

The Negative Effects Social Media has on Young Adult's Mental Health

Virginia Commonwealth University

Kyla Berkshire

### **Abstract**

Social media is an incredibly strong presence and has been affecting teenagers greatly over the past several years. This paper responds to this growing issue by establishing the underlying effects of social media on a young teenager's mental health. The focus of the paper dedicates its reasonings to the effects of isolation, anxiety, depression, suicide rates, and increase in self-insecurity and decrease in confidence. The paper argues that there are several studies and data reasoning from numerous psychologists and scientists that prove how negative social media is to a teenager's life and the effect it has on mental health concerns growing in the population. Several studies within the paper evaluate the long-term and short-term effects differing social media platforms have on a young adult's brain and activities and evaluations that follow with the data. The main argument of the detrimental effects of social media are outlined through different evidence and reasoning to fully prove the foundation of mental health increases in teenagers, mainly due to social media and its addictive tendencies for younger minds.

*Keywords:* social media, mental health, depression, anxiety, isolation, psychologists, journals, Instagram, conflict, evaluation studies, longitudinal studies

Every day I follow the same morning routine. Wakeup, stretch, open blinds, check social media. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat. Seems almost silly to constantly be staring at my phone within the first few minutes of opening my eyes. I go to Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, etc. just to see what I had missed between the 6-8 hours I had been sleeping. I then always seem to catch a feeling of loneliness and melancholy each time after looking through the refreshed feed throughout these apps. Yet I continue to follow my routine. What is this helping? Why am I doing this? Why am I feeling so down? It's a consistent issue that concerns almost every young adult around the world with a social media account. These negative feelings are forever associated with differing internet platforms and people are facing the consequences. The extensive and constant use of social media has its extreme setbacks and growing problems, mental health being the center effect of it all.

It is a known fact that social media is one of the most powerful devices in today's society. Based on a recent study, the average person uses social media for a total of 145 minutes a day, which isn't surprising given the variety of apps and platforms accessible. Essentially, that equates to someone losing over 2 hours of their life to continuous scrolling and endless posts. Social media and the internet is an undeniable force that people use every day for hours on end. From politicians to marketers to newscasters, media is constantly being utilized and operated as a means of communication, information, and self-expression. It is an incredibly in-depth phenomenon, given the fact that people sometimes use their personal mobile devices just for the use of social media, especially young adults.

Teens are most affected by the evolving world of technology and media platforms. Although parents, teachers, and counselors are the ones seeing the issue and raising awareness to the impacts, young teens are ultimately the ones that are paying the price of these social media

platforms. They spend their early lives messaging and scrolling through platform after platform and quitting social media seems like an undoable thing in their day and age. In a recent study by the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, four scientists studied the longitudinal effects of social media on mental health and how that plays a part in early adolescent youth. They found that “of these adolescents, 20% of the boys and 52% of the girls reported to be concerned about their own social media use as being too time-consuming” (Beeres, 2021, p. 953). Eventually, this then leads to increased anxiety, depression, body issues, and isolation. Think about the social media app, Instagram. Teens are constantly chatting, direct messaging, and scrolling through thousands of posts a day. They are exposed to extensive comparison and filtered images that can fog what real life really is. Teens are utilizing Instagram to hide from their daily lives. They start to spend all their time looking through people’s perfect posts and end up finding the negative in their own lives. Self-image is completely detrimental because of this. Teens are just navigating life and the media they consume puts a blurred line over the deception between reality and expectation. Ultimately, social media is affecting teens more than we know. It is raising mental health concerns across the globe and leading to some deep conclusions, like suicide or depression. Social media is an incredibly powerful presence, and teens are the main group of people who are exposed to it and the main group who are affected in a negative way. Based on numerous studies and examinations of social media usage in relation to anxiety and depression, evidence strongly suggests that social media is very harmful and detrimental to a young adult’s growth and mental health, given its effects of isolation, anxiety, depression, suicide rates, and increase in self-insecurity and decrease in confidence.

