

Forum: ECOSOC

Issue: The question of the effect of technological devices on mental health

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Introduction

In an era characterized by unprecedented technological advancements, the integration of digital devices into daily life has become synonymous with humans, fundamentally changing human interaction with the world. From the handheld convenience of smartphones to the immersive engagement offered by computers and other digital interfaces, technology has revolutionized nearly every aspect of modern existence. However, amidst this rapid transformation, concerns have emerged regarding the potential ramifications of excessive technological immersion on mental health.

The undeniable benefits of technological innovation in enhancing connectivity, productivity, and access to information are juxtaposed against a growing recognition of its impacts on mental well-being. This contrast has prompted a critical examination of the relationship between technological devices and mental health, raising questions about the profound impact of screen time, social media engagement, and the emergence of digital intervention on psychological welfare.

Central to this discussion is the escalating concern surrounding the duration and nature of screen time. The exploration of how this pervasive exposure affects sleep patterns, attention spans, and emotional stability is pivotal in understanding its potential implications for mental health. Moreover, the advent of social media platforms has redefined social interaction, enabling instantaneous connectivity and the sharing of experiences across the globe. Yet, the inherent dynamics of social media, such as social comparison, cyberbullying, and digital validation, have raised pertinent questions pertaining to their impact on psychological well-being, particularly among younger generations.

Simultaneously, the burgeoning field of technological interventions for mental health offers promise by providing accessible resources, such as mental health apps and online therapy platforms. However, these solutions pose intricate challenges regarding efficacy, ethical considerations, and the potential reshaping of traditional therapeutic landscapes.

Addressing the question of the effect of technological devices on mental health involves delving into the multifaceted relationship between technological devices and mental health, recognising the dual roles of technology as both a boon and a bane. Understanding this complex interplay is paramount in navigating the intricate landscape where technology and mental well-being intersect, fostering a nuanced dialogue between nations about the challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities.

Definition of Key Terms

Blue Light

Short-wavelength, high-energy visible light emitted by screens can disrupt sleep patterns and potentially impact mental and physical health.

Circadian Rhythms

The body's natural internal processes that regulate the sleep-wake cycle and other physiological functions over a 24-hour period.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

A type of psychotherapy that focuses on identifying and changing negative thought patterns and behaviors.

Cyberbullying

Harassment, intimidation, or aggression occurring through digital communication platforms.

Digital Detox

A period of time during which an individual refrains from using technological devices to reduce stress, promote mindfulness, or re-establish a healthier relationship with technology.

Digital Identity

The persona or representation an individual constructs online through their activities, interactions, and shared content on social media platforms.

Dopamine Regulation

The orchestrated control mechanism in the brain that governs the production, release, and reuptake of dopamine, a neurotransmitter crucial for modulating mood, motivation, and neural signaling.

Executive Functioning

Cognitive processes involving abilities such as problem solving, decision-making, and impulse control can be impacted by excessive screen time.

FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)

A feeling of anxiety or inadequacy is triggered by the belief that others are experiencing enjoyable events or opportunities while one is not present or involved.

Hypersomnia

A condition characterized by excessive daytime sleepiness or prolonged nighttime sleep, potentially influenced by disrupted sleep patterns from screen exposure.

Neuroplasticity

The brain's ability to reorganize and form new neural connections in response to experiences, learning, or changes in the environment.

Nomophobia (No-Mobile-Phone Phobia)

The fear or anxiety associated with being without a mobile device or unable to use it highlights dependency on technology.

Psychopathology

The study of mental disorders encompasses their development, symptoms, causes, and treatment.

Selective Self-Presentation

The intentional act of presenting specific aspects of oneself while concealing others is often observed in social media profiles.

Telepsychiatry

The delivery of psychiatric care remotely through telecommunications technology encompasses diagnosis, therapy, and consultation.

Background Information

Within this topic, there are three distinct elements that stand as pivotal domains influencing psychological well-being in the digital age. Screen time, social media engagement and technological interventions serve as the backbone for a

Highlighting the Relationship Between Screen time and Psychological Well-being

The pervasive integration of technological devices in daily life has sparked growing concerns about their impact on mental health. Among the various facets of this impact, the relationship between excessive screen time and psychological well-being stands out prominently. This relationship is multifaceted, involving intricate neurobiological mechanisms that intersect with prolonged exposure to screens emitting blue light.

