

What is the negative correlation between social media and mental health among young people and how do different approaches to social media and mental health education in Canada and Japan lead to different results?

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According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the definition of social media is “websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone” (“Social Media,” n.d.) Among the various offerings of social media Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are the most commonly used online platforms and it is young people who make up the largest audience share. Through these platforms, users are able to share not only their ideas by not only text but also through pictures and videos.

Here are some examples of the benefit that social media provides: First, it is easy to keep in touch with other people. While people needed to send a letter or use a telephone to talk with friends in the past decades, people can easily exchange messages with their friends with visual images on social media now and it is simpler than ever to stay in touch across international barriers and time zones. Second, there is a huge amount of information on social media so that people can find out the information they are looking for. If you are wondering about tonight’s dinner recipe, you will quickly find out the recipe which shows instructions with words, pictures, or even with videos. Thus, there are advantages of the usage of social media if you use it properly. Despite that, social media has been one of the elements that causes health problems, especially in terms of the mental health of human beings.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “... a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” (World Health Organization n.d.). Therefore, an unhealthy condition is a state of not well-being physically, mentally, and socially. According to the WHO, mental health is an important component in the shape of human’s overall health. Specifically, having a mental disorder is characterized as a mixed condition with unusual perception, emotions, behavior, and relationship with other people. Anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, schizophrenia,

and bipolar disorder are all examples of mental illness. Among them, depression is globally considered as a common mental illness. The study shows more than 264 million people over the world experienced and suffered the illness (World Health Organization, 2020). Although the cause of mental disorder differs in individuals, it is built up by internal factors like stress and nutrition, the environment in which one is surrounded, and the ability to interact with other people. Nevertheless, since social media changes people's behavior and can lead to people using it excessively, the relationship between social media and mental health is considered to be a serious modern issue. Hayakawa (2018) shows that teenagers in Japan use social media for 105 minutes in a day, and the usage time of 20-29 years old people was 151 minutes, which is longer than watching TV. In addition, social media can lead to mental problems because of a lack in-person communication and also due to conflicts on the Internet.

In this paper, I will mention what I consider to be the three biggest negative effects that social media brings to young people; social isolation, cyberbullying, and body image. To prevent young people from having mental disorders because of the addictive use of social media, a lot of institutions and associations provide education for children and adults to teach them how to use the Internet, media literacy, and how to deal with mental issues. However, the way of approaching mental health is quite different between western countries and Japan.

Personally, I studied at a college in Canada for one year and realized that the perspective of mental health is quite different from Japan, where I grew up. For example, Japan has a strong stigma that going to counseling is a sign of weakness. Mental disorders could happen to anyone anytime, but the stigma prevents people from obtaining correct knowledge about mental health. Compared to Japan, I had a strong impression on the perspective of people in Canada that they know the importance of mental health care and that there was good

provision of mental health care services. As a result of my experiences, I will focus on the differences in terms of media literacy education and mental health services at school for the youth between Japan and Canada.

Negative effects of social media on mental health

Social isolation

Many studies such as those by O'Reilly, Dogra, Whiteman, et al. (2018) and Hunt, Lipson & Young (2018) on social media and mental issues have indicated that excessive use of social media results in mental vulnerability such as loneliness. Addictive use of social media means people who excessively spend time on social media. On the other hand, loneliness is a state of being alone or undesirably feeling disconnected from the social community. Due to the lack of interaction with people by spending more time on social media, individuals who have potential for social media addiction might experience mental problems such as loneliness, lower self-esteem, and depression (Shettar, Karkal, Kakunje, Mendonsa & Chandran, 2017). Shettar et al. conducted research to examine the correlation between loneliness and Facebook addiction of 100 post-graduate students in Southern India. The results show participants who have the possibility of Facebook addiction tend to feel a higher level of loneliness than those who are not addicted to Facebook.

While people can feel connected to their friends and communities easily through regular usage of social media, the Royal Society for Public Health (2017) shows that it can lead to young people's psychological distress in terms of anxiety and lower satisfaction because they feel that they are missing out on their life. "Fear of Missing Out" is an example of social anxiety, which is usually known by the acronym "FoMO". It describes the feeling of "a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is

absent” (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, Gladwell, 2013). People feel anxiety by seeing other people having fun without them, and the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing prompts people to repeatedly check their online platforms and updates by others. According to the survey of Australian Psychological Society (2015), which was conducted among Australian teenagers and adults, teenagers who have tendencies to use social media more constantly per day may experience these features of FoMO such as wanting to know friends’ in-jokes. FoMO can have a negative impact on their feelings such as lower self-esteem and loneliness. Thus, while social media engages young people to stay connected with others, there is a high probability that more frequent use of social media may lead to people feeling more anxious and disconnected. It is this disconnection from social interaction and other people that may exacerbate FoMO in heavy social media users.

