

# Effects of Social Media on Teenagers' Mental Health

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## ABSTRACT

Teenagers spend a significant amount of time on social media with no age restrictions. Spending too much time on social media cause teenager to encounter health issues such as anxiety, depression, and inclination toward suicide. This paper examined the reason behind teenagers' anxiety and depression was because spending time on social media limited their time to engage in face-to-face interactions. This study planned to conduct a questionnaire survey to collect data, and the research found that social media had various negative effects on teenagers' mental health.

**Keywords:** *teenagers, social media, anxiety, depression, mental health*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Research from the American Association of Suicidology, proves that social media is one of the leading causes of mental issues among teenagers [1]. Most of them engage in social media an unhealthy amount of time which drains their mental health leading to depression, anxiety, and self-harm, and suicidal behavior. Some of these social media platforms include Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tik Tok, and YouTube. With no strict age restriction, anyone can create an account and be part of the online society. These studies revealed that teenagers were unable to keep up with the pressure from keeping up with social media expectations, which caused anxiety and depression. Human beings are social beings, lack of social interactions causes isolation and fear of missing out (FOMO) which is also another effect of social media use. These teenagers are constantly online hence limiting their face-to-face interactions with their peers or even family members. This isolation may grow into loneliness which may trigger their depressions leading to self-harm and suicidal tendencies. Extensive research has been done on this topic and the unanimous conclusion is that social media plays a major role in the deteriorating mental health of teenagers. This paper tried to explain the logical reason behind the negative effect social media has on teenagers.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The studies done reveal that most teenagers are having a hard time keeping up with the pressures of social media which is why their mental health is deteriorating

[2]. For instance, almost every teen on social media is faking their lifestyle by either posting flamboyant lifestyle, face tuning their bodies, or editing their bodies to fit in the society's perceived image. Nonetheless, they fail to understand that everyone on the platform is faking their life, and this potentially drives them to the edge as they resort to self-harm and suicidal acts.

## 3. NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH

The effects of social media on mental health include addiction, social anxiety, fear of missing out (FOMO), self-harm, depression, and isolation. The pressure that social media has on these youths is alarming as they are influenced to keep up with their appearance. When they are unable to do so, they feel like they are inadequate even though it is a façade that most people are upholding [3]. Most teens are on YouTube and Instagram which are the most widespread social media platforms. Teenagers even younger than eighteen already have monetized YouTube channels from which they earn and live lavish lifestyles from the videos they post on there. This lavish lifestyle makes their peers who are not living as them feel inadequate and anxious seeing their peers or even people younger than them making millions while they are struggling. These teens are unable to understand that most do the times, people post and share the highlights of their lives and rarely their low moments. They keep feeling dissatisfied with their lives without because the social media posts are manipulated to make their lives look better than it is [4].

The influence that social media has on young people

is alarming as they are always online at any given time. Platforms like TikTok have trending challenges that push teenagers to participate so they look cool or trendy. The fear of missing out (FOMO) makes them do despicable things as there is always a trend online that attracts them because they want to be seen taking part in them. FOMO also compels teenagers to keep checking their phones for updates from their social media platforms. This is proven to be unhealthy because they live an anxious life as they wait for updates from everyone. This over-concentration on their phones also cultivates the culture of isolation as they are always on their phones which is not healthy for them [5]. A study done confirmed that most teenagers are addicted to social media that they are isolated from everyone else. This addiction makes them lonely since they are seeking solace in social media which is a façade and does nothing for their social life.

Anxiety and depression have increased over the years and one of the leading causes is social media usage. According to an article on the EIN Presswire [6], suicide rates have increased as teens are increasingly having suicidal thoughts due to depression. Although they always display warning signs, caregivers need to note that limiting social media and offering guidance helps in understanding how social media works. According to a study done, face-to-face interaction helps to effectively reduce stress and elevate one's mood [7]. Interacting with peers helps them feel unified and now as opposed to them being stuck on social media all the time [8]. Physical interaction proves to them that they have someone who cares as opposed to the online followers and people who do not care and are not even aware that they exist. The anxiety and depression that come from extreme uses of social media manifest in mood swings that escalate to mood disorders which then lead to depression. This research proves that some of these depressed teenagers suffer mental breakdowns which leads them to have suicidal thoughts.

