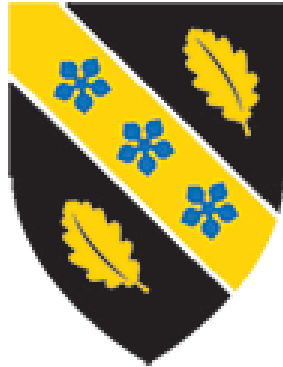


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Table of Contents

Essay: Discuss the impact of social media on mental health in adolescence	3
References:.....	7

Essay: Discuss the impact of social media on mental health in adolescence

Adolescents are heavy users of social media in general and globally with evidence suggesting that the majority use social media sites on a daily basis including TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook (UNESCO, 2023). Social media has become a significant segment of today's adolescent life, offering a chance for communication, fun, learning and self-expression. But there are growing worries about its effects on adolescent mental health. Mental health is an important developmental concern of youth, as it affects emotional health, behaviour, school performance, interpersonal relationships and life adaptability. Social media can also help to foster social connectedness, emotional support and creativity but there have also been studies to show that it can cause anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, cyber-bullying, body dissatisfaction and sleep disturbances when used in excess or when used in inappropriate ways (Keles, McCrae and Grealish, 2020). The results showed that social media can have a positive and negative impact on mental health based on how adolescents use the internet.

The essay will explore the effects of social media on adolescent's mental health, highlighting the positive and negative outcomes. It will discuss the Psychosexual Theory of Freud's and how specific unconscious motivations, personality development and early childhood experiences could impact the behaviours and emotions of adolescents in relation to social media. The essay will also discuss how the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) informs understanding of the ways in which attitudes, subjective norms and perceived control of behaviour can affect the intentions of adolescents to use social media and can influence their online behaviours. These theories complement one another and offer psychological lenses to studying the complex relationship between social media use and adolescent mental health.

In Sigmund Freud's Psychosexual Theory, personality develops through a series of stages in childhood, each one having its own focus of pleasure on a different part of the body. Freud identified five stages of psychosexual development: the oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital stages. The genital stage starts at puberty and extends into adulthood. At this point, sexual maturity emerges, as does an increased focus on relationships and an attempt to form healthy emotional and social relationships. Freud believed that personality is formed by the interaction between the id, the ego and the superego. The id is related to instinctual needs and desires and wants immediate satisfaction, the ego is related to reality and rational thinking and the superego is related to moral values and social expectations. When these three aspects are balanced, they create a healthy personality.

Freud's theory is relevant to the adolescent period because there are emotional changes, self identity formation, greater peer interactions and a heightened need for social acceptance. A conflict between instinctive wishes and social expectations and the development of emotional and behavioral control are common features of adolescent development. These mental functions are a helpful way of understanding how adolescents might be experiencing social media and how social media use can affect a young person's emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Freud's Psychosexual Theory is a theory that helps explain why social media is very alluring to adolescents. In the genital stage, the youth look for acceptance, recognition and meaningful engagement with others more and more. These psychological needs can be met through social media platforms, where adolescents have the ability to connect with their peers, share their thoughts and opinions and get feedback from their interactions such as likes, comments and followers. Freud's view is that these are ways for the needs of the id to be met, while the ego tries to reconcile actions online with in real life and the superego promotes socially acceptable actions. Therefore, social media can be a force for good mental health by fostering a sense of connection, allowing them to express themselves and offering access to online communities that support mental well-being (Best, Manktelow and Taylor, 2014).

Freud's theory, however, accounts for some dangers of social media use too. Adolescents may feel at odds with the urge to be popular and the moral values from parents, school or society. Overemphasis on appearance, popularity or acceptance online can lead to increased anxiety, body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. Additionally, unrealistic images, cyberbullying and social comparison pressures can cause conflict which can lead to depression and emotional upset (Valkenburg, Meier and Beyens, 2022). Keles, McCrae and Grealish (2020) found that excessive social media usage among adolescents has been linked to psychological distress, anxiety and depression. Based on Freud's theory, it is possible that an imbalance in the unconscious drives and emotional conflicts could impact adolescent's reactions to social media and their mental health.

Freud's theory of psychosexual development is useful in understanding the emotional and unconscious aspects that can affect the actions of adolescents while using social media. Its most notable feature is the emphasis on the need for personality development, emotional conflict and the impact of early experiences on subsequent behavior. It also acknowledges that adolescent's need to be accepted or to have a relationship can influence their emotional reactions to their online experiences.

