

Impact of Social Media on the Social and Emotional Development of Adolescents: An Educational Perspective

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Abstract—In the contemporary digital era, social media has emerged as a powerful socialising agent, particularly influencing the lives of adolescents. Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage marked by significant social and emotional changes, and excessive or unguided engagement with social media platforms has raised concerns regarding adolescents' social relationships, emotional regulation, self-esteem, and overall well-being. The present paper aims to examine the impact of social media on the social and emotional development of adolescents from an educational perspective. The study is conceptual and analytical in nature and is based on a critical review of existing national and international literature related to social media use, adolescent development, and social-emotional outcomes. The reviewed studies indicate that while social media provides opportunities for social connectivity, self-expression, and emotional support, it also poses risks such as social comparison, cyberbullying, emotional dependency, anxiety, and reduced face-to-face interaction. The paper highlights the role of education as a moderating and guiding force in promoting healthy and responsible social media usage among adolescents. It emphasises the need for integrating digital literacy and social-emotional learning within the educational framework to support balanced social and emotional development. The study contributes to social sciences research by offering educational insights for enhancing adolescents' digital well-being.

Index Terms—Social Media; Adolescents; Social Development; Emotional Development; Educational Perspective; Social Sciences

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of social media use among adolescents in India marks a profound transformation in how young people communicate, learn, and engage

socially. Recent reports indicate that over 75% of Indian adolescents actively use platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube on a daily basis, driven by increased smartphone availability and affordable internet connectivity (Kumar & Singh, 2023; Sharma, 2022; TRAI, 2023). This digital immersion profoundly influences their social interactions and identity formation (Chakraborty & Mukherjee, 2021). Adolescence is a pivotal developmental stage characterized by significant neurobiological, psychological, and social changes that shape an individual's identity and emotional competencies (Erikson, 1968; Steinberg, 2014). Social-emotional development during this period is critical as it underpins lifelong skills such as emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication (Denham, Bassett, & Zinsser, 2012; CASEL, 2020).

In the Indian context, emerging research highlights the complex challenges adolescents face with social media use. Patel, Sharma, and Gupta (2021) found that excessive use correlates with increased anxiety, depression, and feelings of social isolation among secondary school students. Additionally, Singh, Reddy, and Sharma (2022) identified cyberbullying and social comparison as significant contributors to diminished self-esteem and emotional distress. Despite these findings, much of the existing discourse has concentrated narrowly on mental health issues, overlooking the broader construct of social-emotional development. Scholars argue for a more holistic perspective that incorporates Social Emotional Learning (SEL), which emphasizes critical skills such as self-awareness, responsible decision-making, and

resilience (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones & Kahn, 2017; Zins et al., 2007).

Education plays a pivotal role in mediating adolescents' social media experiences by promoting digital literacy and responsible online behavior. Brown and Larson (2020) emphasize that school-based SEL and digital literacy programs enhance students' ability to navigate the complexities of social media, fostering healthier engagement and mitigating risks. Furthermore, UNESCO (2021) advocates for integrating digital literacy into educational curricula worldwide to build adolescents' critical thinking and emotional resilience. The National Education Policy of India (MHRD, 2020) similarly underscores the need to equip students with 21st-century skills, including digital competence and socio-emotional learning. Given the profound integration of social media into adolescents' lives, leveraging education as a protective and promotive framework for balanced social and emotional development is an urgent priority.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to comprehensively examine the multifaceted impact of social media on the social and emotional development of adolescents. Specifically, the study aims to investigate how social media usage influences adolescents' social interactions, peer relationships, and identity formation, thereby affecting their overall social development. Additionally, the research seeks to analyze the emotional consequences associated with social media engagement, including aspects such as self-esteem, anxiety, emotional sensitivity, and the culture of social comparison.

