

Nurturing Mental and Emotional Well-being in the Cyberspace

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In the modern era, cyberspace has an impact on every facet of human connection. The Internet, which offers forums for people to connect, engage, and work with one another in all facets of life is transforming the world in many ways. In a sense, it has developed into an additional setting for social contact between people, much like their homes, schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, etc. This also has a direct impact on mental and emotional well-being while blending their personal, social, and professional spaces with cyberspace. Hence, it is important to create awareness about the impact as well as the ways and means of maintaining a balance in cyberspace to ensure healthy mental and emotional well-being. Nurturing mental and emotional wellness through various strategies is essential. By fostering awareness, embracing digital wellness practices, and advocating for a more empathetic online culture, we can harness the potential of cyberspace while prioritizing mental and emotional health in this rapidly evolving digital age.

Keywords: cyberspace, well-being, mental health, digital detox, digital wellness

In the ever-evolving landscape of the digital age, the advent of cyberspace has brought remarkable advancements and unprecedented connectivity. Cyberspace, once a new frontier, has now become an integral part of the human experience. The incorporation of technology into everyday lives has transformed communication, information sharing, and access in a revolutionary manner. While opening doors of opportunity, it has also brought new factors that can influence mental wellness for both better and worse. As society becomes ever more digital and online spaces are increasingly where people spend their time, supporting healthy psychological functioning will require awareness of technology's complex relationship with the human condition.

The digital era has enabled worldwide interconnectivity, facilitating the formation of relationships and access to information across borders. Cyberspace and its plethora of social media platforms, instant messaging services, and online communities have redefined how people engage, share experiences, and view the world. However, amid constant connectivity, it is prudent to recognize the impacts of perpetual connectivity on mental wellness. The ceaseless influx of data, opportunities for social appraisal, and desire for omnipresence can all exacerbate stress, worry, and feelings of inadequacy. While technology has connected the global population and increased access to knowledge, non-stop digital engagement may negatively influence mental health and well-being. As such, in an increasingly networked age, it is important for both individuals and organizations to thoughtfully consider how perpetual connectivity affects psychological well-being and implement strategies to promote work-life balance, wellness, and mindfulness.

Importance of Mental and Emotional Wellness in the Cyberspace

The integration of technology into human lives has been found to significantly impact mental health both positively and negatively (Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Given the widespread digitization of information, questions emerge around how technology currently influences mental health, what issues have developed as a result, and what opportunities exist in the digital world to support mental well-being. Both physical and mental health are important indicators of overall health. Traditionally, discussions around health have focused primarily on physical health. But mental health deserves equal consideration as technology continues to change the way people live and interact on a daily basis.

Brock Chisholm, the World Health Organization's (WHO) first Director-General, stated that without mental health, true physical health cannot exist (Kolappa et al., 2013). Mental well-being is a combination of how one feels (emotions & life satisfaction) and how one connects with others through relationships, autonomy, purpose in life, and independence (Public Health Foundation, 2014). It is a condition that affects all people equally, regardless of age. Emotional well-being refers to how individuals manage their emotions and deal with life's challenges (Medical News Today, 2023). Maintaining physical and internal health while also effectively handling stress and cultivating healthy social bonds may all contribute to an individual's emotional well-being (Keyes, 2007). Everything is fragile in an age of hyperactivity and diligence, and this extreme leads to feelings of insecurity globally. Therefore, awareness of the factors affecting mental and emotional wellness in virtual spaces and the precautions needed to avoid any psychological disturbances is essential. Mental wellness in cyberspace is incredibly important due to the significant impact of digital environments on mental health.

