

# **Social Media and Online Health Communities: Changes in psychological states and the fight against depression.**

## **Abstract:**

The importance of social media and online communities in people's life has risen significantly over the last decades. Social media platforms and communities are among the most used services on the internet with 3.9 billion of users worldwide. This paper will discuss on the facts that social media platforms and online communities are supporting and helping people with depressive disorders by providing a safe space to address and express their mental issues and also making them develop better lifestyle within the society. Online health and wellbeing communities foster a feeling of belonging by including a third space that is more open and less overwhelming for people, compared to conventional types of support stagnated with stigmas. In this way, online communities and social platforms has consequently helped in supporting people with depressive disorders and also encouraging them to seek proper treatments whilst breaking the social stigmas.

**Keyword:** #depression #socialstigma #socialmedia #community

## **Introduction**

On this digital age, social media platforms and online networking has become an intrinsic and fundamental part of people's everyday life all over the world. The use of the internet and online platforms have been vastly diversified and are being used in various aspects over the past decades since the emergence of the Web 2.0, along with its features that has made it more dynamic and enhanced the interactivity of its users, and as a result, social media sites and online communities have increasingly emerged (Akar et al., 2018). Social media platforms are one of the most used and leading services worldwide. As a matter of fact, statistics showed that there are over 3.9 billion active users on social media platforms globally which accounts for almost half of the total global population (Osborne-Gowey, 2014). The people engage with each other online has drastically

evolved since the emergence of social media platforms. It has given internet users the freedom to learn about what is going on in the world in real time, to communicate with one another and keep in touch with friends abroad, and to have instant access to an infinite amount of information. Social media has made the planet feel more approachable by allowing people to share common ground with others online. Moreover, social media sites and online communities have grown in popularity among internet users by enabling them to address different topics that are commonly covered in conventional media. This paper will be focused on how social media and communities online are helping and supporting people to cope with depressive disorders.

### **Social Media has given rise to the awareness of mental health issues.**

Depression is a widespread and somehow, a dangerous psychiatric condition that has a negative impact on how people may behave, think, talk, and act on a daily basis. It is also, thankfully, curable with proper help and support. As a matter of fact, depression also induces sadness and a lack of interest in previously loved practices and activities. This condition can also trigger a slew of mental and physical issues, as well as a reduction in one's ability to efficiently cope and manage at home and performance within the workplace. Onwards with a survey based among young people ranging from teenagers to young adults in the USA, its statistics, as a result, showed that almost 18% of them are diagnosed to be depressed. Moreover, with internet technologies being involved in almost every aspects of our daily lives, from entertainment to utilities for work, education and communication, individuals and most significantly the younger generation, are being more and more exposed and addicted to online media from younger ages (Hamutoglu et al., 2020). It is true that social media may have a contribution in the induction of depressive disorders among the young generation since they spend much less time in person interacting with their friends and doing it far more time online, mostly via social media. This may impact developmental milestones of the young generation, such as their personality and identity development and the formation of social and cultural norms (Lin et al., 2016). To controvert, the consortium between depression and online social media has set forward mixed sequels. Users of social media can experience less

depression as a result of increased social capital, the perceived social support, and overall life satisfaction (Lin et al., 2016).

Social Media can indeed be a great tool and an effective utility when being used properly. Since digital and online media research has become one major field of study in humanities, people; in particular, the young generation and parents; are now being more aware of their mental health and its conditions; and the factors which contributes to a good lifestyle aside with the comfort brought by technology and online media (Ellis & Tucker, 2020). Onwards with some recent studies which showed results that social media may be a potential contributing factor leading to depression in young people (Wang et al., 2020), amongst are the most prevalent factors that give rise to depression are the lifestyles and are the standards that people use to project online. Individuals who use online social media, with just a tap, has the possibility learn about the lives of other people, and this can contribute to the rise of social comparison among them. As a result, peoples' mental health can be knocked back with the social comparisons on social media platforms (Wang et al., 2020). With the apprehension of this issue, various campaigns and experts are now being part and are having their presence on social media platforms in order to raise awareness over the issues of depression and other mental conditions by pin pointing the key factors that affects the consciousness, beliefs and perceptions of the people consuming media on social media platforms. As a matter of fact, contents on social media platforms have been highly diversified over the past few years (Osborne-Gowey, 2014), and social media users are now being exposed to more diverse, deep, and positive contents to consume online.

