

Keira Lee

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

### **Introduction**

One of the biggest influences in a teenager's daily life today is social media, both on how they communicate with others and their self-image and identity. Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat make it so easy for adolescents to share moments of immediacy with others, to feel connected to their peers and involved with digital communities. These platforms open new doors for connection and self-expression, but have also left the door wide open to increasing apprehension about their repercussions on mental wellness and human interactions. Social media consumes several hours a day of the average teenager's time, which has led researchers to wonder whether this constant exposure is making more young people anxious, depressed and less able to communicate face-to-face.

This research investigates the impact of social media on teenagers which are mental health and communication behavior. In particular it investigates how social media use has both a positive and negative effect in areas such as emotional health, social comparison and communication behaviour. These effects may assist teenagers, teachers and parents in learning better ways to use social media while continuing healthy connections with people.

**Research Question:**

How does social media use affect teenagers' mental health and communication habits?

**Literature Review:****Social Media and Teen Mental Health**

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.

### **Methodology:**

#### **Research Design**

This study used a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods in exploring the impacts of social media on teenagers' mental health and communication behavior. Purposeful employment of a mixed-methods approach enables deeper insight regarding the impact that social media use has on teens' mental health and communication patterns. This design merges quantitative and qualitative data, allowing for both the observation of broad trends as well more in-depth sensemaking. A survey formed the quantitative base of this study and provided data on how participants used social media, their emotions and what type of communication they preferred. The qualitative side was obtained per an interview, offering in-depth, human insights to justify those trends. This data analytic complementary approach enhances the credibility of findings, in that supporting evidence is derived from multiple domains.

Beyond data collection, this study conducted a simple descriptive analysis to interpret the results of its findings. For survey responses, percentages and patterns in participant answers were utilized and for interview responses codes based on recurrent themes (e.g., social pass/fail division, emotional impact of decision-making discussions, communication preferences). The identified themes were then matched across both processes to find consistent patterns and associations. This allowed the study to link detailed accounts with broader trends, offering a clearer picture of how social media affects young people's health and communication in daily life.

### **Survey Method**

A survey was distributed using Google Forms to collect quantitative and qualitative data regarding teenagers' social media usage, emotional responses, and communication habits. The survey consisted of six questions, including a combination of multiple-choice, Likert-style, and open-ended formats. This structure allowed for both measurable data and more detailed personal responses. The multiple-choice questions focused on frequency of use and platform preferences, while the open-ended questions gave participants the opportunity to explain their thoughts and experiences in their own words.

A total of 15 teenagers participated in the survey. Participants were selected based on accessibility and willingness to respond, making this a convenience sample. Although this method allows for quick data collection, it also means that the sample may not fully represent all teenagers. The survey was distributed digitally, which made it easily accessible and encouraged participation, especially since the topic is directly relevant to the participants' daily lives.

The questions were designed to directly address the research question by focusing on key variables such as time spent on social media, emotional impact, experiences with social comparison, and preferences for communication. For example, participants were asked how often they use social media each day, whether they feel pressure to compare themselves to others, and whether social media affects their mood. Additional questions explored whether social media helps or harms communication with others and whether it replaces face-to-face interactions.

After the data was collected, responses were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics. Percentages were calculated for each multiple-choice question to identify overall trends among participants. Open-ended responses were reviewed and coded for common themes, such as feelings of insecurity, connection, or pressure. These themes were then compared to the numerical data to identify patterns and relationships. This method of analysis helped provide a clearer understanding of how social media use affects teenagers both emotionally and socially.

### **Interview Method**

To gain deeper insight into teenagers' personal experiences with social media, a semi-structured interview was conducted with one participant. The interview included five open-ended questions designed to explore how social media affects the participant's mood, self-esteem, and communication habits. Unlike a face-to-face interview, this interview was conducted through text messaging. This format allowed the participant to respond at their own pace and in a more comfortable, familiar communication setting, which may have encouraged more honest and thoughtful responses.