Threats to Mental and Emotional Wellness in Cyberspace

Cyberspace can be a benefit to society when used appropriately and legally; however, it can also be detrimental. Numerous studies have consistently linked excessive social media usage to increased

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feelings of depression, anxiety, and loneliness (Herrera-Peco et al., 2023). The culture of social comparison amplified on social media platforms often leads individuals to feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and anxiety (Vogel et al., 2015). Endlessly scrolling through curated depictions of others' seemingly perfect lives can breed unrealistic expectations, fostering dissatisfaction with one's own life (Appel et al., 2016). The boundary between personal and digital experiences has become increasingly blurred, leading to issues such as digital burnout, information overload, and the fear of missing out (Przybylski et al., 2013). The prevalent issue of information overload is being made worse by the increasing usage of information and communication technology as well as continuous digitalization (Arnold et al., 2023).

Increased internet usage is linked to cyberbullying (Ali & Shahbuddin, 2022). This constant connectivity can disrupt mental equilibrium, impacting the ability to focus, relax, and maintain healthy relationships. The repercussions of such negative interactions extend beyond the virtual world, deeply affecting mental health and self-esteem. The curated content and culture of social comparison on social media negatively impact self-esteem and mental well-being (Vogel et al., 2015). Moreover, the prevalence of cyberbullying and online harassment poses significant threats to mental health, leading to stress and trauma (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). The anonymity of cyberspace has enabled cyberbullying and online harassment, causing severe emotional distress and trauma for victims. Ethical concerns regarding data privacy, confidentiality, and the quality of care in online mental health services are recurring themes (Torous & Morris, 2017). Explorations examine and found that online interactions influence psychological factors like self-identity and social relationships, potentially altering perceptions of reality (Veenhoven, 2009).

Cyberbullying and online harassment can significantly threaten mental health by increasing stress levels and potentially causing psychological trauma (Kowalski et al., 2014). The anonymity provided by online environments enables harmful behaviors, often resulting in severe emotional distress for victims. Repeated negative interactions or targeted attacks online may lead to anxiety, depression, or even suicidal ideation (Cassidy et al., 2013). Scholars have also raised ethical concerns regarding data privacy, confidentiality, and quality of care in digital mental health services. Potential privacy breaches, identity theft, or exposure of personal information are likely to induce stress and anxiety by weakening individuals' sense of safety and security online (Baruh et al., 2017). Virtual interactions additionally influence psychological factors such as self-identity and social relationships, potentially distorting perceptions of reality. Researchers explore how technology, particularly the internet, shapes human behavior by challenging traditional concepts of identity management, privacy, and interpersonal relationships. Studies have demonstrated the transformative impact of online spaces on the human psyche and societal dynamics (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011).

The overuse of technology and excessive engagement with social media and video games can enable addictive tendencies that negatively impact individuals' lives. Prolonged usage may disrupt sleep routines and real world relationships as some users experience withdrawal symptoms during offline periods (Demirci et al., 2015). Internet addiction appears to be an emerging public health issue associated with mental health challenges and problematic behavioral patterns, especially among youth and adolescents. Direct exposure to

disturbing or traumatic content such as violence, offensive speech, or explicit material online has potential psychological risks and may result in symptoms associated with trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (Newhagen, 1998). Curiously, while digital connectivity can maintain connections to others, dedicating unhealthy amounts of time to online activities alone may enable social isolation and feelings of loneliness. This may occur particularly when virtual relationships lack authenticity and substance to support users' well-being and real world social functioning (Primack et al., 2017). Overall usage should be monitored to ensure a balanced and healthy approach to technology.

