 2011)*.
- The more followers they may have been able to create or attract on social media, the more strongly their personal fable seems to be fed.
- These imaginary concepts are made even more concrete and alive by creating one's virtual audience through user-generated content such as postings, personal blogs, pictures, video clips, and the like on personal pages like Facebook or MySpace.
- Likewise, an individual can easily create (virtual) friends on Facebook and even believe that they have a lot of friends by

Source: https://psychologenie.com

*Martin, J., & Sokol, B. (2011). Generalized others and imaginary audiences: A neo-Meadian approach to adolescent egocentrism. New Ideas in Psychology, 29(3), 364–375.

The idea of the personal fable is related to the imaginary audience. This is the belief by an adolescent that one is highly special and unique. The more followers they may have been able to create or attract on social media, the more strongly this personal fable seems to be fed. These imaginary concepts are made even more concrete and alive by creating one's virtual audience through user-generated content such as postings, personal blogs, pictures, video clips etc., on personal pages like Facebook or MySpace. Similarly, an individual can easily create virtual friends on Facebook and even believe that they have a lot of friends by adding friends to one's personal page.

The personal fable's influence on adolescents extends into the realm of identity formation and new media. As discussed in previous modules, individuals may construct online personas that reflect their perceived uniqueness seeking affirmation from their virtual audience.

Identity Formation and New Media

- The affordances of newer communication technology drives adolescents to look for attractive role models with whom they can identify.
- In the relatively safe environments of the "virtuality" of the internet, the adolescents may feel safe to experiment with and try out different roles or explore a variety of "possible selves". (Kapidzic & Herring, 2011)*
- Identity construction is supported not only through the exposure of one's "personal fable" and showing favorite role models on social networking sites, but also by the possibility of actually "acquiring an identity" through creating an avatar. (You & Sundar, 2013)**

*Kapidzic, S., & Herring, S. C. (2011). Gender, communication, and self-presentation in teen chatrooms revisited: Have patterns changed? Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 17(1), 39–59.

**You, S., & Sundar, S. S. (2013, April). I feel for my avatar: embodied perception in VEs. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 3135–3138). ACM.

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The affordance of newer communication technology drives adolescents to look for attractive role models with whom they can identify. In the relatively safe environments of the virtuality of the internet, the adolescents may feel safe to experiment with and try out different roles or explore a variety of possible selves. Identity construction is supported not only through the exposure of one's personal fable and showing favourite role models on social networking sites but also by the possibility of actually acquiring an identity through creating an avatar.

This complex interplay between cognitive distortions, identity development and new media underscore the intricate dynamics shaping the experiences of contemporary adolescent lives. Furthermore, as adolescents navigate identity formation within the digital landscape, the influence of peers in new media becomes increasingly significant.
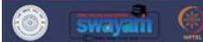
Peer Influence in New Media*

- Adolescents strongly depend on their peers for emotional security and normative behavior while secure relationships with peers are associated with social and emotional competence.
- Newer communication technologies provide new ways through which peers communicate and influence each other, more so than in traditional media.
- On social networking sites and blogs, peers directly comment on each other's postings.
- The abundant exposure to a large variety of relevant others will evoke continuous comparisons with peer group members.

*Brown, B. B., & Larson, J. (2009). Peer relationships in adolescence. In R. M. Lerner & L. Steinberg (Eds.), Handbook of adolescent psychology (3rd ed., pp. 74–103). New York, NY: Wiley. doi:10.1002/9780470479193

Source: https://parentingskillssite.wordpress.com

Adolescents strongly depend on their peers for emotional security and normative behaviour while secure relationships with peers are associated with social and emotional competence. Newer communication technologies provide new ways through which peers communicate and influence each other more so than in traditional media. On social networking sites and blogs, peers directly comment on each other's postings. The abundant exposure to a large variety of relevant others will evoke continuous comparisons with peer group members.

