



Relationship Between Social Media Consumption Depression and Loneliness During COVID-19 Era

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Abstract

The function of Pakistani media regarding the COVID-19 has undergone through the deceptive process. The broadcasts are often devoid of medical experts involving politicians and journalists to talk on COVID-19 forums. This is a quantitative survey research which has been designed to investigate the relationship between social media consumption depression and loneliness among the citizens of Lahore city who use social media was the population of this study. Empirical data has been collected through purposive sampling technique from 500 respondents from Lahore city of Pakistan. Descriptive and inferential analysis has been carried out by using SPSS=23. From the finding of the empirical data it has been depicted that people use social media to get updates about the latest situation and be connected with friends. Today social media is playing a key role for social activities. Data reveals a significant relationship between social media consumption and awareness about Covid-19 and proposed preventive measures. Alongside, a significant relationship has also been unveiled between of social media usage and level of depression and loneliness among the targeted respondents of this study.

Key Words: Social Media, COVID-19, Loneliness, Depression

1. Introduction

In the present era of science, the importance of mass media has emerged dominant in every field. For a long time, the media has affected the mindset, personality, and feelings of great populations. During the international crisis, the media's primary character is to make sure that precise information is shared efficiently and the masses are kept updated. The function of Pakistani media regarding the COVID-19 has undergone through the deceptive process. The broadcasts are often devoid of medical experts involving politicians and journalists to talk on COVID-19 forums. They usually exploit fragile situations to triumph media debates, looking for higher ratings, and acquire political influence. Their point of view and debates over the present predicament seem to be disconcerted and abstain from any tone of positivity. Another serious aspect is television programs generally use flammable terms and words, exploiting fear to increase the trouble. News channels discuss much about deaths and anguish than hopefulness, thus talking about stress and torment among the people (Garfin, Silver, & Holman, 2020). The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic developed a global public health crisis. People faced many problems and difficulties to resume their normal life functions like before, as the COVID-19 fears, uncertainty, and stress were too much manage virtually. The COVID-19 health crisis also affected marital life among couples.

1.1. Role of Social Media During COVID-19

People use social media to get updates about the latest situation and be connected with friends. Today social media is playing a key role and it is used to communicate the messages transmitted using these technologies. Social media is used for social activities such as forming different groups according to their preferences and education levels. Social media is creating awareness among people about any issue and its role has been increasing with passage of time (Zhuravskaya, Petrova, & Enikolopov, 2020).

Social media (SM) applications have played a critical role for the rapid dissemination of information during the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited insight is provided into the main reliable SM source for information and awareness about the pandemic. Social media has provided a platform of updated information for the people who seek health-related information about the COVID-19 pandemic. People have faced significant pressure and health threat caused by the corona-virus pandemic, which has increased social media use, as people want to seek accurate health-related information and stay connected with peers, friends, and family. Through social media applications, public communication and interaction go beyond personal messages delivery to seeking correct information and the full scope of the COVID-19 pandemic to develop a real sense of virus prevention. The emergence of the COVID-19 outbreak has changed life patterns in response to preventive measures. The ongoing global health crisis has developed a strong sense of coronavirus contagious disease prevention. It might promote health behavior changes, such as maintaining social distancing, using sanitizer, wearing masks, and washing hands. The health behavior theories explain the health behavior model, which describes why individuals fail to adopt preventive measures or screening tests for the early detection of infectious disease. The health behavior model helps understand the useful strategies to improve people's health behavior, like adherence to medical treatment against the disease. The HBM explains that people start to be involved in health-related behavior when people perceive susceptibility to a contagious disease, which has severe health consequences. Its benefits to health-related human behavior outweigh the barriers. The world needs to restore, and the entire country's blockade is no longer a concrete solution because the economy must return to normality as soon as possible. The application of social media technology plays a vital role in responding to the most critical global health crisis.

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Social media provides up-to-date and reliable information to the public.

Today social media is playing a key role and it is used to communicate the messages transmitted using these technologies. In this digital era, social media may be valuable tools in the disease surveillance toolkit used for improving public health professionals' ability to detect disease outbreaks faster than traditional methods and to enhance outbreak response. Social media creates a highly interactive podium through which a person performed different activities such as sharing, creating, discussing, liking and posting comments (Khan & Shahbaz, 2015). It plays a supporting role to facilitate people and politicians (Shabir et al., 2014).

