

The Effect of Social Media on the Mental Health of Adolescents: The Study of Anxiety, Depression, and Self-Esteem

Ramjan Ali

Assistant Professor, Sammilani Teachers' Training College, Kolkata

Abstract- *Social media has been very much incorporated in the lives of adolescents, which has had a great impact on mental health. The given paper discusses the impact of social media on adolescent anxiety, depression, and self-esteem in the context of a qualitative case study. It examines both the beneficial and adverse outcomes, of which overuse, cyberbullying, and social comparison are the key factors. The researcher uses thematic analysis and in-depth interviewing to offer a comprehensive picture of appropriate mental health of adolescents in the digital age.*

Keywords: Social Media, Adolescents, Mental Health, Anxiety, Depression, Self-Esteem.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has transformed interactions, communication and perception of the world among the adolescents. Instagram, Tik Tok, Snapchat, and Facebook are the recently emerged platforms which became part of the life of adolescents and offered them the chance to express themselves, communicate with others and be entertained. A recent study by the Pew Research Center (2022) found out that nearly 95% of teenagers use social media on a regular basis, with some spending more than three hours a day on the websites. This unprecedented engagement has led to concern regarding its effects on the mental health of individuals both concerning the aspects of anxiety, depression and self-esteem. The impact of social media on adolescent mental health is complex, and it involves both the positive and negative. On the one hand, these platforms are arenas of self-expressions, getting connected with others and finding supportive communities. Teenagers could discuss mental health, relate to fellow teens, and feel supported by the Internet communication. According to some researchers, social media promotes a feeling of

belonging, especially to marginalized individuals who might face the problem of not being accepted by members of their close-lived communities (Naslund et al., 2020). Besides, the social media campaign of mental health advocacy has led to the challenge of mental health conditions stigmatization, as well as its awareness and promotion.

Conversely, social media has also been associated with a lot of mental health problems in teenagers. The studies have indicated that excessive use of these platforms may lead to an increase in anxiety and depression in most cases, which may be because of social comparison, cyberbullying, and inaccurate views on life (Twenge et al., 2018). Social comparison is one of the most alarming ones, since teens often compare their personal identities to the modeled and perfect lives of influencers and their peers. This may cause inadequacy, low self-esteem and distorted self-image (Chou & Edge, 2012). Moreover, the problem of cyberbullying does not fade away, and research has shown that about 37 percent of teenagers have been victims of some sort of internet bullying (Patchin and Hinduja, 2020). Such negative experiences repeated may increase loneliness, emotional discomfort and social withdrawal.

The popularity of social media also puts into question the issue of screen time and its psychological effects. The long-term use of screens interferes with sleeping habits, decreases the need to communicate face-to-face, and leads to digital addiction, which may adversely impact the well-being of adolescents (Keles, McCrae, and Grealish, 2020). Adolescents who spend too much time using social media are likely to complain of lack of concentration on academic

pursuits, lack of physical activity and more propensity to make comparisons with other people. In spite of these obstacles, it must be noted that social media is not a bad thing per se. The manner in which the adolescents interact with social media, what they read and their capability to critically assess the online interactions are important in defining its effects on the mental health. The main issue is to make a compromise, to utilize the advantages of the social media and reduce its possible disadvantages.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To investigate how the use of social media is perceived to affect the mental health of adolescents, specifically their anxiety, depression and self-esteem.
- To investigate how the excessive use of social media is contributing to emotional and psychological problems among adolescents.
- To examine the experiences of adolescents of cyberbullying and its impact on their mental health.
- To know the effects of social comparison occurring on social media sites on self-concept and self-esteem of adolescents.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The connection between social media use and mental health of adolescents has been studied by many researchers. A study conducted by Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) established that individuals who use social media extensively develop more anxiety, depression, and various psychological distresses. The researchers found social comparison, cyberbullying, and screen time as the most important factors that affect mental health outcomes. Though, Best, Manktelow, and Taylor (2014) made a systematic narrative review that revealed both negative and positive impacts of social media on teenagers. Although social media can lead to self-expression and peer-support, the media can also contribute to the setting in which the value of oneself is determined by online acceptance.

The impact of social media on the body image concerns in young women was investigated in a study by Fardouly et al. (2015). The investigators concluded that the continuous exposure to overedited and unrealistic images on the social media platforms is

leading to a decrease in self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. This is in line with previous research by Chou and Edge (2012), who found out that the lives of others seem more satisfactory when teenagers look at their online profile, which serves to add to the sense of inadequacy.