- Peer Pressure to conform to in-group standards, norms, and values-highly common among adolescents-may be further increased through the depictions in new media technologies.
- The massive portrayals of specific types of young characters in the online portals may perhaps even push toward standardization of specifically held opinions.
- For example, the overwhelming portrayal of partying, good-looking youngsters may cause peer pressure on others.
- It may invoke enhanced objectified consciousness in others and perhaps also decreased self-esteem in those who feel inferior compared to all those optimally exposed identities

*Veldhuis, J., Konijn, E. A., & Seidell, J. C. (2014b). Peer feedback modifies effects of media's thin-body ideal on adolescent girls. Appetite, 73, 172–82.

Source: https://projectpeerpressure.weebly.com
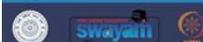
Peer pressure to confirm to in-group standards, norms and values highly common among adolescents may be further increased through the depictions in new media technologies. The massive portrayals of specific types of young characters in the online portals may perhaps even push towards standardization of specifically held opinions. For example, the overwhelming portrayal of partying good looking youngsters may cause peer pressure on others. It may invoke enhanced objectified consciousness in others and perhaps also decreased self-esteem in those who feel inferior in comparison to those optimally exposed identities.

Mood management theory, a prominent concept in media psychology, posits that individuals choose media content to regulate their emotional states. This theory acknowledges that people, especially adolescents, engage with new media to alleviate negative emotions or enhance positive ones. It plays a pivotal role in understanding media consumption patterns and their emotional consequences.

Mood Management Theory

- Mood management theory (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985)* and the theory of media attendance (LaRose & Eastin, 2004)** both propose that dysphoric moods play a role in media consumption.
- LaRose et al. (2003)*** uncovered a mechanism that further describes the process: depression was directly related to expectations that Internet use would relieve dysphoria, which were in turn directly related to both deficient self-observation and deficient self- reaction, both of which were powerful determinants of Internet usage.

* Zillmann, D., & Bryant, J. (1985). Affect, mood and emotion as determinants of selective media exposure. In D. Zillmann & J. Bryant (Eds.), Selective exposure to communication (pp. 157–190). Hillsale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

** LaRose, R., & Eastin, M. S. (2004). A social cognitive theory of internet uses and gratifications: Toward a new model of media attendance. Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 48, 358–377.

*** LaRose, R., Lin, C. A., & Eastin, M. S. (2003). Unregulated internet usage: Addiction, habit, or deficient self-regulation? Media Psychology, 5, 225–253.

Mood management theory which has been put across by Zillman and Bryant in 1985 and the theory of media attendance proposed by Larose and Easton in 2004 proposed that dysphoric moods play a role in media consumption. Larose etcetera uncovered a mechanism that further describes the process. Depression was directly related to expectations that internet use would relieve dysphoria which were in turn directly related to both deficient self-observation and deficient self-reaction both of which were powerful determinants of internet usage.

Understanding the interplay between mood management theory and mental health disorders is essential. New media can either serve as a coping mechanism potentially alleviating symptoms or exacerbate existing issues.

Social media usage has been associated with various issues including depression and anxiety. The constant exposure to online stimuli and the potential for cyberbullying and harassment can increase these conditions. It has also been linked to reduced positive mood, lower levels of happiness, decreased life satisfaction and an inclination toward addictive and detrimental mental health behaviors.

We are going to share a video now. It discusses a new warning by the Surgeon General of the US about the impact of social media on the mental health of children. It states that there isn't enough evidence to deem social media platforms safe for kids and teenagers and expresses concern over the rising rates of depression, anxiety and suicide among young people partly attributed to the impact of social media.