Another significant focus of the study is to explore the role and responsibility of the educational system in guiding adolescents toward healthy and responsible social media use. This includes understanding how schools and educators can mediate digital behaviors to promote positive social-emotional outcomes. Finally, the study intends to propose educational strategies and interventions grounded in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) frameworks that can effectively support adolescents in navigating the digital landscape while enhancing their social and emotional well-being.

The specific objectives are as follows:

2.1 To examine the impact of social media on adolescents' social development.

2.2 To analyse the influence of social media on emotional development.

2.3 To study educational responsibility in promoting healthy social media use.

2.4 To suggest educational strategies for social-emotional well-being.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study is structured to explore the relationship between adolescents' social media usage and their social and emotional development, with education acting as a moderating influence. This framework identifies the key variables and their interconnections to provide clarity on how social media engagement affects adolescents and how educational interventions can mediate these effects. The independent variable is social media usage, which directly impacts the dependent variables—social development and emotional development. Education, particularly through digital literacy and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs, is conceptualized as a moderating variable that can influence or buffer the effects of social media on adolescents (CASEL, 2020; Brown & Larson, 2020).

3.1 Independent Variable: Social Media Usage

Social media usage is defined as the extent and nature of adolescents' interaction with online platforms, including activities such as communication, content sharing, and consumption of multimedia (Kumar & Singh, 2023). In India, the rise of affordable smartphones and accessible internet services has substantially increased social media engagement among adolescents (Sharma, 2022). This variable includes quantitative aspects such as time spent on social media and qualitative elements such as the purpose of use, ranging from social interaction to information seeking and entertainment. Variations in these dimensions of social media use can significantly influence adolescents' social experiences and emotional states, affecting their development during this sensitive period (Chakraborty & Mukherjee, 2021).

3.2 Dependent Variables

The study focuses on two primary dependent variables: social development and emotional

development, which represent the key outcomes influenced by adolescents' social media usage.

3.2.1 Social Development

Social development encompasses the growth of adolescents' interpersonal skills, peer relationships, social identity, and their ability to navigate complex social environments both online and offline. It involves the formation of social competencies such as communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution, which are critical during adolescence—a period marked by increased peer influence and identity exploration (Erikson, 1968; Denham, Bassett, & Zinsser, 2012). Social media plays a dual role by offering opportunities for social connection and support, while also exposing adolescents to challenges like social validation pressures and cyberbullying, which can impact their social growth (Chakraborty & Mukherjee, 2021; Patel, Sharma, & Gupta, 2021).

3.2.2 Emotional Development

Emotional development refers to the processes by which adolescents acquire skills related to recognizing, expressing, and regulating emotions. This includes developing self-awareness, emotional resilience, empathy, and coping mechanisms to handle stress and anxiety (Steinberg, 2014; CASEL, 2020). The emotional experiences influenced by social media use include self-esteem fluctuations, anxiety linked to social comparison, and dependence on online validation, all of which significantly shape adolescents' emotional well-being (Durlak et al., 2011; Singh, Reddy, & Sharma, 2022).

3.3 Moderating Variable: Education (Digital Literacy & SEL)

Education functions as a critical moderating variable in this study by shaping how adolescents interact with social media and mitigating potential negative effects on their social and emotional development. Digital literacy education equips students with essential skills to critically evaluate online content, navigate digital platforms responsibly, and protect themselves from cyber risks (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010; UNESCO, 2021). Concurrently, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs foster emotional intelligence, self-regulation, empathy, and ethical digital behavior, thereby strengthening adolescents' resilience against

the challenges posed by social media (Jones et al., 2017).

Drawing on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework, education integrates both digital literacy and SEL to provide a comprehensive approach that empowers adolescents to engage meaningfully and safely in digital environments (CASEL, 2020). Moreover, recent research highlights the importance of culturally contextualized SEL interventions that consider indigenous knowledge systems and local educational practices (Macan, 2023; Lashkari, 2025). These approaches underscore education's pivotal role not only in promoting healthy social media use but also in fostering holistic social-emotional well-being among adolescents.

