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The Negative Effects of Social Media on Adolescent Social Connections and Wellbeing

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Abstract. Nowadays, social media has become one of the most important parts of adolescent's life, however, its impact on adolescents' social connections and psychological wellbeing is still a debatable question. This study examines the negative effects of social media on adolescent social connections and wellbeing through multiple research. These researches synthesizes findings from employing a systematic review methodology to analyze based on evidence on social media use patterns, mental health outcomes, and social skill development among adolescents aged 13-17. The findings reveal that problematic social media use, characterized by addictive patterns, passive consumption, and social comparison, it is more strongly associated with negative mental health outcomes. Key mechanisms identified include the displacement of essential activities such as sleep and face-to-face interactions, the process of getting fear of missing out (FOMO), and the missing out of offline social skills because of reduced practice of a subtle difference in interpersonal communication. The results further indicate that adolescents' populations, particularly adolescents from low-socioeconomic-status backgrounds, may experience harmful effects. This study concludes that interventions should move beyond simply screen-time limitations toward specific strategies addressing the quality of social media use, and supporting healthy offline social connections.

Keywords: Social media, adolescent mental health, social connections, FOMO

1. Introduction

Social media today has started to take a place in people's daily life especially among teenagers because they grew up in a time when technology has been changing fast. Social media can have both positive and negative effects on teenagers. On one social media helps teenagers get information quickly and stay in touch with friends. On the side it also increases the chance of having problems with mental health like feeling sad, worried or lonely [1]. For example a study from Pew Research Center found that 18% of teenagers between 13 and 17 use media every day while 32% of the people who took part said they felt lonely at once a week found by Pew Research Center in 2022. Another study from Common Sense Media found that 95% of teens have faced cyberbullying, which can make them feel left out discovered by Common Sense Media during 2018. These numbers show that social media can expose teenagers to things that're not good, like violent scenes mean words and

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things that are too sexual. This can hurt teenagers' confidence, how they see their bodies and importantly their mental health [1].

This study looks at the worries about how social media affects teenagers. This research is very important for teachers, parents and people who help with health as they want to help teenagers feel better in the world full of digital technology. In this study the effects of media on how teenagers connect with others and how they feel are looked at from three main areas, including how using social media leads to feeling anxious and lonely how good or bad online relationships are and how offline social skills play a role. Also how using media relates to depression in teenagers is studied. This study uses a lot of sources like books and articles to put what is already known. This way of working helps to look at all the research find things that many studies agree on and see where more work is needed which helps to understand this topic. The goal of this study is to look at the effects of social media on how teenagers connect with others and how they feel and to give good ideas for ways to help reduce these bad effects. To do this the study looks at studies finds out what causes the results and thinks about what this means for rules and, for how to help people in real life.

2. Social media, anxiety, and the loneliness paradox

A growing amount of proof shows that using media is connected to more feelings of being alone and more anxiety in teenagers. Some people believe that social media helps teenagers talk to others.. Studies show that how teenagers use social media is more important than how much they use it. For example teenagers who just look at media without talking to anyone have worse mental health.. Those who reach out and make online friends can get the help they need. This helps explain why some teenagers do online while others feel very alone. The way people interact matters a lot. Good interactions make people feel better.. Seeing posts that make people compare themselves to others can make them feel more sad.

Another way social media causes anxiety is through the "Fear of Missing Out" or FOMO. Teenagers who think others are having times online feel more worried and sad. New studies found that being lonely makes teenagers use media more. This makes the fear of missing out. This creates a cycle. Lonely teenagers use media to feel connected but they end up feeling lonelier because they see others best moments.

The COVID-19 pandemic made this problem worse. Teenagers used tools more to stay in touch. This change was linked to in-person social skills and more loneliness. Some research says that when the Internet is used to help relationships and make new friends it can help with loneliness.. When it is used to avoid real-life social situations loneliness gets worse. Teenagers are especially at risk because they need approval from friends and haven't learned how to handle complicated situations yet. Also online connections are not as deep or real as face-, to-face talks. This might explain why even though they are more connected online teenagers say they feel more lonely. The distance that screens create helps bad behavior spread on sites. This hurts the health of teenagers.

3. The quality of online connections and erosion of offline social skills

One of the biggest issues with social media is how it could affect offline connections among adolescents. Studies show that playing games and using media can make it harder to talk and connect with people in person. These skills are particularly important in interpersonal interactions. Text-based communication lacks nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and vocal tone, which may limit the interpretation of others' emotions and intentions. Without these teens can have a time

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understanding emotions. What others are feeling. This can make it harder to be good at situations [2, 3].

The idea called the hypothesis says that time spent on media takes away time that could be used for real-life meetings. It also takes away time for activities and rest. All of these are important for growing up [4, 5]. Teens who spend time on media might miss the chance to learn and improve key social skills. These skills include understanding body language hearing tone of voice and handling talks. These skills are important for making and keeping friends. Not learning them can hurt how a person feels over time [3].

