Excessive Use of Electronic Media and Subjective Well-Being

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Abstract: *Mass media is a huge industry which has been, most of the times, found to adversely impact the psyche of the viewer through psychological constructs like body image, self-esteem, emotions, social relationships, personality traits and various other similar factors and hence, the field of subjective well-being is no exception. Subjective well-being includes first and foremost measures of how people experience and evaluate their life as a whole. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2013) defined subjective well-being as a measure of three elements- life evaluation, affect and eudemonia. The review analyses the impact of electronic media on all three areas of subjective well-being separately. It was observed that the area of life evaluation had negative consequences from excessive media use and similar was observed for the area of affect. Considerable components of eudemonia, but not all, were also negatively associated with heavy use of media. No study was encountered which empirically studied the other components of eudemonia in relation to mass media. However, much research work entails that excessive media use is consequent of low subjective well-being but less influence is found on the eudemonic element.*

Keywords: media subjective well-being eudemonia affect

1. Introduction

The pervasiveness of media in the contemporary society can be validated by the necessity and easy availability of television, laptops, smart phones, tablets and so on. Use of all forms of media, namely television, internet, video games, smart phones, tablets, computer-laptops is very common.

Media has great amount of influences on its audience and so does its various forms. Past researches observe that media use impacts almost every sphere of human life. Studies focussed on internet use found its negative impact in the form of depression among adolescents (Belanger, Akre, Berchtold & Michaud, 2011; Cristakis et al., 2011; Park et al., 2012; Do et al., 2013) and among young adults (Romer et al., 2013). Also, increased internet use was found to result in increased signs of obsessive-compulsive disorders, impulsivity, hostility and social anxiety (Subrahmanyam et al., 2001; Ko, Yen, Yen, Chen, & Chen, 2012). Increased loneliness was also related to increased online time Hofferth (2010) and Shen and Williams (2010). Gui and Stanca (2009) observed that television viewing leads individuals to overestimate other people's affluence and such deviated observation results in lower life satisfaction. Ample research work demonstrates the effects of video gaming on health. Playing video game predicted depression, aggression (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011; Lemmens et al., 2011; Gentile et al., 2011), social withdrawal, anxiety and social phobia (Gentile et al., 2011; Scott & Porter-Armstrong, 2013).

1.1 Electronic Media Use

The main reason for using media is its instant advantage and insignificant cost. Opposite to going for an outdoor activity or visiting movie theatres, there is hardly any requirement for appropriate dressing and making prior arrangements. Importantly, use of various media forms does not ask for any specific physical or mental capacities. Media activities, unlike any other leisure time activity do not require the coordination among various people. Simultaneously, it provides considerable entertainment value. However, most of the times, the cost one has to pay for excessive media use is not immediately encountered like reduced social life, educational achievement and vocation while instant consequences appear for insufficient sleep (Frey et al., 2007).

People tend to give way to too much use of media and most of the time they regret for spending more than required time in doing so. In addition, overcoming this weakened will appears quite difficult. The reason for this can be attributed to the fact that media serves itself for over consumption (Frey et al., 2007). On the whole, in present times, media use is inescapable, plentiful and offers stimulation for multiple senses, hence, existing as powerful duplication of social interest.

1.2 Subjective Well-being

Subjective well-being is a measure of three elements- life evaluation, affect and eudemonia (Helliwell & Barrington-Leigh, 2010; Dolan et al., 2011; Hicks, 2011; Diener et al., 2013; OECD, 2013). OECD- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2013) in its Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being explained-

Life evaluation captures a reflective assessment on a person's life or some specific aspect of it. This can be an assessment of "life as a whole" or something more focused. Such assessments are the result of a judgement by the individual rather than the description of an emotional state.

Affect is the term psychologists use to describe a person's feelings. Measures of affect can be thought of as measures

of particular feelings or emotional states, and they are typically measured with reference to a particular point in time. Such measures capture how people experience life rather than how they remember it. In addition to life evaluations and affect, there is a substantial literature focused on the concept of good psychological functioning, sometimes also referred to as „flourishing" or 'eudaimonic' well-being (Huppert & So, 2013). Eudaimonic well-being goes beyond the respondent's reflective evaluation and emotional states to focus on functioning and the realization of the person's potential. Huppert et al. (2009) characterize the „functioning" element of well-being as comprising autonomy, competence, interest in learning, goal orientation, resilience, sense of purpose, social engagement, caring and altruism.

2. Media and Elements of Subjective Well-Being

Media is widely identified as a powerful and potential agent of socialization in the present society. It is an important source of obtaining social information and encourages social comparison. Additionally, high amount of media use may have a negative impact on life satisfaction and relationships with other people. Media can also have a direct effect on well-being as it contributes to define our reference group and goals and by adversely influencing physical and mental health. Certain researches approve that excessive media use is consequent of deteriorated subjective well-being among individuals.

1) Life Evaluation

Life satisfaction- Materialism and dissatisfaction with standard of living, which in turn lead to feelings of dissatisfaction with life, were influenced by media (Sirgy et al., 1998). Moreover, individuals indulging in media for many hours, reported lower life satisfaction (Frey et al., 2007). Similarly, greater media use was related to lower life satisfaction.

