



Student Name: Shazia

Student ID: 2511888

Module Name: Psychology in Health and Social Care

Module Code: LCHS4010

Lecturer Name: Brian Mashumba

Assignment Name: Component 2 Essay

The Impact of social media on mental health on adolescents'

Social media has become a huge part of everyday life for adolescents. It allows people to communicate, express themselves, share content and maintain friendships. However social media also has a negative impact on adolescents mental health and wellbeing. Research has linked social media use with issues such as depression, anxiety, body image concerns, low self-esteem, losing confidence and problematic social media use. At the same time social media can provide help and support for these issues, friendships and access to mental health information. Therefore, the effects of social media are complex and can depend on how it's used, the individuals psychological needs and their experiences online.

Adolescence is an important period of development because young people are in the process of developing their identity and becoming more independent. Erikson's theory of psychological development describes adolescence as the stage of identity vs role confusion, this is when young people explore who they are and categorise where they belong. So through social media young people are able to experiment with their identity based on how they present themselves online. They can choose their appearance, interests and the social groups they want to be associated with. The qualitative literature review by Popat and Tarrant discovered that adolescents use social media for self-expression and validation. Young people could use profiles and pictures to express themselves, but it could also become negative when they constantly rely heavily on other people's reactions to feel good about themselves.

Likes comments and followers can increase popularity and social approval. The review discovered that young people consistently check the amount of likes and comments they received and compared them with others. Receiving less interaction than others on a post could negatively affect their self-esteem, while positive feedback on a post could give them temporary confidence. This relates to Erikson's theory because adolescences are still developing their identities and wanting to be accepted by others. If their self worth is them constantly relying on validation and online approval, social media can make identity development more difficult. However social media doesn't always have a negative affect. Some young people choose to make private accounts so they can only express themselves to close friends, people they are comfortable with or use pictures as a form of personal reflection. This suggests that the way social media is used is important.

Social comparison is another factor that can affect their mental health. Although social media isn't always reality, young people are easily influenced by the media and may compare appearance, lifestyle, friendships and popularity with what they see online. The qualitative review identified appearance comparison and body ideals as one of its main themes. Young people compare themselves with images of what they consider to be the 'perfect body' even when these images may have been digitally edited. This could reduce ones confidence and negatively affect body image. Research also noticed concerns about eating disorders as unrealistic body images could encourage unhealthy ways of thinking about their physical appearance. Cyberbullying about their appearance could make it more difficult because young people may receive negative comments about their bodies.

Social media can also create pressure to stay connected. The review discovered that young people sometimes felt they needed to be active online, so they don't miss what's going on in their friend's life. Social media can contribute to fear of missing out and encourage dangerous compulsive use. Some people may feel pressured to keep streaks, reply to messages or ensure that all platforms are checked regularly. This pressure could also affect relationships in person with some adolescences as social media is known to reduce the quality time with friends and family. Being disconnected can cause anxiety because they could be judged and later left out from their friendship groups. Also, social media use before bed can lead to sleeping difficulties.

The research also shows that social media can have a positive outcome on a young person's wellbeing. Popat and Tarrant identified social engagement and peer support as one of their five main themes. Adolescents described using social media to communicate more easily and find people with similar experiences. Online communities could be useful for people who feel isolated as they will be able to connect with others who understand the difficulties they are struggling with and they could help them feel less alone by being there for one another when one needs someone to talk to. Some people felt that seeing other people's recovery stories made them feel less alone and actually encouraged them to seek professional support.

This shows why social media shouldn't just be seen as harmful. The purpose and how its used are important. For example, using social media to communicate with friends will have a different effect in comparison to repeatedly comparing appearances and checking likes. Positive and negative effects could happen at the same time. Social media can help a teenager feel connected to their friends but also have that constant pressure of staying available.

Cognitive flexibility was another important factor. This is when young people may be influenced by what they see on social media, which can change or shape their views, attitudes and beliefs. Particularly when they are repeatedly exposed to certain ideas or images. If an individual has difficulties adapting their thinking or finding different solutions to dealing with stressful situations, they may run to social media as a form of distraction or escaping reality. This suggests that psychological characteristics can help explain why some adolescents may develop concerning patterns of use while others don't.

Another problem is bullying, harassment and harmful content on social media. The qualitative data found that cyberbullying could cause stress, anxiety, confusion and isolation. People being able to stay anonymous online, makes it easier as they are comfortable to say horrible things to others while keeping their identity unknown. Teenagers also talked about seeing things like self harm content, violent images and other upsetting posts, which could be especially harmful for young people who are already struggling with their mental health.

There are some limitations of the research that need to be considered. The first study that I found used a cross-sectional diagram, which showed links between different factors but did not prove that one cause another. For example, the study found a link between unmet psychological needs and problematic social media use, but this doesn't mean that having unmet needs directly causes problematic social media use. The study also used self-reported information from young people meaning some answers may have not been

accurate. Another limitation of the research is the research was carried out with secondary and high school students in one area of Turkey and used convenience sampling. This means that results are not very reliable as they may not apply to all teenagers from different countries and backgrounds.

The qualitative review also had some limitations. Although qualitative research was useful because it allowed teenagers to open up and talk about their own personal experiences, the studies may have used different methods and different sample sizes. Some used focus groups while others used interviews and online questionnaires. There were also differences in the genders and locations of the participants involved. This means the research may not represent every adolescent's experience of social media. However, using different research methods also meant that a wide range of experiences could be included.

Overall, the research shows that social media has both positive and negative effects on adolescent mental health and wellbeing. It can help teenagers express themselves, connect with friends, find support from others and access mental health information. However, it can also contribute to low self-esteem, comparing appearance, fear of missing out, cyberbullying and problematic social media use. Psychological factors such as psychological needs and cognitive flexibility can help explain why social media can have such a strong effect during adolescence because teenagers are still developing their identity and looking for validation and acceptance from other people.

In conclusion, social media shouldn't be seen as completely good or bad for teenagers, its effects can depend on the individual, what they see online, why they use social media and how their outside life of social media is. Supporting teenagers' psychological needs, helping them develop flexible ways of thinking and encouraging healthier activities could help reduce some of the negative effects. At the same time, the positive side of social media, such as friendships, support and feeling connected to others shouldn't be ignored. Overall, a balanced approach is needed so teenagers can enjoy the benefits of social media while also understanding and managing some of the risks.

Reference list

Bala, A. and Madu, O. (2026). Navigating the digital age: Adolescent Mental Health, online interactions, and the need for responsible community support. *JAACAP Connect*.

doi:10.62414/001c.154605.

Dombak, K., Yayla, İ.E., Makas, S., Çelik, E., Sahranç, Ü. and Kaya, M. (2025).

Psychological needs and problematic social media use in adolescents: A gender-moderated mediation via sensation seeking and cognitive flexibility. *Healthcare*, [online] 14(1), p.8.

doi:10.3390/healthcare14010008.

Khalaf, A.M., Alubied, A.A., Khalaf, A.M. and Rifaey, A.A. (2023). The impact of social media on the mental health of adolescents and young adults: A systematic review. *Cureus*, [online] 15(8), pp.1–10. doi:10.7759/cureus.42990.

Popat, A. and Tarrant, C. (2022). Exploring adolescents' perspectives on social media and mental health and well-being – a qualitative literature review. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 28(1), pp.323–337. doi:10.1177/13591045221092884.

Sharma, V. and Sharma, A. (2026). Social media and adolescent Mental Health: A comprehensive narrative review. *Cureus*. [online] doi:10.7759/cureus.103089.