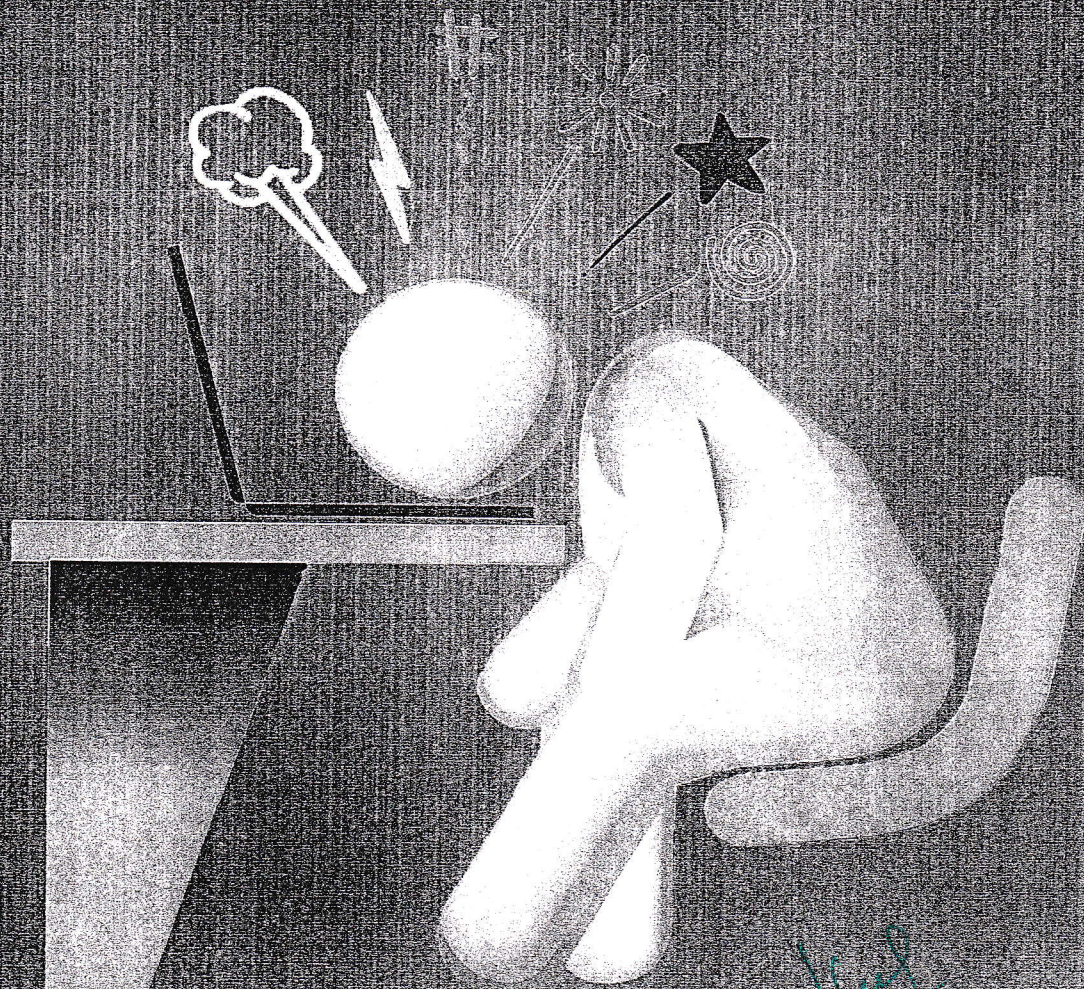


SOCIAL MEDIA
INFLUENCE ON YOUTH IN THEIR PSYCHO-SOCIAL
BEHAVIOURAL FUNCTIONS



Principal
St. Xavier's College of Education
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INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENTS

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ADOLESCENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Adolescence is the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. It represents one of the critical transitions in the life span and is characterized by a tremendous pace in growth and change WHO (2014).

