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In the world today, there are billions of people using an interconnected network known as social media. It is a place where people find each other from all walks of life and areas of the planet and more recently a way for people to create and express themselves to the world. There has been the highest surge of usage amongst adolescents on these social platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat due to the connectivity it gives with the world outside. Social media is a network with unlimited communication amongst people of all ages and walks of life. Because of this it is also seen as a place in which individuals can bully and harass users since a person can create numerous fake accounts portraying them as someone that they are not. This could lead to false hope for someone who really cares and manipulation to do or think in ways that could harm adolescents' growth. In the pandemic era, as well, there was a new fear of missing out or "FOMO" that began to arise because of the amount of interaction and socialization that became digital within that time period. While these points are valid in some instances, there are also many more immense benefits like social media helping inform adolescents on mental health issues, giving hope to those in unfortunate situations, and giving a way for one's imagination and creativity to flourish infinitely.

Information is key in a time where misinformation is a very common and unavoidable obstacle. However, through social media and by following the correct and verified individuals one can find reliable information on mental health issues to combat and react to those

situations. A study done by O'Reilly et al. found a common agreement amongst adolescents, professional educators, and mental health practitioners that social media is often used by adolescents to seek information about mental health. O'Reilly et al. states "social media does offer a useful way of education and reaching adolescents to promote mental wellbeing (O'Reilly et al. 2018)." The findings of the study were as follows, "Three key themes were identified: (i) the role social media can play for mental health promotion; (ii) adolescents' use of social media and (iii) benefits and challenges of using social media to promote mental health. (O'Reilly et al. 2018)" These findings lead the researchers to concluding that " notwithstanding the negative implications of social media and the need for some caution, social media can have a role to play in mental health promotion. (O'Reilly et al. 2018)" Limitations of this study include the small sample of mental health practitioners and educational professionals that are also used in the study and the "adolescents' interchangeable understanding of positive mental health and illness (O'Reilly et al. 2018)." These do not, however, discredit the conclusion made as O'Reilly et al. states that all the participants are still "amenable to digital health promotion."

Apps like Instagram also have mental health resources for individuals who may have posted content that could result in self endangerment to help those in need. This has saved countless lives and has led to thousands of social media users to seek help for mental health issues instead of hiding from them. Adolescents can also find inspiration and ways to deal with mental health issues by looking into what other people they may follow may have gone through. This could give them inspiration to deal with their own situation and also potentially someone else that can hold them accountable and be able to relate with the obstacles the young individual may be facing. Social media could also serve as an outpost for mental health professionals as well to give ways for adolescents to know when to ask for help and if they may even need it at

all. Especially if that particular adolescent is nervous about confronting parents or guardians about the issues they may be experiencing.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced everyone into social isolation and led to one of the biggest life-altering events in world history. For adolescents, however, it took a chunk of their childhood that they would never be able to experience again. They lost social interaction and the opportunity to live a normal life. But most of all, they lost hope that they would be able to pick up where they left off and if their lives afterwards could ever be the same. This was expected to lead to a plethora of mental health issues especially for those who used an excessive amount of social media. The fear of missing out, also known as “FOMO”, was the main culprit in this accusation. FOMO was believed to be the main cause for the hopeless feelings in adolescents due to it creating feelings of the world slipping away. It can also create an anxiety that makes adolescents feel left out which would in turn lead to a much higher usage of social media to try and keep up with the world.

A study done by Cauberghe et al. suggests that there are other reasons why adolescents would use social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the study was to examine “if social media are beneficial for adolescents to cope with feelings of anxiety and loneliness during the quarantine (Cauberghe et al. 2021).” Cauberghe et al. gathered just over two thousand Belgian adolescents to test “how feelings of anxiety and loneliness contributed to their happiness level, and whether different social media coping strategies mediated these relations (Cauberghe et al. 2021).” It was found through the study that “participants reported to use social media for actively coping with the current situation...it was the most beneficial strategy to use social media to self-regulate mood during the lockdown (Cauberghe et al. 2021).” This led them to the conclusion that “social media can be used as a constructive coping strategy for adolescents to

deal with anxious feelings during the COVID-19 quarantine (Cauberghe et al. 2021).”

Limitations for this study, as noted in the study by Cauberghe et al., include a self-selection bias potentially being involved and it was based on scales that were developed before the pandemic. While these limitations are present, however, they were taken into consideration before conclusions were officially drawn.