Since social media has been taking over society, it is more prominent than ever. This wasn’t a prevalent issue 20 years ago, or even 15 years ago. It is a development issue that has

greatly risen to the surface in the past 10 years with the advancement of social media and technology. We are in a time of extreme social media usage and updates within society and teens are utilizing this as a way to interact and communicate behind closed doors. Due to this, social media has been shown to lead to young teen isolation and decreases face-to-face interaction. It gives people the opportunity to hide behind a screen and utilize social media as a form of social activity. In a study conducted by the *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, psychologists Eriksson, Lindner, and Mortberg, found that “internet and social media might be less anxiety provoking than face-to-face interactions” and that “reciprocity and openness, has been reported to be low for socially anxious individuals” (Eriksson et al., 2020, p. 820). This is even argued by the news platform, PBS, where Gretchen Frazee and Patty Morales state that “for adolescents, using social media in a way that detracts from face-to-face interactions could be particularly detrimental to mental health” (Frazee & Morales, 2019, p.1). This represents the connection between isolation and social media. Teens are understanding these platforms as a replacement for in-person interaction, taking away from actual experiences in life as a teenager.

Experts can agree that extensive internet and media usage results in various psychological distress, including separation of digital versus personal connections and relationships. What once used to be a constant connectivity to other peers and classmates, has now transitioned into strictly electronic communication. This ties into the idea that various platforms result in jealous and envious emotions brought on by teenagers. Chung-Ying Lin, an associate professor at the Institute of Allied Health Sciences, noted that “individuals with problematic social media use may suffer from *fear of missing out* which may result in mental health problems for some individuals” (Lin et al., 2020, p.165). This fear directly stems from the action of consistent usage of media and teens' isolation of just their phone and themselves. With constant scrolling and

online activity, the normal response for a teenager is to isolate themselves and dwell on other peer's posts and updates. Lin also argues that "through this specific fear, individuals' stress and level of burnout are possibly increased" (Lin et al., 2020, p. 168). The constant activity of social media brings upon several unending emotions, FOMO and isolation being two main ones. Social media gives teenagers the opportunity to focus immensely on other people's lives, forgetting to live their own and forcing isolation.

On the other hand, experts argue that social media can also carry a positive effect on relationships and communication within teens and adults. It is suggested that differing media platforms and outlets allow teens to become connected to one another and provides a communication device to make friends and express feelings with adults. Frazee and Morales again point out that "yet while social media can facilitate bullying and lead to more anxiety and depression among young people, it can also be used to help those who are struggling with depression, and can help loved ones pick up on warning signs early on" (Frazee & Morales, 2019, p.1). Social media can provide a network that allows close relatives and friends to reach each other and communicate freely with teenagers about suffering from severe mental issues and illnesses. It can act as a productive outlet for teenagers growing relationship stages through society. An example of this is presented by *PSYCOM*, a digital mental health resource and written by Katie Hurley:

Teens in marginalized groups—including LGBTQ teens and teens struggling with mental health issues—can find support and friendship through use of social media. When teens connect with small groups of supportive teens via social media, those

connections can be the difference between living in isolation and finding support (Hurley, 2020, p.1)

A teenager struggling with finding their identity and looking for support are able to utilize social media to find similar groups and communities where their connections can grow.

While social media does give teenagers access to people and family across the world, there are still severe limits and results that can come from this. Severe comparison and isolation are still two very real consequences of the access to an abundance of people online. With unlimited connections, teens still face the fear of missing out among differing activities and even family gatherings. There are several communication outlets that social media provides, but that is part of the problem. Instead of communicating face-to-face, teens will use these features to isolate themselves from the real world and completely change their view of expectation and reality. While communicating online is extremely easy, communicating in person seems like more of a task compared to digital connections. Due to this, laziness and extreme separation will occur. Teenagers will be prone to isolate themselves from the real world and give up on living their actual life due to the immense number of opportunities a signal device can provide, such as communication and online connectivity between like-minded individuals.