Another negative effect of social media is cyberbullying which accounts for up to at least 10% of teenage bullying cases. As technology continues improving so are more ways of communication either wanted or unwanted. This is a great case of cyberbullying which has been rampant in recent years. Bullying has improved from physical abuse to social abuse on social media which cripples the esteem of the victims. Cyberbullying entails snaky or abusive comments on the victims' posts [9]. These comments could be screenshots and turned into memes which intensifies the issues even further. Social media has also become a hotbed of sharing rumors and hurtful lies that cause emotional scars [10]. Since these platforms are free for everyone, if you post something on there, it becomes public and open for everyone to comment, share and like or dislike. This has made it easy for social media bullies to access their victims as they can just easily comment hurtful remarks on their pictures and the message is received.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires were used for this survey as the core method of data collection. The reason for using this method is to ensure that the people taking part in the survey have relevant information to share. Using questionnaires guarantees the researcher that the respondents are expressing their realities since they are stating their personal experiences. For this study, a mix of qualitative and quantitative research was conducted to ensure that the results were credible and extensive. The methodology used was thorough in collecting all the necessary data for this study. It factored in the personal experience of the participants and ensured that all the ethical considerations were fulfilled before beginning the research. These ethical considerations include seeking informed consent from the participants, anonymity, voluntary participation, no harm done to the participants, and relevance throughout the study. The purpose of fulfilling these considerations is to ensure that the data collection process is reliable and by the book. Making the research credible and reliable.

Qualitative research was used in the entire survey questions as the goal was to collect meaningful information about their experiences with social media. From part two of the questionnaire, the respondents were supposed to provide personal experiences with social media and the impacts it has on them. The questions were targeted at exposing their emotions and getting them to express their feelings. Since the respondents have lived the experience, they understand and can, therefore, speak correctly on how social media affects their lives. The fact that they are providing personal accounts, the likelihood of flawed data is significantly low especially since their identities are anonymous. This protection makes them open up more as they provide personal information.

Quantitative research on the other hand was instrumental in proving the numbers needed to understand the severity of the impacts of social media on the respondents. Through these questions, one can easily identify the number of people affected by social media and the intensity of the problem. It is easy to extrapolate the exact number of people that are severely affected by social media and find ways to help them reduce the problem and at the same time identify those that are not affected by it. This data then helps with drawing the right conclusion on the effects of social media on teens' mental health based on the number of people and their responses. The numbers collected on the different genders involved in the study helps with shaping out the findings of the data collected.

## 5. FINDINGS

The research findings reveal that most participants are addicted to social media most of who are affected by the content they consume there. According to them, they

always feel defeated when they go offline from social media because of the pressure that comes from viewing their peers living their best life out there. Most of them also admitted to using social media to escape their realities which in hindsight triggers their anxiety and depression. A good number of them disclosed that they do it for fun and entertainment which may not be mutually exclusive in this research. Bottom line is that most subjects in the research are social media addicts, and this affects their mental health.

Social media affects the mental health of most teenagers based on the responses received from the questionnaires, most of whom affected are female as per the data collected. The responses received from the questionnaires also prove that most females are affected by anxiety induced by constantly being on social media. Their social media hours were over the roof with most of them being on there for over five hours on Instagram alone. They also admitted to being on all the other platforms listed on the questionnaire proving that they may be suffering for fear of missing out hence consuming content from all the platforms.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Many teenagers are greatly affected by social media and the façade of perfection implied by the users. According to the findings, many teenagers spend hours on different social media platforms going through pages that drive their anxiety and depression off the roof. As they peruse and follow their pages, they feel demotivated and sometimes even insufficient in their lives for not having the same things and accomplishments as the influencers they follow. Sadly, they may be aware that most people only post the highs and accomplishments in their lives, but they fail to be patient with themselves. Although they know that some of the posts may be fake, they still give themselves a hard time for not having made the same progress. It is also confirmed that a few of them have either engaged in social media bullying or have been victims of the same. This cyberbullying ranges from body shaming to leaving nasty and negative comments on other users' posts.

From findings, each social media company, for example, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, should consider putting age restrictions on the use of the application. Furthermore, they should set a time quota for minors since they have weaker self-control. In addition, verbal use on the internet should be constantly monitored as cyberbullying has become more commonly seen recently.

For future studies, it is advisable to carry cyberbullying into research and to study the direct relationship between hours of social media usage to teenagers' mental health issues

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