

Impact of Modern Social Media on the Psychosocial Health of Adolescents: A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

This research paper critically examines the impact of modern social media on the psychosocial health of adolescents. Social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Snapchat and TikTok have become major spaces for communication, learning, entertainment and identity formation. They offer opportunities for self-expression, peer support, creativity and access to information. However, excessive and unregulated use may create psychological and social risks, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, body-image dissatisfaction, sleep disturbance, cyberbullying, social comparison and reduced face-to-face interaction. The study highlights that the impact of social media is not uniform; it depends on age, personality, family environment, peer relations, duration of use and type of online content. A critical approach is therefore necessary. Instead of rejecting social media completely, adolescents need digital literacy, parental guidance, emotional support and balanced media habits. Healthy use can strengthen psychosocial development, while misuse can seriously disturb adolescent well-being in contemporary digital society.

Keywords: Social Media, Adolescents, Psychosocial Health, Mental Health, Cyberbullying, Social Comparison, Digital Addiction, Self-Esteem Etc.

I INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a sensitive stage of physical, emotional and social development. During this

period, children search for identity, peer acceptance, independence and emotional stability. Modern social media has deeply entered this developmental process. It connects adolescents with friends, teachers, celebrities, influencers and global information, but it also exposes them to comparison, online criticism, misinformation and addictive patterns of use. Therefore, the relationship between social media and psychosocial health cannot be understood only as harmful or useful. It must be studied critically by considering both opportunities and risks. This paper discusses these impacts with examples and scholarly citations.

Modern social media has become one of the most powerful influences on adolescent life. Adolescents are no longer only passive receivers of information; they are active creators, sharers and consumers of digital content. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, WhatsApp and TikTok influence their friendships, self-image, emotional expression, study habits and leisure activities. Nesi defines social media broadly as digital tools that allow users to interact socially and both create and consume content (Nesi, 2020, p. 116). This shows that social media is not merely entertainment; it is a social environment in which adolescents construct identity and relationships.

The positive impact of social media is visible in communication and social support. Many adolescents use social media to remain connected with friends, classmates and relatives. For example, a student living away from close friends can maintain emotional contact through video calls,

group chats and online communities. The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory observes that social media may provide community, self-expression and peer support for some young people (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023, p. 6). Thus, social media can reduce loneliness when it is used meaningfully. For adolescents who feel shy in face-to-face interaction, online platforms sometimes provide a safer space to express thoughts, talents and personal interests.

Social media also contributes to learning and creativity. Adolescents use YouTube lectures, educational reels, discussion forums and online groups for academic purposes. A student preparing for examinations may watch explanatory videos, join a study group or follow educational pages. Such use can increase confidence and motivation. Nesi notes that modern media has created both challenges and opportunities for youth mental health (Nesi, 2020, p. 116). This balanced view is important because social media is not harmful by nature; the harm often depends on the purpose, duration and emotional condition of the user.

However, the negative effects are equally serious. Excessive use of social media can disturb sleep, concentration and emotional regulation. Many adolescents check notifications late at night, scroll continuously and feel unable to disconnect. Twenge and Campbell found that after one hour per day, higher screen time was associated with lower psychological well-being, including lower self-control, more distractibility and difficulty making friends (Twenge & Campbell, 2018, p. 271). For example, a teenager who spends four to five hours daily on reels and gaming communities may lose interest in study, outdoor play and family communication.

One major psychosocial effect is social comparison. Adolescents often compare their appearance, lifestyle, marks, popularity and family status with others online. Instagram photos, filtered selfies and influencer lifestyles may create unrealistic standards. A girl who repeatedly sees

edited beauty images may begin to feel dissatisfied with her own body. A boy who sees friends displaying expensive phones, bikes or travel may develop feelings of inferiority. The Surgeon General's Advisory notes that early adolescence is a period when identity and self-worth are forming and young people are especially sensitive to peer opinions and comparison (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023, p. 5).

Cyberbullying is another harmful effect. Earlier bullying was mostly limited to school or neighbourhood, but online bullying can continue twenty-four hours a day. Abusive comments, fake accounts, edited photos, public insults and group exclusion can seriously damage an adolescent's mental health. Nesi observes that cybervictimization is associated with higher rates of self-harm, suicidal behaviour and internalizing problems (Nesi, 2020, p. 117). For example, if a student's photo is shared with insulting captions in a school WhatsApp group, the shame and fear may affect attendance, academic performance and self-confidence.

Social media also affects family relationships. Many adolescents spend more time online than in conversation with parents or siblings. During meals, study hours or family gatherings, mobile use may reduce emotional bonding. This weakens direct communication skills. A teenager may be highly active in online chats but unable to discuss personal problems with parents. In this way, social media can create psychological nearness with distant online contacts but emotional distance within the family. Psychosocial health requires both personal emotional stability and healthy social relations; therefore, family communication remains essential.