Along with isolation, social media has proven to increase anxiety and depression rates in young teens. Mental health concerns are growing rapidly among today's generation of young adults and teenagers. This is all to blame due to the unending effects of social media and its hold it has upon younger generations. A key factor concerning these two mental health conditions is the concept of social anxiety. Nowadays, teens are consistently using social media as a token of attention and praise between groups of people. When a person posts on Instagram, the post is

monitored by a number of likes and comments. This handed attention increases the effects of social anxiety because there is now a constant need to be known and appreciated. It can feel almost addicting, especially relating to the link between the outside world and the internet and the consistent urge and worry to stay online.

Eriksson, Lindner, and Mortberg once again found specific links to mental health concerns from social media. They quoted that “symptoms of social anxiety (SPIN) was significantly correlated with passive and total social media use” (Eriksson et al., 2020, p. 820). Their study showcased an association between anxiety increases and the use of total social media use, thus providing the correlation. Also, Chung-Ying Lin, proved the following point with his study on the underlying causes of mental health issues in teens. He said, “The present study showed that problematic social media use was associated with different types of negative mental health consequences and poorer psychological well-being (e.g., depression, anxiety). Therefore, minimizing problematic social media use among the general population may prevent subsequent mental health problems” (Lin et al., 2020, p.165). The link between depression and social media is not a coincidence and is a very real thing, especially in teenagers. Everyday people benefit from social interaction, whether that be conversations or physical outings, people are meant to interact with others. However, teens use social media as their form of social interaction and consider this to be their form of activity with their friends for their day. Without the benefits of social interaction and the connection it provides, teens can feel absent and out of control in their lives leading to symptoms like depression and anxiety.

Carl Newport, an author and an associate professor at Georgetown University, also provided key evidence that these two results are very real and happening every day in his Ted Talk on “Why You Should Quit Social Media.” He is constantly around teenagers and young



adults so he can see first-hand what happens when too much social media is involved in someone's life. He says, "If you talk to mental health experts on college campuses, they'll tell you that along with the rise of ubiquitous smartphone use and social media use among the students on the campus, came an explosion of anxiety-related disorders on those campuses" (Newport, 2018, p.1). These disorders are extremely common from the use of social media and are happening almost every day. Without proper attention to social media usage, teenagers will continue to utilize different platforms and apps as their social activity, losing connection from the outside world and resulting in depression and anxiety.

Alternatively, scientists and authors are also finding that social media may have a positive effect on social skills and help develop teen's communication skills from a young age. In his study, Newport even said "If I do not have a well-cultivated social media brand, people won't know who I am, people won't be able to find me, opportunities won't come my way, and I will effectively disappear from the economy" (Newport, 2018, p.1). This goes to show how powerful social media is in the form of interlinkage and varying opportunities that could come from the array of people found online. Teens can interact with different people to help develop their connection outreach and people skills.

While these opportunities are immense, social media still takes away from actual life. While teens are at home endlessly scrolling through different social media platforms, they continue to miss out on several interactive opportunities that come throughout a person's existence. This can be physical activity, new skills, talents, friendship outings, and family time. There are several outweighed opportunities that differ from online occasions and provide better outcomes and experiences. Ultimately, humans are meant to interact face-to-face and are incredibly reliant on other people's connections and interrelation. Through the internet, these

connections feel too forced and don't supply teenagers with the proper social and communication skills needed as they develop adulthood. With the constant need for social media, teenagers commonly miss out on the connection and accomplishing parts of life due to the constant scrolling and messaging through social media, which then leads to increased depression and social anxiety within teenagers.

Depression and anxiety are two very intense mental health concerns that come from the extensive use of social media. However, these concerns are brought even a step further when the usage of social media is highly excessive and depression symptoms become controlling. An incredibly hard subject to talk about is the increase of suicide rates in teenagers over the past decade. Frazee and Morales found that "suicide rates among females have been on the rise for several years in this time period, with the rates for 15- to 19-year-olds rising more quickly after 2009" (Frazee & Morales, 2019, p.1). As saddening as this is to find, it is an unfortunately very real outcome of teenagers' use of social media and devotion to differing platforms. Social media is creating an entirely new interactive world that takes teens away from their lives and creates extreme distress instead. Newport also pointed out that "Social media brings with it multiple, well-documented, and significant harms" (Newport, 2018, p.1). These harms translate into severe outcomes of teenagers which stem from depression and then stem from unexcused use of social media. Social media brings less sleep, less physical activity, less connection, and more online bullying and online risks. This suicide rate increase is no coincidence and showcases the final consequence of teen's continuing download of apps and their use.