Cyberbullying

In Japan, “Ijime”, which means bullying, is one of the most pressing social issues. Since 2014/15 school year, the number of cases of bullying among students of public elementary, junior high, high schools in Japan has been skyrocketing. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan (2020) indicated that more than 612,000 cases of bullying occurred at public schools in Japan in 2019. “Bullying” is defined as repeated aggressive acts and behavior that harm other people and misuse of imbalanced power in a physical, verbal or social way (Stopbullying.gov, 2019).

It is reported that it mainly happens in places like schools and workplace. However, the growth and massive use of social media invented a new platform of bullying such as social media apps and online community services, which is Cyberbullying. “Cyberbullying” is a type of bullying that is carried out over digital devices including text messages, online social

media and online games. That activity contains sending or sharing unpleasant messages, pictures and contents of someone that harms another person and it may be carried out anonymously.

According to a survey from Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan, over 17,000 students from elementary to high school reported that they were bullied through phones or computers in 2019/20 in Japan (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan, 2020). This number has been increasing every year since 2015/16, which had around 9,000 cases (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan, 2017). This result likely shows that the contemporary form of abuse has become drastically more common among children and teenagers, perhaps simply due to the fact that children have access to technology on a scale never seen before. Since cyberbullying has its own unique features such as the difficulty of removing harmful content from the Internet, the potential for viral spread and a young and largely vulnerable audience, it is a matter of great concern to be able to protect young people from cyberbullying.

First, there are limits to the extent to which we can eliminate cruel content completely once it is published on the Internet. In other words, abusive content like pictures and comments permanently remain on the Internet in some way unless it is reported or blocked and even then there are no guarantees that the material is gone forever. There is also the possibility of an impact on the reputation of the people who have experienced cyberbullying at a later date such as when it comes to employment.

Second, it is often impossible to see who has uploaded something or to track who has seen the contents. Any people can access to abusive content of someone and share it to others, so it

is largely out of control once the contents are on the network. Where children post embarrassing content of someone they want to hurt, it is not only the victim who suffers. He/she will suffer from mental damage caused when someone distributes this content, but those children who post it may also come to suffer from the regret which comes from doing something irreversible and their mental health will be affected accordingly as well.

Third, it is hard for adults including parents to discover that their children are suffering cyberbullying so many children may face these problems alone. During the era of social media, a lot of children have access to digital devices and social media by themselves so that monitoring what children do on the Internet and encouraging them to ask for help related to troubles happening online is a big challenge for adults.

One of the biggest incidents associated with bullying is suicide. In 2020, a Japanese female wrestler, Hana Kimura, committed suicide because of cyberbullying. She was 22 years old at that time. She was a popular person on the reality TV show called Terrace House. However, her attitude on the show triggered audiences to condemn her for her behavior, personality and also her appearance through social media, and those aggressive actions are widely thought to have led her to ending her life. After this shocking news emerged, new legislation was discussed in Japan but, at time of writing, no such legislation has been forthcoming. I would argue strongly that legislation and mental support for young people who have been bullied on social media are important in order to stop similar incidents from occurring in future.

Body image

Social media can change people's way of observing themselves. First, people tend to internalize social norms of beauty, such as ideal posture, through using social media. On TV

shows, celebrities who are perceived as “having an ideal body” such as having a skinny body, big eyes, pale skin are featured in a more positive way. Nowadays, since a lot of celebrities also use social media, people can easily access their social media accounts and constantly check their updates. That means there are more opportunities to see these “ideal bodies”, lifestyles and thoughts through social media, which was impossible to the same extent even a decade ago. While some people get inspired by these updates in a positive way, others get stressed out by comparing their appearances to those of celebrities.

One study by Uragami, Kojima & Sawamiya (2015) supports the opinion that social media has an impact on young people’s mental health negatively in terms of internalization. They undertook a survey about how college students internalize the ideal body as a result of getting information through the media referring to gender differences. It results that female students have more tendency to be influenced by the media in terms of appearance. In addition, more female students feel anxiety or pressure to be skinny by thin ideal internalization from social media than male students do to be muscular. Social media can be a risk factor for negative body image among young people, especially females and can lead to body dissatisfaction and various mental and physical disorders that come alongside it.