Facebook is a major social media site that was introduced by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. There are more than 350 million users can easily log in to their account by using this application. Mobile gadget and it is a unique characteristic of only Facebook. Twitter is known as a micro blogging site that was introduced by Jack Dorsey in 2006.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The outbreak of the corona virus disease COVID-19 has created a global health crisis that has had a deep impact on the way perceive the world and our everyday lives. Not only the rate of contagion and patterns of transmission threatens our sense of agency, but the safety measures put in place to contain the spread of the virus also require social distancing. Within this context the role of social media in our lives is very important. Mass media including social media is a strong medium to create awareness among people. People use social media to get updates about the latest situation and be connected with friends. Social media is used for social activities such as forming different groups according to their preferences and education levels. The problem of the study may be manifested in the following questions: what relationship between media usage depression and loneliness in Pakistani people.

With the help of previous literature, it will be trying to find the answer to these questions from the Pakistani perspective; and it will provide a guideline for further research.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

- To measure the frequency of social media consumption by people during COVID-19 pandemic.
- To investigate relationship between consumption of social media and psychological effects (depression and loneliness) among Pakistani People.

1.4. Rationale of the Study

In the present era of science, the importance of mass media has emerged dominant in every field. For a long time, the media has affected the mindset, personality, and feelings of great populations. During the international crisis, the media's primary character is to make sure that precise information is shared efficiently and the masses are kept updated. By use of social media is a powerful force shaping how we experience the world and ourselves. How can different forms of social media for mass communication promote adaptive responses to foster positive health attitudes and adherence to preventive measures against COVID-19.

The effects of social media on people's mental health cannot be compared with European countries due to the differences in demographic characteristics. In order to make effective communication during pandemic it is necessary to investigate the psychological effect of the social media consumption amongst the population. Therefore, this study has been designed to investigate the relationship between social media consumption depression and loneliness amongst the population.

1.5. Research Questions

RQ-1 To what extent do adults use social media during the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ-2 What is the level of relationship between frequency of social media usage and information sought by the targeted population?

RQ-3 What is the level of relationship between using mass media and psychological effects (loneliness and depression) on audience?

1.6. Hypotheses

There is significant relationship between information obtained from social media and psychological effects (loneliness and depression)

1.7. Significance of the Research

Knowledge, information, and entertainment through social media produce effects on society. Social media provides an opportunity to increase their contacts and exchange of views and ideas (Khan & Shahbaz, 2015). It will be a significant addition to the unexplored area and focus on investigating the relationship between social media usage loneliness and depression. The significance of the research is the change in opinion is likely to be what comes to mind when people use social media. The main significance of the research is to examine how such technological distractions are playing a role to create psychological effects.

2. Literature Review

People use social media to get updates about the latest situation and be connected with friends. Today social media is playing a key role. Social media is used for social activities. Social media is creating awareness among people about any issue and its

role has been increasing (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020). Kugelman, (2012) explored that social media is a powerful tool and it was used in five different ways; stories breaking, mobilizing people, promoting, and coordinating humanitarian, activist, and speedy communication. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of social media has also increased. There were Constant feeling of sorrow enhancing pain and grief about COVID-19 due to the different posts on social media. Fake news, misinformation and rumors were spreading in a short time through social media (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2021). According to the result that social media has become a strong messaging tool of information. Khan & Shahbaz (2015) examined the social media's role during the pandemic situation. Hamilton (2011) explored the usages of social media during the pandemic situation. It was examined the effects of social media on people, and it was found that the concept of communication has changed due to social media. Mass Media is an institution or institution that has a series of cultural and information production activities carried out by various types of communication and mass to be distributed to audiences in accordance with prevailing habits. The concept of media according to the results of research that has been carried out by experts is a communication between humans, which begins with the use of certain tools or media, and in its implementation, communication has not used voice or gesture movements (Schroeder, & Stier, 2019). For example, looking at the model or form of communication carried out in pre-civilization, at that time communication was carried out by humans using paintings on cave walls, through writing and through maps as a form of information exchange carried out (Wright, 2020). As quoted by Nunik Solichatun, Gerlach and Ely said that the media when understood in broad terms is human, material or events that build conditions that enable students to acquire knowledge, skills or attitudes.

People of different age groups were found psychologically affected during Covid in different ways. Covid changed all ways of life now they have to pass the life in isolation and loneliness because of lockdown. The findings of the research showed that the high penetration rate of social media messages created different effects like constant feelings of sorrow enhancing pain and grief about COVID-19 due to the different posts of social media (ERGÜL TOPÇU, YASAK, KALAFAT, & ALTINOĞLU DİKMEER, 2021). Furthermore, they explored the different impacts of social media during the pandemic situation. Mass media, in terms of its benefits, is a forum for channeling communication to the wider community or the masses. Any information that will be conveyed to a wide audience by using the medium in conveying it is called mass communication; meanwhile the medium is called mass media or mass media in English (Fatema & Lariscy, 2020). Mass media is an acronym for mass media communication. It is called mass media because there is a mass character that is attached to or owned by the media itself (Kleinnijenhuis, Van Hoof, & Van Atteveldt, 2019).

