

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology has positioned social media as an integral part of adolescents' daily lives. While social media offers benefits such as easy access to information and social connectivity, excessive use has raised concerns regarding its impact on mental health. This study aims to examine the influence of social media on adolescent mental health, focusing on psychological outcomes such as anxiety, stress, depression, and feelings of loneliness. Using a quantitative explanatory approach, data were collected through questionnaires distributed to adolescents aged 14–18 years who actively use social media. The findings indicate that high intensity and prolonged duration of social media use are significantly associated with moderate levels of mental health problems among adolescents. Social comparison, the search for online validation, and reduced face-to-face social interaction emerge as key factors contributing to these conditions. The study highlights that although social media can serve as a supportive tool for communication and learning, unregulated use may negatively affect adolescents' psychological well-being. Therefore, collaborative efforts involving families, schools, and health professionals are essential to promote healthy and responsible social media use among adolescents.

Keywords: Social Media, Mental Health, Adolescents

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed patterns of communication and social interaction, particularly among adolescents. Social media platforms have become a dominant space for self-expression, information exchange, and social engagement. For adolescents, a developmental stage characterized by emotional instability and identity formation, social media plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions, behaviors, and social relationships. While these platforms offer opportunities for learning, creativity, and connectivity, their intensive use has also generated growing concern regarding adolescent mental health (Ardhania, S. Z., & Lestari, 2024).

Adolescence is a critical period marked by heightened vulnerability to psychological disturbances such as anxiety, stress, depression, and social withdrawal. The increasing reliance on social media during this stage may intensify these vulnerabilities, especially when adolescents are exposed to unrealistic social standards, cyberbullying, and constant social comparison. The pressure

to gain recognition through likes, comments, and online visibility often encourages adolescents to seek validation externally, which can negatively influence self-esteem and emotional stability (Ardatien Najwa, A. A., Fauziyyah Al Ghifari, Z., & Kusmawati, 2025).

Moreover, excessive social media use has been associated with reduced quality of face-to-face interactions, disrupted sleep patterns, and decreased academic concentration. These conditions may contribute indirectly to mental health problems by limiting adolescents' ability to develop healthy coping mechanisms and meaningful interpersonal relationships. The digital environment, while providing instant connectivity, can also foster feelings of loneliness and emotional isolation when online interactions replace real-world social support (apriani, 2024).

Given the pervasive role of social media in adolescents' lives, it is essential to empirically examine its impact on mental health. Understanding this relationship is crucial for developing effective preventive strategies and interventions that promote psychological well-being. Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing the influence of social media use on adolescent mental health, emphasizing the need for balanced and responsible digital engagement supported by families, educational institutions, and mental health professionals.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design with an explanatory approach to examine the influence of social media use on adolescent mental health. The quantitative method was chosen to identify the strength and direction of the relationship between social media usage and mental health conditions among adolescents in a systematic and measurable manner (Akbar et al., 2024). The explanatory approach allowed the study to analyze how variations in social media use contribute to changes in adolescents' psychological well-being.

The population of this study consisted of adolescents aged 14–18 years who actively use social media. A non-probability sampling technique was applied, specifically purposive sampling, with selection criteria including active ownership and daily use of at least one social media platform. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure the intensity of social media use and indicators of mental health such as anxiety, stress, depression, and loneliness. The questionnaire was distributed directly to respondents and completed independently.

Data analysis was conducted using simple linear regression to determine the effect of social media use as the independent variable on mental health as the dependent variable. Prior to hypothesis testing, the data were examined to ensure validity and reliability. The results of the analysis were used to assess whether social media use had a significant influence on adolescent mental health and to identify the overall tendency of mental health conditions within the studied population.

RESULTS

Social Media Use Patterns Among Adolescents

Social media has become a central component of adolescents' daily lives, shaping how they communicate, express themselves, and construct their social identities (Ardatien Najwa, A. A., Fauziyyah Al Ghifari, Z., & Kusmawati, 2025). At this developmental stage, adolescents are actively exploring who they are and how they are perceived by others. Social media platforms provide a virtual space that allows them to present curated versions of themselves, share personal experiences, and seek recognition from peers. This condition makes social media not merely a tool for communication, but also a medium for self-actualization and social validation (Daud, M., & Sulaehani, R. Daud, M., & Sulaehani, 2024).

In terms of usage patterns, adolescents tend to access social media frequently and for extended periods each day. The ease of access through smartphones enables continuous connectivity, allowing adolescents to engage with social media at almost any time. Activities such as scrolling through feeds, posting photos or videos, commenting, and monitoring peer responses become routine behaviors. This repetitive pattern reflects a habit-forming process in which social media use gradually integrates into adolescents' emotional and social routines.

