Fallacies in the Age of Social Media
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Abstract: Social media is known to be one of the finest achievements of the 21st century. However, it is no surprise that there are two sides to every coin. While there are a lot of advantages of social media in our day-to-day life, it is difficult to ignore its negative consequences. As the interactions between people have increased, so have the standards and expectations of people and undoubtedly, so has the mental distress that people constantly face. Multiple researches conducted on the negative impacts of social media indicate towards the downside of social media, especially its negative footprint on people’s identities, social life, mental health, and emotional well-being. Although there are various modalities that have been used to identify and solve the problems that people experience with social media, there are other modalities of counseling that have the potential to be effective and helpful but have not been explored in this regard. One such modality is Logic-Based Therapy. Logic-Based Therapy and Consultation is a philosophy-based practice that aims to help identify the different emotional and behavioral ways in which people upset themselves by their own faulty thinking. LBT identifies a number of fallacies or incorrect reasonings that people use very frequently in their lives and also suggests ways in which individuals can learn to cope with these fallacies. A lot of the fallacies identified by LBT can be seen in practice through social media. This paper aims at providing an insight into the reality of social media and online presence while highlighting the most common fallacies that people commit in emotional and behavioral reasoning as identified by LBT. The paper will also explore how and why people often commit these fallacies and suggest some antidotes to combat these fallacies.

Keywords: Logic Based Therapy, Social Media, mental health, fallacies, antidotes.

Introduction

In the modern world, media is considered to be the 4th pillar of democracy. As a whole, media constitutes several means or channels of communication, information, and entertainment that contribute to the efficient functioning of our day-to-day life. Broadcast media and print media like television, radio, and newspapers have always been popular channels of media. However, recent years have witnessed the rise of a new type of media, known as Digital Media. Digital Media comprises a vast array of technologies like images, videos, web pages, websites, digital audio, documents, and electronic books. The aim of digital media was to increase convenience and communication through the means of electronic devices. As and when the time progressed, there were considerable advancements in these technologies as well. Some prime examples are how computers became portable laptops, the camera and picture quality improved drastically, storage devices upgraded to cloud storage, telephones became cell phones which then further
advanced to become smartphones, the invention of the internet, and many more. However, one of the most significant advances is Social Media- which facilitates communication and interaction through the building of virtual networks and communities. Examples of popular social media networks include apps like Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Meta, and TikTok.

The growth of Social Media has made the world a “global village” as it led to increased interconnectedness across the world. These platforms became a mode of communication among people and also became a way in which people could showcase and display their lives to the world. As different cultures and communities started interacting, a lot of new changes were made. Communication with our loved ones became easy and it became one of the top sources for knowledge, interests and entertainment.

While there were a lot of positives that came out of the development of social media, there were also a lot of negatives. As people were now able to communicate with people from different cultural and economic backgrounds, there was a sudden shift in the way people viewed their lives and themselves. A lot of comparisons were made between the real and reel lives of people and this resulted in lower levels of satisfaction and happiness among people. The world became a place of impossible expectations and unfulfilled desires. Some of the most noticeable negative effects of social media are increased levels of social anxiety and depression, cyberbullying, identity crisis, emotional distress, poor memory, lack of concentration, insomnia, suicidal ideation.

**Why another research on social media and mental health?**

As social media is ever developing, there is a need for frequent research in order to ensure that the available resources and information are up-to-date. Another advantage that these constant researches would provide is the facilitation of information necessary for developing different strategies and behavioral plans to combat the issues arising due to the use of social media which would be effective in helping people regulate their presence on the internet.

In the past couple of years, a lot of the researches and studies have highlighted these negative impacts and there has been increased awareness about mental health concerns which has made it easier to acknowledge and identify our shortcomings and unhealthy thought patterns. There has also been a drastic improvement in people’s abilities to accept new things. All of these factors have contributed to making people realize the need for help in order to embrace their shortcomings, learn from them and improve. Despite this progress however, the mental health movement is still largely stigmatized and people who are vocal about their needs for improvement are often ostracized. Another considerable downside is that despite increased awareness about these issues, there is no particular awareness on how to approach these issues and seek help that is best suited to our needs. Some modalities of intervention like Psychotherapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy are quite established and frequently used in practice. However, there are also a few modalities that are quite new and have not yet been fully explored but are equally as effective in helping people through their unhealthy patterns of thought. One such modality is Logic-Based Therapy and Consultation.
What is logic-based therapy and how is it relevant?

