Social Media and Mental Health

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Technology is AMAZING. It is unbelievable the advancements we have made in even the last decade. It has completely changed our world, culture, and communities, both in great ways, and not so great ways.

Social media specifically is something that has very positive and negative effects on people. With social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and so many others, we are able to experience conversations with friends, strangers, relatives – just about anyone anywhere on the globe. It connects us in new and fascinating ways. And yet, though it is promoted as a brilliant way to connect, it causes people to divide, detach, and disengage from what’s directly surrounding us.

Sean Parker, Facebook’s first president, made some alarming statements about the website in 2017. He said that social media, “exploits a vulnerability in human society and psychology… it literally changes your relationship with society and with each other.” Later, he stated that he was “something of a conscientious objector” to using social media because of what he realized it was doing to people. He said, “the thought process when building Facebook was to figure out how do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible? God only knows what it is doing to our children’s brains.” Yikes…

A recent study was performed to see the effect social media had on mental and emotional states. In the study, a certain portion of Facebook users had to see posts with negative information for 7 days. As a result, these users’ online behavior changed – they were more apt to emphasize negative emotions and post similar information more often. “People were affected by bad news in a way as if it happened to them in reality, and, thus, it became the part of their impressions.” The opposite was also tested – when the news feed is full of positive posts, people would more often feel happier, display kindness, love, and compassion more often.

To sum it all up, social media effects our behavior and emotions greatly. It is a platform where we can post false selves, where anyone can state their opinion as an “expert”, where we fall into the comparison trap with others, and where our mental state can be influenced by both positive and negative posts.

It would be beneficial for our mental health if we took breaks from social media. We should detach from it when we realize how it is affecting our moods and behaviors, and understand that there are better, more helpful ways to connect with others.

Technology and social media should not be tossed out the window. They are great tools for connection, entertainment, and making things easier. But let’s be cautious of how we use them, especially in knowing how it influences our mental and emotional health!

*Questions for Discussion and Reflection*

1. How do you use technology? What benefits do you see from it? How has it made your life more enjoyable/easier?
2. What about the opposite – What negatives do you see from technology? How has it made your life more challenging – or how have you seen it affect your mental state?
3. Do you think Jesus would use social media if He were alive today? How do you think He would use it? Do you think He would post often?
4. Have you ever intentionally taken a break from social media? Did you notice a difference, positive or negative?
5. Why do you think social media has such a strong influence on our mental and emotional well-being?
6. Read Colossians 3:8-17. After reading this passage, how do you think Paul would respond to social media? Many times, even Christians can have a hurtful and negative presence online. How would Paul suggest we use social media?
7. What can you do this week to either have a positive presence on social media platforms, or take a break from it to experience healing from negativity that it displays?