IV. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

4.1. Social Media and Adolescent Emotions

Research on social media's impact on adolescent emotions has revealed complex and multifaceted effects. International studies consistently indicate that social media platforms serve as double-edged swords: while they offer avenues for emotional expression, peer support, and identity exploration, they also expose adolescents to risks such as anxiety, depression, and emotional distress (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Vannucci, Flannery, & Ohannessian, 2017). For example, Nesi and Prinstein (2015) found that social media interactions can both exacerbate and alleviate depressive symptoms depending on the nature and quality of online communication.

Moreover, social comparison theory has been applied extensively to understand adolescent emotional responses on social media. Adolescents tend to compare themselves with idealized online portrayals of peers, which often leads to decreased self-esteem and heightened emotional vulnerability (Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli, 2014). This "comparison culture" intensifies feelings of inadequacy and anxiety, particularly among vulnerable populations (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2016).

On the positive side, social media facilitates access to emotional support networks and communities that can enhance emotional regulation and coping strategies (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). Virtual support groups have been shown to provide adolescents with a sense of belonging and validation, helping them

manage emotions such as loneliness and stress (Naslund, Aschbrenner, & Bartels, 2016).

In summary, international research emphasizes the nuanced role of social media in shaping adolescent emotions, highlighting the importance of contextual factors such as usage patterns, peer interactions, and individual vulnerabilities in determining emotional outcomes.

4.2 Social Comparison and Emotional Regulation

Social comparison is a fundamental psychological process through which individuals evaluate themselves by comparing to others, influencing emotions and self-perception (Festinger, 1954). In the context of social media, adolescents are frequently exposed to curated and often idealized representations of their peers' lives, which intensifies the tendency for upward social comparisons comparing oneself to others perceived as better off. Such comparisons can lead to feelings of inadequacy, lower self-esteem, and emotional distress (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2016). Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory provides a foundational framework to understand how adolescents use social media as a platform for self-evaluation. On these platforms, the availability of immediate feedback in the form of likes, comments, and shares further amplifies emotional responses linked to social comparison. This dynamic often results in emotional regulation challenges as adolescents struggle to manage feelings of envy, anxiety, and depressive symptoms triggered by perceived social deficits (Vogel et al., 2014).

Conversely, emotional regulation defined as the ability to monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional reactions (Gross, 1998) can be both supported and undermined by social media use. While social media may offer opportunities for emotional expression and peer support that foster regulation skills, the pressure from constant comparison can overwhelm coping capacities. Research suggests that adolescents with higher emotional regulation skills are better equipped to mitigate negative impacts of social comparison on social media, highlighting the importance of developing these competencies through education and SEL interventions (Compas et al., 2017).

In summary, the interplay between social comparison and emotional regulation is critical in shaping adolescents' emotional experiences on social media,

necessitating targeted strategies to support healthy emotional processing.

4.3 Indian Studies

4.3.1 Mental Health and Social Media among Indian Adolescents

Emerging research within the Indian context highlights significant associations between social media use and mental health outcomes among adolescents. Studies indicate that excessive and unregulated social media engagement contributes to heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress in this population (Patel, Sharma, & Gupta, 2021; Singh, Reddy, & Sharma, 2022). For instance, Patel et al. (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study involving secondary school students in urban India, revealing that frequent social media use correlated strongly with symptoms of social anxiety and feelings of loneliness. The qualitative component further underscored the role of cyberbullying and social comparison as key stressors adversely impacting adolescent mental health.

Similarly, Singh et al. (2022) explored the psychological effects of cyberbullying on Indian teenagers and found a significant negative impact on self-esteem and emotional well-being. Their study emphasized that cyberbullying incidents often go unreported due to stigma and lack of adequate support systems, exacerbating emotional challenges. These findings resonate with broader concerns about the mental health implications of social media use among Indian adolescents, particularly in the absence of structured educational interventions (Ranjan & Bhatia, 2020).

