

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON THE MIND OF YOUNG PEOPLE

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Abstract: This article examines the psychological impact of social networks on young people, exploring both the positive and negative effects. While digital platforms enable socialization, self-expression, and learning, they also introduce risks such as anxiety, self-esteem issues, and cyberbullying. The study highlights the need for balanced media consumption and strategies for self-regulation to minimize harmful consequences. Emphasizing mindfulness in social media use, the article suggests that conscious engagement can foster healthier digital habits among young users, promoting their mental well-being in an increasingly digital world.

Keywords: digital developments, social values, media culture, communication skills, social comparusion, unhealthy osessions, self-harm.

INTRODUCTION

These days, media channels are becoming more diverse and innovative. Information and communication technologies and their discoveries provide the media environment intensification. Digital developments are nearly correlated with global and societal changes displayed through the update of social values and interpersonal communication models. These trends are more evident among youth as this social group is the most mobile and responsive to almost all aspects of progress. The media culture of a young person remains remarkably crucial in this process.

Positive Effects

Social media platforms provide opportunities to socialise, play, and learn, and can positively impact mental health by helping young people: Maintain social bonds and stay up to date with family and friends across the globe connect with new friends and groups of people who share similar interests or experiences access constant support and advice anonymously, providing a lifeline to young people who may struggle in silence develop communication skills while encouraging more open and honest discussion of thoughts and feelings express themselves and develop their personality.

Negative Effects

Interactive technologies are relatively new, and research into short- and long-term consequences is limited. However, multiple studies have linked high usage to increased risk of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts.

Potential risks of social media include:

Social comparison. Fear of missing out (FOMO) is not a new term, but social media sites can exacerbate these feelings. Virtual profiles allow people to share highlights of their lives, setting unrealistic expectations that leave young people feeling insecure and dissatisfied. FOMO then impacts self-esteem, triggering anxiety and encouraging more compulsive use of social media.

Body image. Young people may compare themselves to celebrities, influencers, or people they admire, developing unhealthy obsessions with appearance that can significantly impact self-esteem.

Sleep patterns. Greater social media usage has been linked to poorer sleep quality, which is in turn linked to low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.

Self-harm and suicidal ideation. Although social media can be great for support-seeking, certain content can have a negative influence, normalising self-harm and exposing young people to explicit images/videos. With access to online forums discussing self-harm and suicide, young people may be encouraged to engage in such behaviours with devastating consequences.

Cyberbullying. Young people may enact or fall victim to bullying behaviour online. The Office for National Statistics recently highlighted how 1 in 5 children in the UK experience some form of cyberbullying. Whether through “trolling”, exclusion, or sharing embarrassing images/videos, bullying significantly increases a young person’s risk of developing depression and low self-esteem, making them twice as likely to self-harm.

Set time limits

An effective way to control dependence on social networks is to establish time limits for their use. Young people can define specific times of the day to review their online profiles and limit the time spent on these platforms. Setting clear schedules and sticking to them can help reduce anxiety and improve overall well-being.

Practice self-control

It is important to develop self-control skills to resist the temptation to constantly check social media. Young people can implement strategies such as keeping their devices out of reach for certain periods, turning off notifications, and focusing on meaningful off-screen activities to reduce digital dependency.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while social media provides numerous advantages for young people, fostering connection, self-expression, and learning, it also presents significant challenges. The potential for issues like anxiety, depression, social comparison, and cyberbullying underscores the importance of a balanced approach to social media use. By setting time limits and practicing self-control, young people can enjoy the positive aspects of digital platforms while safeguarding their mental health. Encouraging mindful usage of social media will allow youth to develop healthier relationships with technology, enabling them to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

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