Source: TODAY Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SvqoaZzyVs
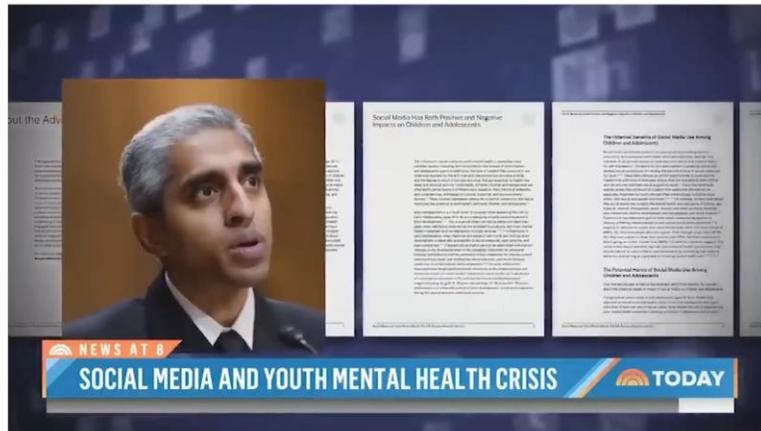
For decades there's been that Surgeon General's warning on packs of cigarettes but this morning for the first time a new warning about something else, social media and what it means for kids' mental health. Why now for this advisory? We're issuing this advisory to sound the alarm. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy says there's not enough evidence to show social media platforms are safe enough for kids and teens. We see rates of depression and anxiety and suicide and loneliness going up among young people and I'm concerned that social media is an important driver of that youth mental health crisis.

This is the defining public health issue of our time, youth mental health. Research shows 95% of teens are on social media, more than a third say they're on constantly and teens spend an average of three and a half hours each day on these kinds of apps, something research shows can double the risk of experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety. The other day my daughter came up to my wife and I and asked us if she could post a picture on social media. How old is she? My daughter is five years old. She's actually in preschool but she's been hearing about this from her friends.

All of the big platforms require users to be at least 13 years old to create accounts but nearly 40% of kids ages 8 to 12 say they've used social media too. Tech expert Max Stossel sees it in the conversations he's had in the past six years with more than a hundred thousand students, parents and teachers. When I started doing this work I was getting the question is 16 too young to give my kid a smartphone, now I'm getting the question is like third grade too young to give my kid a smartphone. Stossel recommends 14 but ultimately the right age may be different for different families. You are almost certain to get pushback from tech companies who say they're trying to protect kids, they have age

limits in place.

  I appreciate that the technology companies have taken some steps to try to keep kids safe but it hasn't been nearly enough. The Surgeon General thinks Congress can and should do more to regulate social media companies the same way safety standards are in place for car seats for example and at home the advisory recommends creating a family media plan together implementing tech free zones like at meal times and partnering with other parents with similar philosophies for support. What's at stake here is our kids and their future, plain and simple. Here's the thing the Surgeon General's advisory acknowledges there are good things about teens being on social media, the ability to connect, to have friendships, to find support. We've reached out to the big social media platforms on this waiting to hear back but many of them have put some safety precautions in place.

  Meta for example prompts teens to take breaks and has a family center and guides to help people use the platform. It really is a debate for each family. If you're wondering okay what is the Surgeon General doing he tells me that he and his wife plan to wait until their kids are out of middle school to get on those apps. Savannah.

The video highlights that nearly all teens use social media and excessive use is linked to symptoms of depression and anxiety. Mental health disorders when aggravated by excessive new media use can pave the way for online addiction. Individuals struggling with conditions like depression or anxiety may turn to the internet as an escape or a source of comfort. Inadvertently they fall into the trap of compulsive online behaviors which further implicates their mental well-being.

Online Addiction

- It has been claimed that excessive internet use can be pathological and addictive and that such behavior comes under the more generic label of "technological addiction". (Widyanto & Griffiths, 2006)*
- Young (1999)** claims there are five specific subtypes:
  - Cybersexual addiction: Compulsive use of adult web sites for cybersex and cyberporn.
  - Cyber-relationship addiction: Over-involvement in online relationships.
  - Net compulsions: Obsessive online gambling, shopping or day trading.
  - Information overload: Compulsive web surfing or database searches.
  - Computer addiction: Obsessive computer game playing.