Additionally, a meta-analysis of online harassment (Kowalski et al., 2018) showed that an adolescent victim of cyberbullying has an increased social withdrawal, emotional distress, and academic problems. Naslund et al. (2020), conversely, investigated the advantages of online peer support networks and reported that those adolescents who could get access to positive digital communities had better self-confidence and less anxiety. The literature shows that the association between social media usage and adolescent mental health is rather complex and multifaceted, which can be explained by the necessity of specific interventions and digital literacy training.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A case study research design is used in this study as a qualitative research design. The data will be gathered using the semi-structured in-depth interviews with adolescents aged 13-18, who have access to social media and social media and their effects on mental health. The patterns of anxiety and depression as well as self-esteem are identified with the help of thematic analysis. Purposive sampling will be applied in choosing the participants so that they are diverse in their experiences in various social media. All ethical issues such as informed consent and confidentiality are upheld during the study. The collection of data will be conducted through conducting the interviews by transcribing them, coding answers and categorizing the emergent themes to make meaningful conclusions.

V. CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

To have more profound understanding of the effect of social media on adolescent mental health, this section provides three individual case studies. These examples demonstrate how different people experienced social media, both negatively and positively, with regards to anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.

Case 1: Social comparison and Low self-esteem

A, a 16-year-old high school graduate and active Instagram and Tik Tok user, spends about four to five hours every day on the website. She subscribes to influencers, celebrities and her peers who regularly share flattering images and videos with supposedly beautiful lives, success, and beauty.

Experience

One of them reported that she had experienced a profound sense of inadequacy in comparison to very curated material that she found on the internet. She observed that a lot of the influencers that she followed were depicting a fictitious ideal of beauty, body image, and way of life. Although she was aware that these photos were filtered and edited, she was incapable of ensuring that she was not feeling inadequate. In the long run, A developed body image worries, where one can resort to restrictive dieting and excessive exercise in the effort to emulate internet beauty ideals. She was also self-doubting about her own academic and social success, believing that she was not good enough to compare to her peers who published the same achievements on the internet.

Mental Health Consequences

The self-esteem of A dropped because she was more obsessed with the online confirmation given by other people. Her symptoms were characterized by a greater degree of social withdrawal, emotional distress, and the perception of greater levels of anxiety when she posted her own pictures on the internet because of being judged. She started to develop the depressive episodes, usually escaping the actual social life.

Analysis

The case of A is consistent with the results of Fardouly et al. (2015), who believe that social comparison facilitated by social media could be a large factor in body dissatisfaction and lowered self-esteem. It can cause unrealistic expectations and anxiety symptoms and self-doubt based on the inclination to juxtapose the actual life experiences with highly curated online material. The case demonstrates the necessity of digital literacy programs that will help adolescents to evaluate and navigate social media without losing their self-esteem.

Case 2: Anxiety, Cyberbullying

B is a 15-year-old male student, who actively used Snapchat and Discord which they used to communicate with friends and participate in online gaming communities. At the very beginning, he was enjoying his social media relationships, but the moment when he became the victim of cyberbullying appeared.

Experience

B has fallen victim to online harassment, as has been caused by a group of his classmates who opened an anonymous account on Snapchat just to taunt and offend him. The bullies shared screenshots of his personal discussions, edited photos to spread rumours and made complimentary remarks about his looks and grades. Although the bullies were blocked, they just opened other ones, and this made him feel like they trapped him in a cycle of humiliation.

The persecution spilled over to the Discord where he was the subject of offensive memes and jokes within the gaming community. B was helpless because even after switching off, he could not get away with the bullying. The anxiety caused by the constant notifications and the fear of how the next post was going to look like were too terrible to be checked on his phone, and he could barely engage in online communication.

Mental Health Consequences

The anxiety levels of B grew considerably. He complained that he had panic attacks, problems sleeping, and failing to concentrate in school. Gradually, he stopped socializing, online as well as offline, in fear of being victimized again. His self-confidence vanished thus he shunned out groups in school and isolated himself with his peers.

Analysis:

The case of B aligns with the results of Kowalski et al. (2018) who point out that psychological consequences of cyber bullying are long-term, could be anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. Social media sites allow anonymity that only serves to intimidate victims without being directly confronted, which only increases the situation. The case highlights that more measures are necessary to prevent cyberbullying, conduct more stringent online moderation and provide

mental health assistance to the teens facing online harassment.

Case 3: Mental Well-being Positive Usage of Social Media.

C is a non-binary 17-year-old student who has first experienced a sense of loneliness and social isolation. They were challenged in the ability to speak freely about their identity, and their mental illness struggles with the people around them. Nevertheless, they could find comfort in online groups where mental health advocacy and LGBTQ+ support are discussed.

