

Social Media and Adolescents

Jaya Shrivastava¹, Dr. Urmila Pratiti²

¹Research Scholar

²Assist. Professor, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities

Mansarover Global University, Sehore

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19647928>

Abstract

This study examines the positive and negative effects of social media on adolescents. On the one hand, social media provides opportunities to build social networks, gain emotional support, and foster identity formation, particularly for individuals who may lack offline support systems. However, excessive and unregulated use can increase anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, reduce face-to-face interactions, disrupt sleep, expose users to cyberbullying, and increase their vulnerability to sleep disturbances. The impact of social media varies based on factors such as the length of time spent using it, the type of content consumed, the user's psychological characteristics, and the social and cultural context. In addition, the study emphasises the significance of parental supervision, digital literacy, and responsible usage practices in minimising risks and maximising benefits. To support healthy adolescent development, the research emphasises the need for a balanced approach to social media use.

Keywords: Social Media, Adolescents, Mental Health, Social Interaction, Digital Literacy, Parental Supervision, Responsible Social Media Use

Introduction

Sites and apps that let anyone share content they've created are known as social media. Anyone can also respond to others' posts on social media. That can include text, pictures, reactions, likes, comments on others' posts, and links to information.

Definition of social media: According to official definitions from Merriam-Webster, Britannica, and NIST, social media refers to electronic, internet-based communication that enables users to create, share, and form online communities or networks. Many people benefit from online sharing on social media sites to keep in touch with old friends and make new ones.

Adolescents-According to the W.H.O., Adolescence is the developmental stage that separates childhood from maturity. The World Health Organisation (2022) defines an adolescent as any person aged 10-19.

Physical, intellectual, emotional, and social transformations are all a part of adolescence's development. Even though these changes happen throughout life, the tween and adolescent years can be especially scary.

For nearly all young people, social media is their primary means of communication and connection. In fact, 81% of adolescents say that they feel more connected to their friends when they use social media. The use of social media by adolescents greatly benefits from this. However, this is unfamiliar territory for many parents of children born into a world dominated by social media. This is especially important because adolescents feel a lot of pressure as they grow up and become adults to "fit in" with their peers.

Adolescents may be more crucial than other age groups. Adolescents' friendships contribute to the formation of adolescents' identities and help them feel supported. So, it's only natural to wonder how adolescents might be affected by their use of social media. Social pressure, identity formation, and emotional ups and downs are all part of adolescence. Social media is a place of connection and positivity for those who can effortlessly form and maintain friend networks and a sense of belonging.

YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. The impact of social media tends to vary among adolescents. Engagement with social media is associated with both positive and negative effects on adolescents. These effects can vary significantly from one adolescent to the next. The influence of social media on adolescents is shaped by what adolescents encounter and engage with online. The duration of time spent online. Psychological aspects, including maturity and any existing mental health issues. Individual life situations, which encompass cultural, social, and economic elements. Below are the typical advantages and disadvantages of social media use among adolescents, along with suggestions for addressing them.

Objective:

1. To investigate the beneficial effects of social media on adolescents.
2. To investigate the negative effects of social media on adolescents.
3. To suggest strategies for promoting healthy and responsible use of social media among adolescents.

Advantages of social media

Adolescents can establish social networks, chat with others, and create online identities through social media. Adolescents can get support from others who share their interests or experiences through these networks. This type of support may be especially helpful for adolescents who are either alone or lacking offline social support. We are going through a stressful time. Suffer from chronic medical conditions. Adolescents can also use social media to stay in touch

with their support networks. That can be especially crucial for children from underrepresented groups, like LGBTQ, who may be unwilling or unable to discuss their identity with caregivers (Craig, S. L., et al., *Social Media + Society*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2021). In such cases, online support can be a lifeline. Adolescents can sometimes benefit from social media platforms; they can express themselves. Make connections with other adolescents both locally and internationally. Find out how other adolescents deal with difficult life circumstances and mental health issues. View or participate in moderated chat forums that encourage honest conversation about mental health issues. If someone notices symptoms of mental health conditions, get help or medical care. In general, adolescents can benefit from social media. They might also aid depressed adolescents in maintaining social connections. And social media that's humorous or distracting may help a struggling adolescent cope with a challenging day.