Central to this discussion are circadian rhythms. Blue light, predominantly emitted by screens, exerts a disruptive influence on these rhythms. Exposure to blue light, especially in the evening or at night, inhibits the release of melatonin, a hormone that initiates and maintains sleep. The result is disrupted sleep patterns, including difficulty falling asleep and poor sleep quality, which can lead to hypersomnia. Long-term screen exposure significantly affects the brain's neuroplasticity, the ability to reorganize neural pathways and form new connections. Screen time interferes with the brain's natural processes of neuroplasticity during crucial developmental stages, such as childhood and adolescence. In addition to affecting cognitive functions, this interference may also affect emotional regulation due to altered synaptic connections and neural networks.

Dopamine regulation, a crucial neurochemical process associated with pleasure, reward, and motivation, becomes a focal point in understanding the impact of screen time on mental health. Excessive engagement with screens, particularly with content inducing intense stimulation or fostering addictive behaviors, can influence dopamine pathways. This influence on the reward system may lead

to altered mood states, diminished motivation, and compromised attention spans, contributing to disruptions in both sleep patterns and neuroplasticity. Furthermore, disturbances in circadian rhythms and sleep patterns extend their impact beyond hypersomnia. Research suggests that inadequate sleep or disrupted sleep architecture due to prolonged screen exposure correlates with attention deficits and cognitive impairments. The compromised consolidation of memories during sleep and impaired information processing further exacerbate cognitive functions, directly influencing neuroplasticity and the brain's adaptive capabilities.

The connection between blue light emitted by screens and key neurobiological mechanisms, circadian rhythms, melatonin secretion, dopamine control, and neuroplasticity, emphasises the complex relationship between screen usage and mental health. Understanding these pathways is critical in order to address the potential negative consequences of extended screen exposure on psychological well-being. Ongoing research efforts aim to fully understand this complexity, revealing information on the neurological impact of screen usage and its consequences for mental health.

The profound impact of excessive screen time on mental health extends beyond individual experiences and infiltrates broader social dynamics. The pervasiveness of screens in daily life not only affects individual well-being but also shapes societal norms and behaviors. As screen-based interactions become ubiquitous, societal norms around communication, leisure, and socialization undergo transformation. Social validation and self-worth are often intertwined with online interactions, contributing to a culture of comparison and constant connectivity.

This cultural shift can heighten social pressures, particularly among younger generations, influencing self-perception and expectations. The emphasis on curated digital personas and the pressure to maintain an online presence can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy or anxiety when one's reality doesn't align with the perceived perfection portrayed online. Moreover, the ubiquity of screens fosters an 'always-on' culture, blurring boundaries between work, leisure, and personal time. This continuous connectivity can lead to increased stress, burnout, and difficulty disengaging from digital devices. As a result, societal norms may inadvertently promote behaviors that prioritize screen time over crucial aspects of well-being, such as quality sleep, face-to-face interactions, and mindfulness.

Addressing the Growing Concern of the Impact of Social Media on Mental Health

The pervasive presence of social media platforms has fundamentally altered the landscape of human interaction, giving rise to a myriad of psychological phenomena that significantly influence mental well-being. Among these phenomena, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) emerges as a prominent concept. FOMO encapsulates the anxiety or sense of inadequacy arising from the belief that others are experiencing enjoyable events or opportunities while one is not present or involved. In the context of social media, where curated content often portrays an idealized version of life, this fear can intensify, leading to feelings of social exclusion and psychological distress.

Central to the experience of social media is the creation of digital identities—a persona or

representation individuals construct through their online activities and interactions. This digital identity encompasses not only the content one shares but also the content others share about them. The process of identity construction in virtual spaces can significantly influence self-esteem, social comparison tendencies, and emotional well-being as individuals navigate between their offline and online personas.

Selective self-presentation is a common phenomenon observed in social media behavior, wherein individuals intentionally portray specific aspects of themselves while concealing others. This deliberate curation contributes to the creation of an idealized online image, emphasizing desirable attributes or experiences while minimizing less favorable aspects. The presentation of this curated identity can lead to discrepancies between real-life experiences and the idealized online representations, fostering unrealistic social comparisons and contributing to feelings of inadequacy. Moreover, the prevalence of social media has brought forth the emergence of nomophobia. This fear underscores the dependency on technology and the constant need for connectivity, raising concerns about its potential impact on emotional well-being and social functioning.

