

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUNG PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

In the modern digital era, social media has become an essential part of everyday life, especially for young people. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook allow individuals to communicate, share information, and express their thoughts. Although social media provides many opportunities for connection and learning, researchers are increasingly concerned about its psychological effects. This article explores the impact of social media on the mental health of young people, discussing both positive and negative consequences, as well as strategies for maintaining a healthy digital lifestyle.

Keywords: adolescents, youth, mental health, stress, anxiety, depression, wellbeing, coping

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, the development of digital technology has dramatically transformed communication and social interaction. Social media platforms have created new ways for individuals to interact with each other regardless of geographical distance. Young people are among the most active users of social media, often spending several hours a day on online platforms. While these technologies provide opportunities for self-expression, creativity, and communication, psychologists have raised concerns about their influence on mental health. Adolescence and early adulthood are critical periods for psychological development, identity formation, and emotional regulation (Rideout&Robb, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent psychological research has focused on the relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes. Many studies suggest that moderate use of social media can support social interaction and emotional connection. Online platforms allow users to stay in contact with friends, share experiences, and access educational resources. Several researchers have identified negative psychological effects associated with excessive social media use. Studies indicate that frequent exposure to idealized images and lifestyles on social media can lead to social comparison. This

phenomenon occurs when individuals compare their achievements, appearance, or lifestyle with those of others (Vogel et al., 2014).

Research has also shown that prolonged social media use may increase levels of anxiety, loneliness, and depression among adolescents. Cyberbullying and negative online interactions can further intensify these psychological challenges (Kowalski et al., 2014).

Despite the concerns, social media offers numerous psychological benefits. One important advantage is the ability to maintain social relationships. Young people can easily communicate with friends and family members, even if they live far away. This constant connection can help individuals feel supported and less isolated. Social media can also encourage creativity and self-expression. Platforms allow users to share their ideas, artwork, and opinions with a global audience. For many young individuals, this opportunity helps develop confidence and a sense of identity.

Furthermore, social media provides access to information and educational content. Students can learn new skills, participate in online discussions, and collaborate with others on academic projects. In this way, social media can contribute positively to personal and intellectual development (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014).

Negative Psychological Effects.

Although social media has several benefits, excessive or unhealthy use may cause psychological problems. One of the most common issues is social comparison. Many users present idealized versions of their lives online, showing only positive experiences and achievements. When young people compare themselves with these unrealistic images, they may feel inadequate or dissatisfied with their own lives. Another significant issue is the phenomenon known as the “fear of missing out” (FOMO). This occurs when individuals feel anxious because they believe others are enjoying experiences without them. FOMO can lead to constant checking of social media platforms and increased anxiety (Przybylski et al., 2013).

Cyberbullying is another serious concern in the digital environment. Hurtful comments, online harassment, and public criticism can have a strong emotional impact on adolescents. Victims of cyberbullying often experience low self-esteem, stress, and feelings of loneliness.

Excessive screen time may also disrupt sleep patterns and reduce face-to-face social interaction. These changes can negatively affect emotional stability and overall mental health.

Strategies for Healthy Social Media Use

To reduce the negative psychological effects of social media, it is important to promote healthy digital habits. One effective strategy is setting limits on daily screen time. By reducing the amount of time spent online, individuals can focus more on real-life activities and relationships.

Developing critical thinking skills is also essential. Young people should understand that social media often presents an unrealistic version of reality. Recognizing this fact can help reduce the negative effects of social comparison. Educational institutions can provide guidance on responsible social media use and encourage students to maintain a healthy balance between online and offline activities. Additionally, parents and teachers should support open communication about online experiences. The relationship between social media and mental health is complex and multifaceted. While digital platforms can enhance communication and provide opportunities for learning, excessive use may create psychological difficulties. When used responsibly, social media can serve as a valuable tool for connection, creativity, and education. Researchers continue to study this topic to better understand its long-term effects.

CONCLUSION

Social media has become a central part of modern life, particularly among young people. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok offer new opportunities for communication, creativity, and information sharing. However, excessive use may contribute to anxiety, social comparison, and cyberbullying. Promoting healthy digital habits is essential for safeguarding the psychological well-being of young people.

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