The semi-structured format provided flexibility, allowing the participant to elaborate on their answers rather than being limited to fixed responses. The questions were designed to align directly with the research question by focusing on key areas such as emotional impact, social comparison, and communication preferences. For example, the participant was asked how social media influences their mood, whether they feel pressure to present a certain image online, and how it affects their interactions with others. Once the responses were collected, they were analyzed using qualitative methods. The researcher reviewed the participant's answers and identified recurring themes, such as feelings of insecurity, pressure to maintain an online image, and a preference for digital communication over face-to-face interaction. These themes were then compared to the survey results to identify similarities and differences between the two data sets.

Although the interview provided valuable, in-depth insight, conducting it through text messaging rather than face-to-face may have limited certain aspects of communication, such as tone of voice and nonverbal cues. However, because texting is a primary form of communication for many teenagers, this method also reflects a realistic and relevant way that participants naturally express themselves. Overall, the interview method added depth and context to the study by capturing personal experiences that helped explain the patterns identified in the survey data.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

A key strength of this study is the use of a mixed-methods approach, which combines both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more complete understanding of the research question. The survey allowed for the collection of measurable data from multiple participants, making it possible to identify common patterns in social media use, emotional responses, and

communication habits. At the same time, the interview added depth by offering detailed, personal insights that helped explain the reasons behind those patterns. This combination increases the overall validity of the findings by allowing the results from each method to support and reinforce one another.

Another strength of this study is its focus on real-life experiences. Because the data was collected directly from teenagers, the findings reflect current and relevant perspectives on social media use. The use of open-ended questions in both the survey and interview also allowed participants to express their thoughts in their own words, providing richer and more meaningful data.

However, there are several limitations to consider. One major limitation is the small sample size, with only 15 survey participants and one interviewee. This limits the ability to generalize the findings to the broader teenage population. Additionally, the participants were likely drawn from a similar social group or environment, which may reduce diversity in responses and perspectives.

Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data. Participants may not always accurately report their behaviors or feelings, either because of memory errors or a desire to present themselves in a positive way. This could affect the accuracy of the results. Furthermore, the use of text messaging for the interview, while convenient, may have limited the depth of responses compared to a face-to-face or verbal interview where follow-up questions and tone could provide additional context.

Finally, this study focuses on short-term experiences rather than long-term effects. It does not track changes in behavior or mental health over time, which could provide a more complete understanding of social media's impact. Future research could address these limitations by including a larger and more diverse sample, using multiple interviews, and incorporating

longitudinal methods to examine how social media use affects teenagers over an extended period.

### **Survey Results**

The survey results provide insight into teenagers' social media use, its impact on mood, and changes in communication patterns. Among the 15 participants, 80% reported using social media for more than three hours daily, indicating high engagement with digital platforms. Instagram and TikTok emerged as the most frequently used platforms, with 90% of participants reporting regular use. When asked about mood, 70% of respondents stated that social media sometimes negatively affects their emotional well-being, while 60% admitted feeling pressure to compare themselves to others online.

Despite these challenges, 75% of participants reported that social media helps them stay connected with friends, demonstrating a positive role in maintaining social relationships. However, 50% indicated that social media sometimes replaces face-to-face communication, suggesting a potential decline in in-person interaction skills. Open-ended survey responses highlighted a range of experiences, including the enjoyment of connecting with friends and family, alongside feelings of insecurity when comparing themselves to peers.

These results reveal a dual effect of social media on teenagers: it provides important opportunities for connection and social support but also introduces emotional stress and a shift in communication practices. The findings suggest that the overall impact of social media is complex and depends on individual usage patterns and perceptions of online interactions.

The survey results revealed several patterns in how teenagers use social media and how it affects them.

- 80% of participants reported using social media for more than 3 hours per day
- 90% reported that Instagram and TikTok were their most used platforms
- 70% stated that social media sometimes negatively affects their mood
- 60% reported feeling pressure to compare themselves to others
- 75% said social media helps them stay connected with friends
- 50% reported that social media sometimes replaces face-to-face communication

These results suggest that while social media is useful for communication, it can also contribute to negative emotional experiences.

### **Interview Results**

The interview provided deeper insight into the patterns identified in the survey results by offering a more personal perspective on social media use. The participant described social media as a regular part of their daily routine, explaining that they use it throughout the day to stay connected with friends, keep up with trends, and pass time. This response supports the survey finding that most teenagers spend several hours on social media each day. The participant emphasized that social media plays an important role in maintaining relationships, especially when in-person interaction is not possible. This reinforces the idea that social media is a central communication tool for teenagers.