In other words, social media may lead to physical and mental vulnerability in young people, one common example of which being eating disorders. Rounsefell, Gibson, McLean, Molenaar, Brennan, Truby & McCaffrey (2019) evaluated how seeing ideal images of celebrities, friends, diet, fitness and fashion may have a negative impact on young people’s food choices and behaviors (such as comparison of appearance). They discovered that young people who could easily access to those images were at increased risk of displaying these choices and behaviors.

Different approaches to social media and mental health in Japan and Canada

As I mentioned above, social media brings many negative effects on mental health of people, especially young people. As this modern issue has become more serious among students, governments around the world are trying to raise awareness about the dangers of social media to young people. It is therefore critical to highlight the importance of offering high quality media literacy education in schools as a way of preventing mental health issues for young people associated with using social media addictively.

However, not every country is successful in achieving high quality media literacy education and it is therefore perhaps illustrative to compare the cases of two countries about which I am familiar - Canada and Japan. In doing so, this paper presents the systems of school mental health care services in both countries for students who have been experiencing mental problems caused by using social media and attempts to analyse the extent to which each is successful.

Media literacy education in Canada and Japan

It is commonly said that the skill of critical thinking is vital for surviving in a world which is surrounded by the Internet and social media. One reason for this is that it helps people to be able to recognize whether information is valid or not, find out fake news or evaluate the reliability of information on the Internet which might bias them in some ways.

The Association of Media Literacy in Ontario (n.d.,) defines the meaning of media literacy as following “Media literacy is the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and use the codes and conventions of a wide variety of media forms and genres appropriately, healthily, effectively and ethically. Media literacy also aims to provide people with the ability to create

and distribute their own media products.” Generally, education of media literacy aims to help children to build the ability to understand the mechanism of the medium and the way to deal with information using any type of media by themselves. In a lot of elementary and secondary schools in western countries, media literacy education is willingly set up in the curriculum as a subject.

Canada is one of the countries that made a great achievement in media literacy education in the later 1900s. Since then, there have been official government associations such as the Association for Media Literacy in Ontario. A lot of curriculums in elementary and secondary schools are supported by the community of advocating media literacy education. The Association for Media Literacy in Ontario, which is known as the AML is the association under the position of Ontario’s Ministry of Education established in 1978. It is the first educational jurisdiction in the world that implemented media studies including media literacy in the learning area of English and Language courses. They are working on curriculum development for elementary and secondary schools with the Ontario Ministry of Education and providing resources for teachers.

In Canada, each province has responsibility for establishing its school curriculum rather than adopting a national curriculum and has its own strong focuses in frameworks. In Ontario language curriculum for grades 1 to 8, media literacy is included in the curriculum with the same standing as Oral communication, Writing and Reading (since 2006). It has the expectation of building the skills of analyzing media texts, creating texts for oneself and interpreting texts critically. Other provinces in Canada have mandated media literacy education following Ontario since they imbedded Media Literacy in 1987. In British Columbia, the strong elements of media literacy in the curriculum frameworks can be found

in English Language Arts and Social Studies. They adopted a subject called New Media 12 in English Language Arts 11-12 for teenagers who frequently access media. The curriculum expects them to be able to understand how diverse form of languages and media can influence society, to analyze information in many types of mass media critically and so on through using a variety of communication forms like oral, written, visual, and digital texts.

On the other hand, in Japan, the school curriculum is developed nationally by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. From school year 2020/21, elementary schools began new school curricular guidelines which contains provision for the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) devices so that children can have more opportunity to access electronic devices not only outside of school but also at school. The main goal of the installation of ICT in education is to develop skills of “Information Literacy” which is defined as the same level of skills as language skills. The definition of Information Literacy in the curriculum is as an essential skill through which students discover and solve problems and construct their own ideas using information and information technology properly and effectively.

Additionally, ICT helps students to aim at that goal and encourages them to learn actively, adaptively, and collaboratively. However, media literacy education as “the development of the ability to critically think and analyze information from the medium” is not preferably mentioned in the new curriculum guidance of elementary school. Instead of it, they emphasize the area of information technology skill such as computer skills, programing skills, logical thinking skills in specific subjects related to Information Technology. Based on that new guidance, Japan is not still offering education which builds critical thinking for students compared to other countries like Canada.

Although the numbers are a few years old, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and

Communications (2014), only 20% of 10 to 29-year-old people have taken media literacy education or workshops. Among those people, 36.8% of people who have devices that could access the Internet have taken the education. Although media literacy education is not specifically mentioned in the national school curriculum yet, some schools have been working on that. They encourage students to participate in discussion with other students about the downsides of social media such as identity theft and help them to understand what information should be fine to share when they are using social media.

