

# **Understanding the Effects of Social Media on Adolescent Mental Health**

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## **Introduction**

Adolescents today experience their development within a world where digital technology controls every aspect. Social media platforms including Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat strongly influence how teens spend their days and how they interact with others while affecting their emotional state. Many researchers together with policymakers now investigate how social media use affects teenagers because their mental health problems persist. Social media serves as a platform for connection and self-expression according to some people, yet others believe it leads to anxiety, depression and identity confusion. The main research question investigates the impact of social media on adolescent mental health while examining the elements that influence these effects. This paper combines psychological, sociology and public health perspectives through an interdisciplinary research method to provide advanced understanding of digital age adolescent well-being. The research aims to surpass basic interpretations by creating an evidence-based analysis of teenagers' social media usage and its effects on mental health.

## **Psychological Effects**

Psychologists have conducted extensive research about media exposure effects on mental health. Research shows that teenagers who spend too much time on social media platforms will develop depression and anxiety disorders and negative body image problems. The research by Kelly et al. (2018) shows that adolescent girls who spent more than three hours per day on social media developed depressive symptoms at a

higher rate than girls who spent less time on these platforms. Social comparison emerges as the primary reason behind this connection between social media usage and depressive symptoms. Adolescents who see idealized images and filtered lifestyles in social media experience dissatisfaction about their appearance and social status which leads to reduced self-esteem.

Research in psychology investigates the connection between adolescent brain development and the online interaction patterns of teens. During adolescence the prefrontal cortex which controls judgment and impulse control remains under development. Teenagers face stronger reactions to online feedback because their brains are more sensitive to emotional experiences during this stage of development. The fMRI imaging research conducted by Sherman et al. (2016) demonstrated that brain areas linked to reward processing became active when adolescents received social media likes. Online validation creates powerful effects on emotional regulation and self-worth which makes the mental health challenges more complex.

The psychological community remains divided regarding the threats associated with screen time exposure. The study conducted by Orben et al. (2020) showed that digital technology use has little effect on adolescent well-being because such effects depend on individual characteristics. The researchers analyzed big data collections to discover that mental health impacts from social media mostly stem from individual life experiences and personality traits and existing psychological conditions. The Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013) states that all adolescents do not face equal levels of vulnerability. According to the model

adolescents' developmental phase together with their psychological requirements determines their vulnerability to media advantages and disadvantages.

### **Sociological Dynamics**

The sociological analysis shows that social media functions as a platform through which adolescents develop and shape their identities. According to symbolic interactionism theory, adolescents develop their self-concepts by interacting with others. The dynamic nature of social interactions becomes more powerful when occurring online. The instant feedback of likes and comments together with followers, creates an immediate influence on how young users see themselves. According to Nesi and Prinstein (2019) adolescents who pay close attention to what their peers think will experience mood fluctuations because of their social media activities. These teenagers demonstrate higher emotional dependence on digital communication while showing increased anxiety about social rejection.

Youth culture sociology studies how digital spaces influence the formation of social norms among young people. The combination of viral challenges with influencer culture and hashtag trends establishes common practices which determine what is deemed normal or desirable. Adolescents absorb these social norms without being aware of their actual effects on their behavior. The psychological theory of social comparison by Festinger directly relates to sociological research. This shows that adolescents exposed to unattainable social standards develop cognitive dissonance and experience increased emotional distress.

Social media interactions from peers generate both beneficial and detrimental consequences for users. The research conducted by George et al. (2021) demonstrates that social media enables youth from marginalized groups including LGBTQ+ teens to explore their identities while connecting with supportive communities. These same digital platforms enable the escalation of online bullying and social discrimination against users. Sociological research reveals that psychological vulnerabilities stem from social structures which create these challenges beyond individual experiences.

### **Public Health Perspectives**

Public health studies analyze social media effects on adolescents through large-scale examinations that evaluate both dangerous elements and beneficial factors. Naslund et al. (2020) demonstrate how digital platforms improve mental healthcare delivery through peer support networks and educational resources and easy access to mental health services. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed how social media networks became essential support systems for youth who experienced both isolation and anxiety (Keles et al., 2020). The unequal distribution of technology access combined with digital literacy differences creates major obstacles for public health initiatives.

The lack of parental supervision together with restricted access to trustworthy information and increased exposure to dangerous content puts adolescents from underserved communities at higher risk. Public health specialists recommend specific programs to reduce the existing inequalities in healthcare access. The development of healthy online behaviors among young users requires school-based digital literacy programs and community outreach initiatives according to George et al. (2021).