Experience:

Took active part in mental health discussions in Reddit, supported mental health groups on Discord, and subscribed to mental health activists on Instagram and Twitter. They used such platforms to network with others who experienced the same situations, which brought them a sense of belonging and emotional solace. The talks in these groups were able to get them to normalize their feelings and devise coping mechanisms towards stress and anxiety.

The availability of the resources and mental health content that C would have found otherwise was one of the advantages of the project. They subscribe to psychologists and mental health practitioners who provided self-care, mindfulness, and stress management strategies. Also, they attended virtual support groups conferences where members exchanged personal experiences and provided support to each other.

Mental Health Benefits:

Such interactions with such on-line communities made C feel a sense of belonging, helped them feel less lonely and feel confident about their ability to express their identity. They have stated that they felt more enabled to get professional assistance regarding their mental health and started to practice more healthy self-care. With time, their anxiety levels were reduced, and they developed good virtual friendships that helped them emotionally through tough times.

Analysis:

The experience of C can be used to confirm the research, presented by Naslund et al. (2020) that

highlights the value of online peer support networks as a means of alleviating mental health issues. Although social media has been criticized due to its negative impacts, this case shows that it can be used as a means of promoting well-being, building communities, and promoting mental health. It highlights the necessity to steer adolescents to constructive online places that facilitate emotional strength and assistance.

VI. DISCUSSION

The correlation between mental health of adolescents and the use of social media is intricate and multidimensional and depends on the length of use, the nature of the content read, the personal psychological traits of the person, and the quality of the interaction over the internet. Although there are adolescents who have benefited in the social connectivity and information that is found on such sites, there are those who have suffered a lot such as anxiety, depression and loss of self-esteem. This discussion reviews some aspects of how social media has affected the mental health of adolescents based on empirical studies, psychological concepts and practical case studies.

1. The Social Comparison and Self-Esteem Role

Social comparison is one of the major psychological processes in which social media has influence on the mental health of adolescents. The social media platforms tend to provide a false picture of life, as people post images, achievements, and experiences that are well-edited to look like that. The vulnerabilities are especially strong in adolescents, who are in extremely crucial age of identity and self-concept formation, as they tend to compare themselves with peers and influencers on the web (Festinger, 1954).

Research results show that upward social comparison, where teens evaluate themselves against others they view as more successful or sexually attractive, may result in feelings of insufficiency, dissatisfaction and low self-esteem (Chou and Edge, 2012). As an example, a study by Fardouly et al. (2018) established that exposure to more appearancecentric content on social media (e.g., fitness influencers, beauty bloggers) is associated with increased body dissatisfaction in girls, especially adolescent girls. Downward social comparison (comparing with oneself with others who appear less successful) on the

other hand can offer momentary positive self-esteem gains but can also lead to unrealistic self-images and narcissism (Vogel et al., 2014).

2. Online Harassment and Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying has become a major issue regarding the social use of media among adolescents. In contrast to conventional bullying, cyber bullying may be anonymous, it can reach a wider audience and last forever because the content about it is permanent. Cyberbullying victims tend to become more anxious, depressed, and socially withdrawn, and in some instances, the abuse may have grave impacts of suicidal thoughts (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, and Lattanner, 2014).

A survey conducted by Patchin and Hinduja (2020) shows that about 37 percent of teenagers have been cyberbullied and most of them have reported to be emotionally distressed in the long run. Loss of self-worth, helplessness, and further victimization are some of the factors that the victims have trouble with. Also, cyber bullying relates to sleeping problems, educational challenges, and low school attendance. The continuum of online harassment prevents adolescents to get out of the harmful interactions, and this increase their psychological distress.

3. Anxiety and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

The Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) which is the feeling of being left out of social events, experiences or conversations occurring on social media is another psychological phenomenon linked to the use of social media (Przybylski et al., 2013). Teenagers, who highly rate the importance of peer acceptance and belonging to groups, might be forced to remain continuously active on social media in order not to be left behind in the trending discussions, social events, or viral posts.

FoMO has been associated with a rise in stress, anxiety, and obsessive usage of social media. Research conducted by Oberst et al. (2017) revealed that adolescents with high FoMO tendencies are prone to develop problematic social media habits, including the need to check notifications constantly, going to bed late to scroll feeds, and putting social media ahead of life responsibilities. Such an unceasing desire to remain connected may result in poor sleep habits, lower grades, and lower quality of life in general.

