

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECT THE HEALTH OF THE YOUTH?

Devina Puri

Word Count: 1952

As per the Cambridge dictionary, “Social media consists of websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone”. The usage of social media has grown multifold. In 2021, there were 4.48 billion people actively using social media in the world, a rapid increase from 3.69 billion in 2020. Back in 2015, there were only 2.07 billion users. Almost 38% of the world’s population uses social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. While weighing the impact, the research shows that it has had a profound impact on its users, with 32% of children suffering from anxiety due to social media, teenagers with 5+ hours of social media usage were more than 70% likely to have trouble sleeping but on the other hand, it makes youngsters feel connected to their friends and family and increases their cognitive capacity. The area of influence is huge therefore making it important to study the impact on the youth.

Issue 1 - Impact on Mental health:

Mental health refers to behavioural and emotional well-being. It is related to how people think, feel, and behave. Social media was first introduced to connect people however it has evolved over the years and has impacted the mental well-being of millions of people positively and negatively. It is a large-scale problem as a large number of teens are affected as shown by a survey conducted by The American Academy Of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. The survey showed that 90% of teens (13-17) use social media. 75% of people who use the internet report having at least one active social media profile, and 51% report visiting a social media site at least daily. Additionally, two-thirds of American teen social media users say social networking sites help them to interact with people from different backgrounds, making them aware of different cultures and traditions from around the world and increasing their acceptance towards them. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of American teens on social media say they have met new friends on a social media platform indicating that it connects people with common interests or personalities. This aids in reducing loneliness and boosting mental health. Connecting to some cultures which may be more accepting, open-minded and aware could be beneficial.

Moreover, social media acts as an outlet for creativity and self-expression for teens, thereby becoming beneficial to mental health as it enables them to share their talents and feel encouraged and receive feedback from others, improving their self-confidence. More than 53% of American teens who go online create content for the internet. 32% say that they have created or worked on web pages or blogs for others. Therefore, social media can give teens a way to express themselves in a different manner that isn't in front of a large crowd. Whether they choose to write, make images or record videos, they can reveal their talents in a less direct way. Social media can allow them to have a voice and might give them the confidence to speak offline too. In the United States, YouTube has become the most popular social media platform with 85% of 13 to 17-year-olds creating and viewing content to create content or view it, 72% use Instagram, 69% use Snapchat, 51% use Facebook, and it’s estimated that 69% of US teens are monthly TikTok users indicating the large scale of impact it has on everyday life. Teens also earn money through these platforms, making them financially independent. Being self-sufficient gives a sense of accomplishment hence boosting mental health.

Although social media has numerous benefits, we should also consider the negative effects. 31% of US teens say it has a positive impact while 24% say that it has a negative impact on their mental health. This is mainly because it creates unrealistic views of others’ lives. Studies show that people mostly share the positive side of their lives making others feel a

sense of dissatisfaction. Instagram and Facebook enhance the concept of people feeling left out which subconsciously results in them checking for updates every minute. Additionally, it has been seen that almost 31% of teenagers in Britain felt ashamed in relation to their body image. Looking at manipulated images or filters on the internet has been said to cause insecurities, especially among the youth about their appearance and body. Four in ten teenagers said images on social media had caused them to worry about body image. These insecurities further lead to mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders or body dysmorphia. Furthermore, about 10% of teens report being bullied on social media, and many other users are exposed to abusive comments. With Instagram being the leading platform with 70% of teenage users in India, 30% of them have shared sensitive information which could be used against them through cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is prevalent as 1 in 10 teenagers in India face it and almost 50% goes unreported. A study by Monash University showed that cyberbullying destroyed self-esteem and results in teenagers thinking they 'aren't enough'. A study conducted by the University of Texas shows that lack of self-esteem creates anxiety, loneliness and an increased risk of depression. Social media platforms like Twitter can be hotspots for spreading harmful rumours, lies, and abuse that can leave permanent emotional scars. Studies about the youth in India show that two in five users are open to accepting requests from friends of friends and/or complete strangers, thus becoming more vulnerable to online threats and hazards.