The rapid evolution of technology and societal conditions presents ongoing challenges to digital security. Cyber criminals are relentless in their efforts to develop new techniques and capabilities aimed at exploiting emerging opportunities for virtual fraud and deception. The abrupt rise of the COVID-19 epidemic has brought new norms, mostly centred on the use of social media, upsetting the attitude of Internet users, particularly youngsters, and leading to an upsurge in cyberbullying. Today, the COVID-19 epidemic has resulted in new social behaviours as a result of a significant change in lifestyle, and the growth in social media use is anticipated to play an important part in increasing the incidence of cyberbullying. Technology and social media reliance may lead to an individual's success or failure, depending on who uses it and how it is used (Kee et al., 2022). Thus COVID-19 pandemic dramatically exacerbated the prevalence of phishing incidents around the world. Key contributing factors included the lack of security awareness training for employees suddenly working remotely, public confusion and anxiety surrounding lockdowns and health issues, as well as increased online commerce and digital payments removed from in-person oversight (Dehghantanha, 2020). As technology and social conditions transform at an accelerated pace, malicious actors are adept at capitalizing on human vulnerabilities during periods of uncertainty. Safeguarding consumers necessitates continuous vigilance against emerging cyber threats through education and strengthened virtual protections.

Cyberspace and Mental Wellness of Students

The digital era has fundamentally transformed the way people consume information and media. Where print was once dominant, screens have become ubiquitous across personal and professional contexts. Computers, smartphones, televisions, and video game consoles now represent the primary conduits through which individuals engage with news, entertainment, communication, and an array of online services. However, public health considerations regarding the impacts of prolonged, uninterrupted screen time have struggled to keep pace with these technological changes. On average, students now spend significantly more time engaged with digital displays due to factors such as the widespread adoption of smartphones, more affordable and accessible internet services, and the abundance of free or low-cost online content. Technological progress has enabled unprecedented connectivity, though excessive engagement with digital tools can become problematic.

Commonly referred to as "digital addiction," over reliance on the internet, platforms and associated technologies risks undermining wellness. Mindful consideration of screen time paired with intentional constraints on daily online activities can help address this issue. While a digital detox or establishing limits for social media and other technologies may at times prove challenging, various

methods exist to constructively govern involvement. With awareness and effort, harmonious incorporation of digital resources into life remains achievable.

Student populations have shown an upsurge in symptoms of anxiety, sadness, eating disorders, and other mental diseases in recent years. Certain individuals have perceived these patterns as a mental health emergency for immediate examination and the development of viable remedies to cater to the requirements of learners.

The primary effects of utilizing the internet for social networking and email by students have been described as potentially causing psychological issues ranging from mood swings to changes in behavior, withdrawn attitudes, and feelings of loneliness. This is due to the fact that users live in an online virtual world rather than engaging face-to-face with other individuals in real world social settings. Spending excessive time interacting with others online instead of in-person can negatively impact a person's psychological state (Shakya & Christakis, 2017).

Student academic performance may also be impacted by internet addiction. Ngoumandjoka (2012) categorized internet users as either heavy or light users based on the amount of time spent online. He found compelling evidence that using the internet was the main reason for the decline in academic goals and achievement among college students. The research discovered that heavy internet users utilized the internet more for leisure activities and entertainment purposes than light users, who were categorized as students primarily focused on their academic studies and course work. His study further stated that students' own perception of the internet's positive impact on their academic grades and performance increased in direct relation to its more constructive use for academic purposes like research rather than non-academic recreational activities.

According to Kakkar (2015), internet addiction can have a significantly negative impact on students' academic performance and mental health. The research concluded that excessive internet use for non-educational entertainment purposes instead of studies can detract from and undermine students' academic engagement as well as their psychological well-being. Too much time spent online pursuing leisure activities left students with less time and energy to dedicate to their course loads, resulting in poorer performance, and increased stress and mood issues from imbalance.

The artificial light emitted by screens can negatively impact vision over time as well as cognitive functioning and sleep patterns if overused in the evenings. In light of these potential health effects, experts widely recommend that students limit non-essential screen activities and observe frequent breaks when engaged in work or leisure on digital devices. Significant progress has been made in recent years by various stakeholders to help people better manage and monitor their screen time. Nowadays, by knowing the need and importance, governments started instituting public policies or providing guidelines aimed at promoting appropriate and balanced usage of digital technologies, especially among students. Meanwhile, some companies/ organisations have considered implementing workplace policies that enable employees to take intermittent breaks away from their screens throughout the normal workday. This balanced, multi-faceted approach aims to recognize both the opportunities and challenges presented by modern

connectivity while still supporting individual and public health, wellness, and productivity over the long term. As screen-based interactions and digital mediums continue to evolve rapidly, a thoughtful, evidence-based perspective on screen time that encourages moderation and self-care will remain important for individuals and societies to reap the benefits of new technologies while avoiding potential negative consequences.