Sarah Simon, a leading journalist in health and science reporting at VeryWell Health, showcases the alarming stressors associated with suicide rate increase and the effects it has on young teenagers:

“Suicide risk increased when they: started using social media early (13 years or earlier), used it and/or watched television for at least two to three hours a day, increased use time as they got older” (Simon, 2021, p. 1).

These correlations represent almost every teenager using social media and it is shocking to see how common it is. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death for ages 10-34, and social media is shown to be one of the main reasons for this. Less time on social media and active guidance on a teenager’s use is extremely encouraged throughout the study to bring down these percentages and help teens focus on a less digital life.

Personally, I can see a first-hand point of view of these mental health concerns. Growing up as a teenager, feelings of self-doubt and inner confidence issues were very common especially throughout high school and middle school. Living in a social media and digital environment did not help decrease those feelings but instead magnified it. Almost every teen experiences a personal issue with confidence and finding one’s worth. It is a constant battle and navigating the world at a young age is incredibly difficult for someone with constant social media comparisons online. The inner conflict a teenager faces is instantly escalated when the access to social media is allowed. Due to this, social media enhances feelings of insecurity and neglect of self-worth. It gives teens intense feelings of comparison and conflict.

I went through high school with the growing popularity of these apps, so I understand the impacts and addictive tendencies. It’s incredibly difficult to watch all of your friends use an app or chat on social media when you don’t have a profile yet. I watch my younger sister and step siblings go through this all the time and struggle with comparison and self-worth all due to these platforms. Eriksson, Lindner, and Mortberg showcased that “In certain contexts, online

interactions have been found to be as influential as offline interactions regarding social acceptance and rejection, peer influence on opinions and others, and emotional precedence in media use and effects. In addition, sexting and unlimited self-disclosure through social media have become new types of risk taking and sensation-seeking behavior, behavior that is known to increase during adolescence” (Eriksson et al., 2020, p. 821). These actions are all triggers for insecurity and comparison between teens which result in extreme inner conflict at a very young age. Teens are exposed to extremely fabricated images and videos that fog their view of themselves and make it easy to point out things wrong with their life instead of focusing on the good. This obsession with a “perfect” life shown on social media is extremely detrimental to a young teenager's mental health and is unfortunately very common and real. It is one of the main mental health effects that comes from excessive use of social media and cannot be avoided.

All in all, social media is one of the most detrimental things to happen to teenagers. It has been proven and shown by numerous studies, psychologists, and scientists that social media is a burden to a young adult’s development and impacts their mental health through a variety of reasons. Honestly, I have always been aware of the harmful impacts of social media and the internet. Ever since I first downloaded a social media app, I could see that there was no beneficial purpose to it. It was honestly just a tool to compare other people my age. Therefore, I am not surprised at these impacts. It’s almost obvious that social media provides no benefits to young teens and adolescents. Being so young, they are unable to see what social media is causing them. People are continuously using social media without wondering what the actual effects are. Why are they letting young teens use these apps so early into their lives? Why can’t we let young teens and adolescents first grow and mature before having access to these apps? All important questions and all need to be answered. Social media is affecting teens more than we know. It is

raising mental health concerns across the globe and leading to some pretty deep conclusions, like suicide or depression.

Parents and adults are the ones that need to help combat these impacts. Limiting a child's time on social media is one of the first steps. Schools and counselors should strictly mandate a no social media policy that keeps kids from using social media in a time of education. While at home, parents need to better monitor how often they allow their kids to use social media and honestly, if they even want to allow social media apps for their children. It should also be made aware that app creators and innovators should move their target audience to older populations, instead of teens. That way, teens won't even be old enough to download these apps. Social media is the new norm of how people live. Unfortunately, we can't undo it. We are unable to put a stop to the growing phenomenon of technology. However, we can be held responsible for enriching future generations with a healthy balance of technology and personal growth.

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