It has been explored that the behavioral factors affecting people utilizing social media. It was examined the changes in the behavior of the people due to using Facebook (Moghavvemi, Ainin Sulaiman Professor, Azliza Aziz, & Seuk Waind.). The result of the analysis explains that the themes had frequent exposure to media messages on Covid-19. The respondents conjointly rated high the media coverage of the pandemic. By implication, urban residents have frequent exposure to mass media messages on Covid how ever have median compliance with the preventive measures. Also, there's a major correlation between their exposure to media messages and compliance with Covid preventive measures (Ufuophu-Biri & Bebenimibo, 2021).

2.1. Cultivation Theory

Over THE time, repeated exposure to media cultivated the belief that the messages conveyed by the media apply to the real world. As people's perceptions are shaped by media exposure, their beliefs, values, and attitudes are shaped as well (George Gerbner, 1998). This theory was developed by Professor George Gerbner. This theory revolves around the core idea that "those people who use media are more likely to see the world through media's lens. George Gerbner's theory "Cultivation" generally dealt with the effects of media. Cultivation theory focuses on the effects of media.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Methodology

This is a quantitative survey research which has been designed to investigate the relationship between social media consumption depression and loneliness

The individuals of Lahore city of Pakistan who use social media was the population of this study. For this research, purposive sampling technique was used to select required respondents for data collection A sampling frame is specific, and it is a set of units from which a sample will be drawn. whereas, 500 respondents from four Lahore city was sample size for this study. A pre-defined criterion was formulated i.e. age, minimum literacy level, and user of different social media tools.

In order to collect relevant data structured questionnaire along with a demographic information sheet is adopted according to indigenous interpretation. Questionnaire contains five (05) point Likert type scales, scales contained at least five (05) items with response options of strongly disagree, disagree, Medium, agree and strongly agree which have been given values as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively.

Initially, researcher himself was supposed to conduct interviews of the respondents however, due to COVID-19 Pandemic situations and other relevant issues and unstable situations in the country researcher couldn't visit the targeted area frequently.

So, due to uncongenial circumstances and paucity of time researcher contacted some volunteers from targeted area for data collection, whereas, some volunteers were also trained to conduct interviews of respondents for data collection; answers were sought through structured questionnaire containing five point Likert scale. Descriptive and inferential analyses have been carried out by the latest version of a Computer Software. Pearson Product Moment correlation has been applied to measure relationship between variables.

4. Data Analysis and Results

Table1

<i>Scales</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>K</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>	
					<i>Potential</i>	<i>Actual</i>
Information obtained via Social Media	.834	05	12.28	5.3	5-25	5-25
Level of Depression	.796	07	19.69	5.7	7-35	7-35
Level of Loneliness	.843	07	21.74	7.3	7-35	7-35

Table 2: Age Group of the Respondents

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group of Respondents				
30-40 Years	--	--	53	10.6
41-50	--	--	181	36.2
51-60	--	--	131	26.2
61-70	--	--	135	27.0

Table 3: Education Level of the Respondents

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Education Level of Respondents				
Primary				
Middle	--	--	59	11.8
Matric	--	--	170	34.0
Intermediate	--	--	113	22.6
Graduation	--	--	133	26.6
Master and Above	--	--	19	3.8
	--	-	06	1.2

Table 4: Monthly Income of the Respondents

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Income Level of the Respondents				
25,000-50,000				
51,000-75,000	--	--	39	7.8
76,000-100,000	--	--	186	37.2
101,000- and Above	--	--	124	24.8
	--	--	151	30.2

Table 5: Frequency of Using Social Media by the Respondents

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Frequency of using Social Media				
1 Hrs				
2 Hrs	--	--	83	16.6

3 Hrs	--	--	102	20.4
4 Hrs	--	--	122	24.4
5 Hrs and above	--	--	102	20.4
	--	--	91	18.2

Table 6: Consumption of Social Media by the Respondents

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Using Social Media	12.28	5.3	--	--

Table 6 reveals the mean score of utilizing communication tools by the respondents during Covid-19 pandemic situation. Table shows that mean score of watching television is 12.285.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of Social Media