Furthermore, adolescents often use multiple social media platforms simultaneously, each serving different social functions. Some platforms are used primarily for private communication, while others function as public spaces for showcasing lifestyle, achievements, or opinions. This multi-platform engagement increases the intensity of exposure to online content and social interaction. As a result, adolescents are constantly confronted with information, trends, and peer activities that may influence their attitudes, expectations, and emotional responses (Al Yasin, R., Annisa Anjani, R. R. K., Salsabil, S., Rahmayanti, T., & Amalia, 2024).

These usage patterns indicate that social media plays a significant role in adolescents' social development. However, the high frequency and duration of use also raise concerns regarding balance and self-control. When online interactions dominate daily activities, adolescents may experience reduced direct social engagement and increased dependence on digital feedback. Understanding these patterns is essential as a foundation for analyzing how social media use may affect adolescents' mental health and psychological well-being.

Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Mental Health

The intensive use of social media has been widely associated with various mental health challenges among adolescents. One of the most prominent effects is the emergence of anxiety and psychological stress resulting from constant exposure to online content. Adolescents are frequently confronted with idealized representations of success, appearance, and lifestyle, which can create unrealistic expectations and trigger negative self-evaluations. Continuous social comparison may lead adolescents to perceive themselves as inadequate, thereby increasing emotional distress and reducing self-confidence (Wahid, A. I., Sufriaman, S., Mahka, M. F. R., & Jaya, 2025).

In addition, social media encourages adolescents to seek validation through likes, comments, and online interactions. When this validation is perceived as insufficient, feelings of rejection and worthlessness may arise. This condition can gradually contribute to depressive symptoms, particularly among adolescents who strongly depend on social media feedback for self-worth. The pressure to maintain an attractive and socially acceptable online identity may also result in

emotional exhaustion and heightened sensitivity to peer judgment (Al Yasin, R., Annisa Anjani, R. R. K., Salsabil, S., Rahmayanti, T., & Amalia, 2024).

Excessive social media use can further intensify feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Although adolescents are digitally connected, online interactions often lack the depth and emotional closeness of face-to-face relationships. As a result, adolescents who spend most of their time engaging in virtual communication may experience reduced social support in real life. Disrupted sleep patterns, decreased concentration, and limited physical activity associated with prolonged screen time also indirectly affect mental health, reinforcing the negative psychological impact of social media on adolescents (Asmanur, A. R., Rusli, S., Isdayanti, I., Sudirman, S., Yani, A., & Amalinda, 2025).

Overall, these findings suggest that social media use, particularly when excessive and unregulated, plays a significant role in influencing adolescent mental health. While social media offers opportunities for connection and information, its psychological consequences must be carefully addressed to prevent long-term mental health problems during this critical developmental period.

The Role of Self-Regulation and Social Environment

The impact of social media on adolescent mental health is not uniform, as it is strongly influenced by individual self-regulation and the quality of social support surrounding adolescents. Self-regulation refers to the ability to control emotions, manage time, and make conscious decisions regarding social media use. Adolescents who possess strong self-regulation skills are more capable of setting boundaries, limiting screen time, and critically filtering online content, which helps reduce the risk of psychological distress (Adelia, T., & Delia, 2025).

Social support from family, school, and peer environments plays a crucial role in mitigating the negative effects of social media. Parental guidance and open communication can help adolescents understand the potential risks of excessive social media use and encourage healthier digital habits. When parents actively engage in discussions about online experiences, adolescents are more likely to feel emotionally supported and less vulnerable to negative online influences. Similarly, schools contribute by providing digital literacy education that promotes responsible and ethical social media use (Ayuanda, L. N., Kusuma, N. I., Arifiana, R., & Kristiyanti, 2025).

Peer support is also essential in shaping adolescents' online behavior and emotional well-being. Positive peer relationships can buffer the effects of online pressure by fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance beyond digital validation. Adolescents who receive adequate emotional support from their social environment tend to develop healthier coping strategies when facing online stressors. Therefore, strengthening self-regulation skills and enhancing social support systems are key strategies to ensure that social media use does not undermine adolescent mental health, but instead contributes to balanced and positive psychosocial development.

CONCLUSIONS

Social media has become an integral part of adolescents' lives and significantly influences their psychological development. This study concludes that social media use has a measurable impact on adolescent mental health, particularly when used excessively and without adequate self-regulation. High intensity of use is associated with increased levels of anxiety, stress, depression, and feelings of loneliness, largely driven by social comparison, the pursuit of online validation, and reduced quality of direct social interaction.

Despite these risks, social media is not inherently harmful. Its effects largely depend on how adolescents manage their digital activities and the extent of support they receive from their social environment. Adolescents who demonstrate effective self-regulation and receive guidance from families, schools, and peers are better equipped to use social media in a balanced and constructive manner. Therefore, promoting digital awareness, strengthening self-control skills, and fostering supportive social environments are essential to minimize negative mental health outcomes and ensure healthy adolescent development in the digital era.

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