Moreover, the cultural nuances in India, including family expectations and social norms, interplay with social media experiences to shape adolescent mental health uniquely (Dasgupta & Singh, 2021). The growing recognition of these challenges has prompted calls for integrating mental health awareness and social-emotional learning within Indian schools to foster healthier digital habits and emotional resilience (Kumar & Mishra, 2023).

4.3.2 Cyberbullying, Self-Esteem, and Emotional Stress

Qualitative studies conducted in the Indian adolescent population have shed important light on the pervasive issue of cyberbullying and its detrimental effects on

self-esteem and emotional well-being. Research indicates that cyberbullying, characterized by repeated online harassment and humiliation, often leads to a significant decline in adolescents' self-worth and heightened emotional distress (Singh, Reddy, & Sharma, 2022; Ranjan & Bhatia, 2020). Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, adolescents have reported experiences of social exclusion, public shaming, and persistent negative comments on social media platforms, which contribute to feelings of isolation and helplessness.

Singh et al. (2022) highlighted how victims of cyberbullying internalize negative feedback, resulting in self-blame and erosion of confidence, which can further lead to anxiety, depression, and academic difficulties. The study also noted that many adolescents do not disclose their experiences due to fear of stigma or lack of trust in adults, emphasizing the need for supportive school environments and accessible counseling services.

Similarly, Ranjan and Bhatia's (2020) qualitative inquiry found that cyberbullying is intricately linked with emotional stress, with many adolescents describing a persistent sense of vulnerability and emotional exhaustion. Their findings stress the role of family and peer support as crucial buffers that can mitigate some adverse effects, but also point out that inadequate awareness and digital safety education exacerbate the problem.

These qualitative insights underscore the critical need for integrating social-emotional learning and anti-bullying policies within educational frameworks to protect adolescents from the emotional harms of cyberbullying and to foster healthier online interactions.

4.4 Research Gap

4.4.1 Limited Educational Interpretation

Despite the growing body of research on the psychological and social effects of social media among adolescents, there remains a notable gap in the educational interpretation of these findings. Most existing studies tend to focus primarily on mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression, with limited exploration of how educational systems can actively address or mediate these challenges (Patel et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2022). There is a paucity of research examining how schools can integrate knowledge about social media's impact into

curriculum design, teacher training, and student support services. Moreover, the complex interplay between digital behavior and social-emotional competencies is often overlooked in educational frameworks, resulting in fragmented approaches that fail to harness the full potential of education as a preventive and promotive agent (Macan, 2023; Lashkari, 2025).

4.4.2 Need for School-Based and SEL-Oriented Approaches

The increasing prevalence of social media-related challenges among adolescents highlights the urgent need for comprehensive school-based interventions that incorporate Social Emotional Learning (SEL). SEL programs, which focus on developing self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and responsible decision-making, have been empirically shown to improve students' social and emotional outcomes across diverse contexts (CASEL, 2020; Durlak et al., 2011). However, in the Indian educational landscape, the systematic adoption of SEL with an emphasis on digital literacy remains limited. Recent scholars advocate for culturally contextualized SEL curricula that address the unique socio-cultural factors influencing Indian adolescents' digital experiences (Macan, 2023; Lashkari, 2025). Such programs can empower students to manage the emotional risks associated with social media while promoting ethical digital citizenship and resilience.

In summary, this research gap underscores the need for studies that not only explore social media's effects but also develop and evaluate educational strategies grounded in SEL principles to support adolescents' holistic development in the digital age.

V. IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social media has become a dominant force shaping the social development of adolescents worldwide, including in India. This impact is multifaceted, affecting peer interactions, identity formation, social validation, and exposure to both positive and negative social experiences. Adolescence is a critical period for developing social competencies and establishing relationships, and social media platforms significantly influence these developmental processes by altering how adolescents communicate, present themselves,

and seek approval from peers (Erikson, 1968; Chakraborty & Mukherjee, 2021).