The association between psychological concepts such as FOMO, digital identity building, selective self-presentation, and nomophobia and social media usage highlights the complex relationship between online interactions and mental health. FOMO can contribute to emotions of social alienation and inadequacy, which are exacerbated by the constant updates and social events promoted on social media. Digital identity creation, influenced by selective self-presentation, can lead to disparities between real-life experiences and controlled online representations, lowering self-esteem and encouraging inaccurate social comparisons. Furthermore, the fear of disconnection associated with nomophobia increases dependency on technology, potentially affecting emotional well-being and social behaviours.

In the broader social context, the prevalence of FOMO-driven behaviors can foster a culture of comparison and competition, where the pursuit of curated experiences showcased online becomes a societal norm. This perpetuates a cycle of comparison and aspiration, impacting collective mental well-being by emphasizing external validation and a constant quest for validation through online approval. The construction of digital identities and selective self-presentation contributes to a culture where online personas often prioritize the display of success, happiness, and idealized lifestyles. This can lead to an environment where authenticity takes a backseat, potentially influencing societal values and perceptions by normalizing the pursuit of unattainable ideals.

Promoting Technological Interventions for Mental Health Support

Technological interventions within the realm of mental health represent a transformative approach, leveraging advancements in technology to enhance accessibility, personalization, and effectiveness of mental health care. Among these interventions, telepsychiatry stands as a pioneering field that integrates telecommunications technology into psychiatric services. This approach enables

mental health professionals to deliver remote psychiatric services, including assessments, therapy sessions, and consultations, overcoming geographical barriers. Telepsychiatry's roots trace back to the late 20th century, initially aimed at extending mental health care to underserved regions lacking access to psychiatric services.

The evolution of telecommunications infrastructure and digital platforms has expanded the potential of telepsychiatry. Secure video conferencing and virtual platforms now facilitate assessments, therapy sessions, and medication prescriptions remotely. Telepsychiatry has proven effective in addressing barriers to mental health care, enhancing accessibility, and enabling timely interventions, particularly in emergencies or crises. However, challenges related to technological disparities, internet accessibility, and privacy concerns necessitate robust technological infrastructure and stringent data security measures.

In tandem with telepsychiatry, machine learning algorithms, a subset of artificial intelligence, have emerged as a significant technological tool in mental health interventions. These sophisticated algorithms analyze vast datasets encompassing patient information, behavioral patterns, treatment responses, and biological markers. Their capacity to learn from data, identify patterns, and make predictions without explicit programming allows them to predict mental health outcomes, identify risk factors, and personalize treatment plans. Machine learning aids in early identification of mental health conditions by recognizing subtle patterns in behavior or physiological data, potentially enabling timely interventions. However, concerns regarding data privacy, algorithmic bias, and ethical considerations necessitate careful integration of machine learning into mental health care. Ethical frameworks and regulatory oversight are imperative to address concerns related to sensitive mental health data, algorithmic transparency, and potential biases.

Parallel to these technological advancements, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), a well-established psychotherapeutic approach, has undergone a digital transformation. Digital interventions based on CBT principles leverage technology to offer accessible mental health support. These interventions, accessible through web platforms or mobile applications, provide self-guided modules, interactive exercises, and therapeutic guidance akin to traditional CBT techniques. The integration of CBT into digital interventions aims to enhance accessibility, offering tools for cognitive restructuring, mood tracking, relaxation exercises, and thought challenging. These platforms empower individuals to engage in CBT-based interventions at their convenience, fostering self-management of mental health concerns outside conventional therapy settings. However, debates persist regarding the effectiveness of self-guided digital interventions compared to therapist-led CBT sessions. Concerns encompass the need for personalized guidance, potential algorithmic oversimplification, and the depth of therapeutic engagement within digital settings.

Telepsychiatry, machine learning algorithms, and digital CBT therapies have evolved to reflect a paradigm shift in offering accessible, personalised, and timely mental health support. However, issues

like as technological infrastructure, ethical concerns, and the necessity for continuing review highlight the complexities of using technology into mental health care. A thorough grasp of the underpinnings and limitations of these interventions is critical for capitalising on technology's promise to advance mental health care paradigms.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved + Past Solutions

People's Republic of China (China)

China, with its extensive tech user base, has recognised the need to regulate and mitigate potential negative impacts of technology on mental health. The government has imposed regulations limiting screen time for minors and encouraged tech companies to develop features promoting healthy usage. However, given the high levels of censorship within the authoritarian government, the success of the solution must be taken with a pinch of salt.