The digital media landscape has undergone substantial changes in recent years. Video streaming platforms have witnessed unprecedented increases in worldwide viewer ship, as supported by data analytics of user behavior and engagement. Younger demographics, particularly those within the secondary level of school education, frequently interact with and consume content online. Furthermore, as many digital services and platforms do not require identity verification, payment details, or confirmation of age, potentially mature material can be readily accessed by minors without restriction. Unrestricted exposure to such content at impressionable developmental stages may negatively impact mental wellness, social development, academic performance, and healthy maturation. With children and teenagers comprising a sizable portion of the online audience, thoughtful consideration of the ramifications of this trend is merited. Increased access to online resources brings both opportunities and risks for developing minds that deserve attention from policymakers, educators, and parents to help and guide minors towards age-appropriate interactions and content consumption to optimize well-being.

Nurturing Digital and Emotional Wellness

While cyberspace presents its challenges, it also offers a plethora of opportunities to prioritize and foster mental and emotional well-being. Access to mental health resources through cyberspace has been widely acknowledged. Online therapy, support groups, and mental health apps offer individuals accessibility to professional help, overcoming geographical constraints (Fox & Rosen, 2018; Torous & Morris, 2017). Anonymity in online platforms fosters a sense of comfort, enabling individuals to express themselves more openly, reducing fear of judgment (Joinson, 2001). Research evaluates the efficacy of digital therapeutic interventions such as mindfulness apps and cognitive-behavioral therapy platforms in improving mental wellness (Naslund et al., 2017). Emerging technologies like virtual reality (VR) and artificial intelligence (AI) show promise in mental health interventions, though with ethical implications that warrant further investigation (Torous et al., 2020). As the research brings out several positive factors for cyberspace to nurture mental well-being, it is also essential to follow certain practices that can nurture mental and emotional wellness while there is more exposure to cyberspace. Nurturing mental wellness in cyberspace involves creating a supportive and healthy online environment. Here are some strategies to promote mental well-being in digital spaces:

Promote Digital Literacy: Individuals need to be educated about online safety, privacy, and responsible use of technology. Critical thinking skills to navigate cyberspace effectively and evaluate online information need to be inculcated

Foster Positive Digital Interactions: Kindness, empathy, and respect in online interactions need to be encouraged. Guidelines and community standards need to be developed that promote positive behavior and discourage cyberbullying or negativity.

Develop Healthy Online Habits: Regular breaks from screens need to be encouraged, balanced use of technology needs to be promoted, and boundaries for online activities need to be set. Importance of disconnecting and engaging in offline activities need to be taught for nurturing the mental as well as physical health.

Provide Mental Health Resources: Mental health resources need to be made easily accessible in cyberspace. Information regarding support groups, helplines need to be available for easy access and also mental health professionals need to be made available as well as accessible for those in need of assistance.

Create Safe Online Spaces: Safe and moderated online communities need to be established where individuals feel comfortable sharing their experiences, seeking advice, or discussing mental health issues without fear of judgment or harassment.

Encourage Mindfulness and Self-care: Mindfulness practices and self-care routines need to be promoted. Strategies to manage stress, anxiety, and emotions while navigating cyberspace need to be taught.

Support Digital Detox: Encourage and facilitate periods of digital detox where individuals disconnect from screens and focus on offline activities, fostering a healthier balance between the digital and physical worlds. When someone follows digital detox, family, friends and the communities around them also need support.