5.1 Peer Interaction

Peer interaction constitutes a core element of adolescent social development, and social media has transformed traditional modes of communication among youth. Studies indicate that digital platforms facilitate constant and diverse peer interactions, enabling adolescents to maintain existing friendships and establish new connections beyond geographical boundaries (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). These interactions can enhance social skills such as collaboration, empathy, and conflict resolution when mediated appropriately. However, research also highlights potential drawbacks; excessive reliance on online communication may reduce opportunities for face-to-face interactions, leading to superficial relationships and social withdrawal in some cases (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). Thus, the quality and context of peer interactions on social media play a decisive role in determining their developmental outcomes.

5.2 Online Identity Formation

Social media platforms serve as significant arenas for adolescents to explore and construct their identities. During adolescence, identity development is a crucial psychosocial task, as described by Erikson (1968). Online environments allow youth to experiment with different aspects of their personalities and social roles in a relatively safe and controlled space (Turkle, 2011). Adolescents often curate their online personas by selectively presenting traits and experiences that align with desired social images (Chakraborty & Mukherjee, 2021). While this can support identity exploration and self-expression, it may also lead to inauthentic self-representation and increased pressure to conform to social norms dictated by peer feedback (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2016). These dynamics influence adolescents' self-esteem and social confidence, underscoring the importance of supportive educational interventions that foster healthy identity development.

5.3 Social Validation and Pressure

Social validation is a central psychological motivator behind adolescents' engagement with social media. The desire for approval through likes, comments, and shares creates a feedback loop where external

affirmation becomes closely tied to self-worth and identity (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, & Eckles, 2014). This pursuit of social validation can significantly influence adolescents' behavior, encouraging them to curate their online presence meticulously and sometimes engage in risky or conformist behaviors to gain peer acceptance (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

Social media platforms exploit this psychological need by providing quantifiable metrics of approval, which can intensify social comparison and anxiety. Adolescents often experience pressure to maintain an idealized online image, leading to emotional strain when expectations are not met (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2016). The pressure to conform to peer norms in digital spaces may also result in diminished authenticity and increased vulnerability to negative feedback (Burrow & Rainone, 2017).

Moreover, this pressure can exacerbate mental health challenges, particularly for adolescents already struggling with self-esteem and emotional regulation. Understanding the dynamics of social validation and pressure within social media environments is essential for developing interventions that promote healthier digital habits and emotional resilience among youth.

5.4 Cyberbullying and Social Withdrawal

Cyberbullying represents one of the most harmful social consequences of adolescent social media use, often leading to significant social withdrawal and emotional distress. It involves repeated, intentional aggression through digital platforms, which can cause victims to experience feelings of humiliation, fear, and isolation (Ranjan & Bhatia, 2020). Research has shown that adolescents subjected to cyberbullying frequently withdraw from both online and offline social interactions as a coping mechanism, further impairing their social development (Singh, Reddy, & Sharma, 2022).

The anonymity and pervasive nature of cyberbullying exacerbate its psychological impact, making it difficult for victims to escape harassment (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). Victims often report declines in self-esteem, increased anxiety, and symptoms of depression, which contribute to withdrawal behaviors and a reduced sense of belonging among peers (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018).

Educational institutions play a vital role in addressing cyberbullying by implementing preventative measures, promoting awareness, and providing

supportive counseling to affected students (Ranjan & Bhatia, 2020). Addressing cyberbullying is crucial for fostering safe online environments that support positive social development in adolescents.

VI. IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Self-Esteem and Emotional Sensitivity

Self-esteem, a critical component of adolescent emotional development, is closely linked to self-concept and plays a pivotal role in shaping emotional sensitivity. Social media's influence on self-esteem among adolescents is well-documented, with research indicating both beneficial and detrimental effects depending on usage patterns and contextual factors (Vogel et al., 2014; Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). Adolescents often use social media as a platform for self-presentation and feedback, which can bolster self-esteem when positive reinforcement is received but can equally lead to heightened emotional sensitivity and vulnerability when met with criticism or social comparison (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

Studies show that frequent exposure to idealized images and curated content on social media can distort adolescents' self-concept, fostering feelings of inadequacy and emotional distress (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2016). Emotional sensitivity may manifest as increased reactivity to social feedback, leading to fluctuations in mood and greater susceptibility to anxiety and depression (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). Conversely, positive social interactions and supportive online communities can enhance emotional resilience and contribute to healthier self-esteem development (Naslund, Aschbrenner, & Bartels, 2016).

