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A Critical Analysis on the Impact of Social Media in Teenagers' Lives

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ABSTRACT

Teenagers are the most active users of social networking sites these days. A lot of things in today's young people's lives will be affected by social media. How they use these sites will also have an effect on their experiences and chances. As a result, questions and disagreements come up about how social networking sites affect the growth of teenagers. This paper systematically reviews the literature to assess the influence of social networking sites on the social and emotional development of adolescents. The research demonstrates significant risks and benefits to a teenager's social and emotional development linked to social media usage.

Keywords: *teens, adolescents, social media, networking sites, identity, social development, emotional development, mental health.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Teenagers go through a lot of changes and growth during this time. As people grow up, they go through a lot of changes in their bodies, minds, feelings, and relationships. This is an important time. This trip is full of mood swings, a strong desire to be independent and free from parents, the formation of complicated new social groups, and rising academic stress. The rise of the internet, and more specifically social media, has added a strong and new factor to this already chaotic situation. Young people today, who are often called "digital natives," can't picture life without social media sites like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter. They are always connected to this hyper-connected world, which makes things a lot more complicated and affects their lives in ways that are both clearly good and not so good (Malaeb et al., 2020).

A lot of parents, teachers, and mental health professionals are very worried about how constant exposure to technology might affect development. There has been a lot of talk about how much time younger kids spend in front of screens, but the effect on teens is probably more important because of how they use screens. Teenagers use technology in a way that is much more intense, personal, and social than how a child plays an educational game. Experts are increasingly asserting that the fundamental aspects of adolescent existence—social validation, communication, and self-perception—are now intricately linked with social media, potentially exacerbating anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem (Kim et al., 2020). This paper aims to perform a critical analysis of the existing research on this topic, moving beyond a simplistic "good versus bad" dichotomy to explore the intricate and often contradictory effects of social media on adolescents' social and emotional well-being.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of social media's effects on teenagers is a new but quickly growing area of academic research. Research has examined its impact on neurological development, mental health, social competencies, and civic participation. The findings from this body of work consistently reveal a complex, multifaceted relationship, highlighting both significant opportunities for growth and substantial risks to well-being.

2.1. Positive Impacts: Social Connection and Identity Formation

People often say that one of the best things about social media is that it helps them make and keep friends. Teenagers care a lot about their friendships and feeling like they belong, so social media is a great way for them to stay in touch with friends no matter where they are or what time it is. This digital "third place" can be very helpful for teens who feel like they don't have anyone to talk to or who have trouble talking to people in person. For adolescents from marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ youth or those with chronic illnesses, the internet is an important resource that gives them comfort, support, and a sense of community that they may not have in their immediate physical environment (Martínez-Castaño et al., 2020).

In addition, social media is a modern way to find out who you are and show who you are. Teenagers are trying to figure out who they are, and the internet gives them a safe place to try out different parts of their personalities and interests. The ability to carefully curate a profile, share pictures, post ideas, and

communicate through status updates has become the new-age equivalent of "note-passing" or personal diaries (Noor Al-Deen and Hendricks, 2012). For a generation that has grown up using these sites all the time, talking to people online is not an option; it's a part of real life. It is a big way for them to meet new people and a big way for them to shape, negotiate, and show the world who they are becoming (McMahon, 2019). This can also mean teaching teens new skills that will help them express themselves better online, like how to use computers, edit videos, and design graphics.

2.2. Negative Impacts: Mental Health and Emotional Well-being

A substantial and expanding corpus of research indicates that excessive social media usage correlates with detrimental mental health, despite the evident advantages of connectivity. Many experts believe that the constant flow of notifications, updates, and social pressures from these platforms may cause teenagers to have a constant "fight-or-flight" response, which could make them more likely to develop ADHD, anxiety, or depression (Kreutzer, 2018). The psychological phenomenon of social comparison is the crux of this issue. On social media, teens often see highly edited, idealized versions of reality. This makes them compare their own lives, bodies, and accomplishments to standards that aren't realistic. It can hurt your self-esteem and make you feel bad about yourself and jealous if you always compare yourself to others. A 2018 study that changed the game found a strong link between how often people use social media and how often they are diagnosed with mental health problems. The study found that teens aged 14 to 17 who spent seven hours a day on social media were more than twice as likely to have been diagnosed with depression or treated for a mental health problem than teens who only spent an hour a day on screens (Flew, 2015). A lot of teens are getting anxious because they feel like they have to keep up a perfect online image and because they are afraid of missing out (FOMO). This is a public health problem because more and more teens are getting anxious.

2.3. Online Risks: Cyberbullying, Disinformation, and Future Prospects

A lot of teens say that most of their online interactions are good, but they are still very worried about bad things like cyberbullying. People who harass others online may feel more powerful because they think they are anonymous. Digital content can last forever and be shared, so one mean post or embarrassing picture can have a long-lasting and deep effect on a teen's mental and emotional health (Fenton, 2015). Cyberbullying can follow a victim home, which is different from regular bullying, which doesn't give them a break.

A teen's online presence can affect their future in real ways, not just by causing problems with other people. In this day and age of digital footprints, it's common for employers and university admissions officers to look at candidates' social media profiles as part of the hiring process. Inappropriate remarks, discriminatory humor, or compromising images disseminated during adolescence—a developmental stage when the prefrontal cortex, responsible for judgment and impulse regulation, is still evolving—may reemerge years later, negatively impacting future employment and educational opportunities (Bucher, 2015). Teenagers are more likely to get stuck in echo chambers and spread false and misleading information quickly because social media feeds are based on algorithms. This makes it harder for them to think critically and consider different points of view.

3. DISCUSSION

The current research unequivocally illustrates that social media functions as a double-edged sword for the developing adolescent. It is not just one thing; it is a complicated ecosystem that can be very useful or very harmful. It gives people more chances than ever to meet new people, learn about themselves, and find a place to belong. For a lot of teens, it's a must-have tool that helps them keep friends and find help that makes their lives better. But the risks to mental and emotional health are big and well-known. The psychological mechanisms of social comparison, the addictive nature of platform design, and the persistent threat of cyberbullying can create a harmful digital environment. The link between using something a lot and bad mental health outcomes has gone from being a side theory to a major concern backed by a lot of evidence. People can also fight on the platforms and leave a permanent digital footprint that could have effects in the future that they didn't expect. The most important thing to think about is not whether social media is "good" or "bad," but how it is used. Things like the user's personality, the support system they have in real life, and how much help they get from their parents can make the effect less strong. There also seems to be a big difference between active use (like sending a direct message to a friend) and passive use (like scrolling through idealized posts). The latter is more strongly linked to declines in well-being. .

4. CONCLUSION

In the end, social media has both good and bad sides. How it affects people depends a lot on who they are, what they do, and how they use it. The internet is now an important part of everyday life. It's in our homes, schools, and libraries, and any teen with a device can easily get to it. So, trying to completely block or stop access isn't a good or realistic plan.

The most important thing for parents, teachers, and society as a whole to do is to stop talking about fear and punishment and start talking about guidance and digital literacy. We shouldn't just ask if social media is good or bad; we should also work to keep the lines of communication open with teens. We need to help them navigate this complicated digital world with wisdom and strength. This means showing them how to tell the difference between truth and lies, how to protect their private information, how to recognize bad behavior in themselves and their friends, and how to use technology in a good way. We can help them use the powerful tools of social media to their advantage while lowering the risks that come with them by teaching them how to think critically and giving them a strong base in digital citizenship. Future research should continue to investigate the long-term effects of extensive social media use and identify evidence-based strategies to promote digital wellness among adolescents.

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