LBT is a method of philosophical counseling that states that people upset themselves with their own faulty thinking. The prime focus of LBT is examining the incorrect reasoning responsible for our negative and self-destructive thoughts also known as fallacies. LBT identifies eight fallacies of emotional and behavioral reasoning and three fallacies of reporting. Alongside, LBT also suggests a few antidotes to overcome these faulty thinking patterns.

Several fallacies identified by LBT seem to be in full effect while examining the downsides of social media. With the increase in usage of the available technology, more fallacies are being committed but such behavior has been normalized to an extent that one hardly realizes that there is a fault in our line of reasoning. As irrational thoughts and beliefs are one of the root causes of poor mental health, being aware about the existence of such thoughts and how to identify them is crucial. Therefore, these fallacies, if not refuted or amended in time, could lead to serious repercussions and deterioration of a person's mental health and may further give rise to problems like depression, stress and anxiety.

Even though the use of social media is not completely avoidable in the current era, one can definitely take steps to filter their thoughts and interpretations by ensuring that rational reasoning is being followed.

Research methodology

To gather data for the research, short online interviews of 25 participants were conducted. The participants were Indian and ranged between the ages of 16 to 28 years old. The participants were first asked six basic questions in order to understand what their perspective and stance was with regards to social media.

The first question focused on asking participants about their average time spent on social media, and most of them reported spending over 5 hours a day. The next question focused on asking them whether social media has more advantages or disadvantages. The general consensus was that even though they really enjoyed spending time on social media, it could not be ignored or denied that there were certainly more disadvantages than the advantages. Most participants responded yes, when they were asked the third question, if social media affects a person's health negatively. Some participants spoke about the fear of missing out or being isolated or being seen as boring when asked about some of the challenges that they faced while being on social media. Next, they were asked if they ever sought any form of intervention for the issues that they face. When they replied in a negative, a follow up question was presented asking them the reason for the same and they responded that either there were no means to afford them, there was no knowledge or awareness about different methods and which suited them best, or they simply could not approach for help without being scared of their parents, partners or friend's reactions. They were then asked if they thought irrational thoughts or the way we interpret certain situations have an impact on our mental health, and most of them replied in a positive, saying that they often misinterpret the situation while overthinking.
After they were done answering the six questions, they were given a few situational examples and asked if they could relate to it or if they have seen it in effect on social media. For example, one of the situations was “while hearing somebody else's story online of losing their loved ones, I worry a lot about what would happen to me if I lost someone who I loved and what I would do then.” This particular example was one of dutiful worrying. After a few similar examples, I was able to determine the fallacies that were most commonly indulged in. After analyzing the responses of all the 25 interviewees, we could establish the three most commonly seen fallacies.

After concluding the interviews, the participants were also given a small brief about the purpose of the interview along with the meaning of some of the fallacies they committed. Post the interview, a lot of the participants also showed interest in learning about how they could improve from these faults.

**The Fallacies**

**Demanding Perfection:** The fallacy of demanding perfection is committed when a person has a perceived need for the absolute and faces psychological distress when excellence is not achieved. It is recognized as one of the most common fallacies committed by people in the course of their lives. Social media has brought about a newfound obsession with perfectionism. There is a constant urge to be “perfect” in every aspect. A good example of this would be the latest beauty trends wherein people use certain artificial filters to cover up things that they consider to be their flaws. Another major example identified could be the constant comparison people make of their real accomplishments to another’s documented accomplishments leading to the feeling of inadequacy. These documented accomplishments become the standard of expectation that people have of what they wish to achieve and anything less than that is considered to be terrible and disastrous. Since perfectionism is abstract and subjective, it is no surprise that such a type of thinking can lead to a plethora of problems like depression, OCD, lowered self-esteem, restlessness, uneasiness, discomfort with their looks or performance, anxiety, anti-social behavior among many others.