United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

The emphasis on the right to mental health has gained significant traction without the Human Rights Council. In March 2016, a collective statement by 73 states highlighted the pivotal role of mental health in achieving the full realization of the right to health. It stressed the importance of embracing a human rights perspective to uphold the inherent dignity of all individuals and ensure unfettered access to human rights without prejudice.

Subsequently, in July 2016, Human Rights Resolution A/HRC/RES/32/18 (listed below) underscores the imperative of integrating a human rights framework into mental health and community services. This integration aimed to eradicate violence and discrimination while fostering inclusivity and active participation. The resolution mandated the High Commissioner to compile a report, presented in March 2017 (A/HRC/34/32), identifying prevalent challenges encountered by users of mental health services, individuals with mental health conditions, and those with psychosocial disabilities.

Further recognition surfaced in September 2017 through Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/36/13, acknowledging the significance of embedding mental health services within primary and general healthcare systems. This acknowledgment emphasized the need for effective mental health and community-based services that safeguard, advocate for, and honor the rights to personal liberty and security. It also stressed the importance of independent living and inclusive community engagement on an equal footing with others. The resolution called for a consultation led by the High Commissioner to outline strategies for advancing human rights within the sphere of mental health.

The progression continued with Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/43/13 in July 2020, urging States to propel a fundamental transformation in mental health practices. The resolution urged States to adopt, implement, update, strengthen, or monitor prevailing laws, policies, and practices. Additionally, it urged the High Commissioner to organize a consultation in 2021 to explore optimal methods for aligning national laws, policies, and practices concerning mental health with the principles

outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

United Kingdom (UK)

In the UK, organizations like the Royal Society for Public Health have launched campaigns to raise awareness of mental health impacts associated with technology use. Parliamentary inquiries have been conducted to investigate social media's influence on mental well-being, leading to discussions on regulations and policies. Collaboration between the government, healthcare providers, and tech companies aims to address mental health challenges while promoting responsible tech use.

United States of America (USA)

The United States, with its significant tech industry and influence, has been actively involved in understanding and addressing the impact of technology on mental health. The Surgeon General's office has highlighted mental health challenges related to technology, emphasizing the need for research, awareness, and responsible usage. Initiatives have been undertaken at federal and state levels to study screen time effects, promote digital well-being, and advocate for mental health awareness in schools and communities.

World Economic Forum (WEF)

The WEF focuses on the intersection of technology and mental health. It facilitates discussions among policy makers, industry leaders, and experts to explore policy approaches advocate for responsible tech use, and address mental health challenges arising from technology. The forum highlights the need for collaboration between governments, technology companies, and health organizations to promote mental well-being in the digital age.

Timeline of Events

Date (start - end)	Name	Description
August, 1st, 2003	Release of MySpace	This was the first wide-spread usage of social media. It allowed individuals to connect with friends and peaked in 2005 with 25 million users.
February, 4th, 2004	Release of Facebook	The launch of the world's most popular social media site occurred in 2004, first only to Harvard students and globally in 2006. Many other websites followed with the release of Facebook including LinkedIn, YouTube and Reddit, each geared towards a different audience.
March, 21st, 2006	Release of Twitter	Twitter was launched in 2006, to serve its purpose

		as a text message based tool used to update friends. While that has changed, Twitter still serves as an instrumental part of social media today.
June, 29th, 2007	Release of the first iPhone	The release of the first iPhone marked a pivotal moment in technological advancement, revolutionizing how individuals interacted with digital devices. While it enhanced connectivity and accessibility, the constant availability and engagement with smartphones introduced concerns about excessive screen time, digital addiction, and its potential impact on mental health, including issues like decreased attention spans, increased stress, and disrupted sleep patterns.
December, 2007	YouTube partnership model	The world's very first influencers came to being with the debut of YouTube's partnership model which allowed channels who met certain criteria, like viewership and subscribers to run ads to make revenue.
July, 8th, 2011	Release of 'Picaboo'	The release of 'Picaboo,' later rebranded as Snapchat, introduced a novel concept of ephemeral messaging, where content disappears after a short time. This platform's arrival brought new dynamics to social media by emphasizing temporary and spontaneous communication, reshaping digital interactions. While initially appealing for its privacy features, the platform also contributed to concerns about social pressures, anxiety due to temporary content, and increased reliance on social validation through images, potentially impacting mental health by influencing self-image and social comparison.
2016	The US Election and social media's fake news crisis	The 2016 U.S. election saw a significant intersection between social media and the proliferation of fake news. Various platforms were

