

Book Review

Social Media Wellness: Helping Tweens and Teens Thrive in an Unbalanced Digital World by Ana Homayoun

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The book ‘Social Media Wellness: Helping Tweens and Teens Thrive in an Unbalanced Digital World’ by Ana Homayoun is very relevant and much-needed text in the present time. The book, which largely stems from the author's personal experiences and long career as a counsellor, touches upon a subject which has been an issue for every teen and tween, who is using a smartphone or spending long hours at surfing internet. Perhaps, it won't be an exaggeration that the subject of the book is an issue for almost every smartphone user (*I myself downloaded a few apps after reading the book to review my own smartphone usage and I did find things to feel concern about.*). The book is largely written with a background where (smart) mobile devices find space in the day to day work plan of the tweens, teen and schools and discusses the mental wellbeing of the mobile phone users largely in relation to the social networking applications. The book further highlights that how over-reliance of the school on the digital devices and infrastructure further problematizes the issue. Another important aspect of the book is that it beautifully highlights how the digital world, particularly the social networking sites, affect our day to day life, work efficiency and adds to our anxieties and insecurities. In terms of the design of the book, the book is divided into 8 chapters with first 3 chapters (page 1-80) being dedicated towards building an understanding of the subject while the rest of the chapters (page 81-186) are dedicated towards providing exercises and strategies which can be used to manage the social media wellness in different circumstances. Further, the book is very much reader friendly and it largely appears as a self-help tool for schools, and children to assess their actions which are adding the problem of digital device addictions. In addition, book also provides tips to parents, school and teachers to surmount this over-dependence on the digital infrastructure, to improve the mental wellbeing as well as the work planning. Considering the manner in which the exercises and self-help tips are given in the book, the book seems to be a must read for those who want to help anyone with the social media addiction. However, at the same time, despite so many positives, the book should be dealt with a caution because the author herself writes that “*the strategies in this book may have little to no immediate effect when a student is struggling with a serious technology addiction* (page 99)”. Although, the author provides a checklist to understand the severity of the addiction (page 173) but considering the psychological nature of the issue it becomes important to embrace the limitation of the book.

Although, even with the supposed limitation emerging due to the nature of the book as a self-help tool or being based exclusively on author's personal experiences and hence lacking the academic rigor of presenting the entire sweep of scholarship in the field, the book is an important read not just for that part of the world having large technology dependence but even for developing nations like India. The book calls for a preparedness keeping the Indian education system and conditions in mind. The need for digital technologies is very well

highlighted in the NCF 2005. However, it is conspicuous by the absence of any reflection on the safety of children while accessing these technologies. The book under review may perhaps give a clue to the policy makers to fill this important gap. The quest for reducing the bag weight of children (Dutta, 2019) and known attempts of Indian government to introduce smart devices for students (Mea.gov.in, 2019), one can clearly see etching of our future. In addition, when we consider the upcoming market of e-learning platforms in India (Christopher, 2019), and the numbers of e-learning platforms both private (Jain, 2019) as well as government (mhrd.gov.in, 2019) which have emerged recently, the book does ring a bell for the policy makers. Moreover, the falling price of smartphones and increased access for inexpensive (*almost free*) and fast data connection will only add to the problem the book has highlighted and positioned to deal with (Mandavia, 2019 and Economic Times, 2019). Besides, the book also points at the policy of having online portals as an alternate to regular education and demands to have appropriate measures in place to deal with such issues emerging from the over-usage of the digital infrastructure. To conclude, it can be said that despite being written as a self-help book for parents, school and children, it does leave a lot for policy makers and teachers in those countries where digital infrastructure is still making its space. The book gives a very subtle warning to have a system in place to deal with the issues which have emanated due to the excess use of the digital infrastructure in developed countries and pleads us to be cautious enough towards the mental well-being of our Gen-Next.

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- Recently High Court and then Supreme court of India banned an app due to its bad effect on children, which quite prove the relevance of the book even in Indian circumstances.; Read the report about the app here Mandavia, Megha. 2019. "TikTok: SC Stay on Ban, Government Asks Apple & Google to Take down TikTok App." *The Economic Times*, 2019. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/software/no-sc-stay-on-ban-government-asks-apple-google-to-take-down-tiktok-app/articleshow/68898483.cms>.