Another important issue is digital addiction or problematic use. Likes, comments, shares and followers create a reward system. Adolescents may repeatedly check their phones to see whether their posts are appreciated. If the response is low, they may feel rejected or ignored. The Surgeon

General's Advisory states that frequent social media use may affect brain areas related to emotional learning, impulse control and social reward sensitivity (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023, p. 5). This is especially important because adolescence is already a stage of strong emotional fluctuation and peer approval.

The impact of social media on mental health is not the same for all adolescents. Valkenburg, Meier and Beyens reviewed many studies and found that most reviews described the association between social media use and mental health as weak or inconsistent, while some considered it substantial and harmful (Valkenburg, Meier & Beyens, 2022, p. 58). This means that research does not support a simple statement such as "social media is always bad." A confident, well-supported adolescent may use social media creatively, while a lonely or anxious adolescent may experience stronger negative effects.

Orben and Przybylski also argue that the relationship between digital technology use and adolescent well-being is negative but small in large-scale data (Orben & Przybylski, 2019, p. 173). This critical perspective prevents exaggeration. For example, if a student is depressed, social media may be one factor, but family conflict, academic pressure, economic problems, bullying and personality factors may also be involved. Therefore, blaming only social media may hide deeper social and psychological causes. Still, certain patterns of use are clearly risky. Passive scrolling, late-night use, exposure to violent or sexual content, online gambling-like reward systems, hate speech and appearance-based comparison can harm mental health. In contrast, active learning, creative posting, meaningful conversation and supportive online communities may be beneficial. The Surgeon General's Advisory states that social media impact depends on time spent, type of content, interaction style and disruption of healthy activities such as sleep and

physical activity (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023, p. 5).

Peer pressure is another psychosocial dimension. Adolescents may feel forced to follow trends, make reels, accept risky challenges or share personal photos to remain accepted in their peer group. Fear of missing out, commonly called FOMO, can create anxiety. A student may attend a family function physically but remain mentally occupied with friends' online activities. This reduces present-moment awareness and emotional satisfaction. Social media therefore changes not only communication but also the adolescent's sense of belonging and social value. Body image concerns are also increasing. Adolescents, especially girls, may compare themselves with edited images of celebrities and influencers. Filters, beauty apps and artificial presentation of life create a false idea of perfection. This may lead to dissatisfaction, dieting pressure and low self-worth. Boys may also experience pressure regarding body shape, height, fashion or economic status. Such comparison directly affects psychosocial health because self-esteem is connected with social acceptance and emotional stability.

Academic performance may also suffer. Many students begin using phones for study but quickly shift to entertainment, chats or reels. Notifications break concentration and reduce deep learning. For example, a student reading online notes may open a message, then watch a short video, and finally spend an hour scrolling. This creates procrastination and guilt. Repeated distraction affects attention span and academic confidence. Twenge and Campbell's findings on distractibility and inability to finish tasks are relevant here (Twenge & Campbell, 2018, p. 271). At the same time, schools and parents should avoid only punishment-based control. Total restriction may create secrecy, rebellion or digital ignorance. Instead, adolescents need digital literacy. They should be taught how algorithms work, how edited images mislead viewers, how to report

cyberbullying, how to protect privacy and how to balance online and offline life. The American Psychological Association's advisory recommends age-appropriate social media use, monitoring, digital literacy and protection from harmful content (American Psychological Association, 2023).

Parents play a central role in healthy media habits. Open discussion is more useful than constant scolding. Parents should ask adolescents what they watch, whom they follow and how they feel after using social media. Family rules such as no-phone meals, fixed sleep time, study-time phone limits and shared digital activities can help. Teachers can also conduct awareness programmes about cyberbullying, self-esteem, online safety and emotional health. Counsellors should observe signs such as withdrawal, sleep problems, sudden academic decline, irritability and excessive phone dependence.

A critical study must therefore conclude that modern social media is a double-edged instrument. It can support learning, creativity, friendship and identity formation. But it can also intensify anxiety, comparison, isolation, sleep disturbance, cyberbullying and low self-esteem. The outcome depends on how adolescents use it, how adults guide them and how platforms are designed. Healthy psychosocial development requires balance between digital connection and real-life relationships. Social media should become a tool for growth, not a source of psychological pressure.

II CONCLUSION

The study concludes that modern social media has a significant influence on the psychosocial health of adolescents. Its impact is neither completely positive nor completely negative. Social media provides adolescents with opportunities for communication, learning, creativity, identity expression and peer support. At the same time, excessive and careless use may lead to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, cyberbullying, sleep disturbance, social comparison and weakening of

family relationships. The most important finding is that the effect of social media depends on the nature of use, duration, content, emotional maturity and social environment of the adolescent. Therefore, society should not simply reject social media, but should promote responsible and balanced use. Parents, teachers, counsellors and policymakers must work together to develop digital literacy, emotional awareness and safe online behaviour. When used wisely, social media can support adolescent development; when misused, it can become a serious psychosocial risk.

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