There is a silver lining to technology's shortcomings. Tynes discovered that Black youth on social media receive valuable social support from other Black people. They might learn to be more critical of racism through those interactions. This is significant because her research also demonstrates that adolescents who are capable of criticising racism experience less psychological distress when they witness traumatic events related to race online (*Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 2008).

Disadvantages of social media

Some adolescents may experience negative effects from using social media. It could: Distract them from family activities, exercise, and homework. irritate sleep. result in inaccurate or biased information, become a tool for disseminating rumours or sharing excessive personal information, and influence some adolescents to develop unrealistic views of other people's lives and bodies. Some adolescents should be exposed to online predators who may attempt to exploit or extort them. Exposing some adolescents to cyberbullying can raise the risk of mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. Depression and low self-esteem are increased by peer rejection and a lack of close friendships. Research shows that some adolescents who are heavy social media users are often bored and unhappy and tend to get into more trouble than their peers.

Young girls' self-perceptions can be particularly harmed emotionally by social media. When girls are between the ages of 11 and 13, and boys are between the ages of 14 and 15, greater social media use predicts a decrease in life satisfaction a year later. In contrast, less use is associated with greater life satisfaction. (Orben, A. et al., *Nature Communications*, Vol. 13, No. 2022, 1649)

Another piece of research indicates that young people may be more likely to engage in risky behaviours themselves when they are exposed to them online, such as substance abuse or self-harm. Nesi and colleagues conducted a longitudinal study of high school students and found that, even after controlling for demographic and developmental risk factors, children who saw their peers drinking on social media were more likely to start drinking and to binge drink one year later (Journal of Adolescent Health, Vol. 60, No. 6, 2017).

In addition, negative social media posts and interactions, as well as some risk-taking-related content, have been linked to self-harm and, in rare instances, death. Numerous factors are associated with the risks of using social media. One possibility is the length of time adolescents spend on these platforms. Spending three hours a day on social media was linked to a higher risk of mental health problems in a US study of 12- to 15-year-olds. That study was based on data collected in 2013 and 2014 from more than 6,500 participants.

More than 12,000 adolescents in England, aged 13 to 16, were the subjects of another study. The researchers found that using social media more than three times a day predicted poor mental health and well-being in adolescents.

But not all research has found a link between time spent on social media and mental health risks in adolescents.

Adolescents' use of social media may also be a factor in its impact. For instance, certain types of content may increase mental health risks for some adolescents. Harming oneself or other people. promotion of eating disorders-related behaviours like dieting and purging. Adolescents with mental health issues may be even more vulnerable to these kinds of content. Anxiety and depression can also be exacerbated by social media exposure to hate speech, discrimination, and cyberbullying. What adolescents share about themselves on social media also matters.

Adolescents' brains often make decisions without much thought. So, adolescents might post something when they're angry or upset, and regret it later. Stress posting is the term for this. Adolescents who post content are also at risk of sharing sexual photos or highly personal stories. Adolescents may experience bullying, harassment, or even blackmail as a result of this.

How to safeguard an adolescent

We can take steps to help adolescents use social media responsibly and mitigate some of its potential negative effects.

Make use of the following suggestions:

Limits and rules can be set as needed. Social media shouldn't get in the way of activities, sleep, meals, or homework.

Enact a policy requiring students to complete their homework before engaging in social media. Alternatively, limit how long adolescents use social media each day and restrict access at specific times. These times might be at mealtimes with the family and an hour before bed. Set an example by following these rules. And let adolescents know the consequences if rules aren't followed. Manage any difficult behaviours.