Also the way profiles are made online often shows the parts of other people's lives. This can make teens think they are not good enough compared to others. These kinds of thoughts can bring down self-esteem. They can also make teens feel like they are not enough [6]. The effect is even worse, for teens who already feel worried or sad. They might think posts are proof that they are not living up to others [7]. The mix of not getting to grow real-life skills and seeing more comparisons creates a habit. This bad habit can hurt skills and mental health [7].

4. Social media and adolescent depression: examining the evidence

The connection between using media and feeling sad or depressed has been talked about a lot. Some studies say there is a link. When people look at data over time the story is more complicated. A big study that followed 5,535 teenagers from when they were 15 or 16 years old until they were older found that when they first looked at the data there was a link between using social media and feeling depressed later.. When they took other things into account that link went away [8]. The people who did the study said that if everyone agrees that using media doesn't affect mental health over the long term then trying to get teens to use less social media probably won't stop mental health issues [8].

Other studies that followed people over time saw different things. One large study with 2,316 teenagers found that only those who used media more than three hours a day had more signs of feeling sad two years later [5]. This suggests that there is a point where using much social media causes more problems, not just a straight line. The same study found that not getting sleep and having trouble sleeping helped explain why using social media led to more sadness and worry. This shows that getting sleep is really important [4, 5].

Using media in a way that is not healthy—like using it so much that it feels like an addiction or feeling bad when not using it or knowing it's harmful but still doing it—is more connected to feeling sad than just using it normally [9]. One study found that using media in a bad way was linked to more sad feelings. The study found that the number of followers and the frequency of media use may be less important than whether media use is harmful [6, 7].

A study that looked at teenagers in 35 countries and looked at about 145,000 of them found that using media in a bad way was linked to more problems with mental health and less happiness. This was true in all the countries they studied. It was even stronger for teenagers from families, with money [8]. This suggests that people who are already struggling more might be hurt more by using media in a bad way.

5. Discussion and implications

The evidence reviewed indicates that the relationship between media use and adolescent well-being is complex. It depends on factors and on the context in which it occurs.

Several key themes appear in the analysis.

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First how people use social media matters than how long they spend on it. Active engagement that seeks support can protect adolescents while passive scrolling encourages comparison and can lead to negative feelings [3, 6].

Second when social media replaces activities such as sleep, physical exercise and face-to-face social interaction it creates a critical pathway that harms mental health [4, 5].

Third when social media use becomes resembles addiction the risks are greater than when the use is general [7, 9].

Fourth adolescents living in socioeconomic situations may feel the negative effects even more strongly so interventions should focus on these vulnerable groups [8].

The practical implications for intervention are significant.

The study shows that adolescents who scroll through media without interacting are at higher risk for poor mental health. Educational programs should therefore encourage meaningful use rather than passive scrolling.

The study also shows that sleep loss and weaker social skills are the ways in which social media hurts mental health. Programs that teach sleep habits and offline social skills can help reduce these negative effects.

Finally the study finds that problematic patterns of use— than simply the time spent—are most strongly linked to depression. Clinical programs should therefore address the problems that drive problematic use, such as trouble managing emotions and social anxiety [7].

Regulatory measures, such, as raising the age for social media to 16 are one possible approach but early attempts have struggled with verifying age.

Educational programs that teach media literacy and healthy ways to use media can give adolescents the tools to think critically about digital environments instead of simply absorbing them [6].

Clinical programs that address regulation and problematic patterns of social media use can break the cycle that links loneliness, fear of missing out and later mental health problems [9, 10].

The research results of this study can be in three points about how social media affects populations. First the findings show that social media use patterns— scrolling and problematic use —are strongly linked to higher anxiety, depression and loneliness among adolescents. Vulnerable groups, such as those from socioeconomic status backgrounds experience these effects even more severely as shown by [7, 8]. Second the results show that the quality of connections and the loss of social skills are key ways social media harms adolescent social competence. This suggests that interventions should encourage use and strengthen offline social skills as recommended by Orben [2, 3]. Third the evidence points to sleep disruption and social comparison as mediators, between media use and mental health outcomes. This underscores the need to address these mechanisms in both interventions according to [4-6].

6. Conclusion

In conclusion social media brings both effects on adolescent social connections and wellbeing. Social media also offers chances for connection and support to marginalized youth. Yet media's addictive design, the displacement of essential activities and the encouragement of negative social comparison have created serious mental health problems for a generation that grows up online. Research increasingly shows that problematic usage patterns, not the length of time people use media drive negative outcomes. Vulnerable populations may be hit harder by media.

Future research should keep distinguishing between types of media engagement. Future research should look at how individual differences change the effects. Policy and clinical interventions

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should go beyond screen-time limits. Policy and clinical interventions should use strategies that address the quality of engagement, foster media literacy and support the building of healthy offline social connections.

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