

The Psychological Impact of Social Media on Adolescents

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Abstract

Concerns over social media's potential effects on users' psychological health have grown as its usage has increased. Online social media, which has become an integral part of our everyday lives, is held responsible for the rise in mental health issues among younger people. The purpose of this article is to review the diverse literature that has been conducted on the psychological effects of social media on adolescents. This review highlights both the positive and negative psychological impacts of social media on adolescents. While social media offers opportunities for learning, connection, entertainment, and income generation, it also contributes to addiction, cybercrime, anxiety, and the erosion of cultural values. The influence on adolescents' self-esteem and mental health is significant, with time spent, activity type, emotional investment, and addiction closely linked to psychological distress. Despite existing studies, many mediating and moderating factors remain under-explored. The findings emphasize the need for comprehensive educational programs, tailored interventions for cyberbullying, and balanced policies that promote healthy, supportive digital engagement for adolescents.

Keywords: Psychological Impact, Social Media, Adolescents, Psychological Well-Being, Self-Esteem, Mental Health, Cyberbullying.

1 Introduction

Unquestionably, social media has a significant impact on everyone in today's society, but it particularly affects young people. Socialisation is no longer the sole purpose of these platforms for adolescents; they are now utilised for academic purposes, networking with peers and employers, and various forms of

* ISBN No. - 978-93-49028-92-0

digital interaction [1]. Social scientists who are researching the impact of digital media on teenage culture and psychology are interested in this robust portrayal. Young individuals are no longer able to ignore the fact that social media has become an integral component of their daily lives. The young person can create new acquaintances, share knowledge, and cultivate positive self-image and self-esteem by utilising social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram [2]. The significance of these positive attributes is that they are advantageous for their psychological and social development. However, there are risks associated with using these digital spaces that have been covered in sociological research, and one of the most urgent problems is body image dissatisfaction [3]. Adolescents' mental health is often impacted by comparison and assessment against socially acceptable norms, which leads to this discontent. In order to evaluate the outcomes of social media's existence, one needs accept both its advantages and disadvantages. Even while these platforms may help young people interact with others and better themselves, they also expose them to a variety of mental health issues and differing societal standards [4], [5].

This underscores the necessity of maintaining a balance between the beneficial applications of social media and the potential drawbacks. Social media gives teenagers the freedom to self-organise their communication and choose what information to share and with whom, which is one of its key benefits [6]. Users that have this much control may feel more powerful and somewhat in control of their privacy. It also raises concerns about the security of these platforms and the possibility of uploading content that might endanger viewers who are already at risk [7]. However, this article's discussion of the negative impacts of social media will not include cyberbullying; rather, it will address other issues such as the pressure to project a particular image, the stress that comes from standard peer pressure, and the psychological consequences of being in the spotlight all the time [8]. Complex solutions that may maximise benefits and minimise drawbacks are needed to manage these complicated problems. Cybereducation and immunity strategies should be implemented to instruct individuals on how to establish positive relationships on digital platforms [9]. The inclusion of mental health services in policy measures that correspond to the use of new internet media is also crucial. By taking these measures, a safer and more supportive online environment will be created while teenagers take use of the many possibilities offered by social media and avoid being exposed to some of the negativity that exists there [10].

A. Psychological Effect

This word acknowledges a number of factors that impact people's emotions, thoughts, and behaviour. Psychological impacts may be seen in human resource management, battle simulations, the effects of pubbing on mental health and relationships, the Lady Macbeth effect, and placebo effects on self-reported well-being or athletic performance [11], [12].

B. Adolescents

The term "adolescence," which comes from the Latin word "adolescere," which means "to mature," refers to the crucial period of growth and development that occurs between pubertal and legal maturity.

Despite the fact that the teenagers' emotions are still developing, this period, which spans from 13 to 19, marks the passage from childhood to maturity. Adolescence is the word used by people on English-speaking continents to describe these years since the English names for the numbers thirteen through nineteen all finish in this sound, highlighting the many developmental phases that fall within this age range [13].

C. The role of social media in adolescence

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage marked by emotional development, peer connections, and identity building. As they transition from infancy to maturity, adolescents are especially susceptible to social influences during this period. Teenagers may interact with their friends, explore their identities, and seek for social approval via social media. It has changed the way young people engage in many ways, providing them with new opportunities for connection, education, and self-expression [14].