In addition, the government has been working on advocating adults like parents and teachers to teach how to protect children from Internet crisis, in cooperation with NPOs and associations. For example, Japan Internet Safety Promotion Association, founded in 2009, advocates the way to maintain a safe Internet environment. They give the opportunity to familiarize the concept of media literacy and let people know the way to manage themselves on the Internet through their website, resources, and workshops. Thus, while there is still a lack of awareness of the terminology “media literacy” as a part of critical thinking skills in Japan, institutions and the government are at least try to spread the core concepts to make its citizens more familiar with it.

Mental health services in Canada and Japan

There are some different approaches to treating mental struggles for young people. Ideally, professional support services such as counselors or social workers will help suffers to solve their mental problems before the circumstances become more severe and bring about lifelong impact on their mental health. However, that is not always possible. In this section, school mental health services in Canada and Japan are presented and their approaches are compared in terms of their efficacy as solutions for students who are already facing mental difficulty.

In Canada, since there are high rates of experiencing a mental disorder or other types of addiction, people tend to perceive mental health care as a significant element of their overall health that needs maintenance and care just like any physical ailment. As a result, the government willingly invests in mental health support. In Ontario, 48% of elementary schools and 80% of secondary schools stated that they have regular access to social workers in 2019 (People for Education, 2019). The demand for school counseling has been increasing year by year.

However, there is also concern about the lack of counselors and a suggestion that there are not enough of them to meet student's needs. In Ontario for example, one full-time school guidance counselor works for 385 students on average at secondary schools. In 2018, only 14% of elementary schools had guidance counselors, and most of them were part-time and scheduled 1.5 days a week. (People for Education, 2018). To attack this problem, the government recently has provided funding to school boards for teachers and counselors.

In post-secondary schools such as college and university, there is a high-quality of mental health services. For instance, the University of British Columbia provides mental health support services which help students' navigate school life. A lot of students suffer from emotional distress of study. Drop-in counseling is an in-person one-on-one 45 minutes session. A Wellness Advising appointment is a short time session with wellness advisors to know the level of support that individuals need for their current mental health condition. These advisors typically possess a master's degree in counselling. Not only schools but also a lot of organizations and communities offer similar support services, such as Canada's 24/7 online service which enables young people to get online counseling if it is hard to talk with

someone in person or to make a time for appointments at schools for them. One of the features of the support system in Canada is that they have many types of counseling for specific cultural backgrounds such as those in First Nations/Indigenous communities.

Promisingly, according to the Japan Society of School Health (2018), there is a health room where students can get physical and mental care in every school. Among participating schools, about 22 students in elementary schools, 19 students in junior high school, and 20 students in high school came to the health room every day on average in 2016. The most common reason why those students came to the health room was due to mental problems. Therefore, it can be seen that the demand for the health room is likely high for students in terms of mental support. Additionally, the percentages of school with school counselors' services were 57.3% in elementary schools, 93.5% in junior high schools, 81.4% in high schools (the Japan Society of School Health, 2018). This is a good percentage in comparison with Ontario.

However, the problem is that school counselors who have specific qualifications in the field of mental health care are mostly working in part-time positions at school. Instead, health teachers, who maintain the room and advocate health awareness for students and their parents supporting their school life, determine the next correspondence for students who come to a health room. This might be decided whether they should talk to the homeroom teacher, school doctor, or school counselors depending on the severity of the situation. That means health teacher is the platform to connect with other support. These health teachers often lack the qualifications and rigorous training of their Canadian equivalents.

Furthermore, school students cannot see a school counselor directly to get counseling when

they need it. Typically it will be up to the homeroom teacher, unqualified in mental health issues, to try and resolve the situation. This is even the case at universities. In the undergraduate situation, there is also a school-style homeroom system constituted of one professor responsible for supporting tens of students. These professors are rarely qualified mental health professionals. Therefore, in terms of the quality of counseling, it is difficult to say there are enough full-time qualified counselors in schools or universities in Japan compared to Canada.

In summary, while there are fewer of them, the basic requirements for advisors and health care workers are much higher in Canada and those who are responsible for students' mental health are mostly working full-time for one institution. Conversely, although the ratio of counsellors to students is better in Japan, it is much more difficult for Japanese students to get access to licensed, qualified health care advisors. The homeroom system simply does not provide for that.