Address Cybersecurity Concerns: Individuals need to be educated about online security measures to reduce anxieties related to data breaches or identity theft, fostering a sense of digital safety and security.

Normalize Discussions: Open and accepting environment needs to be created where discussing mental health concerns is normalized. Conversations around mental wellness, reducing stigma, and promoting help-seeking behavior need to be encouraged.

Lead by Example: Parents, educators, or leaders need to be a role model and demonstrate responsible technology use, self-care practices, and a balanced approach to digital engagement.

By implementing these strategies, more supportive and conducive cyberspace can be created that promotes mental wellness, encourages positive interactions, and provides resources for those in need of mental health support. Every individual also needs to take efforts at their level to maintain mental and emotional wellness like:

- Being mindful about the online environment and balancing digital engagement.
- Setting healthy boundaries like managing screen time, defining limits on social media use and also establishing the healthy digital habits themselves.
- Being part of communities that support mental wellness and create positive online interactions. Whenever they face an issue, seek help from the community and also offer help whenever and to whomever it is required.
- Access and utilize digital resources on mental wellness.
- Engage in physical activities and maintain a balance between physical and online engagement.
- Establish relationships with persons in the physical environment rather than developing relationships with virtual and unknown persons.
- Maintain a holistic approach to mental health, one must balance one's digital presence with real-world experiences.

After investigating the psychological, social, and cognitive

consequences of our hyperconnected digital lifestyles, a deliberate and intentional approach to technology use is advocated proposing the concept of digital minimalism as a solution to combat distraction and reclaim our focus in an increasingly noisy and tech-saturated world (Newport, 2019). "Digital Minimalism" serves as a guide for individuals seeking a more purposeful and balanced approach to technology use, emphasizing the importance of deliberate choices and intentional living in the digital age. The ACE model, which stands for Avoidance, Cope, and Escape, was also offered. This model often involves using technology or digital devices as a means to cope with or escape from stress, discomfort, or challenging emotions. Instead of effectively addressing underlying issues or emotions, individuals might turn to technology as a way to distract themselves or numb their feelings temporarily. While technology can offer valuable tools for self-care and mental wellness, solely relying on it as a coping mechanism or means of escape can lead to dependency and potential negative consequences for mental health. Encouraging healthy coping strategies that involve more direct and sustainable ways of managing emotions and stress is essential.

Conclusion

The emergence of cyberspace in the ever-changing world of the digital era has brought tremendous improvements and unparalleled connectedness. However, it is imperative to navigate this digital landscape mindfully to safeguard mental and emotional well-being. The era of cyberspace presents both challenges and opportunities for nurturing mental and emotional well-being. Striking a balance between utilizing the benefits of technology while being conscious of its potential pitfalls is key to nurturing a healthy relationship with cyberspace.

By fostering awareness, embracing digital wellness practices, and advocating for a more empathetic online culture, we can harness the potential of cyberspace while prioritizing mental and emotional health in this rapidly evolving digital age. Embracing mindfulness, setting healthy boundaries, fostering supportive online communities, and utilizing digital resources can empower individuals to navigate the digital landscape while safeguarding their mental health. By integrating these practices and striking a balance between the digital and physical worlds, we can thrive emotionally and mentally in this ever-evolving era of technology.

Furthermore, cultivating a supportive online network is critical for cultivating mental and emotional well-being. Participating in online forums, organisations, or therapy sessions can give a sense of belonging and support. While cyberspace poses issues, it also offers a platform for raising mental health awareness and making services available. Online treatment, mental health applications, and educational platforms provide individuals with tools and knowledge to help them manage their mental health efficiently. Organizations and individuals can leverage these digital resources to spread awareness, reduce stigma, and provide assistance to those in need. There's a call for longitudinal studies to comprehend the long-term effects of cyberspace on mental health. Furthermore, understanding how digital technology impacts mental well-being across diverse populations remains a crucial area for future research.

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