In a positive light, social media can cultivate a sense of community and belonging. Teenagers may discover new concepts and cultures, exchange personal experiences, and maintain friendships thanks to it. Social media is widely used by young people for activism, social problem awareness-raising, and network building. Online communities may provide marginalised or lonely teenagers a secure environment in which they can interact with others who have gone through similar things and find acceptance [15].

Nevertheless, the same characteristics that draw people to social media may also be detrimental to mental health. Adolescents may become susceptible to addiction-like behaviours, cyberbullying, and negative social comparisons as they spend more time online. Depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues may result from continuous pressure to present an idealised version of oneself [16], [17].

D. Positive Aspects of Social Media

The hazards and effects of social media on individuals, particularly young people, frequently result in a negative perception of the platform. However, if used sensibly, appropriately, and cautiously, these platforms may have a positive influence. The following are some instances of social media's advantages:

- **Facilitates communication:** Posts, videos, direct messages, debates, and other types of communication are all available on these platforms, both one-way and two-way. Young individuals may use it to hone and improve their communication abilities.
- **Enhances connections with family, friends, peers and others:** Especially if they don't live nearby, they help young people maintain relationships and encourage social engagements. They also benefit from the ability to establish connections with individuals from around the world.
- **Provides access to information and resources:** The development of critical thinking, social, digital, and communication skills can be facilitated by social media platforms (Internet Matters). They may also help them learn more about the world and provide information, guidance, and educational opportunities on a variety of subjects and problems, such as mental health.
- **Raises awareness:** Social media platforms may help young people spread the word about mental health challenges. Moreover, it facilitates the exchange of resources, experiences, and coping

strategies among users, thereby reducing stigma and encouraging young people to seek assistance and advice. It also gives you the chance to create groups with others who care about the same things, such social causes and the environment.

- **Promotes support networks:** For young people, these platforms may provide support networks that they can use if they want assistance, counsel, or direction, particularly during trying times. They may also aid them with their schooling and future employment by offering networking opportunities.
- **Enhances creativity:** Young individuals may express themselves, find new ideas, and share their creative work on these sites. Confidence and self-esteem can be enhanced by receiving positive feedback and encouragement.
- **Promotes acceptance:** Social networking sites may have advantages even if they are linked to negative impacts on optimism and body image. Images that are diverse can have a positive impact on the self-esteem and confidence of youthful individuals.

E. Negative Impact on Mental Health

Social media has the potential to have both positive and negative effects on young people, particularly their mental health. This topic has been the subject of extensive discussion and research for many years. The following are a few instances of the many detrimental effects social media may have on young people's mental health:

- **Poor physical health:** The excessive use of social media by young people can result in a decrease in outdoor activity, a sedentary lifestyle, and a lack of exercise. This can contribute to obesity and other health issues, which can have a negative impact on their mental health. Additionally, the danger of sleep deprivation exists.
- **Comparing themselves to others:** Young individuals are frequently exposed to exaggerated beauty standards and lifestyle ideals by social media platforms, which frequently feature idealised images of individuals, such as celebrities and influencers. Eating disorders and other negative behaviours may result from body dissatisfaction, concerns with appearance, and feelings of inadequacy.
- **Privacy concerns:** A lack of privacy awareness and excessive sharing of personal information on social media may expose young people to abuse, cyberbullying, and hazardous individuals. Significant mental consequences may result if their information is misused or if it adversely affects their reputation.
- **Access to harmful content:** It might be upsetting to encounter pictures and videos on social media that are dark, violent, sexual, or inappropriate.
- **Negative interactions:** People may be both their best and worst selves on social media. Certain individuals utilise these platforms solely to harass, abuse, or "troll" others, which can have a detrimental impact on the emotional and mental health of young individuals. Numerous heartbreaking instances of young people ending their own lives demonstrate the catastrophic effects of cyberbullying.

- **Poor social skills:** Young people's social skill development may suffer if they spend too much time online and don't interact with others in person, particularly if they are younger. Because they may not be able to establish real relationships with others online, it can also result in social isolation, loneliness, and a decline in wellbeing.
- **Increased risk of addiction and mental health problems:** poor mood, poor self-esteem, anxiety, sadness, and an increased risk of addiction have all been connected to social media usage. Individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions may be more vulnerable. Self-harm, suicide, and even homicide may result from the use of social media, particularly when individuals are exposed to violent imagery and are groomed online.

