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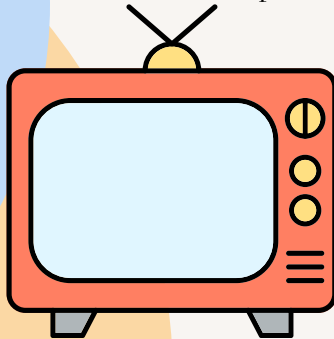


Social Media's Mental Health Effects

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Adaptation of Percieved Media

According to the uses and gratifications perspective, people choose media that meets their personal needs. Some of the most common personal needs that are met by social media are the needs for enjoyment and learning. Social media offers arousal and excitement for those using it (Kim & Haridakis, 2009). This issue may not sound particularly harmful, but the fulfillment of media-based needs can lead to addiction. When combined with social cognitive theory, this idea poses a problem. Social cognitive theory shows that social media unconsciously teaches the human mind to replicate what it perceives (Bandura, 2002). These replications can be in the form of violent behavior and a change in worldview beliefs. This is related to other aspects of cultivation theory.



Like social cognitive theory, cultivation theory suggests that the viewer unconsciously learns certain beliefs, or reinforces beliefs that the viewer already had about their environment by watching media (Shrum, 2017). These are effects that are usually long-lasting in the mind, but can be more intense for a shorter period of time. This is similar to all people thinking they are going to be attacked while walking outside to grab the mail in the morning (mean world syndrome).

Those that watch violent media are more likely to develop an anxiety about violence occurring to them in real life. Similarly, media that portrays the world as gloomy will cause viewers to believe the world is gloomy. These effects on mental health are an ongoing problem in the youth community of mass proportions.

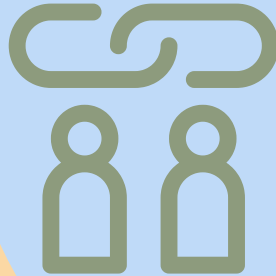


Social media in today's society also has an effect on news and the spread of information. The darkest sides of media are the ones that entertain the audience for the longest periods of time. In accordance with the theories discussed above, these darkest sides of media will transfer to those of the viewer.

Parasocial Interactions & Relationships

Interactions:

Parasocial interactions are defined as a one-sided interaction with a media figure that is not reciprocated. Parasocial interactions play an important role in today's world, as they can improve the mental health of individuals and reduce the shame individuals feel when struggling with their mental health. Parasocial interactions can be helpful because they can still feel real and allow for certain elements to be developed, such as friendship.



These interactions also are very common among people who are struggling with mental health because viewers can rely on social media to connect to celebrities with the same problems, while also feeling like they are not the only ones going through these problems. These interactions are also important because they can be used as a coping method for those who may be struggling with their mental health. Teens and young adults are most likely to form this type of interaction because they find that characters who are in similar situations to them help them cope with their problems. This is done by relating to the character in some way, even when the character does not do anything in return or contribute to the interaction.

This type of interaction can also have the ability to find ways to promote mental health problems and find preventative options for mental health. Parasocial interactions were extremely valued during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they allowed people who were at home to relate to characters in their favorite tv shows and movies. An example of this is comparing the characters becoming stuck in rooms due to dangerous chemicals or the characters that are medically isolated, to the viewers not being able to see their families in real life.



These are examples of how important parasocial interactions were over the course of the pandemic. Parasocial interactions can also be very powerful in the real-world of mental health as well. These interactions can help viewers cope with mental health by the viewer following along, and getting ideas on how to cope.

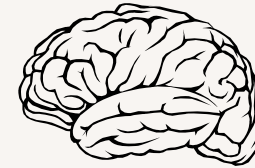
Parasocial interactions are valuable in mental health scenarios because it allows the patient to follow the celebrity on social media while being able to relate to what they are going through. These interactions can also be useful to help repair the mental health of a person after they lose a loved one. These interactions are important in this case because they can relate to their favorite tv character and how they have dealt with loss. They then can be able to apply those same factors to their own lives. Parasocial interactions are very important as they keep evolving in today's world. Parasocial interactions are important because they are able to help teens and young adults find new ways to cope with the effects of their mental health, which could be a result from their social media use.

As the viewer learns more about the persona through various media, they imagine what interacting with the person would be like and the world from the celebrity's perspective. This leads them to empathize with the celebrity.

These mental simulation processes can facilitate the formation of parasocial bonds because they increase the sense that the celebrity is familiar. A sense of intimacy develops out of the "shared" experiences and different social media platforms. This is because they offer seemingly intimate information about the celebrity's mental state.

Relationships:

Parasocial relationships have been categorized as imaginary one-sided friendships television viewers have with a "persona"/character. These are based on vicarious relationships rather than a real-life relationship. This feeling of having a relationship comes from a belief that the viewer knows and understands the persona in the same way that they know their real-life friends.



By using this indirectly-gained information to form models about the celebrity's thoughts and feelings, individuals can believe that they have insight into the celebrity's current and future behavior without directly interacting with the celebrity.



An Individual who has a parasocial bond with a celebrity has no distinction between the celebrity and their real-life friends. These individuals feel great empathy for the celebrity and take pride in the celebrity's successes while also feeling understood by the celebrity. This is similar to how people feel about their friends in everyday social life. Due to the nature of parasocial relationships being so closely related to those of real-life relationships, it has been concluded that parasocial relationships and real relationships are able to fulfill the same needs.



Although individuals are able to gain the same feelings of closeness with their chosen celebrity in a parasocial relationship as with a real-life person, this can also lead to a dependence of this celebrity through social surrogacy. Social surrogacy is the idea that television programs can serve as a surrogate for social interactions. Individuals become so entrapped with the idolization and the need to maintain this relationship, that these individuals can also be unaware of the consequences of their relationships.

Viewers with social surrogates are only seeking out connections when their social needs are increased and their satisfactions are decreased. Many don't realize they only engage in this behavior when they need to replenish their social battery, similar to how people don't realize they are engaging in replenishment while eating food or drinking water.



This mechanism is just simply engrained in humans to replenish what they are needing and missing. This allows individuals to be blinded by the fact that they are engaging in this type of behavior. Instead of seeing this as a problem, it is an instinctual way of replenishing social needs. This causes a never-ending cycle of the constant need to follow up with the person behind the persona/character.