



Psychological effects of social media demand more study

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“I do think people have broad questions about how the internet and the technologies that the internet enables are perceived,” Elliot Schrage, Facebook’s vice president for communications, policy and marketing, noted in Sunday’s Daily News.

“There is tremendous anxiety about this, and so what we’ve decided – and this has been a consensus decision – is that the best way to alleviate the anxiety is to help people understand what we’re doing.”

Although not the main thrust of the article, I believe Schrage touched upon something we should all be deeply concerned about; i.e., the mental and emotional challenges an unhealthy obsession with social media can predictably precipitate.

For example, in a recent study conducted at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, a link was found between extensive use of social media and depression among college students.

After analyzing the responses of almost 1,800 individuals between the ages of 19 and 32, investigators concluded that those who constantly interact with social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat are almost three times as likely to report being depressed as compared to their not-so-connected peers.

Moreover, a preponderance of evidence clearly supports the notion that involvement with social media can be highly addictive. Researchers at the University of Chicago found that social media is more addictive than cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs.

Think about that for a moment.

The only reason this revelation does not get more attention is because addiction to social media is not associated with physical ailments such as cancer, liver disease and emphysema. But the psychological consequences, which we are just now beginning to fully comprehend and appreciate, can be equally devastating.

As Schrage astutely observes, we need to better understand how social media is affecting us in fundamental ways – and not necessarily for the better.

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