**Awfulizing:** Awfulizing is the tendency of people to think of an event in a more negative light than what it actually is. Awfulizing usually occurs when the event that has taken place is undesirable or disappointing. People who engage in awfulizing think that something undesirable that has happened to them, is the worst thing that could ever happen. Which then leads them into a downward spiral of thoughts and emotions. With the extensive exposure that social media has facilitated, comparison has also increased and so has people’s tendency to awfulize. People constantly compare themselves and their reality to the reality that others depict. For example, a lot of the students have voiced their concerns on social media with regards to the pandemic and quarantine. According to them, there is nothing worse that could possibly happen to them than spending the best years of their lives at home. However, they fail to consider the possibilities of a worse scenario, like one in which they themselves or their loved ones lose their lives. Another example could be when people compare their living conditions and financial positions to people who are economically more privileged than them and then feel discouraged about their lives. They may think that there is nothing worse than not being able to afford the finest luxuries and comfort in life but may fail to consider worse possibilities like not having enough money to afford basic necessities.
like food and shelter. This type of thinking contributes to depression, anxiety, dissatisfaction in life, self-pity, hopelessness, pessimism, worthlessness and, in some cases, learned helplessness.

**Jumping on the Bandwagon:** Jumping on the bandwagon is simply following and conforming to the opinions and practices of the majority. This phenomenon is also often called herd mentality. People usually indulge in these practices, even if they do not necessarily agree with them because they do not want to be alienated or looked down upon for their beliefs. There is a need for acceptance and approval by society. There are several situations in the sphere of social media in which jumping on the bandwagon is commonly practiced. A fine example of this is when there is a particular person or celebrity on social media who is faced with a lot of scrutiny and hate. If an individual actually likes the person who is hated, they are more likely to not reveal their likeness of the person and in some cases may even resort to badmouthing them or agreeing to the negative statements about them. Oftentimes in such cases, some people do not even know much about the person but have a negative opinion of them based on the negative opinions of others. Another common example of this is when people from the LGBTQIA+ community do not accept and embrace their sexuality because they don’t want to be identified as not normal and do not wish to be ostracized because of their preferences. A plausible reason for people following herd mentality could be the fact that the saying “majority is always right” is often imposed on us. Jumping on the bandwagon often leads to feelings of resentment (because one is unable to do what they want), pessimism, depression, hopelessness, and anxiety.

These are some of the most commonly committed fallacies. To some extent, all these fallacies go hand in hand and are collectively present in an individual’s reasoning, majorly contributing to restricting them from achieving their full potential.

**Uplifting philosophies for the fallacies**

Since the primary focus of Logic Based Therapy revolves around improving our thinking and reasoning abilities, adopting certain philosophies in our lives would definitely be beneficial to filter our thoughts. Let us look at a few examples of philosophies that could be used to combat some of the major problems in social media.

**Demanding Perfection:** One of the major problems is of course the use of artificial filters to cover our flaws and insecurities. One of the best suited solutions to this problem can be found in a quote by Augustine and Hume which says

"Stop scrutinizing your body, looking for defects, and degrading it according to subjective, cultural ideals. Instead, celebrate the beauty in the function and harmony of your natural endowment."

This philosophy suggests that we should not scrutinize our looks and our bodies or dehumanize ourselves just because there are certain norms that we are expected to follow. Perfectionism is an abstract and subjective concept so sticking to it as a mantra won’t do us any good. Instead, we should focus on embracing ourselves just the way we are and celebrate the fact that we have a body that can perform all its destined functions. The problem of comparing our real accomplishments to others’ documented accomplishments...
also finds a powerful solution in a quote by William James, "Drop the practically absurd demand for perfection and accept instead the possibility of improvement." While it is good to have high expectations, we shouldn't be disheartened if we don't achieve them. Instead, we should aim to be a bit better at a task to achieve satisfaction. Another antidote for this particular problem is the famous quote from Bhagavad Gita, "Your authority extends only to the action and not the fruits thereof." This is very similar to a quote by Spinoza and Epictetus that emphasizes that while we cannot control the outcome of our actions, we can control the effort that we put in. Most of the times people do a particular task in order to receive appreciation, achievement or recognition in return and when they do not receive it, they beat themselves over it. Applying this particular philosophy in our life could definitely help to combat this issue.

