

Discuss the Impact of Social Media on Mental Health in Adolescence

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Introduction

Social media is a part of life for teenagers. They use it to keep up with friends, make new ones and figure out who they are. Then 90% of teens have a social media account. This number is still going up.(Agyapong-Opoku & Greenshaw, 2025).

People who study this stuff do not agree on whether social media's good or bad for teenagers. It seems that the answer depends on how much time teens spend on the internet and what they do when they are online. This essay looks at how social media affects the health of teenagers using two ideas from psychology: Freud's idea about how people develop and Bowlby's idea, about how people form relationships.

Freud's theory offers insight into why teenagers are so drawn to likes and comments: adolescence is a period of identity formation, and social media provides constant feedback that helps shape self perception.

Bowlby's attachment theory takes a different angle, proposing that the quality of a teenager's early relationships with caregivers shapes how they later engage with social media. Teenagers with weaker family bonds may be more likely to use these platforms in unhealthy ways.

This essay first considers how extensively teenagers use social media, then applies Freud's and Bowlby's theories separately to explain its psychological effects, and finally brings the two frameworks together to show that social media's impact varies from teenager to teenager, depending on their individual circumstances and psychological makeup.

Social Media Use and Mental Health in Adolescence

When we are teenagers we really care what other people think of us. This is why what we see on social media can have a big impact on us during these years. Some people have looked at a lot of studies. I found that using social media a lot is linked to feeling more depressed and anxious.. It is not that simple. If we just scroll through social media without talking to anyone it can make us feel worse. On the other hand social media can be helpful if we use it to talk to our friends and family because it can make us feel less alone.

Other reviews have found that teenagers who spend excessive time on social media and smartphones report higher stress, more self-harm, and poorer sleep all of which can affect academic performance and cognitive functioning. Still other research suggests the effects are conditional: teenagers with strong family relationships and good digital literacy tend to

experience social media more positively, while those lacking these protective factors are more vulnerable to its downsides.

When researchers talk to teenagers they say they have feelings about social media.

They like that it helps them feel connected to others and that it's useful for figuring out who they are.

They don't like that it can make them feel bad, about themselves or get bullied online.

This research shows that social media isn't the problem.

It's how teenagers use media and what's going on in their lives that matters.

The next two sections look at this issue using the theories of Freud and Bowlby.

Theory One: Freud's Psychosexual Theory

Freud said that our personality grows through stages. Each stage focuses on a body part. These stages are: anal, phallic, latency, genital.

During adolescence we are on the stage. This is when we start to feel sexual feelings strongly.

According to Freud as teenagers we have to balance our feelings with our moral values. This is a struggle for many teens.

This stage is also about finding out who you are. Teenagers try out things, see what feels real to them and try to be part of their group.

Sigmund Freud's ideas can help us understand why social media is so popular. These platforms are about showing yourself off through pictures and getting feedback from others. They make you compare yourself to others all the time. Getting likes and comments is like getting a treat. It makes you want to keep doing what got you that treat in the place.

This thing about comparing ourselves to others all the time has a side. When we always compare ourselves to others it can make us feel like we are not good enough. We might find ourselves checking our phone over and over again and it can be really hard to stop. If someone says something mean to us it can really hurt. Teenagers might just try to ignore these comments or not think about dealing with their feelings about social media and the constant comparison, on social media.

It's worth noting that Sigmund Freud's theory is very old and came out before the internet. It was not meant to explain life. This theory gives us one way to look at things. It's not a scientifically proven fact. Still it's helpful to see how social media is connected to the social changes that happen during adolescence like figuring out who you are feeling good about, about yourself and making friends. Social media and adolescence are closely linked.

Cyberbullying is a risk on social media. It can really hurt people's feelings. Make them feel super alone.

This is why we need to be careful when using media. We should think about how it affects us and the people around us.

Freud's theory says that social media affects teenagers a lot. This is because social media deals with things that teenagers are trying to figure out now like managing their desires, comparing themselves to others and finding out who they are. Whether social media is good or bad, for them, depends on how they use it.

Theory Two: Bowlby's Attachment Theory

According to Bowlby's attachment theory, babies have a psychological relationship with their caregivers, which influences not only their sense of security but also their perception of themselves and the people around them. Babies who receive consistent and responsive care will have secure attachment because they will be self-assured and trusting of other people. On the other hand, babies who do not receive consistent care will have insecure attachments.

These early attachment patterns carry forward into adolescence, shaping how teenagers approach friendships, romantic relationships, and online interactions. In effect, early caregiving experiences become a template teenagers use often unconsciously to interpret and navigate their social world, including social media.

The attachment theory explains well why teenagers are affected differently by social media. According to studies, securely attached teenagers have the ability to use these sites in a constructive manner for connecting with their loved ones as well as seeking comfort when they face difficult situations. The results of these studies show that teenagers belonging to this category face few mental health issues associated with social media (Psychology Town, 2026).

By contrast, teenagers with anxious attachment styles may use social media in ways that reinforce insecurity—checking accounts compulsively, repeatedly seeking reassurance from friends, and becoming distressed when excluded from online interactions. This pattern has been linked to problematic social media use in research by D'Arienzo, Boursier, and Griffiths (2019).

Conversely, adolescents displaying avoidant attachment styles have been found to show a contradictory pattern. According to findings published by *Frontiers in Psychology* (2026), adolescents adopt social media as a form of compensation for emotional intimacy. This is, however, not enough to fulfill their emotional requirements since these adolescents turn out to be even lonelier than before.

When combined, these studies reveal the significance of the psychological foundation established prior to teenage participation in social media in determining whether social media will be a source of either support or difficulty for them. Teenagers who are securely attached have an inclination to utilize social media in a manner which supports their well-being, whereas those who are insecurely attached have a tendency to engage with social media in manners which are detrimental to their psychological well-being.

Conclusion

This essay has talked about how social media affects teenagers' health using Freud's ideas about our minds and Bowlby's ideas about relationships.

Freud's ideas say that social media makes being a teenager harder because we compare ourselves to others and try to get likes and followers.

It may affect adolescents' self worth and make them feel insecure about who they are.

On the other hand, according to Bowlby's theory, adolescents' attitude towards social networking sites is determined by their sense of security in relationships.

In case they feel secure and supported, social networking sites will assist them in communication with other people.

If they feel anxious or alone, social media can make things worse.

Even though Freud and Bowlby came up with their ideas at times and in different ways they both agree that social media does not affect all teenagers the same way.

It depends on who they're what they bring to their online experiences.

This is why some studies have found that social media is bad for teenagers while others have found that it is not so bad.

One problem with Freud's ideas is that they are hard to test and were developed before the internet existed.

Bowlby's ideas are more based on evidence.

Research is necessary to understand how social media influences teenagers.

What then are the implications of this research finding for promoting the wellbeing of teenagers in a media saturated society?

It means that we should not simply concentrate on restricting their time spent using it.

On the contrary, we should endeavor to foster positive relationships and boost self-esteem in them.

This can help them navigate the challenges of media and stay healthy and happy.

Social media is a part of life for teenagers. We need to think carefully about how it affects them and how we can help them use it in a healthy way.

Social media can be a tool for connection and support.

It can also be a source of stress and anxiety.

By understanding how social media affects teenagers we can help them use it in a way that supports their health.

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