

Impact Of Social Media Usage On Mental Health Of Adolescents – A Research Of Students Across India

Author

Abstract

The increasing use of social media has brought about significant changes in our society, with both positive and negative implications. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of social media on adolescents has been a prominent topic of discussion, particularly as this stage marks a critical period in their development into independent adults, accompanied by significant brain changes. This study examines the effects of social media on the mental health of 53 high school students, consisting of 33 females and 20 males, predominantly within the age range of 13 to 19 years. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on the nuanced effects of social media on mental health.

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I. Introduction

In recent years, the role of social media in shaping the mental health of adolescents has become a topic of growing concern. As platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube have gained popularity among young people, many researchers have explored how social media use might influence self-esteem, anxiety, and overall well-being. Previous studies have suggested that excessive social media usage is linked to higher levels of anxiety and lower self-esteem, as adolescents may engage in constant comparisons with others or face cyberbullying.

However, the relationship between social media and mental health is complex, and existing research presents mixed results. While some studies indicate a clear correlation between heavy social media use and negative mental health outcomes, others suggest that this relationship might vary depending on factors such as platform type, content consumed, and individual usage patterns.

This study aimed to investigate the impact of social media on self-esteem and anxiety levels among high school students. Specifically, it sought to examine whether increased time spent on social media correlates with heightened anxiety and diminished self-esteem.

II. Developments During Adolescence

During adolescence, the brain undergoes substantial development, particularly in areas related to decision-making, impulse control, and risk assessment. The prefrontal cortex, responsible for these functions, does not fully mature until the mid-20s, which can result in impulsive behaviours and a lack of foresight regarding the consequences of online actions¹. Adolescents are also still in the process of developing their ability to regulate emotions, and social media use can exacerbate issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.² These challenges are particularly prevalent when adolescents encounter cyberbullying or are exposed to idealized, unrealistic portrayals of life on social media platforms. Research indicates that lower emotional intelligence is linked to an increase in problematic social media use, amplifying these emotional struggles.³

As adolescents work to establish their identities, they are particularly vulnerable to peer influence. Social media often encourages comparison with others, leading to negative impacts on self-esteem and body image. This constant comparison can result in poor self-perception and contribute to mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. Another concern is that many adolescents lack the maturity to fully comprehend the long-term risks of sharing personal information online, making them susceptible to privacy violations or exploitation. While the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) offers some level of protection for children under the age of 13, older adolescents remain at risk due to the act's limited scope.¹

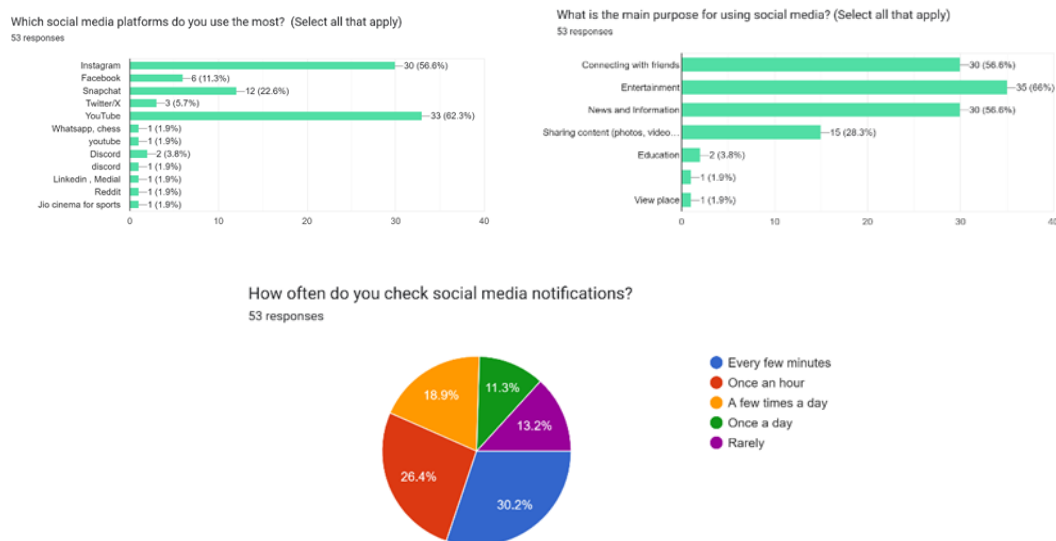
Excessive use of social media can also interfere with the development of essential face-to-face social skills. Adolescents may become more comfortable interacting in online spaces rather than in person, which can hinder their ability to form and maintain meaningful real-world relationships.³ These developmental factors underscore the critical need for effective social media regulation to protect adolescents from potential harms and to support their healthy growth and social development.

III. Examining Social Media Habits And Their Emotional Impact: Methodology And Results

The methodology for this research focused on an online survey designed to capture both the behavioural and psychological impact of social media on its users, particularly adolescents. The survey was distributed through Google Forms, targeting individuals between the ages of 13 and 19. Participants were asked a range of questions that explored how often they used social media, the platforms they frequented, and how these platforms affected their self-perception and mental well-being. The survey also sought to examine users' awareness of the broader mental health implications of social media use.