Therefore, understanding the nuanced impact of social media on self-esteem and emotional sensitivity is essential for designing educational interventions that promote balanced and adaptive emotional development in adolescents.

6.2 Anxiety and Emotional Dependence

Social media use among adolescents has been closely linked with increased levels of anxiety and emotional dependence, reflecting significant challenges in mental health. Research indicates that constant connectivity and the immediacy of social feedback create an environment where adolescents may feel

compelled to seek continuous validation, leading to emotional dependence on social media interactions (Elhai, Dvorak, Levine, & Hall, 2017). This dependence often exacerbates anxiety symptoms, as adolescents worry about social acceptance, fear missing out (FOMO), and experience heightened stress related to online presence and interactions (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013). Mental health studies have documented that excessive social media engagement correlates with generalized anxiety disorder and other anxiety-related conditions among youth (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). The cycle of emotional dependence on digital feedback combined with negative social comparisons can trigger persistent worry and affective instability, which impairs overall emotional well-being (Vannucci, Flannery, & Ohannessian, 2017). Moreover, adolescents with pre-existing vulnerabilities to anxiety may be particularly susceptible to these negative outcomes, highlighting the bidirectional relationship between social media use and mental health (Odgers & Jensen, 2020).

Addressing anxiety and emotional dependence in the context of social media requires integrated approaches that foster emotional regulation skills and promote mindful, balanced usage patterns through educational and counselling interventions.

6.3 Comparison Culture

The culture of social comparison fostered by social media platforms plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' emotional development. Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory explains that individuals evaluate their own abilities and worth by comparing themselves to others, a process intensified by the curated and often idealized portrayals prevalent on social media (Festinger, 1954). Adolescents are especially vulnerable to negative effects of upward social comparisons, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy, envy, and lowered self-esteem (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2016).

Research demonstrates that frequent exposure to peers' highlight reels on platforms like Instagram and Facebook often results in unrealistic self-expectations and heightened emotional distress (Steers, Wickham, & Acitelli, 2014). This "comparison culture" can increase susceptibility to depressive symptoms and anxiety by perpetuating a distorted self-concept that emphasizes others' successes over one's own

experiences (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Moreover, gender differences have been observed, with adolescent girls showing greater emotional sensitivity to social comparisons than boys (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015).

Educational and therapeutic interventions focusing on media literacy and emotional resilience are critical to mitigating the adverse effects of comparison culture and fostering healthier social-emotional development among adolescents.

6.4 Emotional Expression and Support Communities

Social media platforms not only pose risks but also offer valuable opportunities for emotional expression and peer support among adolescents. Online communities can provide safe spaces where youth feel empowered to share their feelings, seek advice, and connect with others who face similar challenges (Naslund, Aschbrenner, Marsch, & Bartels, 2016). These virtual support networks contribute to emotional validation, reduce feelings of isolation, and foster a sense of belonging, which are critical components of emotional well-being during adolescence (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007).

Studies highlight that participation in online support groups can enhance coping strategies and promote positive mental health outcomes by facilitating open dialogue around emotional issues without fear of judgment (Barak, Boniel-Nissim, & Suler, 2008). For marginalized or stigmatized adolescents, such as those experiencing mental health difficulties or identity-related struggles, online peer support can be especially beneficial, offering acceptance and encouragement that may be lacking in offline environments (Naslund et al., 2016).

Therefore, integrating awareness of the benefits of online emotional expression and support communities into educational programs can help adolescents leverage social media positively, balancing risks with opportunities for growth and resilience.