Talk to the adolescents about it if their social media use starts to challenge rules or their sense of what's appropriate. Get in touch with the adolescents' friends or keep watch on what they have done online in the past. Research suggests that setting limits and boundaries around social media, combined with discussions and coaching from adults, is the most effective way to promote positive outcomes for youth. (Wachs, S. et al., *Computers & Education*, Vol. 160, No. 1, 2021).

Turn on privacy settings. This can help keep adolescents from sharing personal information or data that they didn't mean to share. Most likely, the privacy settings on each adolescent's social media accounts can be changed. Monitor adolescents' accounts. The American Psychological Association recommends regularly reviewing a child's social media use during the early adolescent years. Follow or "friend" the child's social media accounts to keep an eye on them, and decide to pay less attention to adolescents' social media accounts as they get older. The adolescents' level of maturity may influence the decision. Regularly talk to the adolescent about social media. Inquire about the adolescent's feelings regarding social media during these conversations. Encourage adolescents to inform parents of any online concerns or problems. Regular talks offer chances to give the child advice about social media, too. For example, teach adolescents to question the accuracy of content. Explain that social media is full of images about beauty and lifestyle that are not realistic. Be a role model for your adolescent. Parents might want to share their own social media habits with their child. That can help them lead by example and prevent one-sidedness in their regular conversations. Define what is unacceptable. Remind the adolescents that it's hurtful to gossip, spread rumours, bully or harm someone's reputation — online or otherwise. Additionally, remind adolescents not to disclose personal information to strangers online. This includes people's addresses, telephone numbers, passwords, and bank or credit card numbers. Encourage friends to meet in person. Adolescents who are prone to social anxiety need to pay even more attention to this. If an adolescent uses social media and shows signs of anxiety, depression, or other mental health problems. Parents should talk to their doctor. Also, talk with the child's care professional if the adolescent has any of the following symptoms.

1. Even when he wants to stop, he uses social media.
2. Uses it so much that school, sleep, activities or relationships suffer.
3. Often spends more time on social platforms than intended.
4. Lies to use social media.

Conclusion

This study's findings show that social media has a complex and varied impact on adolescent development. It introduces risks to mental health, behavioural patterns, and social relationships at the same time that it provides a valuable platform for communication, identity formation, and social support. The dual nature of social media highlights that its effects are not uniform but are shaped by individual, psychological, and environmental factors.

The study's key finding is that the quality of social media engagement is more important than the quantity of use. Positive outcomes are more likely among adolescents who participate in meaningful interactions and supportive communities. In contrast, negative outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, are more likely to occur in adolescents who are exposed to harmful content, social comparison, or excessive usage. In addition, the study emphasises the significance of parental involvement, guidance, and digital literacy in shaping adolescents' online experiences. Setting appropriate boundaries, encouraging open communication, and educating adolescents about responsible usage can significantly reduce risks. In addition, to prepare adolescents for safe and informed participation in online environments, schools and policymakers must increasingly incorporate digital education into the curriculum. In conclusion, the effects of social media are largely determined by how they are used and managed, not by their inherent positive or negative qualities. Social media can become a positive tool that minimises its potential harms and supports healthy adolescent development with a balanced, informed, and guided approach.

Reference

1. Social Media Definition and Meaning-Merriam-Webster, Mar 12, 2026
2. Social media |Definition, History, Examples, and Facts |Britannica
3. Adolescents and social media use: What's the impact? Dec. 24, 2025
4. Orben, A. et al., Nature Communications, Vol. 13, No.1649,2022.
5. (Craig, S.). L., et al., Social Media + Society, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2021.
6. Wachs, S. et al., Computers & Education, Vol. 160, No. 1, 2021.
7. Journal of Adolescent Health, Vol. 60, No. 6, 2017.
8. Journal of Adolescent Health, Vol. 43, No. 6, 2008.