In time, social media has become more than just a place to share pictures of vacations and to give updates on one’s life. For adolescents, it has started to become a known lifestyle. This lifestyle is known as content creation which sees many celebrities, athletes, and literally anyone else displaying their talents or creative abilities to make a living and share with the world. Social media plays a substantial role in this relatively new life. It serves as a platform for connecting with followers and supporters as well as being the main way to access the content produced by the content creator. In an adolescent’s life, however, this can be seen as a way to express themselves and give their ideas and imaginations a place to grow and be accepted.

Creativity expressed via social media and its effects on adolescents were examined in a study done by Pérez-Fuentes et al. in 2019. Their goal in their study was to focus “on the relationships between personality traits and self-expressive creativity in the digital domain in an adolescent population (Pérez-Fuentes et al. 2019).” They gathered around seven hundred fifty adolescents for their study from high schools in Spain and evaluated them using five broad personality factors. From their study, Pérez-Fuentes et al. found that having the platform and support to feel free when opening up can lead to a much higher level of self-esteem and emotional regulation when adolescents express themselves on social media. With this finding Pérez-Fuentes et al. came to the conclusion that “access to the Internet can be used positively to reinforce self-expressive creativity (Pérez-Fuentes et al. 2019).” The study then goes on further

to say an adolescent's expression over a social media platform has positive effects as it "promotes feelings of empowerment and self-affirmation...that reinforce self-esteem and emotional intelligence (Pérez-Fuentes et al. 2019)." Limitations described by Pérez-Fuentes et al. include the study only being done in a single country which can affect how applicable the study can be to the rest of the world. One other limitation is that this study used self reported data which can affect the reliability of the results determined. The strengths, however, like the target group being centralized for adolescents and the data being gathered using previously verified personality factors build upon the credibility of the study. Therefore, the conclusion's validity still stands.

Social media has been negatively stereotyped since its arrival in the technological world we live in today. Particularly on adolescents, however, it has been considered to be one of the main predictors for mental health issues and other problems associated with negative social interactions. One thing that most of the individuals blaming social media forget though is that mental health disorders and social issues have always been a thing but because of social media that have now gained more recognition. Going back to the study by O'Reilly et al., it is clear that social media is a platform where one can learn more about their mental health and what problems may arise as well as signs for knowing if one should reach out for assistance. Proceeding then to the study by Cauberghe et al., it is then seen that by using social media one can learn to cope with feelings of anxiety and loneliness, particularly in times when most hope seems lost.

To further expand on the rebuttal previously stated for this argument, there is still some validity to the opposing argument. However, in most cases, social media is not the culprit for the mental health issues one may be facing. A study that can back this is one done by Berryman et al. in 2018. The aim of the study was to "expand upon previous research by examining links

between social media use and mental health related outcomes (Berryman et al. 2018).” With this study, the researchers gathered around five hundred undergraduate students from a university and they used Likert scale model items in order to examine their participants during the study. From the study, Berryman et al. found that “how individuals use social media is more critical than time spent online in regards to mental health (Berryman et al. 2018).” Berryman et al. then came to the conclusion that “social media use is a poor indicator of mental health problems and concerns about social media precipitating a mental health crisis may be unwarranted (Berryman et al. 2018).” Limitations of this study would be the sample being particularly from American individuals as well as it being done on the upper age quartile of adolescents. It does, however, keep a focused group that applies to the predicament of most adolescents since many are actively in some type of school system during their adolescence which helps strengthen the validity of the study.

With the world growing further into the digital age there can be a much larger focus on the safety and upbringing of the world’s future generations. However, the effect of social media should not be an enemy that needs to be targeted in order for adolescents to prosper in their future. If people began to think of social media and its benefits to the adolescents in the world then it would not have as bad a reputation as many may think. Most mental issues that are said to be caused because of social media are because of underlying issues. Therefore, most accusations will instantaneously be rendered not true.

Social media is a place in which adolescents can thrive and learn more about their world and themselves. It allows for a place to gain information on their mental health and how to deal with what they may be facing in the world, it gives hope and joy in times when it may not seem possible, and it allows for one to access and create things that the world may have never seen.

With the right precautions by parents and guardians as well as stable mindsets when using the platforms, social media can be a place that changes an adolescent for the better. Some adolescents could even begin to change the course of history with the boundless opportunities that the platforms present to these bright and talented individuals.

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