Financial satisfaction- Previous researches have explored the differences in beliefs and preferences between heavy and light media users; basing this exploration on the fact that portrayal of life in media significantly differs from real life. Media displays great amount of violence and jumbled relationships as well as exhibit immensely affluent people and more luxury as compared to the real life. Thus, people who spend a large amount of time using media report higher material aspirations (Bruni & Stanca, 2006; Sirgy et al., 1998; Shrum, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2005) and rate their relative income lower, which is related to lower subjective well-being. Same findings have been reported by Frey et al., (2007) that heavy media users exhibit lower satisfaction with their financial situation and place more importance on affluence.

Health- Research entails that excessive media use is likely to result in various psychological and medical health issues (Martin, 2011). Ray and Jat (2010) reported that excessive media use may be a risk factor for development of depression. O'Connor (2011) quote that for every one hour increase in media use, there was an association with an increase in depression. A study of Norwegian adolescents found that a high media use led to more back pain and headaches (Torsheim et al., 2010).

Sleep- The specific impact of media use on sleep quality was examined and found that using more media in the last 90 min before sleep resulted in worse sleep quality in children (Foley et al., 2013).
Late evening media use among 6 to 13 year olds in Saudi was associated with reduced total sleep time (Foley et al., 2013) and inadequate sleep has been associated with a range of behavioural and health disturbances in young people, including poor concentration and academic performance, lack of coordination, increased aggression, hyperactivity, metabolic dysfunction and obesity.

Leisure- The use of media dominates the leisure activity in contemporary society. The reduced (paid and unpaid) working hours achieved in the past decade resulted in more leisure time but this leisure is replaced by media use to a large extent (Frey et al., 2007).

2) Affect

Negative Affect- While various studies are found focussing on particular activities like television viewing, video gaming and internet, few studies also examine the impact of screen time on health and report that loneliness, depression, withdrawal, anxiety, aggression increased with excessive screen time (Martin, 2011). Also, more instances of sadness, suicidal ideas and suicide planning were reported by excessive screen time (Messias, Castro, Saini, Usman, and Peeples, 2011). Ray & Jat (2010) stated that screen time predicted increased aggression, aggressive feelings among children and adolescents. They also found positive associations between violent media content and increased tendency of anger, anxiety and violent behaviour. Individuals spending large share of time in using media exhibit more anxiety and less trust in others (Frey et al., 2007; Hassan & Daniyal, 2013).

Positive Affect- It has been found that excessive media use was negatively related to happiness. O'Connor (2011) quote that viewing television in bedroom resulted in least happiness among the respondents of the study.

3) Eudemonia
Social engagement- Frey et al., (2007) state that people who give up to excessive use of media bestow greater importance on affluence, feel less safe, trust other people less and have a perception that they are involved in less social activities. Research indicates that media use impairs relationships with peers and increases the risk for social isolation (Rosen et al., 2015), agoraphobia and antisocial behavior.

Large amount of time spent on media activities resulted in less time spent with parents, siblings, and peers (Hofferth, 2010; Jolin & Weller, 2011; Shen & Williams, 2010) along with a decreased sense of community (Shen & Williams, 2010). Also, poor self-esteem and social incompetence were reported by subjects who spent great amount of time with media activities (Jolin & Weller, 2011; Shen & Williams, 2010).

Altruism- There exists a negative correlation between violent media viewing and altruistic behaviors (Ray & Jat, 2010).

Caring- Children and teenagers who watch violent television programs become less caring and less sensitive than those who do not.

The other side of the coin

Good amount of scientific work shows that media and its various forms are almost like a hazard to an individual's subjective well-being. Nevertheless, the debate continues about whether the time period of media use or the content or both are to be held responsible for degradation of subjective well-being. Wilson (2008) is of the opinion that media effect depends on the content to which the children are exposed and is highly influenced by age, gender, race, home life and temperament.

However, media, in its improvised form, can do enough good too. It was found that educational games provided stress relief, increased attentiveness, school performance, and may increase supportive relationships. Wilson (2008) found that educational programs and situation comedy increased altruism, cooperation and tolerance among youth. Group interaction, collaboration and motivation can be increased by digital media. Also, positive association between video games play and group cooperation, self-esteem, creative thinking and problem solving was reported. However, such studies have been conducted on small samples over a short period of time, thus, hampering their conclusions and generating a need of detailed research in the same context.

3. Conclusion

Media use is a common activity people give up to as it doesn't require any mental capacities. Reviewing the literature resulted in the gain of knowledge that excessive media use has negative impacts on life and financial satisfaction, health, sleep and leisure. It gives way to negative affect and is related to decreased social engagements, altruism and caring. To sum up, heavy use of media adversely influences all three elements of subjective well-being but less impact was found on eudemonic element. Ample research work demonstrates that prolonged media use is a hazard to subjective well-being and has great potential to interfere with it. However, future research work must focus whether media and its different forms could promote any of the parameters of subjective well-being.

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