### **Contents on Social Media Platforms as a change**

With the concerns over mental health worldwide, many popular people ranging from celebrities, models and also influencers who people use to follow or admire and often compared to on online social media platforms, are now creating contents which relates to the motivations, disciplines, and the path they have followed in order to achieve such lifestyles. Influential social media users have the power to disseminate important knowledge and viewpoints on diverse issues significantly the depression disorders linked

over the matter of social comparison (Vollenbroek et al., 2014). These types of contents have become very popular on social media platforms and it inspires people to adapt to changes and disciplines to work on themselves, which results to a positive impact on individuals lives, rather than just comparing themselves. Also, when the influential social media personalities express their emotions and concerns over mental health, people will relate and realise that in the end, they are no different and it's not the standards that matters at all. Moreover, with the rapid evolution in media technologies, internet users can now create content at ease (Osborne-Gowey, 2014). Various writers, therapists and campaigns now have their presence on social media and since user generated contents are getting more prominent, there are now various social media pages which explicitly targets people with mental health issues and depressive disorders. These type of social media pages comprises of positive quotes being posted on a regular basis, true life stories on the path of people's and their success and also tips on how to manage with diets, exercises, workplaces, relationships, and time management in order to improve the lifestyles of people, and also because good habits and mindsets plays and impactful role in having a healthy mental health (Walsh, 2011).

### **Online communities as first point of contact for help and support.**

Moreover, social media platforms, as well as online health and wellbeing communities, have now become a very popular platform and a third space for people to connect with other people around the globe, and exchange social and mental support. Communities can be formed in various ways on online media, and amongst the most popular communities' platforms, for examples, includes Facebook, Reddit, Quora and even hashtags on social media platforms which enables people to connect on diverse topics, which are within easy reach online and exposed to a wide range audience with no geographical barriers. Owing to the social stigma and oppression that are associated with mental health disorders, online mental health communities and forums can be a beneficial outlet for people who are suffering from such disorders (Park & Conway, 2017). Online communities provide people with a comfortable and welcoming online landscape in which they can express their frustrations and concerns while still receiving support and motivation from other members. In addition, social media and online communities has

enabled people to create multiple identities, and also, anonym profiles which they can use to express themselves to other people via a digital and online portal. Many people are lacking in-person interactions nowadays, and it is becoming harder and harder for many to trust and express their emotions along with the social stigmas being omni present about emotions and mental disorders. Consequently, people are being encouraged to express themselves and seek support via the online communities where they will not be judge by their surroundings. As analysed by Park and Conway (2017), the members being part in depression communities online tends to start using less negative but more positive words over time as interaction increases within the community, and since the members also share coping strategies which other people finds helpful.

Furthermore, depression is being well recognized as a major public health problem that can be handled reasonably successfully by taking antidepressants, but however, depressive disorders is still prone to reappear after its discontinuation, and several people prefer psychological treatment and therapies instead of taking antidepressants as it is proven to be more effective (Richards et al., 2016). According to a survey conducted on the behalf of the WHO (World Health Organization), about 60% of people globally are estimated to suffer from depression and are not receiving treatments (Wade, 2010). The barriers which are limiting people to receive treatment are the stigmas of the society around depression as being a disease and the lack of psychological services. However, it seems that the internet and social media platforms have a lot of potential for assisting and supporting depressed individuals, which may be beneficial to doctors and therapists as well (Wade, 2010). Social networking outlets are empowering people to be involved about discussing and sharing their psychological problems as people become more knowledgeable of their mental health and issues. Living during this digital age, the first point of contact for an individual to seek for information over any type of issue and support will be on the internet and social media platforms (Ellis & Tucker, 2020). Many physicians and therapists are utilizing social media platforms to advertise and making people aware of the services and coaching they provide to enable people to live a healthier lifestyle. Since there is an awareness of their presence to a broad number of audiences, this contributes to break the social stigma of people suffering from mental

health issues and the need of psychological treatments, thus encouraging people to make a step forward to seek support.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, social comparison on social media platforms is reviewed as being one major contributing factor to the root of depressive disorders which are associated with the use and consumption of media on online social media platforms. Since the emergence of social media platforms till now, people are now more used to, aware and tolerant of the media they consume on online platforms. As previously stated, social media platforms and online communities provides a substantial medium; a “third space”; for people to feel they belong within these community networks and making them realise that they are not alone, resulting in a decrease in the depression levels of people. The way experts and influential personalities are addressing mental health over social media is gradually breaking the stigma of mental issues among people with depressive disorders within society. People are now more knowledgeable about these issues and are being encouraged to address with experts for treatment, thanks to social media platforms and also online communities supporting each other.

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