This is an impressionable age group and to combat such negative impacts, it is crucial for teenagers to communicate about their experiences, specifically to a trusted adult who can help them. It is important for young children and teenagers to attend workshops or seminars in understanding the possible risks of joining social media so that they can stay safe and secure while browsing online or through social media. Furthermore, internet safety rules and guidelines should become a permanent part of the syllabus of schools and colleges.

Issue 2 - Impact of social media on Physical Health:

A person's physical health is the condition of their body and the extent to which it is free from illness or is able to resist illness. Several studies have shown the link between excessive use of social media leading to various issues such as difficulty sleeping, eyestrain, trouble focusing, bad posture and unhealthy dieting leading to more serious issues like malnutrition, but on the other hand, it can motivate people to become more active, improve cognitive development and hand-eye coordination

Firstly, when healthy physical lifestyles such as exercising and balanced diets are encouraged on the internet as "trends", people feel motivated to make changes in their life leading to better physical health. Social media allows fitness trainers, influencers and professionals to give their insights hence studies show on Instagram alone, the world over 180 million users explore hashtags such as #fitness on a daily basis. This indicates that social media largely affects physical health. A study by Stanford Children's Hospital in Palo Alto, California found that seeing exercise-related social media posts, such as images of friends exercising or wearing workout clothes, checking into gyms, or posting about fitness-related accomplishments, made them feel motivated to work out. A study conducted by Hope Labs showed that 64% of US teens and young adults have used health-related apps with the most common being fitness apps. The use of fitness apps like Cult, Nike Run Club and Strava help individuals track their workouts, customise their routines and follow a proper diet. They help individuals understand whether their current routine and diet allow for progress. Further,

social media fitness influencers who gather vast followers have the power to motivate teenagers to understand their bodies and work towards taking care of it. Their accounts also provide a means of convenience in accessing quality information and knowledge as well as act as a support group.

On the other hand, social media's impact on physical health can be negative. Studies show teenagers suffer from sleep deprivation, unhealthy weight controls, eye strain and slouched posture due to excessive use of social platforms. 50% of girls and 30% of boys on social media use unhealthy weight control behaviours such as skipping meals, fasting, and vomiting, by looking at unrealistic edited images. A study in Britain shows that four in ten teenagers said images on social media had caused them to worry about body image. Teenagers tend to look and want a body type similar to celebrities, influencers or even their friends, hence they begin to skip meals and find unhealthy ways to achieve their unrealistic goals. Lack of proper nutrition can lead to headaches, tiredness and contributes to stress. With the above naturally, teenagers going through their prime years of education do not stay focused and end up slacking. Moreover, teenagers view pro-tobacco users on social platforms as encouraging resulting in them getting pulled into activities like smoking. 5.4% of American teenagers smoke due to influence and peer pressure. A study conducted by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that teenagers who regularly use popular social media outlets were more likely to drink, use drugs, and buy tobacco than adolescents who either did not use social media or used it less frequently showing how it can have negative impacts to teenagers lungs, liver and brain. Additionally, in order to achieve and maintain healthy sleep, bodies need to be able to naturally produce melatonin. A study in a newsletter by Medical News Today suggests that staring at screens, chatting with friends in bed is not recommended as the blue light emitted from electronic screens has the greatest impact on sleep. Blue light stimulates parts of the brain that makes us feel alert which delays melatonin production and prevents teenagers from having quality sleep patterns. Disrupted and delayed sleeping patterns can often draw ties with, poor academic performances as shown by a study in the Hindustan Times. A study by the Official Publications Or The North American Spine Society indicates a rise in patients with upper back pain linking it to poor posture due to excessive viewing of the screen and use of social media. It is referred to as "tech neck" and it is predicted that a large number of today's youth could require surgeries if they don't make a conscious effort to keep their posture straight. Additionally with the world shifting online, children at a young age have had to switch their lives and learn online. The usage of screens for 8 hours+ for education and additional free time hours spent on social media have resulted in digital eye strain. Digital eyestrain causes irritation and fatigued eyes and headaches. A 2015 study from Pew Research found that 72% of teenagers played video games, whether on a computer, a phone, or through a television screen. That number was even higher at 84% when looking specifically at teenage boys.