Freud's theory has been flawed, however, in some ways. Empirical testing of many of its concepts, such as the id, the unconscious and the inner conflicts are challenging, because

they are difficult to measure scientifically. Other critics also contend that Freud has undervalued the role of social, cultural and technological factors and undervalued the importance of sexuality and childhood experiences. Besides, the theory is developed prior to the emergence of social media and thus cannot directly account for the digital communication and/or online behavior. Freud's theory provides valuable psychological perspectives on the impact of social media but it cannot be fully interpreted without reference to more modern theories, as the relationship itself is complex.

Icek Ajzen (1991) created a model called Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to explain the relationship between attitude, social influences and control on human behaviour. It is theorised that people's actions can be largely explained by their behavioural intentions which refer to their desire to engage in a specific behaviour. Three concepts are important in determining behavioural intention: attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Attitude is a person's positive or negative judgement of a behaviour. Subjective norms refer to what people think others (family, friends or peers) expect them to do. Perceived behavioural control is the extent of one's self-efficacy or self-confidence in carrying out or controlling a behaviour.

Considering the Theory of Planned Behaviour, one might note that adolescents are greatly affected by the expectations of others in society and the need to fit in the eyes of the other people around them. In adolescence, people grow more independent and look to the opinions of others for their own acceptance and approval.

Theory of Planned behaviour is a practical explanation of adolescent's use of social media. Changing attitudes among adolescents to the use of social media is because they perceive it as fun, entertaining and helping them express themselves and build their friendships. Subjective norms are another important factor as peers, influencers and classmates may encourage frequent social media use, leading to pressure to be active on social media. In addition, teen's perceived behavioural control for using social media is high as it is easily accessible and user-friendly for them. All of these factors contribute to boost behavioural intentions and regular use of social media.

It also provides a rationale for the potential positive and negative impacts of social media on mental health. Positive attitudes towards wellbeing focus information, mental health awareness campaigns and supportive online communities could foster positive behaviours (Best, Manktelow and Taylor, 2014). Rather, adolescents who view social media as a source of social support may feel more connected and experience less loneliness. But there can be a lot of peer pressure to keep using the internet which can lead to unhealthy social comparisons, risky online challenges and too much time spent on the internet. Keles et al. (2020) indicated that there is a significant relationship between problematic social media

usage, depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents. Theory of Planned Behaviour also proposes that the beliefs, perceived social expectations and self-efficacy of adolescents affect their social media usage behaviours and consequently their mental health.

The theory of planned behaviour is important in explaining why adolescents use social media in a structured and evidence-based way. It has the advantage of integrating factors of cognition, social and motivational which give it a high degree of applicability in the contemporary digital environment. The theory has been widely endorsed with research on a number of health behaviours and provides helpful advice for how interventions can promote healthier online behaviors.

However, there are some limitations to the theory. It assumes that behaviour is rational and planned whereas adolescents use social media impulsively and without conscious plans. The theory also addresses emotions, unconscious motivations, personality traits and technological characteristics like algorithms that impact online behavior but to a lesser degree. Also, it does not account for the fact that young people with similar attitudes and social influences can have very different mental health outcomes. Hence, the Theory of Planned Behaviour is a suitable model for explaining adolescent social media use, but using Freud's Psychosexual theory alongside the theory will lead to a better explanation of social media use because it will account for both conscious decision making and unconscious psychological factors, which have an impact on the adolescent's behaviour and mental health.

To sum up, social media can have a profound and varied effect on adolescent mental health. It is beneficial in many ways, such as better communication, self-expression, information and social support. But overuse or misuse could lead to the development of anxiety, depression, low self esteem, cyberbullying, body dissatisfaction and emotional distress. The net effect of social media thus relies on the youth's actions on these platforms and the psychological characteristics affecting their actions.

Freud's Psychosexual Theory as well as the Theory of Planned Behaviour provide some insights into these effects. Freud's theory provides explanations for how the unconscious motivations, development of personalities and need for social approval affect adolescent's emotions in response to social media. Theory of Planned Behaviour, on the contrary, illustrates that attitudes, peer influence and perceived behavioural control are the factors that affect the intentions of adolescents for using SNS and their online behaviors. Each theory has its own limitations but when considered together and in the context of unconscious psychological processes and conscious decision making, the combination offers the most comprehensive explanation.

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