**Awfulizing:** The antidotes for comparing our living conditions to people who are more fortunate than us is a philosophy by Rabindranath Tagore which states that "By shedding tears when we missed the sun, we also missed the stars." It basically implies that when we're upset about something that we don't have, we also fail to realize the importance and be grateful for the things that we do have. Every situation has a beauty of its own and it is in our best interest to accept it the way it is. Another antidote to the same problem could be the philosophy by Epictetus, where he says "compare what seems awful to you to a much worse thing and content yourself with how much worse things could have truly been". This philosophy basically implies that since there is always something worse that could happen, it is best if we be grateful for the current situation that we are in as there are individuals for whom our situation is way more idealistic than their position, so we should try to make the best out of it. Next, we have the problem of missing the fun years of our lives due to the pandemic. For this we have two antidotes, the first one being by Rabindranath Tagore, where he says "clouds come in my life not to carry rain, but to add color to my sunset sky." This philosophy suggests that everything has a purpose. According to this philosophy, we could look at the pandemic as something very unfortunate, but we could also look at it as something very fortunate, because it gives us time from our daily hectic life to sit at home and relax and think about things that are important. The second antidote is "since the awfulness of something is not itself an unalterable fact, but instead, your own inference from the facts, stop inferring awfulness." This philosophy also suggests that our perception is the basis for our thoughts in any situation. We can look at the wasted years in the pandemic in a more positive way by seeing them as a time for self-development and finding our own identity as opposed to missing out on fun.

**Jumping on the Bandwagon:** For the antidote to the issue of conforming to hate culture directed towards people, the first antidote is by Swami Vivekananda- 'Bear no attention whatsoever to newspaper nonsense.' Newspapers are ideally meant to tell us about reality, but instead they force their perception of reality or their way of thinking down our throats. Similar is the case with people. Just how we don't believe everything portrayed by the media, we should also not believe every opinion enforced by the society, because only seldom does it have any truth to it. Another antidote that could be used is "Instead of looking to others for approval, we should think of ourselves as an independent, autonomous creator of virtues." This basically also implies that there is no need for us to conform to any norms and that we can simply create our own norms. There is no specific need for our moral compass to be defined by societal norms and emphasis should be on the fact that our actions remain
congruent to our own beliefs. The next issue is identity crisis and dissatisfaction in the LGBTQIA+ community. The first antidote for this is suggested by Santayana and Mill, where they advise people to "learn from history and not believe things just because they are official." This advice is in perfect congruence with the example of homosexuality in our society. Homosexuality is something that has existed for as long as humanity has, and there are several evidences for it in the ancient scriptures. The legality or current acceptability of something does not define whether a fact is valid or not.

**Limitations of the paper**

To gather data for this particular topic, alongside research, interviews were also used. There is a chance that the opinions of the people who gave interviews were influenced heavily by their cultural and social beliefs. The sample population for the interview were primarily based on convenience sampling, and were mostly from India so the nature of the answers could be determined by the societal expectations and differing backgrounds. Another drawback of convenience sampling is that the population was mostly from an urban background and they had much more knowledge about the importance of mental health in our lives so the people had ease in understanding the fact that social media is negatively related to our mental health and that there could be varied opinions about this had the scale of the study been wider. Out of all the people who were approached for the purpose of this study, very few of them knew about logic-based therapy. A lot of them were also from a non-philosophical background, they were not aware of the meaning of fallacies or the importance of rationality in our everyday lives. Another limitation is that all the philosophies suggested were subjected to my personal interpretation and understanding.

**Conclusion**

While inevitably there are negatives in social media, the extent to which the negatives affect us depend on our interpretation of these concepts. Adopting these philosophies in our life is certainly an effective way to improve our thought process for a healthier and mindful social media experience.

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**Reference**