In conclusion, it is without a doubt that social media presents multiple opportunities for teenagers to express themselves, learn about who they are and also take care of themselves. Despite these beneficial features, this assignment has opened my eyes towards the harsh reality of so many teenagers who fall victims to insecurity, anxiousness, isolation and depression. Due to the constant need to have a 'perfect' life, teenagers are tricked to believing that their life should mimic the lives they see online. They believe that the life of social media influencers is the way of life. Rather than it serving as a future goal, it acts as a catalyst to suffering from various mental health issues. As they are the future of humankind, it is vital for them to

References

- “72% Of Teens Play Video Games; Rises to 84% of Teen Boys.” *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*, 4 Aug. 2015, https://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/2015-08-06_teens-and-friendships_3-01/.
- Akana, Kehani. “Social Media Affects Teens' Mental and Physical Health.” *The Cane Tassel*, 2020, <https://thecanetassel.org/821/features/social-medias-effects-on-teens-mental-and-physical-health/>.
- Anderson, Monica, and Jingjing Jiang. “1. Teens and Their Experiences on Social Media.” *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*, Pew Research Center, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/11/28/teens-and-their-experiences-on-social-media/>.
- “Body Image: How we think and feel about our bodies.” *Research Report - Mental Health Foundation*. 2019, <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/DqVNBWRVvpAPQzw.pdf>.
- Comstock, Jonah. “Survey: Two Thirds of Teens, Young Adults Have Used a Health App.” *MobiHealthNews*, 1 Aug. 2018, <https://www.mobihealthnews.com/content/survey-two-thirds-teens-young-adults-have-used-health-app>.
- “Does Social Media Motivate or Discourage You to Work Out?” *Stanford Children's Health - Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Stanford*, 2020, <https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=does-social-media-motivate-or-discourage-you-to-work-out-88-p11067>.
- Ehmke, Rachel. “How Using Social Media Affects Teenagers.” *Child Mind Institute*, 2022, <https://childmind.org/article/how-using-social-media-affects-teenagers/>.
- Grove, Christine. “Taking the Fight to Cyberbullying.” *Monash Lens*, 2022, <https://lens.monash.edu/@education/2018/01/18/1299375/no-one-size-fits-all-approach-in-tackling-cyberbullying>.
- “Healthy Sleep Patterns, Alertness on Waking up May Be Affected by Tablet Devices.” *Hindustan Times*, 23 May 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/health/healthy-sleep-patterns-alertness-on-waking-up-may-be-affected-by-tablet-devices/story-rdPOtTvbATE8nTg7VxD5gP.html>.
- Lee, Yong. “How Does Social Media Affect Our Mental and Physical Health?” *Community Health Center in Houston, TX*, 2017, <https://www.offeringhope.org/social-media-affect-mental-health>.
- Lenhart, Amanda, and Mary Madden. “Teen Content Creators and Consumers.” *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*, Pew Research Center, 31 Dec. 2019.

MayLauren . “Positive Effects of Social Media on Your Teen.” *Family Orbit Blog*, 10 Feb. 2020, <https://www.familyorbit.com/blog/the-positive-effects-of-social-media-on-your-teen/>.

Maheshwari, Rhea. “1 In 10 Indian Adolescents Faces Cyberbullying, Half Don't Report: Study.” *Indiaspend*, Indiaspend, 13 Mar. 2020, <https://www.indiaspend.com/1-in-10-indian-adolescents-faces-cyberbullying-half-dont-report-study/>.

“Social Media.” *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/social-media>.

“Social-Media Use 'Disrupting Teen Sleep and Exercise'.” *BBC News*, BBC, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-49330254>.

Sumayya, Rukku. “How to Earn Money from Instagram in India 2022: 5 Methods.” *Oniv Digital*, 2022, <https://www.onivdigital.com/blog/how-to-earn-money-from-instagram-in-india/>.

Vandewalle, Gillies, et al. “Light as a Modulator of Cognitive Brain Function.” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2009, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19748817/>.

Wahl , Siegfried, et al. “The Inner Clock-Blue Light Sets the Human Rhythm.” *Journal of Biophotonics*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2019, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31433569/>.