Statement Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
I found News about Covid-19 on Social Media (Facebook, Twiter, Whatsapp & Instagram).	2.24	1.268
I found information about mortality rate caused by Covid-19 on Social Media (Facebook, Twiter, Whatsapp & Instagram).	2.70	1.381
I found information about different preventive measures (frequent hand washing, mask wearing, stay at home and social distancing during etc) on Social Media (Facebook, Twiter, Whatsapp & Instagram).	2.67	1.364
I updated myself about the number of Covid infected rate in Pakistan on Social Media (Facebook, Twiter, Whatsapp & Instagram).	2.22	1.381
I did not go to my friends during the pandemic.	3.06	1.281
I stayed at home during pandemic.	3.07	1.313
I lacked companionship.	3.07	1.302
I did not have gossip with another person during pandemic.	3.21	1.307
I felt myself alone at home during pandemic.	3.15	1.269
I had a little interest or pleasure in doing things.	3.20	1.232
I felt tired or having little energy.	3.04	1.264
Troubled and stayed asleep, or sleeping too much.	3.14	1.303
Poor appetite or overeating.	2.75	1.289
I felt boring during pandemic.	2.49	1.356
My social relationships were superficial.	2.70	1.316
I Felt down and depressed.	2.37	1.314

Table 8: Pearson Correlation Moment between Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1- Frequency of Using Social Media	--	.385**	.230**	.340**
2- Information by Social Media	.385**	--	.325**	.703**
3- Level of Loneliness	.230**	.325**	--	.657**
4- Level of Depression	.340**	.703**	.657**	--

5. Discussion

The respondents were categorized and divided into four groups (30 to 40, 41 to 50, 51 to 60 and 61 Years old and above) The table shows (53=10.6%) respondents of total sample belong to the age group of 30 to 40 years' respondents, (181=36.2%) respondents are 41 to 50 years old, whereas, (131=26.2%) respondents belong to 51 to 60 years old and (135=27.0%) respondents are 61 years old OR above. There were categorized of the respondents according to education level (Primary, Middle, Metric, Intermediate, Graduation and Master degree) The table shows (59=11.8%) respondents of total sample belongs to the age group of respondents educated up to primary level, (170=34.0%) respondents have Middle level of education, (113=22.6%) respondents belongs to Matric pass respondents, (133=26.6%) respondents have education upto intermediate, (19=3.8%) respondents are graduated and only (06=1.2%) respondents possessed Master degree) OR above.

Empirical data narrates that respondents were also categorized and divided into four groups (25000 to 50000, 51000 to 75000, 76000 to 101000 to above) The table shows (39=7.8%) respondents of total sample belongs to the group of respondents having income of PKRs.25000-50000 per month, (186=37.2%) respondents belongs to the group of respondents having income of PKRs.500,00-75,000 per month, whereas, (124=24.8%) belongs to the group of respondents having income of PKRs.76,000-100,000 per monthly and (151=30.2%) respondents have their monthly income PKRs.100,000/- OR above.

Daily basis frequency of using social media including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram by the respondents, data reveals that 83=16.6% respondents used social media for one (01) hour daily during Covid-19 pandemic flows, 102=20.4% respondents consumed up to two (02) hours daily in using social media, 122=24.4% respondents used social media for up to three (03) hours per day, 102=20.4% respondents were engaged in using social media for up to four (04) hours daily and only 91=18.2 % respondents utilized up to five (05) hours per day in using social media. Similarly, according to Khan & Shahbaz (2015) the social media has become a strong messaging tool of information. Social media is creating awareness among people about any issue and its role has been increasing with passage of time (Zhuravskaya, Petrova, & Enikolopov, 2020).

Table-8 is showing the relationship between variables and depicts significant relationship at the level of $<.385^{**}$ between frequency of using Social Media and information obtained regarding Covid-19 by the respondents. Data also shows significant relationship at the level of $<.230^{**}$ between using Social Media and level of loneliness amongst respondents and significant relationship $<.340^{**}$ between using Social Media and level of depression among the respondents. The findings of the research are in lined with that the high penetration rate of social media messages created different effects like constant feelings of sorrow enhancing pain and grief about COVID-19 due to the different posts of social media (ERGÜL TOPÇU, YASAK, KALAFAT, & ALTINOĞLU DİKMEER, 2021); however, the findings are contradicting to those of Ufuophu-Biri & Bebenimibo, (2021) that there's a major correlation between their exposure to media messages and compliance with Covid preventive measures.

6. Conclusion

From the finding of the empirical data it has been depicted that people use social media to get updates about the latest situation and be connected with friends. Today social media is playing a key role for social activities. Data reveals a significant relationship between social media consumption and awareness about Covid-19 and proposed preventive measures. Alongside, a significant relationship has also been unveiled between of social media usage and level of depression and loneliness among the targeted respondents of this study.

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