		<p>inundated with misleading or false information, influencing public opinion and potentially impacting the election outcome. The dissemination of misinformation through social media raised concerns about its role in shaping political narratives and prompted discussions about the regulation and responsibility of these platforms in curbing fake news.</p>
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Relevant UN Treaties

- Right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, 30 July 2015 **(A/70/213)**
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, 28 March 2017 **(A/HRC/35/21)**
- Right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, 14 July 2017 **(A/72/137)**
- Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, 27 July 2018 **(A/73/216)**
- Right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, 12 April 2019 **(A/HRC/41/34)**
- Right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, 15 April 2020 **(A/HRC/44/48)**

Possible Solutions

While there are a variety of solutions that may be adopted by nations, here are some specific solutions to be explored by delegates. Each subtopic necessitates a unique set of approaches and initiatives aimed at promoting responsible technology usage, fostering supportive digital environments, and harnessing technological advancements to improve human mental health. By implementing these solutions, nations can work collectively towards mitigating the adverse effects while leveraging the potential of technology. Each paragraph has been divided into a separate solution to the issue.

Highlighting the Relationship Between Screen time and Psychological Well-being:

Public health campaigns and education programs would be viable solutions that can be explored by nations. This would take the form of UN initiatives aiming to improve awareness surrounding this issue, with a specific focus on screen time and its impact on mental well-being. Furthermore, the creation of educational material to target certain age groups might also allow younger individuals to be aware of

the appropriate balance.

Guidelines and regulations can take the form of both international regulations and governmental policies on the issue. The creation of international regulations will provide the opportunity for countries to agree on universal standards but might pose the issue of being too general, making it difficult for their impact to be significant. Policies to be considered in such regulations would include screen time limits for children around the globe. The implementation of government policies, on the other hand, would be more specific and would offer the opportunity for more tangible change. Policies could include promoting screen-free usage in public spaces and could force tech companies to modify their services to promote healthier usage of technology.

Technological innovation for wellbeing is another possible solution that will be effective in limiting the impacts of this issue. By creating research allocations, countries might be able to research technologies that help manage these issues, such as apps that track screen time and promote healthy usage. These research allocations could be funded by countries collectively, allowing for multi-state collaboration.

Addressing the Growing Concern of the Impact of Social Media on Mental Health:

Digital literacy and online safety programs are prime solutions that can be employed to mitigate the impacts of social media on mental health. Similar to the previous subtopic, this solution would comprise digital campaigns aiming to educate the public on the impacts of irresponsible social media usage and the importance of online safety. This concept of education could also be expanded to a UN taskforce. The creation of such a task force would focus its efforts on collaborating with social media companies to prevent the proliferation of harmful language found on social media through proactive policies and measures.

Promoting positive online engagement is another solution that member nations might apply. This would include positive community engagement, where the community focuses on discussions surrounding mental health and creating support structures. The other method is to increase awareness on social media platforms and encourage social media to encourage positive content rather than just likes and shares.

Research and policy development are perhaps the most crucial solutions when considering this subtopic. By focusing efforts on international research collaborations, member nations will be able to evaluate the impact of social media and correctly discern its impact. This will allow member nations to make educated decisions. This would look like creating regulatory frameworks that include the creation of guidelines on content moderation, advertisement policies, and privacy protections.

Promoting Technological Interventions for Mental Health Support:

Access to mental health services is the biggest barrier in today's world when considering the proliferation of mental health issues. Member nations should consider resource allocation, which would support the development and dissemination of mental health apps and online therapy platforms,

ensuring accessibility and affordability, especially in underserved regions. This could extend to telemedicine support. Telemedicine support refers to remote help, allowing mental health professionals to have a greater impact. Policy changes could advocate for greater telemedicine support.

Quality assurance and standards are another way to ensure that there are no compromises on mental health standards. The establishment of international standards or certifications will ensure that member nations are working towards similar standards. This way, there is no compromise on effectiveness, safety, or adherence to ethical guidelines. Furthermore, the training of mental health professionals is another method through which nations can work to similar standards. The development of tracking programs for mental health professionals will allow doctors to be aware of the latest advancements and their role in advancing mental care.

Ethical and privacy considerations are the final solutions to be considered by delegates. The creation of ethical guidelines could ensure user data privacy, informed consent, and transparency in how mental health data is collected, stored, and utilized. Just as crucial to the creation of these ethical standards is their implementation. Implementation by member nations should be of utmost priority to ensure the progress of access to mental health services.

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