F. Psychological Effects of Social Media on Youth

The authors of the research came to the conclusion after gathering the data that there are three main reasons why today's young are influenced by social media:

- **Inadequate sleep**— Teens continued to browse their social media accounts, staying up late.
- **Exposure to cyberbullying**— having content that is detrimental, deceptive, or private about them displayed on social media
- **Lack of physical activity**— Teenagers were sat for long amounts of time and had less opportunity to engage in physical activity as a result of browsing through social media on their mobile phones or other devices. Because of this, they were unable to experience the advantageous effects of exercise on their mental health.

2 Literature Review

(Fumagalli et al., 2024) [18] Early studies seemed to indicate that social media usage, especially among teenagers, would have the opposite effect. They found that social media use had a detrimental impact on wellbeing, which led to demands for more regulation and surveillance of social media platforms. In order to make sense of these contradictory results, we examine the most recent studies on the impact of social media usage on teenage psychological health. In the process, we address methodological concerns that impede the generalisability and interpretation of prior research and offer an agenda of study for consumer researchers who are interested in investigating the consequences of adolescent social media usage.

(Katee, 2024) [4] By analysing the social media interaction behaviours of a sample of 300 participants, this research investigates the psychological and social consequences of social media on teenagers. The results suggest that unmeasured variables like personality characteristics and offline social contexts may have a greater effect than the measured influence of certain social media behaviours. The study makes clear that in order to fully comprehend the intricate relationships between social media and teenage wellbeing, more factors must be included in future studies and longitudinal designs must be used.

(Abd Rahim & Ku Johari, 2023) [19] Through group therapy, this research seeks to investigate how social media affects teenagers' mental health. There are three primary themes that the study reveals: factors, effects, and actions. Peer influence, easy access to data, a learning tool, keeping up with the progress of favourite celebrities, maintaining relationships with distant friends and family, boredom from

busy parents, making new friends, and wanting to be an influencer are some of the eight sub-themes that fall under the factors. The impacts are divided into six sub-themes, including learning from any location, sharing interests and ideas, damaged family ties at home, cyberbullying, and falling for false information. The steps sub-themes include five themes: parental supervision, restricting social media use, setting up a personal schedule, time spent with family, and choosing carefully what to post on social media.

(Hidayat et al., 2023) [20] This research asserts that adolescents experience both positive and negative consequences as a result of their use of social media. Teenagers benefit from using social media because it facilitates communication and information retrieval, enhances learning outcomes and creativity, and may have good social and economic effects. Addiction, indolence, cyberbullying, pornography, and behavioural changes are some of the negative effects of social media use on teenagers. Hence, a variety of measures, including media literacy training and parental monitoring, are required to reduce the detrimental effects of social media use on teenagers.

(Khalaf et al., 2023) [21] It is becoming increasingly challenging for adolescents to envision their futures without social media. Teenage and professional viewpoints have a significant impact on how social media is seen in relation to mental health, despite the fact that there is no scientific data to back this assertion. Chronic sleep deprivation, which is a consequence of the widespread use of cell phones and other forms of media by young people, has a detrimental impact on their cognitive abilities, academic performance, and socio-emotional functions. The use of smartphones and social media among adolescents is associated with an increase in suicidality, self-harming behaviours, and mental distress, as indicated by data from numerous empirical, longitudinal, and cross-sectional studies. Clinicians can collaborate with young individuals and their families to mitigate the risks associated with smartphone and social media usage by employing developmentally appropriate strategies, such as education and practical problem-solving, with an open and nonjudgmental approach.

(Phung, 2023) [22] Every day, new features and applications are added to social media, which is always evolving and changing. Teenagers may thus experience and feel both positively and negatively about social media. Although it can be employed as well for self-expression, it can lead to teenagers often comparing themselves to the people they follow on the internet. This essay aims to identify the good and bad effects that social media may have on teenagers. Upon examining six primary articles, it is evident that the adverse effects significantly overshadow the beneficial ones. Additionally, a prospective, mixed-method design is suggested for a future study to identify interventions that can be implemented to enhance the overall experience of using social media.

