

Keira Lee

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The Effects of Social Media on Teenagers' Mental Health and Communication

Over the past decade, social media has become one of the most dominant forms of communication among teenagers. Studies show that most adolescents use social media daily, often spending several hours interacting with online platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. These platforms allow young people to communicate with friends, share experiences, and participate in online communities. However, the increasing amount of time teenagers spend online has raised concerns among researchers about its potential effects on mental health and communication. While social media can help teens stay connected, scholars have found that excessive use may contribute to anxiety, depression, and changes in interpersonal communication. At the same time, other researchers highlight the benefits of social media, such as opportunities for emotional support and identity exploration. This literature review examines current research related to the question of how does social media use affect teenagers' mental health and communication? The research can be organized into three major themes: the relationship between social media and teen mental health, the influence of social media on communication patterns, and the potential positive benefits of social media for adolescents.

One of the most widely studied areas of social media research focuses on its effects on teenagers' mental health. Many researchers have found a connection between heavy social media use and increased levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. Betul Keles, Niall McCrae, and Annmarie Grealish conducted a systematic review examining how social media affects

adolescents. Their findings suggest that high levels of social media use are often linked to emotional difficulties, noting that “all domains of social media use are correlated with depression, anxiety and psychological distress” among adolescents (Keles, McCrae, and Grealish). This research suggests that frequent online engagement may contribute to emotional stress for some teenagers.

Similarly, Jean Twenge and her colleagues found that increased screen time is associated with declining psychological well-being among adolescents. Their research showed that teenagers who spend more time on digital media are more likely to experience depressive symptoms and feelings of loneliness compared to those who spend less time online. According to Twenge and her team, adolescents who spend more time on social media report “lower psychological well-being” than those who engage less frequently with digital platforms (Twenge). These findings suggest that excessive social media use may negatively affect teenagers’ mental health. Another concern related to social media use is its effect on teenagers’ self-esteem. Social media often encourages users to present idealized images of their lives, which can lead to social comparison. Erin A. Vogel and her colleagues explain that “social networking sites provide abundant social comparison opportunities” for users (Vogel). When teenagers compare their appearance, achievements, or popularity to what they see online, they may begin to feel that they do not measure up. Vogel’s research also found that individuals who frequently engage in these comparisons may experience lower levels of self-esteem. In addition, teenagers may develop parasocial relationships, which are one-sided emotional connections with influencers or celebrities online. These relationships can create unrealistic expectations about appearance, lifestyle, and success, which may further impact teenagers’ mental health and self-perception.

Another important theme in the research is how social media has changed the way teenagers communicate. Digital platforms have made communication faster and more accessible, allowing teens to stay connected with friends and family regardless of location. According to research from the Pew Research Center, teenagers rely heavily on social media and messaging apps to communicate with others. Monica Anderson and Jingjing Jiang report that most teens say social media helps them feel more connected to their friends and allows them to maintain relationships more easily. However, some researchers argue that digital communication can also change the quality of conversations. Nancy K. Baym explains that while online communication allows people to stay connected, it may lack important elements of face-to-face interaction. These include facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language, which are important parts of effective communication. Without these cues, online conversations may sometimes feel less personal or meaningful.

In addition, some scholars worry that frequent use of social media may reduce the amount of in-person communication among teenagers. Sherry Turkle argues that technology has changed how people interact with one another, explaining that many individuals turn to their phones instead of having direct conversations. Turkle writes that “we expect more from technology and less from each other,” suggesting that reliance on digital communication may weaken deeper personal relationships. This shift in communication patterns has raised concerns about whether teenagers are losing important interpersonal skills as they rely more heavily on technology.

Although many studies focus on negative outcomes, researchers also highlight several positive effects of social media for teenagers. One important benefit is that social media can create support systems for young people. Online platforms allow teenagers to connect with others who may share similar experiences or challenges. Paul Best and his colleagues explain that online

communication can help adolescents build supportive relationships and reduce feelings of isolation. Their research suggests that social media can provide valuable emotional support, particularly for teenagers who may not feel comfortable discussing personal issues in face-to-face settings. Social media can also provide opportunities for teenagers to express themselves and explore their identities. Dana Boyd explains that online platforms give teenagers a space to experiment with how they present themselves and share their ideas with others. According to Boyd, social media allows adolescents to “develop identities and build social connections” within online communities. These platforms may help teenagers explore their interests, express creativity, and connect with others who share similar values or experiences.

These positive aspects demonstrate that social media is not entirely harmful. Instead, its impact on teenagers depends on how it is used and how much time individuals spend engaging with these platforms. When used responsibly, social media can provide meaningful opportunities for communication, support, and personal growth.

Overall, existing research shows that social media plays a complex role in teenagers’ lives. Many studies suggest that heavy social media use is associated with mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. At the same time, social media has significantly changed how teenagers communicate, making it easier to stay connected but sometimes reducing face-to-face interactions. Despite these concerns, social media can also provide important benefits by creating supportive communities and allowing teenagers to express themselves and explore their identities. Although researchers have examined many aspects of social media use, several questions still remain. Many studies focus on general patterns of social media use but do not fully explore teenagers’ personal experiences, motivations for using social media, and the

effects of time spent online. More research is needed to better understand how different types of social media interactions affect mental health and communication over time.

To address these gaps, future research could include surveys and interviews with teenagers.

Surveys would allow researchers to collect data from a larger group about how often teens use social media and how it affects their mood, relationships, and communication habits. Interviews could provide deeper insights by allowing teenagers to explain their personal experiences and feelings about social media. Using these research methods could help scholars gain a clearer understanding of how social media influences teenagers' mental health and communication in everyday life.

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