Public health researchers investigate additional consequences which result from prolonged screen usage in addition to psychological results. The excessive use of media leads to sleep problems and decreased physical exercise and academic withdrawal which create additional mental health challenges. The research by Carter et al. (2016) discovered that teenagers who used social media late at night experienced poor sleep quality which then led to increased anxiety and depressive symptoms. Public health strategies need to address multiple layers of impact because they must reach beyond treating mental illness to prevent and promote health.

### **Common Ground**

The three fields of psychology, sociology and public health maintain fundamental commonalities in their research findings. The three fields agree that the environment in which social media is used plays a more important role than the amount of time spent on it. Emotional resilience, peer relationships, and structural access are interconnected. The experiences of adolescents depend on their emotional resources together with their social environment and their systemic support systems.

A person with weak emotional control abilities and few friends will be more susceptible to dangerous online activities. A teenager from an under-resourced community experiences different digital risks than peers who have additional protective factors. These disciplines unite to support solutions which recognize individual characteristics alongside social conditions and broader structural elements. The different disciplines emphasize the need to start interventions at an early stage. Psychology supports the development of coping mechanisms and resilience during

early childhood. Sociological research shows that positive peer environments must be built to support mental health instead of developing toxic online cultures. Public health supports preventive education and fair resource distribution to prevent risks from becoming more severe. The disciplines share a mutual understanding that adolescents need empowerment instead of protection alone. Adolescents require training in digital literacy together with critical thinking abilities and emotional intelligence to safely use online spaces on their own.

The three disciplines unite in their approach to provide adolescents with positive engagement tools instead of criticizing social media. The integration of interdisciplinary knowledge reveals that effective interventions need to consist of multiple layers that support individuals. The combined strategies demonstrate the unified purpose of all disciplines to build better developmental routes for adolescents in modern digital times.

### **Disciplinary Conflicts**

Different disciplines maintain varying opinions about the extent of social media's effects on society. Psychological research investigates personal mental disorders yet sociological studies analyze how social environments and peer group dynamics affect behavior. Public health introduces additional complexity through its examination of access patterns alongside behavioral patterns and systemic inequalities. Different perspectives do not conflict with each other because they offer distinct viewpoints which enhance our comprehension.

Developing interdisciplinary frameworks stands as the key to uniting these different perspectives. An integrated intervention model would unite cognitive behavioral therapy from psychology with peer mentorship programs from sociology and school-based education campaigns from public health. These models would integrate personal risk elements with social environment factors and community system components. The complete understanding of social media's impact on mental health requires uniting all available knowledge.

### **Policy and Practical Implications**

The implementation of practical interventions requires the application of interdisciplinary knowledge. Mental health programs need to combine social media education with emotional regulation strategies for their implementation. Educational institutions should establish peer-based mentorship programs to teach students how to use the internet safely, while preventing cyberbullying incidents. The government needs to establish regulations for algorithms which target vulnerable adolescents by showing them dangerous content. Public health initiatives should focus on teaching people about safe screen usage and digital competence, particularly in areas with limited resources. Healthcare providers need to include standard assessments for problematic social media use during adolescent wellness visits, to establish connections between digital behaviors, physical and mental health results. The implementation of platform design modifications including the removal of public "like" counts and built-in mental health resources would create healthier online environments. Instagram has already introduced the ability to hide likes.

## Conclusion

Social media presents multiple interconnected effects on the mental health of adolescents. Research from psychology, sociology and public health demonstrates how personal vulnerability together with peer influences determines outcomes. Interventions need to address content along with interaction style and digital access rather than focusing only on-screen time limitations. Researchers and practitioners who combine different disciplinary perspectives can create strategies that genuinely support adolescent well-being by integrating various insights.

Future research needs to sustain its use of interdisciplinary frameworks to develop improved interventions and enhance digital equity while teaching adolescents effective online navigation that protects their mental health. Digital environments that prioritize mental health require collaboration between schools, healthcare providers, policymakers and technology companies. The combination of early digital citizenship education with strong public health initiatives that teach media literacy skills enables adolescents to handle social pressures on the internet. The ongoing need for interdisciplinary research exists to track social media use, development and adapt interventions for emerging platforms.

Society must demonstrate complete dedication to building a healthier digital environment for adolescents at every institutional level. Through interdisciplinary collaboration and complete strategic approaches, we can develop supportive

environments which enable adolescents to succeed emotionally, socially and academically in both online and offline spaces.

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