(Tiwari & Singh, 2023) [23] The purpose of this essay is to examine the complex connection between teenage mental health and social media use. This research looks at how social media is ingrained in their life and how it can affect their mental health, with a particular emphasis on anxiety, despair, and self-esteem. The gathered data yields many important conclusions. The pressure to fit in with society's expectations, cyberbullying, and the continual exposure to idealised pictures all greatly increase stress and mental suffering. Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to the effect on self-esteem since comparing oneself to well manicured online identities often results in feelings of inferiority and

diminished self-worth. These bad emotions are made worse by the 'social comparison' phenomena that social media promotes, which distorts reality. Nevertheless, the research also emphasises potential opportunities for positive engagement in the midst of these adverse consequences. Potential mitigating variables include moderation, appropriate use, and awareness programs that promote resilience and digital literacy.

(Ostic et al., 2021) [11] The primary goal of this paper is to illuminate the connection between psychological well-being and the use of social media. Building on the work of other disciplines in the literature, it offers a more thorough analysis of the phenomena by taking into account a number of mediators, such as social isolation, smartphone addiction, and social capital types (bonding and bridging social capital). Due mostly to the beneficial effects of social capital bridging and bonding, the results indicate that social media use has a generally favourable indirect influence on psychological well-being. The explanatory power of the empirical model is 45.1%. In order to resolve the discrepancies discovered so far in the literature, this research offers real data and sound statistical analysis showing that both positive and negative impacts coexist.

(Keles et al., 2020) [24] Online social media, which has become an integral part of our everyday lives, is held responsible for the rise in mental health issues among younger people. Evidence on the impact of social media usage on teenage psychological distress, anxiety, and depression was included in this systematic review. Time spent, activity, investment, and addiction were the four social media categories into which the findings were divided. Depression, anxiety, and psychological discomfort were associated with all domains. However, because of the methodological constraints of cross-sectional design, sampling, and measurements, there are significant cautions. Longitudinal cohort studies and qualitative research should be used to better understand the mechanisms behind the alleged negative impacts of social media on mental health.

3 Research Gap

While existing research highlights the influence of social media on adolescent behavior, self-esteem, and mental health, significant gaps remain in understanding its long-term psychological impact across diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Most studies focus on short-term effects or are limited to Western contexts, overlooking variations in digital access, parental influence, and coping mechanisms. Additionally, the role of algorithm-driven content exposure, cyberbullying, and social comparison needs deeper exploration. There is also a lack of interdisciplinary approaches that integrate psychological theories with digital media studies. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing effective interventions and promoting healthier digital engagement among adolescents.

4 Research Objective

- Study the role of social media in adolescence, and Psychological Effects of Social Media on Youth.
- Study the positive and Negative Impact on Mental Health of adolescence.

- Study the various literature's research on Psychological Impact of Social Media on Adolescents.

5 Research Methodology

This review paper adopts a qualitative research methodology, relying on secondary data and comprehensive literature analysis to investigate the psychological impact of social media on adolescents. The study incorporates academic journals, reports, and case studies published between 2019 and 2025, offering a broad and up-to-date perspective on the topic. By synthesizing findings from psychology, sociology, and media studies, the research critically examines key themes such as anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and social behavior among adolescents. This method enables a nuanced understanding of how social media usage shapes adolescent mental health and contributes to both positive and negative psychological outcomes.

6 Conclusion

This review highlights both the positive and negative psychological impacts of social media on adolescents. On the positive side, social media facilitates social connection, serves as a platform for learning and entertainment, and offers opportunities for economic engagement. However, the negative impacts are significant, including addiction, cybercrime, mental health challenges, and erosion of cultural identity. The social and personal lives of adolescents are deeply shaped by their digital interactions, often resulting in increased anxiety, low self-esteem, and dependency on virtual validation. Professional organizations continue to offer guidance based on incomplete and sometimes conflicting evidence, emphasizing the need for nuanced and evidence-based policies. Restricting adolescent access to digital platforms may not be effective if these tools are essential for socio-digital development in modern economies. Descriptive findings reveal moderate anxiety levels and a growing reliance on social media for social validation, indicating the urgent need for educational programs and regulatory frameworks. Key findings across reviewed studies consistently point to the correlation between time spent on social media, types of activities, emotional investment, and signs of addiction with psychological distress. While some mediators and moderators have been identified, many remain underexplored, underscoring the need for deeper investigation to inform targeted, effective mental health interventions.

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