Source: https://www.tikvahlake.com

* Widyanto, L., & Griffiths, M. D. (2006). Internet addiction: A critical review. International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 4, 31–51

** Young, K. (1999). Internet addiction: Evaluation and treatment. Student British Medical Journal, 7, 351–352.

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It has been claimed that excessive internet use can be pathological and addictive and that such behavior comes under the more generic label of technological addiction. In 1999 research Young claims that there are five specific subtypes. First is cybersexual addiction which suggests a compulsive use of adult websites for cybersex and porn. Cyber relationship addiction suggests over involvement in online relationships. Net compulsions suggest compulsive online gambling, shopping or day trading. Information overload suggests compulsive web surfing or database searches continually. Computer addiction suggests obsessive computer game playing.

  Thus, online addiction encompasses various aspects of digital life, one prominent form is online gambling addiction. This addiction is subset of the broader issue highlights how easy access to online betting platforms can lead to financial reign, strained relationships and also severe psychological distress.

Online Gambling Addiction

- Technological advancements in gambling have led to global trends: gambling outside traditional venues, a shift toward solitary play, deregulation, and expanded gambling opportunities. (Griffiths, 2011)*
- Analysis revealed substantial sociodemographic distinctions between internet and non-internet gamblers, with the former being more male, young, single, educated, and employed in professional roles. (Griffiths et al.,2009)**
- Limited data indicates that online gambling isn't inherently more problematic, but it offers vulnerable individuals (e.g., problem gamblers) easily accessible "convenience" gambling, likely contributing to higher problem gambling rates online. (Wardle, Moody, Spence, et al., 2011)***

*Griffiths, M. D. (2011). Technological trends and the psychosocial impact on gambling. Casino and Gaming International, 7(1), 77–80.

** Griffiths, M. D., Wardle, J., Orford, J., Sproston, K., & Erens, B. (2009). Socio-demographic correlates of internet gambling: Findings from the 2007 British Gambling Prevalence Survey. CyberPsychology & Behavior, 12, 199–202.

*** Wardle, H., Moody, A., Griffiths, M. D., Orford, J., & Volberg, R. (2011). Defining the online gambler and patterns of behaviour integration: Evidence from the British Gambling Prevalence Survey 2010. International Gambling Studies, 11, 339–356.

Technological advancements in gambling have led to sub-global trends. Gambling outside traditional venues, a shift towards solitary play, deregulation and expanded gambling opportunities have now become popular. Analysis revealed substantial socio-demographic distinctions between internet and non-internet gamblers with the former being more male, young, single, educated and employed in professional roles. Limited data indicates that online gambling is not inherently more problematic, but it offers vulnerable individuals easily accessible convenience gambling, likely contributing to higher problem gambling rates online.

The following video discusses concerns about a potential surge in gambling addiction during COVID-19 lockdowns in Europe. It highlights how bookmakers have increased advertising on TV and social media to attract new and vulnerable customers.

Source: euronews Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnG-rUjlfu8

With millions still under lockdown across Europe, there are growing concerns that being housebound for hours on end could be helping fuel a new wave of gambling addiction. In the UK, campaigners say that bookmakers have gone on an advertising blitz on both TV and social media and are trying to use lockdown measures as a way to lure in new and even vulnerable customers.

What we see in is that more people are turning to online gambling, some are to boredom, some are to panic because they have a problem with gambling and they feel they need to go back to it. They've been driven by bonuses and advertising and the temptation is just too much. One person that can speak about that temptation is Alex Macy. He's a former sufferer of gambling disorder. He now works on trying to help warn others about the dangers of gaming addiction.

You know, I put myself back into the, you know, the fog and the haze of gambling when I was there in that position. And if this, you know, if these circumstances were set up on me now, you know, it would cause a lot of anxiety. And there's no doubt I would be gambling more. He says he's been contacted by a number of people under lockdown that have told him they're scared about falling into an addiction trap. On social media, for example, and then they're seeing these adverts pop up, they're clicking on the adverts and then all of a sudden, you know, their bank account has been emptied.

So yeah, it's a really risky time for people out there right now. The UK government has now launched a wide reaching inquiry into problem gambling, which will look at everything from mental health related issues to its impact on crime and suicide. For

campaigners though, it also now needs to attest how the industry used lockdown measures as a means to find new clientele. I don't honestly believe that we can even guesstimate how many people will become problem over the next, over the last few weeks and the next few weeks, because it is an activity that is easy to do, easy to get involved with and very, very, very, very easy to spend and get hooked excessively.

