



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

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Annotation: *In the recent years, social media has become a fundamental part of young people's daily lives. The rapid development of information and communication technologies in the latest decades has dramatically changed the way how young people communicate, learn, and engage with society. This article explores both positive and negative impacts of social media on youth development, education, social engagement, and mental well-being based on reliable research findings. It also discusses effective and responsible ways of using social media in the digital age.*

Keywords: *social media, youth, digital environment, education, mental health, communication.*

In 21st of century, as a result of rapid development of information and communication technologies has transformed the way young people communicate, learn, and interact with society. Platforms such as Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, and others are widely used by youth to express opinions, share information and build social connections. Research indicates that digital environment plays a crucial role in shaping young people's worldview, values, and behavior. Reports by UNESCO highlight that digital technologies can significantly expand educational access and learning opportunities for young people.



Positive Impact of Social Media. One of the most obvious advantages of social media is access to information. Youngsters can instantly receive news, educational materials, and global updates. According to UNESCO (2021), digital technologies have created vast opportunities for educational field, making learning available for youth in remote areas. Not only for sharing information, but also attending online lessons, different kind of video materials, that enhances independent learning skills. In addition, through social networks, young people communicate with representatives of different cultures and countries, gaining a global perspective.

Another important benefit is increased social participation. Indeed, many, young people use social networks to discuss existing social problems, environmental protection, education reforms, human rights and charity initiatives. Pew Research Center analysis shows that socially active media users are more likely to participate in public discussions and social movements. Therefore, a sense of responsibility and initiative can be strengthened through social media.

Negative impact of Social media. Despite many advantages, social media also presents some serious problems. One of the most common issues is an excessive use without a purpose. Most youngsters spend hours scrolling through social platforms instead of focusing on academic or productive activities. Time management is becoming a major issue throughout last years.

Another significant risk for youth is related to mental health. Constant comparison with others, exposure to unrealistic lifestyles, and cyberbullying can negatively affect self - esteem causing emotional distress. The World Health Organization (2021) has noted that overuse of digital platforms may contribute to higher levels of stress, sleep problems, and emotional problems in adolescents.

Moreover, misinformation is becoming another evident concern. Young users do not always verify the credibility of online content, which can lead to misunderstanding, manipulation, or the spread of false information. Therefore, critical thinking and media literacy are essential skills in the modern digital world.



Using Social Media Effectively and Responsibly. Digital literacy must become a priority if we want to benefit from social media. Young people should learn how to properly manage their time, using credible sources and consuming information responsibly. Parents, teachers, and educational institutions play an important role in guiding youth toward balanced and mindful use of digital technologies.

When used purposefully, social media can become a powerful educational tool and a good ally. Virtual travel experiences, for instance, provide great opportunities without any significant financial costs. In addition, creating educational content, participating in online learning communities, and promoting positive initiatives can contribute to personal and professional development. These practices not only strengthen knowledge but also build valuable communication and digital skills for future careers. The key is conscious and purposeful use rather than passive consumption.

In conclusion, social network is a powerful force in shaping the lives of youngsters. It provides valuable opportunities for communication, education, creativity, and social engagement. Meanwhile, excessive use, mental pressure and exposure to misinformation pose real risks to the growing generation. Thus, the conscious, balanced, and responsible use of social media is essential for the harmonious development of young people. With proper guidance and digital literacy, social media can become not a threat, but a meaningful tool for growth in the modern digital age.

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