

Use of Social Media for Social Cure in times of Covid-19

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ABSTRACT:

The Coronavirus continues to be a threat to the health of all the people and social distancing seems to be the key to further reduce the spread and keep ourselves safe. For a major part of 2020, the entire world has been locked inside their homes. During such uncertain times, people relied on various psychosocial factors to maintain their mental health and well-being; Social cure being one of them. Social cure is a term that represents the health benefits that one derives out of social connections. Humans are social animals and feel the need to maintain social connections and to be a part of a larger social group. With the pandemic, eliminating the possibility of physically meeting one another and bonding, social media presented itself as a saving grace. The use of social media significantly increased during the pandemic and the lockdown. Social media not only helped people connect with family and friends but also find a common ground to connect and socialize with people outside their circle. In order to continue the process of socializing, people came up with various activities that all could participate in and feel like a part of the bigger social circle. This gave rise to numerous social media trends across the world. This paper aims to study how people used social media to overcome the isolation and lack of social connect during the pandemic. It also aims to study the social media trends during the pandemic and what prompted people to indulge in them.

Keywords: Social Media, Trends, Social Cure, Covid-19.

INTRODUCTION:

The terms lockdown, pandemic and coronavirus have become synonymous with the year 2020. Another overused term during 2020 is 'Social Distancing', while this maybe true in terms of physical distancing, human beings have never required distancing from socializing or being a part of 'society'. A lot of people have experienced mental health issues during the lockdown. Human beings are social animals and require to feel like a part of a larger whole. People found that not being able to meet one another and engage in social interaction was causing them distress and a feeling of disconnect from the outside world.

Social Media or social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat etc extend the opportunity to engage in social conversation without having to meet one another physically. Social media users often feel that these platforms are a safe space for them to interact, be entertained and even distract themselves from the glaring realities of everyday life. Many have said to find content on social media inspiring. This is also known as a virtual social network.

Social media usage has definitely changed over the course of the pandemic across the world. People have substantially increased their time spent using these social media apps so as to keep themselves informed and entertained. Being behind closed doors without much human interaction for over 9 months can take a toll on one's mental health. A variety of research has linked social isolation to various physical and mental ailments ranging from depression to a weakened immune system and heart diseases. In order to overcome all of these ill effects, people have increased the time spent on consuming content that is put up on these social media apps. This has also helped a majority of users overcome the gloom and find inspiration in these testing times.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Viktoriya Trifonova understanding how the use of social media has changed during the pandemic and lockdown as opposed to pre-covid reveals that there have been dramatic changes in the way that social media is consumed. There was an initial spike recorded in the time spent on social media at about 43% when the lockdown had just begun and about 19% of those say that they will continue to spend more time on social media. This has led to re-consider the role of 'using social media more mindfully'. The uses of social media has become more diverse than before owing to the pandemic. This study also focuses on what kind of content was consumed the most during this period, ofcourse content from friends and family was top ranked; content from local community ranked a close second. This brings back the 'Social' in social media which was lost by unrealistic standards set for a lifestyle by social media otherwise.

Henri Tajfel's notable contribution to psychology has been the social identity theory. Social identity is a person's sense of what their role is as a part of a society. Tajfel (1979) proposed that people derived a great deal of pride and self-worth based on the groups that they identified with like their family, friend circle etc. These groups were said to give an individual a sense of belongingness and identity. Tajfel has also further spoken about social identity as a bifurcation of 'we' & 'them' which further helps one differentiate the social categories. The theory also mentions that this social categorization or 'stereotyping' is a part of a normal cognitive process.

The repercussions of the pandemic have made their way into the personal and professional lives of people. Research has also shown that becoming a part of social groups can help one build resilience and can help

one cope with major changes in life like losing one's job, moving to a new place and even as far as dealing with the loss of a loved one.

A research also goes to show that there was a significant increase in the mood in terms of joy, happiness and satisfaction was experienced by people who felt an enhanced social connection. In most cases it also has enhanced emotional understanding and empathy to oneself and others around. It could be considered as an important resource to protect and curate one's mental health especially during the current crisis of Covid-19. Social Media has helped people overcome the isolation and be a part of their desired social circles despite the physical distancing during the pandemic.

OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH:

1. To analyse how social media usage increased during the lockdown
2. To understand the psychological impact of using Social Media
3. To study how people indulged in social media to overcome the physical distance throughout the lockdown.
4. To learn of the different uses of Social Media in times of Covid-19
5. To understand emerging content and trends on Social Media during a Pandemic
6. To analyse the effect of social cure through social media.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is an exploratory research examining the relationship between Social Media and Social Cure. An overview of the different trends in Social media and how it may lead to Social Cure has been used as a reference point to analyse further the effects of one on the other. Primary data has been collected from 61 respondents using a self-completion online questionnaire. Secondary data has been collected from websites, research papers, and previous studies available online.

SAMPLING

A sample size of 63 respondents has been used for this study. Non-probability Convenience sampling method has been followed to gather primary data. The sampling area is Mumbai Suburbs and some parts of Thane City.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

People over the years have made it a point to use social media mindfully and have become more vary of the kind of information they share. However, the pandemic seems to have changed this user pattern. More and more people have gravitated towards using these social media platforms for various purposes from sharing content, staying connected with their friends and family to consuming information about Covid guidelines and making social media a source for gathering news. This research aims to study this sudden growth of social media users for extended periods of time and how it has become a crutch for individuals to overcome the lack of social connectivity during the lockdown. Not only has it helped individuals cope with difficult situations but also enhanced their mood by making them feel like a part of a larger society which has given rise to the term ‘Social Cure’. The research aims to understand and analyse the relationship between increased usage of social media and its impact on social cure.

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

1. Demographic Details:

Total no. of respondents – 63

Male : 23

Female : 40

2. Social Media usage Data

Usage	Details
Social media platforms used the most	Facebook: 57 Instagram: 59 Snapchat: 16 Pintrest: 20 Twitter: 25
Content generally consumed on these platforms?	Comedy: 45 Inspirational: 33 Educational: 37 Informative: 55 Entertaining: 52
Time spent on these platforms before lockdown?	Less than an hr: 11 1-2 hrs: 25 3-5 hrs: 25

A majority of 44 respondents thought social media is important to help stay in touch with friends and family.

4. Various trends on Social Media during the Pandemic:

<u>Trends</u>	<u>% of respondents</u>
Dalgona Coffee	31 (49.2%)
#SafeHandsChallenge	15 (23.8%)
Gesture Challenge	7 (11.1%)
Online Bingo	13 (20.6%)
Guess the Gibberish	21 (33.3%)
This or That	13 (20.6%)
Home Workout	19 (30.2%)
Who's more likely to	6 (9.5%)

5. Social Media as a Social Cure:

Did pandemic affect the way social media was used?	Yes: 39 No: 24
Social media helped in handling the pandemic better?	Yes: 30 No: 24 Maybe: 9
Will social media continue to have this effect after pandemic?	Yes: 41 No: 3 Maybe: 19

Interpretation: A majority of 39 (61.9%) said that the pandemic did affect the way social media was being used. A majority of 30 respondents (47.6%) said that social media did help them handle the pandemic and lockdown in a better manner. 41 (65.1%) of the respondents said that social media will continue to have this effect on people even after the pandemic.

Conclusions:

Social media is definitely becoming the new form of social cure for people. The pandemic has led people to use these social media platforms to share and receive information and also to entertain themselves. The pandemic has surely changed the way social media is used and this effect will last for a long time to come. Respondents also mentioned that one of the major reasons for sharing or consuming content was because most people in their circles were doing so and they wanted to feel included. Some of the respondents also mentioned that they enjoyed watching their friends and family indulge in social media trends and consumed content only to stay in touch with their social groups. A lot of respondents also used social media to learn new skills and sharpen their knowledge through social media. The rising content creators and relatable content shared is making it easier for people to feel like a part of a larger social group leading to social cure.

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