The lockdown measures, consequential boredom and promotional offers have driven some people towards online gambling, potentially intensifying gambling problems. Online gambling addiction shares commonalities with online gaming addiction, both representing problematic internet related behaviours. These addictive tendencies often result from the same psychological mechanisms related to instant gratification, escapism and reward systems found in games of chance or online gaming, making it crucial to address digital addiction in a comprehensive way.

Online Gaming Addiction

- Research has consistently shown that a small minority of people who play online games do so excessively. (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012)*
- University students are considered susceptible to problematic online gaming due to flexible schedules, constant broadband access, and adjusting to new social and living conditions. (King et al., 2011)**
- Numerous studies highlight that excessive video gaming can harm individuals, as summarized by Griffiths et al. (2012)***, resulting in consequences such as neglecting responsibilities, isolation, decreased well-being, and academic struggles.

* Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. (2012). Online gaming addiction: A systematic review. International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 10, 278–296.

** King, D. L., Delfabbro, P. H., & Zajac, I. T. (2011). Preliminary validation of a new clinical tool for identifying problem video game playing. International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 9, 72–87.

***Griffiths, M. D., Kuss, D. J., & King, D. L. (2012). Video game addiction: Past, present and future. Current Psychiatry Reviews, 8, 308–318.

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Research has consistently shown that a small minority of people who play online games do so excessively. Many of these students are considered susceptible to problematic online gaming due to flexible schedules, constant broadband access and adjusting to new social media and living conditions. Numerous studies highlight that excessive video gaming can harm individuals as summarised by Griffiths et al in their 2012 research. It may result in consequences such as neglecting responsibilities, isolation, decreased wellbeing and academic struggles.

While online gaming addiction focuses on immersive gameplay experiences, social networking addiction revolves around the incessant need for social validation and connection.

Social Networking Addiction

- People addicted to social network sites like Facebook may exhibit addiction-like symptoms similar to substance dependence. (Luscombe, 2009)*.
- Scholars have theorized that young individuals with narcissistic traits may be more susceptible to addictive use of social networking sites. (Campbell et al., 2007)**
- Research on self-perception (Machold et al., 2012***; Olowu & Seri, 2012****) consistently reveals that a substantial portion of young adults acknowledge social networking addiction tendencies or behaviors like
  - constantly checking social networks,
  - engaging in the activity longer than intended,
  - feeling stressed if unable to access social networks, etc.

*Luscombe, B. (2009). Social norms. Facebook and divorce. Time, 173, 93–94.

** Campbell, W. K., Bosson, J. K., Goheen, T. W., Lakey, C. E., & Kernis, M. H. (2007). Do narcissists dislike themselves "deep down inside?" Psychological Science, 18, 227–229.

*** Machold, C., Judge, G., Mavrinac, A., Elliott, J., Murphy, A. M., & Roche, E. (2012). Social networking patterns/hazards among teenagers. Irish Medical Journal, 105, 151–152.

**** Olowu, A. O., & Seri, F. O. (2012). A study of social network addiction among youths in Nigeria. Journal of Social Science and Policy Review, 4, 62–71.

Similarly, people addicted to social networking sites like Facebook may exhibit addiction like symptoms similar to substance dependence. Scholars have theorised that young individuals with narcissistic traits may be more susceptible to addictive use of different social networking sites. Research on self-perception consistently reveals that a substantial portion of young adults acknowledge social networking addiction tendencies or behaviours like constantly checking social networks, engaging in the activity longer than intended and feeling stressed if unable to access social networking et cetera.

