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How social media use contributes to psychiatric disorders

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Abstract

In recent years, social media has become an inseparable part of human life. While it serves as a medium of connection and creativity, its excessive and maladaptive use is increasingly being linked to psychiatric morbidity. Evidence now shows associations between prolonged social media exposure and depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive features, eating disorders, attention deficits, and even psychosis. This article explores the mechanisms through which social media contributes to psychiatric disorders, identifies vulnerable groups, and highlights the importance of timely recognition and intervention.

Keywords: Social media, psychiatric disorders, depression, anxiety, digital addiction, homoeopathy

Introduction

The digital revolution has reshaped the way people interact, learn, and perceive the world. For adolescents and young adults, social media platforms are no longer optional but rather integral to identity formation and peer validation. However, the compulsive pull of notifications, endless scrolling, and algorithm-driven content has a darker underside. Psychiatric clinics are increasingly encountering individuals whose symptoms—be it low mood, anxiety, disturbed sleep, or compulsions—are aggravated or precipitated by excessive social media use. The phenomenon has been termed “problematic social media use,” though it lacks a formal diagnostic category. For the homoeopathic physician, understanding these links is crucial to approaching cases holistically.

Mechanisms Connecting Social Media to Psychiatric Disorders

1. Depression and Suicidality

Negative social comparisons are a central feature. Exposure to curated lives and filtered perfection fosters inadequacy and hopelessness. Cyberbullying further contributes to depressive states and suicidal ideation, especially among adolescents.

2. Anxiety Disorders

The fear of missing out (FOMO), constant notifications, and information overload create a baseline of anticipatory anxiety. Many patients describe heightened worry, restlessness, and inability to disengage. Social anxiety also worsens when self-worth becomes dependent on online validation.

3. Obsessive-Compulsive Features

Compulsive checking of feeds or repeated uploading mirrors ritualistic behavior. Online reassurance-seeking overlaps with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Patients often report distress if unable to check their devices.

4. Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Symptoms

Short-form, rapidly changing content conditions the brain for novelty-seeking. Many heavy users develop distractibility, poor sustained attention, and impulsivity, resembling ADHD-like symptoms.

5. Eating Disorders and Body Image Disturbances

Image-heavy platforms amplify unrealistic beauty standards. Young women, in particular,

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may experience body dissatisfaction, restrictive eating, or binge-purge behaviors following exposure to “thinspiration” or fitness culture content.

6. Psychosis and Mania

Though rare, there are reports of paranoia, conspiracy beliefs, and sleep-deprivation-induced manic episodes triggered by prolonged nocturnal scrolling. For vulnerable individuals, social media acts as a stressor precipitating psychotic relapses.

Vulnerable Populations

- Adolescents navigating identity crises
- Young adults under academic and career stress
- Women exposed to beauty and body ideals
- Individuals with pre-existing psychiatric vulnerabilities

Clinical Implications for Homoeopathic Practice

Homoeopathy approaches disease as a dynamic imbalance of mind and body. When assessing a patient, taking a digital history is becoming as important as diet and lifestyle. In many cases, the exciting cause of symptoms may be prolonged exposure to social media.

- **Case-taking tip:** Ask about daily screen time, emotional responses to social media, and sleep routine.
- **Differentiation:** Clarify whether social media is the cause or the consequence of psychiatric distress.
- **Psychoeducation:** Patients benefit when they understand that their minds are responding naturally to manipulated digital environments, and they are not “weak.”
- **Remedy selection:** Remedies such as *Argentum nitricum* (anticipatory anxiety), *Ignatia* (emotional reactivity), *Natrum muriaticum* (social withdrawal), and *Hyoscyamus* (suspicion, jealousy) may be considered based on the totality.

Preventive and Therapeutic Strategies

- **Digital hygiene:** Encouraging screen-free zones, scheduled breaks, and mindfulness practices.
- **Family involvement:** Parents and partners must support healthier online habits.
- **Therapeutic integration:** Alongside homoeopathy, CBT, mindfulness, and lifestyle modifications show benefit.
- **Policy measures:** Adolescent screen-time limits, algorithm transparency, and public awareness campaigns are urgently needed.

Conclusion

Social media is a double-edged sword. While it fosters connection, excessive content consumption is strongly associated with psychiatric disorders ranging from depression to psychosis. For the homoeopathic physician, awareness of these patterns is vital in case analysis and remedy selection. By addressing both the inner susceptibility and the external exciting cause, homoeopathy can play a significant role in restoring balance.

Conflict of Interest

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