VII. EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

7.1 Role of Schools and Teachers

Schools and teachers play a pivotal role in mediating the effects of social media on adolescents' social and emotional development. As primary agents of socialization, educators are uniquely positioned to guide students toward healthy digital habits and

responsible online behavior (Livingstone, 2014). Teachers can facilitate critical discussions about social media's impact, helping students develop digital literacy skills that enable them to navigate online spaces safely and thoughtfully (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Research underscores the importance of teacher mediation in fostering awareness about the risks of social media, such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and emotional vulnerability, while also promoting its positive potential for connection and support (Schurgin O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Educators who adopt a proactive approach can model ethical digital citizenship, encourage empathy, and support the development of self-regulation skills essential for managing online interactions (Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009).

Moreover, teacher involvement is crucial in identifying students who may be struggling with social media-related emotional difficulties and in coordinating appropriate interventions, including counselling and parental engagement (Parker, 2013). Professional development and training are therefore vital to equip teachers with the knowledge and tools to fulfil this mediation role effectively (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010).

In sum, schools and teachers serve as critical facilitators in shaping adolescents' social-emotional learning within the digital context, balancing opportunities and challenges presented by social media.

7.2 Digital Literacy Education

Digital literacy education is essential in equipping adolescents with the critical skills needed to navigate the complexities of social media and online environments responsibly and effectively. Digital literacy refers to the ability to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information using digital technologies, ensuring safe, ethical, and informed engagement in digital spaces (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004). It encompasses technical skills, critical thinking, online communication, and understanding digital citizenship principles (Hague & Payton, 2010).

Several frameworks guide digital literacy education, providing structured approaches to develop these competencies. The European Commission's Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) outlines key areas including information and data literacy,

communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving, emphasizing both skill acquisition and responsible digital behavior (Carretero, Vuorikari, & Punie, 2017). Similarly, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards emphasize empowering students to be digital citizens who recognize the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of living, learning, and working in a digital society (ISTE, 2016).

Integrating such frameworks into school curricula fosters adolescents' abilities to critically assess online content, recognize risks like misinformation or cyberbullying, and develop self-regulation strategies (Livingstone, 2014).

7.3 Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Integration

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) integration in educational settings is crucial for addressing the social and emotional challenges posed by adolescents' social media use. SEL encompasses the development of core competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, which collectively foster emotional intelligence and resilience (CASEL, 2020). Integrating SEL within digital literacy curricula equips students with the skills to manage online interactions thoughtfully and ethically.

Research shows that SEL programs can mitigate negative effects of social media by enhancing adolescents' ability to regulate emotions, cope with social pressures, and engage in positive social behavior (Durlak et al., 2011). When embedded in schools, SEL provides a structured framework to cultivate empathy, reduce cyberbullying, and promote healthy peer relationships both online and offline (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). Furthermore, SEL fosters critical reflection about one's digital footprint and encourages mindful social media use, empowering adolescents to navigate digital environments responsibly (Denham & Brown, 2010). Given the increasing role of digital communication in adolescents' lives, the combination of SEL and digital literacy education presents a holistic approach to social-emotional well-being in the digital age, preparing students to thrive both socially and emotionally.

7.4 Value-based and Ethical Digital Behaviour

Encouraging adolescents to practice value-based and ethical behavior online is crucial for fostering responsible and respectful use of social media. Ethical digital behavior involves understanding and respecting the rights of others, maintaining privacy, and communicating with empathy and integrity in virtual spaces (Ribble, 2011). Schools play a vital role in teaching these principles by embedding digital citizenship education into their curricula, which emphasizes both technical skills and moral responsibilities (Ribble & Bailey, 2007).

Digital citizenship frameworks guide students to become aware of the consequences of their online actions and to take accountability for their digital footprint (Choi, Glassman, & Cristol, 2017). Teaching adolescents about ethical standards helps them resist peer pressure and avoid harmful behaviors like cyberbullying, misinformation, and privacy violations. Moreover, instilling values such as empathy and respect supports social-emotional development and promotes healthier online interactions.