Excessive engagement in social networking can paradoxically lead to social isolation and loneliness. Despite the illusion of connectivity, individuals may find themselves physically isolated, missing out on real world interactions and struggling to establish deep and meaningful relationships.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

- According to McPherson et al. (2006)*, the Internet's influence on social networks can lead to a geographical dispersion of connections, reducing the importance of local interactions with friends and neighbors.
- This phenomenon replaces strong local ties with weaker and more distant connections.
- Olds and Schwartz (2009)** made a similar argument in their book "The Lonely America," suggesting that online activities can undermine traditional forms of community solidarity.
- Sigman (2009)*** goes a step further, labeling the use of new communication technologies as the primary contributor to a historic decline in face-to-face interactions.

Source: https://progress.im

* McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Brashears, M. E. (2006). Social isolation in America: Changes in core discussion networks over two decades. American sociological review, 71(3), 353-375.

** Olds, J., & Schwartz, R. S. (2009). The lonely American: Drifting apart in the twenty-first century. Beacon Press.

*** Sigman, A. (2009). Well connected. Biologist, 56(1), 14-20.

 The internet's influence on social networks can also lead to a geographical dispersion of connections, reducing the importance of local interactions with friends and neighbours. This phenomenon replaces strong local ties with weaker and more distant connections. States and shorts in their 2009 research made a similar argument in their book The Lonely America, suggesting that online activities can undermine traditional forms of community solidarity. Sigmund in 2009, went a step further and labeled the use of new communication technologies as the primary contributor to a historic decline in face-to-face interactions.

Additionally, the pandemic and resulting lockdowns had forced individuals to rely heavily on the net for various aspects of their lives and it inadvertently contributed to the increase in internet addictions.

The Rise of Internet Addiction During the COVID-19 Lockdowns*

- **Lockdown-induced dependence:** The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have led to increased reliance on the internet for work, education, socializing, and entertainment. This heightened online presence has contributed to the rise of internet addiction.

- **Escapism and coping mechanism:** The restrictions and uncertainties during lockdowns drove individuals to seek solace and distraction in online activities, leading to excessive internet use as a coping mechanism and means of escape.

Source: https://www.newindianexpress.com

*Alimoradi, Z., Lotfi, A., Lin, C. Y., Griffiths, M. D., & Pakpour, A. H. (2022). Estimation of behavioral addiction prevalence during COVID-19 pandemic: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Current addiction reports, 9(4), 486-517.

So how should we study the rise of internet addiction during the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns? The first can be termed as a lockdown induced dependence. The lockdown situation led to increased reliance on the internet for work, education, socializing and entertainment and this highlighted online presence and it contributed to the rise of internet addiction. Secondly, the second factor is termed as escaping and coping mechanism. The restrictions and uncertainties during lockdowns drove individuals to seek solace and also distraction in online activities leading to excessive internet use as a coping mechanism and a means of escape.

- **Implications for mental health:** Prolonged periods of online engagement during lockdowns have intensified the risk of internet addiction and its detrimental effects on mental health, exacerbating feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression.
- **Addressing the issue:** The rise of internet addiction during the pandemic necessitated proactive measures to raise awareness, promote digital well-being, and provide support and resources for individuals struggling with excessive internet use.

Source: https://www.myjewishlearning.com

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Thirdly, it had implications for mental health. Prolonged periods of online engagement during lockdowns intensified the risk of internet addiction and its detrimental effects on mental health, feelings of loneliness, anxiety and depression. The rise of internet addiction during the pandemic necessitated proactive measures to raise awareness to promote digital wellbeing and provide support and resources for individuals struggling with excessive internet use.

Simultaneously, the COVID-19 crisis exposed the stark digital divide in education. Remote learning became a necessity during this time but it also exposed the challenges and inequities within the education system. Students from underprivileged communities faced unequal access to online learning resources enhancing the educational inequalities and also raising concerns about the broader implications of the digital divide.