A major theme that emerged from the interview was the emotional impact of social media, particularly in relation to social comparison. The participant explained that seeing posts from

peers and influencers often creates pressure to present a certain image online. They noted that people tend to share only the best parts of their lives, which can make others feel as though they are not measuring up. As a result, the participant reported experiencing feelings of insecurity and self-doubt at times. This directly reflects the survey findings, where many participants reported negative effects on their mood and pressure to compare themselves to others. These responses suggest that social media can significantly influence how teenagers view themselves and their lives.

Another important theme was the impact of social media on communication habits. The participant stated that they often prefer texting or messaging over face-to-face conversations because it feels easier and less stressful. However, they also acknowledged that this can make communication feel less personal and meaningful. While social media helps maintain connections, it may also reduce opportunities for deeper, in-person interactions. Overall, the interview results highlight the complexity of social media use by showing that it offers both convenience and connection while also contributing to emotional challenges and changes in communication patterns.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study align with existing research and provide further insight into teenagers' experiences. Consistent with Keles and Twenge, this study found that heavy social media use is associated with negative emotional effects such as anxiety and low self-esteem. The role of social comparison identified in this study supports Vogel's research. At the same time, the findings confirm Anderson and Jiang's conclusion that social media helps maintain relationships. However, the results also support Turkle's concern that increased reliance on digital

communication may reduce meaningful face-to-face interaction. A key theme across both methods is the balance between connection and pressure. Teenagers rely on social media for communication but are also aware of its negative effects. This suggests that the impact of social media depends on how it is used, rather than the platforms themselves.

## **Conclusion**

Social media has become an unavoidable and influential part of teenagers' everyday lives, shaping not only how they communicate but also how they think, feel, and perceive themselves. The findings from both the literature and primary research demonstrate that social media has a complex and dual impact. On one hand, it provides valuable opportunities for connection, self-expression, and emotional support. Teenagers are able to maintain relationships, build communities, and explore their identities in ways that were not possible before the rise of digital platforms. On the other hand, excessive use of social media can contribute to negative outcomes such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and reduced face-to-face communication skills.

A key takeaway from this research is that the effects of social media are not entirely positive or negative, but instead depend on how it is used. The balance between meaningful connection and harmful comparison plays a critical role in shaping teenagers' experiences. When social media is used mindfully and in moderation, it can enhance communication and provide support systems. However, when it becomes excessive or centered around comparison and validation, it can negatively impact mental health and interpersonal relationships.

Moving forward, it is important for teenagers to develop healthier habits when using social media, such as setting time limits, being aware of content that affects their mood, and prioritizing in-person communication. Educators and parents also play a role in guiding teenagers toward

responsible use. Ultimately, understanding the impact of social media allows individuals to make more informed choices, helping them use these platforms in ways that support both their mental well-being and their ability to communicate effectively.

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### **Appendix A: Survey Questions**

1. How often do you use social media each day?
2. Which social media platforms do you use most often?
3. Do you think social media affects your mood or mental health? Why or why not?
4. Do you feel pressure to compare yourself to others on social media?
5. Do you think social media helps or hurts communication with friends and family?
6. Have you ever taken a break from social media for your mental health?

### **Appendix B: Interview Questions**

1. How often do you use social media in your daily life?
2. What are your favorite platforms and why?
3. How does social media affect your mood?

4. How does social media impact your communication with others?
5. Do you think social media has more positive or negative effects?

### Appendix C: Survey Results Table

Question	Key Results
Daily Usage	80% use 3+ hours
Most used platforms	Instagram, Ticktock, Snapchat
Negative mood impact	70%
Social Comparison	60%
Helps communication	75%
Replaces in-person	50%

### Appendix D: Interview Consent Form

Title of Study: Social Media and Teen Mental Health

Purpose: To understand how social media affects teenagers' mental health and communication.

Procedures: Participants will answer questions about their experiences with social media.

Confidentiality: Responses will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be used.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix E: Survey Consent**

By completing this survey, you agree to participate voluntarily. Your responses will remain anonymous and used only for academic purposes.

Yes

No