Perhaps indicative of this is the fact that Japan has a high number of suicides every year. Additionally, suicide is leading the 1st cause of death among young people. Although the number of suicides has been decreasing in the last 10 years, there were still more than 20,000 cases in 2018. Japan has the highest rate of suicide among developed countries. The cause of suicide is formed by several factors of environments that people are in, for instance, finance troubles, relationships, school, working, home, and well-being. In particular, well-being is the biggest reason that triggers suicide (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2019). From this evidence, it seems clear that mental health well-being needs to be taken seriously for Japan to overcome this problem.

One of the reasons why a large number of people have committed suicide is likely the stigma

of mental health that many Japanese people still have. On the contrary, this stigma was not something I witnessed in Canada. Any stigma against mental health or mental disorder will almost certainly stop people from attempting to access mental health care services or even taking care of their mental health. One piece of research conducted in Japan showed that 74% of participants in a survey answered that they thought people having delusions and hallucinations should be hospitalized. (Ando, Yamaguchi, Aoki & Thornicroft, 2013). It is still the case that a lot of people think that those suffering mental illness ought to be taken away from the community, hidden from view and isolated by means of hospitalization. As a result, many people suffering from mental illness in Japan may see themselves as a burden on society, which can lead to their illness worsening or even suicide.

In addition, although mental health problems are caused by many environmental factors surrounding the person, many Japanese people still think that mental health problems are the responsibility (or even fault) of the individual and do not think that dealing with them is part of their collective social responsibility. In addition, mental disorder is still considered by many to be something that should not be revealed or that it is something that should be hidden. They would argue that acknowledging someone's mental illness negatively impacts the person who is actually suffering from mental problems, despite the fact that mental illness happens any people and is nothing to be ashamed of. There seems no doubt that these stigmas are formed by a lack of appropriate knowledge and education about mental health.

Conclusion

To sum up, the number of social media users has grown, more and more young people are being influenced by the information they encounter on these platforms. In addition, these influences are not only in positive ways but also in negative ways such as the impact on

mental health.

First, excessive use of social media might cause a feeling of loneliness due to the fact that it forces people to have less time to communicate and interact with other people in person..

Second, cyberbullying is one of the newest social issues in this technology-driven world and it is especially dangerous for young people. Its permanence and its ability to quickly spiral out of control makes it especially risky and it can clearly lead to large numbers of young committing suicide. Third, social media changes the way that young people's look at themselves. Although people can easily get to know celebrities who have ideal postures that admire or attract people. It encourages people to compare themselves with them and leads to people feeling depressed and anxious as they chase after unrealistic beauty standards.

Additionally, the large amount of information on social media can make people feel overwhelmed or less able to think critically.

To solve these situations among young people, media literacy education is likely an effective tool to train their ability to deal with social media and its critical thinking requirements. In Canada, there is a curriculum to teach media literacy that is provided for students from as early as Grade 1. Japan does not have a specific curriculum for media literacy education yet, but the government is working on solutions to counter social media problems alongside other associations by offering seminars and workshops for parents and schools to educate media literacy and the way to protect their children.

I think the current curriculum established in Canada is more effective to actively teach the skills of media literacy for children. Although parents and teachers are important in helping to create a secure environment for children, children will continue to independently access

social media and other media tools. That is why media literacy education system has to be addressed in schools.

For young people suffering from mental health, both Canada and Japan provide counseling services at school. Although school counseling service is highly demanded among students, the number of counselors does not meet the large needs in either country. In Canada, the government has invested heavily in school counseling with highly trained and effective counsellors. It is also true that organizations do their best to create an environment for young people to sustain their mental stability. In Japan, health rooms play roles in counseling for students at their school, although those responsible for administering services are rarely trained professionals. The homeroom system in schools and universities shapes closer relationships between students and teachers so there is an environment for students to talk with someone, although this falls short of professional counseling for mental health.

Based on my research on this paper, since the perception of mental health radically differs between Canada and Japan, it is difficult to argue categorically which country's approach leads to better results. However, I personally would argue that Canada has more effective approaches to media studies and mental health issues for young people through the school curriculum and school services. This is because young people are indeed able to develop skills to think critically and get the opportunity to ask for professional help without tremendous hesitation. On the other hand, in Japan, despite the fact that suicide is the most frequent cause of young people's death, Japanese people still have a strong stigma that mental health is not compatible with "normal" or "healthy" people so that the stigma stops people from seeking access to mental health support. I suggest Japan as a country ought to consider the importance of mental health care, stand up to this stigma by educating people

and providing more professional mental health support in order to enable young people who need someone's help to heal their internal sufferings.

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