Integrating these ethical components into digital literacy and social-emotional learning programs equips students with the necessary tools to navigate digital environments safely and contribute positively to online communities.

VIII. DISCUSSION

The literature reviewed highlights the complex and multifaceted impact of social media on adolescents' social and emotional development. Consistent with international research, social media serves as both a platform for social connection and a source of social pressure and emotional vulnerability (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014; Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). Indian studies reinforce these findings, revealing that adolescents face heightened risks of cyberbullying, emotional stress, and low self-esteem linked to unregulated social media use (Ranjan & Bhatia, 2020; Singh, Reddy, & Sharma, 2022).

The interplay between social media use and emotional challenges such as anxiety, social comparison, and dependence is evident. The mechanisms of social validation and peer feedback can both bolster and undermine adolescent self-concept, depending on the nature of online interactions (Vogel et al., 2014; Nesi

& Prinstein, 2015). This nuanced understanding calls for educational mediation to harness the positive aspects of social media while mitigating its risks.

Educational responsibility emerges as a critical moderator in this dynamic. Schools and teachers can provide essential digital literacy education and social-emotional learning (SEL) integration to build adolescents' resilience and ethical awareness in digital contexts (CASEL, 2020; Livingstone, 2014). However, the literature points to a gap in comprehensive, school-based interventions tailored to the Indian context, highlighting the need for culturally relevant SEL programs that address digital behavior and emotional well-being together (Patel et al., 2021).

In sum, this review underscores the importance of adopting a balanced perspective on social media's role in adolescent development and leveraging educational strategies to promote healthier digital engagement and emotional growth.

IX. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings from the literature review emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive educational strategies to address the complex impact of social media on adolescents' social and emotional development. Curriculum planning should integrate digital literacy and social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks to equip students with critical thinking skills, emotional regulation, and ethical digital citizenship (CASEL, 2020; Livingstone, 2014). This integrated approach can empower adolescents to use social media responsibly and build resilience against its potential harms.

Teacher training is vital to prepare educators to effectively mediate social media's influence by fostering digital competence and socio-emotional skills among students (Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009). Professional development programs should focus on enhancing teachers' understanding of online risks such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and emotional dependence, alongside strategies to promote positive online behavior and peer support.

Additionally, adolescent counseling support services within schools must be strengthened to identify and assist students experiencing emotional distress linked to social media use (Parker, 2013). Counselors can

offer tailored interventions, including mindfulness, coping strategies, and social skills training that complement SEL programs.

Finally, policy recommendations should advocate for collaborative efforts between educational institutions, parents, and policymakers to create safe and supportive digital environments. Policies must promote awareness, prevention of online harms, and equitable access to digital literacy resources (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010).

Implementing these educational implications will foster holistic development, preparing adolescents to navigate the digital world with confidence and emotional well-being.

X. CONCLUSION

The current review highlights the dual nature of social media's impact on adolescents, influencing both their social and emotional development in significant ways. While social media platforms offer valuable opportunities for peer connection, self-expression, and emotional support, they also expose adolescents to risks such as anxiety, social comparison, cyberbullying, and emotional dependence (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014; Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020). Understanding this complex landscape requires an educational focus that moves beyond mental health alone to encompass broader social-emotional learning (SEL) and digital literacy (CASEL, 2020).

Education serves as a critical protective and promotive factor, where schools and teachers can mediate social media use by fostering responsible digital behavior, ethical awareness, and emotional resilience (Livingstone, 2014; Ribble, 2011). Implementing integrated SEL and digital literacy programs tailored to adolescents' developmental needs and cultural contexts is essential for empowering youth to navigate digital environments healthily and safely.

Future empirical research should explore culturally sensitive, school-based interventions that combine SEL and digital literacy to address social media's evolving challenges. Such research can inform policy and practice aimed at optimizing adolescents' social-emotional well-being in the digital age.

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