Online Education and Digital Divide

- The digital divide refers to the gap between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not, leading to disparities in educational opportunities.
- Kasinathan and Ranganathan (2020)* highlight that the COVID-19 virus, while not inherently political or gendered, has brought to the fore issues of access, inclusion, and gender equity, particularly in digital resources.
- The pandemic posed challenges at global, individual, and gender levels, particularly affecting students unable to advance their studies due to infrastructure, unfamiliarity with online education, and added stress. (Tadesse and Muluye, 2020)**

Source: https://www.insightsonindia.com
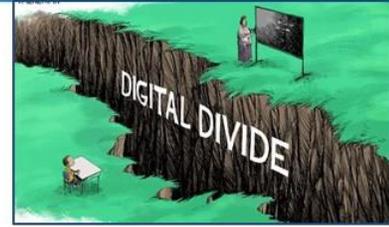
* Kasinathan, G., & Ranganathan, S. (2020). Reclaiming Education During a Pandemic. Deccan Herald.

** Tadesse, S., & Muluye, W. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education system in developing countries: a review. Open Journal of Social Sciences, 8(10), 159-170.

The digital divide refers to the gap between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not and it leads to disparities in educational as well as other opportunities. Researchers have pointed out that the COVID-19 virus, while not inherently political or gendered, has brought to the fore issues of access, inclusion and gender equity, particularly in terms of digital resources. The pandemic posted challenges at global, individual and gender levels, particularly affecting students who were unable to advance their studies due to infrastructure unfamiliarity with online education as well as added stress.

- The COVID-19 pandemic worsened disparities in developing countries, impacting socio-economic status, education, gender, and geography. (Blundell et al., 2020)*
- School closures affected essential workers and single parents.
- Unpaid school fees led to discrimination against children in online learning groups (Singh, 2020)**, exacerbating economic, gender, and generational inequalities.
- In a pandemic-era study on online education, teachers resorted to WhatsApp as their primary digital tool due to issues like poor infrastructure, limited connectivity, and familiarity with the platform. (Mishra, Gupta, and Shree, 2020)***

Source: https://iafor.org

* Blundell, R., Costa Dias, M., Joyce, R., & Xu, X. (2020). COVID-19 and Inequalities. Fiscal studies, 41(2), 291-319.

** Singh, H. P. (2020). Parents protest against private school, demand fee waiver. Hindustan Times, 14.

*** Mishra, L., Gupta, T., & Shree, A. (2020). Online teaching-learning in higher education during lockdown period of COVID-19 pandemic. International journal of educational research open, 1, 100012.

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The pandemic worsened disparities in developing countries impacting socio-economic status, education, gender and geography. School closures also affected essential workers and single parents. Unpaid school fees also led to discrimination against children in online learning groups, enhancing economic, gender and generational inequalities. In a pandemic era study on online education, teachers resorted to WhatsApp as their primary digital tool due to issues like poor infrastructure, limited connectivity and familiarity with the platform.

It can be suggested that the digital age has ushered in transformative changes in how we communicate, how we form identities and also how do we navigate the complex realms of information in a rapidly evolving and continuously changing digital landscape. It is clear that our increasing reliance on technology, the perils of online communication and the profound influence of digital media on adolescent development as well as mental well-being are significant concerns.

Conclusion

- The exploration of adolescent development, the imaginary audience, personal fable, and identity formation, alongside peer influence, reveals the profound impact of digital media on youth.
- It intertwines with mood management theory, emphasizing the emotional aspects of our online experiences, which connects to mental health disorders and various online addictions.
- This complex interplay highlights the importance of engaging with digital media responsibly and mindfully in our increasingly connected world.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated our dependence on technology, presenting new societal challenges, including issues such as online addiction and their implications for mental health.

The exploration of adolescent development, the imaginary audience, personal fable and identity formation alongside peer influence reveals the profound impact of digital media on youth. It intertwines with mood management theory, emphasizing the emotional aspects of our online experiences which connects to mental health disorders and various online addictions. The complex interplay highlights the importance of engaging with digital media responsibly and mindfully in our increasingly connected world. The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated our dependence on technology, presenting new societal challenges including issues such as online addiction and their implications for mental health.

  As we face unprecedented challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, responsible technology use is paramount for individual well-being and societal progress. These issues underscore the urgency of fostering digital literacy, safeguarding online privacy and promoting responsible online engagement.

Thank you.