The survey contained multiple-choice questions. Participants were first informed about the purpose of the study, and consent was obtained prior to their involvement. The survey was administered online, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of responses. On average, participants took 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Questions covered several key areas: the number of hours spent on social media daily, the types of platforms used most frequently (including Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube), and the primary reasons for using these platforms (such as social connection, entertainment, and information gathering). Importantly, the survey included questions designed to assess participants' emotional responses to social media, such as how often they compared themselves to others online and how they felt after using these platforms—whether more confident, less confident, or unchanged. Data collection took place over one week in early October 2024, and once all responses were gathered, the data was exported into a spreadsheet for detailed analysis. Quantitative data was used to identify patterns of social media use, while qualitative responses were analysed for recurring themes related to mental health and self-esteem.

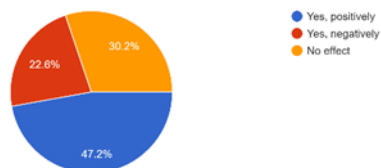
The results of the survey revealed interesting patterns in how the 53 young users engaged with social media. A large majority of respondents spent between 1-2 hours per day on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat, with YouTube being the most dominant platform across the group. Instagram and Snapchat also emerged as popular choices, especially for social interaction and sharing personal updates. The survey responses indicated that social media is primarily used for entertainment and maintaining connections with friends, but there is also significant use of these platforms for accessing news and information.



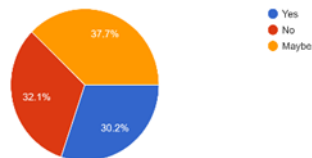
One of the key findings was related to how frequently participants checked their social media notifications. While a portion of the group reported checking once a day, a much larger segment checked multiple times, with some admitting to doing so every few minutes. This frequent checking was often associated with a sense of anxiety or pressure to stay updated, reflecting the addictive nature of social media for some users.

In terms of psychological impact, the responses showed a nuanced picture. A significant number of participants admitted to comparing themselves with others online, with many reporting that this led to feelings of self-doubt or reduced confidence. On the other hand, some respondents felt more connected and confident after using social media, particularly when engaging with friends. However, the majority indicated that their self-worth remained unaffected, suggesting that while social media has a strong influence, its effects on self-esteem can vary widely from person to person.

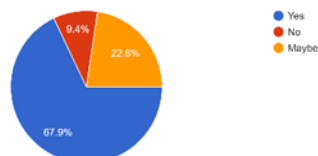
Do you think social media affects your self-esteem?
53 responses



Do you think social media increases you anxiety levels?
53 responses



Do you think there should be more awareness about the impact of social media on mental health?
53 responses

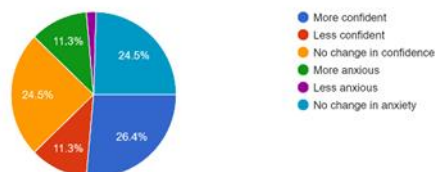


The participants were also asked about their thoughts on social media’s impact on mental health, with most agreeing that there should be more awareness of this issue. However, a small but notable group felt indifferent, indicating that they did not see the need for further discussion or action on the topic.

Open-ended responses in the end were relatively sparse, with a few participants highlighting concerns about the pressures created by social media but offering no specific suggestions for addressing them.

In summary, the results suggest that while social media plays a central role in the lives of young users, it comes with mixed psychological effects. Many users recognize the potential for social media to harm mental health, particularly through comparisons with others and the pressure to stay constantly engaged. Yet some also find social media to be a positive space for connection and expression. These findings underscore the need for ongoing conversations about responsible social media use and its broader implications for mental health, particularly among younger audiences.

How do you feel after spending time on social media?
53 responses



IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research highlights the complex relationship between social media use and its psychological impact on young users. The findings indicate that while social media serves as a valuable tool for connection and entertainment, it also presents significant challenges to mental health, particularly in the form of comparison and self-esteem issues. The data revealed that a considerable number of respondents engage frequently with social media, often feeling compelled to check notifications multiple times a day, which can lead to anxiety and emotional distress.

Furthermore, the survey showed that many young users are aware of the potential negative effects of social media on their mental health and recognize the need for increased awareness and education surrounding these issues. However, the diverse responses regarding self-esteem suggest that the impact of social media is not uniform; while some users derive confidence from their online interactions, others experience feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

These findings underscore the importance of promoting healthy social media practices and fostering resilience among young users. Schools, parents, and policymakers should collaborate to create supportive environments that encourage open discussions about social media’s role in mental health and provide resources for managing its effects.

Future research should aim to explore these dynamics further, focusing on longitudinal studies that assess how social media usage evolves over time and its long-term implications for mental health. Additionally,

investigating strategies that can mitigate the adverse effects of social media while enhancing its positive aspects could provide valuable insights for improving youth mental well-being in the digital age.

References

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