4. Sleep Problems and Psychiatric Consequences

Overuse of social media especially at the onset of sleep has been perceived to have adverse effects on the quality of sleep-in adolescents. Screen light has the power to inhibit the production of melatonin, delaying the onset of sleep and shortening the duration of sleep (Hale and Guan, 2015). Moreover, emotionally arousing material, extreme online debates, cyberbullying or upsetting news, may leave adolescents in a state of physiological arousal, which prevents them from calming down and going to sleep. Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) report a study that identified a considerable level of relationship between poor sleep hygiene and social media use among adolescents. The individuals who spend too much time on social media complain of problems with sleep, constant sleep disturbances at night and exhaustion during the day. SLEEP deprivation has, in its turn, been associated with high vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and mood disorders (Leone and Sigman, 2020).

5. Good Things about social media and Mental Health in adolescents

There are also some positive aspects of social media as far as adolescent mental health is concerned, although it is a potentially risky technology. Social media is used by many adolescents as an emotional support, self-expression, and advocacy of mental health. Support networks, mental health awareness campaigns, and peer networks are safe environments in which adolescents can open to their challenges and get guidance without stigmatization (Naslund et al., 2020).

Moreover, social media has enabled mental health education because there are available resources on mental health issues like anxiety management, coping techniques, and treatment plans. The content of mindfulness, self-care, and resilience created by influencers and mental health experts contribute to making mental health a normal thing to talk about and persuading adolescents to seek help when they need it.

VII. CONCLUSION

The effects of the social media on the mentality of adolescents are extremely subtle, and both positive outcomes and negative consequences can be identified. Although social media has been associated

with social connectivity, self-expression, and mental health awareness, it is also associated with challenges, social comparison, cyberbullying, FoMO, and sleep disruptions. The control of these adverse effects is the key in encouraging responsible digital practices, promoting digital literacy, and ensuring that adolescents are provided with the supportive online and offline environment. Future studies need to aim at formulating intervention measures that would assist adolescents in using social media in a manner that would positively impact their well-being but not harm it.

REFERENCES

- [1] Best, P., Manktelow, R., & Taylor, B. (2014). Online communication, social media and adolescent wellbeing: A systematic narrative review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 41, 27-36.
- [2] Chou, H. T. G., & Edge, N. (2012). "They are happier and having better lives than I am": The impact of using Facebook on perceptions of others' lives. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(2), 117-121. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2011.0324>
- [3] Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P. C., Vartanian, L. R., & Halliwell, E. (2018). Social comparisons on social media: The impact of Facebook on young women's body image concerns and mood. *Body Image*, 10(2), 79-83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.04.002>
- [4] Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117-140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202>
- [5] Hale, L., & Guan, S. (2015). Screen time and sleep among school-aged children and adolescents: A systematic literature review. *Sleep Health*, 1(2), 50-58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2014.08.007>
- [6] Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2020). A systematic review: The influence of social media on depression, anxiety, and psychological distress in adolescents. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 25(1), 79-93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1590851>
- [7] Kowalski, R. M., Giumetti, G. W., Schroeder, A. N., & Lattanner, M. R. (2014). Bullying in the digital age: A critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073-1137. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035618>
- [8] Leone, M. J., & Sigman, M. (2020). Effects of sleep deprivation on the academic performance of adolescents: A meta-analysis. *Nature and Science of Sleep*, 12, 891-903. <https://doi.org/10.2147/NSS.S273695>
- [9] Naslund, J. A., Bondre, A., Torous, J., & Aschbrenner, K. A. (2020). Social media and mental health: Benefits, risks, and opportunities for research and practice. *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*, 5(3), 245-257. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-020-00134-x>
- [10] Oberst, U., Wegmann, E., Stodt, B., Brand, M., & Chamarro, A. (2017). Negative consequences from heavy social networking in adolescents: The mediating role of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). *Journal of Adolescence*, 55, 51-60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.12.008>
- [11] Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2020). Cyberbullying among youth: A comprehensive review of emerging trends and policy implications. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 66(6), S10-S18.
- [12] Przybylski, A. K., Murayama, K., DeHaan, C. R., & Gladwell, V. (2013). Motivational, emotional, and behavioral correlates of Fear of Missing Out. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4), 1841-1848. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.014>
- [13] Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2018). Increases in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among US adolescents after 2010 and links to increased social media use. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 6(1), 3-17.
- [14] Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Okdie, B. M., Eckles, K., & Franz, B. (2014). Who compares and despairs? The effect of social comparison orientation on social media use and its outcomes. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 86, 249-256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.06.026>