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Nomophobia: It's What's Trending

In recent years there has been a significant rise in the use and availability of various online social platforms. According to a 2024 Pew Research Center poll, “Most teens use social media and have a smartphone, and nearly half say they’re online almost constantly” (Faverio). This rise in social media use, especially in teens, has had unpredictable side effects. Vivek Murphy, Surgeon General of the United States, believes that one of these side effects is the “mental health crisis” in young adults. Some aspects of social media are negatively impacting the mental health crisis, while others are positively impacting it.

Social media can deepen the mental health crisis by enforcing unrealistic standards, increasing reliance on devices, and providing additional pathways for bullying. On social media, trends that are oppressive to certain groups often appear. An example of this is certain fashion trends or diets. These unrealistic expectations create self-hate for people who don't fit the trend, even if it's fleeting. Trends also introduce FOMO, or the fear of missing out. People see others participating in trends in real time that they may not be able to participate in. As a result, teens are reluctant to get rid of social media even if they know it's bad for them because they want to be included and seen as cool. Social media also creates an unhealthy reliance on devices. A Cosmo study showed that teenagers spend an average of over seven hours a day on their phones, with over half of that being on social media (Inc., Cosmo Technologies). That's almost half of the time one is awake being spent on a screen. This elevated usage of devices is taking away from the time that teenagers could use to be productive, in turn taking away from the quality of life of young adults. More time spent on social media also increases the amount of bullying people are exposed to. People can hide behind a screen and say whatever they want with

relatively few consequences. When people get bullied, they look back to the internet for validations. It becomes an abusive relationship or addiction where someone gets torn down yet goes back anyway, seeking different results, when often it really just makes them feel worse. On the other hand, this culture of bullying online and in person has created a unique pathway for supportive online communities.

Social media has also had a positive impact on the mental health crisis by creating a space for positive online communities and destigmatizing mental health issues. A new wave of self-love and positive community building has risen along with the trends. It's easier to find similar, like-minded people online. For example, LGBTQ+ support groups and body-positive influencers preach self love and encourage people to accept themselves despite others' opinions. If you're a person in a rural community, now it's easier to be exposed to other lifestyles, figure out who you are and find companionship because of social media. People have also started to use social media as a way to educate others about mental health issues. It's becoming less taboo for people to talk about their mental health struggles than in the past. By finding their community online, people are encouraged to vocalize their struggles, both in person *and* online. Other benefits of online support groups include "emotional support, the availability of advice, enablement of positive personal changes, engagement in valuable social interactions, and the opportunity to disclose and express feelings and views" (Rayland). Online communities can be a unique way to conglomerate a whole group's collective knowledge on a subject. This is a necessary tool for people who don't have the means to understand their own mental health conditions. In some situations, social media is a helpful resource for teenagers who struggle with mental health issues.

Both the positive and negative effects of social media on the mental health crisis make this topic a complex issue. In my experience, the negative effects are more impactful than the positive effects. Social media “platforms are designed to be addictive and are associated with anxiety, depression, and even physical ailments” (McLean Hospital). As a person who struggles with anxiety, I know firsthand that it is not easy to cope with if you don’t have the right resources. The unpredictability of social media qualifies it as an unreliable resource for people who are struggling with their own issues. When social media platforms advertise themselves as community building and supporting, yet are actually designed to become addicting, it can cause people’s mental health to become worse. For the most part, I haven’t grown up on social media. When I noticed myself just scrolling and spending more time on my phone I deleted Instagram. The result, for me, was time. Time spent with my friends and family and productive creative activities. I still go through mental health struggles, but being able to connect to the real world has helped me ground myself and learn to deal with my anxiety.

Social media has had an overwhelming effect on the mental health crisis in young adults, contributing both positive and negative aspects to the issue. The mental health crisis is not a new issue, but the emergence of social media as a major contributor is becoming increasingly relevant. Even though social media has its upsides, overall, it has been more harmful than good. Social media is not going to become obsolete, so we as a society must work to make it better and more reliable for everyone. Nomophobia, or the fear of being disconnected from the online world, is occurring at an alarming rate (NOMOPHOBIA). Setting limits on social media and holding yourself accountable in online interactions can go a long way to improve online communities and experiences. Young adults who use social media *and* their role models need to

work together to create a safer online environment and a world where we don't rely on the internet as much.

Works Cited

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