Social media is a term used to describe the interaction between groups or individuals in which they produce, share, and sometimes exchange ideas over the internet and in virtual communities. It is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Social media is any medium of communication that allows interaction. It enables individuals to make new friends, build business connections or simply extend their personal base by connecting and interacting with friends of friends which can have a multiplying effect. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, micro-blogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation, and wikis are among the different types of social media.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENTS

The influence of social media on adolescents and teenagers is of particular importance today. This is because they are developmentally vulnerable and are among the heaviest users of social networking. They are growing up surrounded by mobile devices and interactive social networking sites such as Twitter, MySpace, and Facebook, which has made the social media a vital aspect of their life. Social network is transforming the manner in which they interact with their parents, peers, as well as how they make use of technology.

The effects of social media on adolescents are twofold. On the positive side, it enhances socialization and communication, learning opportunities, health information, social connection, worldwide connectivity, commonality of interest, real-time information sharing, targeted advertising, increased news cycle speed and even technical skills. On the negative side, it becomes a risk to adolescents and youth more often than most adults realize. Most risks fall into the categories like cyber bullying and crimes against children, sexting, Facebook depression, inappropriate content, lack of understanding of online privacy issues, outside influences of third-party advertising groups, backlash, risks of fraud or identity theft, time waste,

Positive Impacts

Social media provide young people with a range of benefits, and opportunities to empower themselves in a variety of ways.

Socialization and Communication: Social media sites allow teens to accomplish online many of the tasks that are important to them offline: staying connected with friends and family, making new friends, sharing pictures, and exchanging ideas. Social media participation also can offer adolescents deeper benefits that extend into their view of self, community, and the world.

Enhanced Learning Opportunities: Middle and high school students are using social media to connect with one another on homework and group projects. Facebook and similar social media programs allow students to gather outside of class to collaborate and exchange ideas about assignments. Some schools successfully use blogs as teaching tools, which has the benefit of reinforcing skills in English, written expression, and creativity.

Accessing Health Information: One can access online information about the health concerns easily and anonymously. Excellent health resources are increasingly available on a variety of topics of interest, such as sexually transmitted infections, stress reduction, and signs of depression. Anyone with chronic illnesses can access Web sites, through which they can develop supportive networks of people with similar conditions.

Powerful tool for motivation: Social media has proven its power in motivating people to action as well as strong resource to influence social, political and economic policies. It is a powerful tool for youngsters, giving platform for their voice to be heard, enabling them to become active citizens and to voice their opinions on the matters that affect or interest us.

Exploration and distribution of new ideas: Social media has helped young people to explore new ideas as well as to build resilience as they learn to recognize and manage risks. It also allows the distribution of an idea that is then recognized by new audiences that might otherwise have missed out.

Adverse Impacts: Recent researches indicate that there are frequent online expressions of offline behaviors, that have introduced problems such as cyber bullying, privacy issues, sexting, internet addiction and concurrent sleep deprivation.

Cyber bullying and Online Harassment: Cyber bullying is deliberately using digital media to communicate false, embarrassing, or hostile information about another person. It is the most common online risk for all and is a peer-to-peer risk. Although "online harassment" is often used interchangeably with the term "cyber bullying," it is actually a different entity. Cyber bullying is quiet common, can occur to any young person online, and can cause profound psychosocial outcomes including depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and, even suicide.

Sexting: Sexting can be defined as "sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photographs, or images via cell phone, computer, or other digital devices." Many of these images become distributed rapidly via cell phones or the internet. This phenomenon does occur among the teen population; a recent survey revealed that 20% of teens have sent or posted nude or seminude photographs or videos of themselves.

Facebook Depression: Researchers have proposed a new phenomenon called "Facebook depression," defined as depression that develops when preteens and teens spend a great deal of time on social media sites, such as Facebook, and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression. It is observed that many adolescents critically compare their abilities and life with other people and use others' posts as measures for successes and failures in their own life. The impact of this could be catastrophic feelings of low self-esteem.

Privacy concerns and the Digital footprint: The main risk to preadolescents and adolescents online today are risks from each other, risks of improper use of technology, lack of privacy, sharing too much information, or posting false information about themselves or others. These types of behavior put their privacy at risk.

When one visits various web sites, they can leave behind evidence of which sites they have visited. This collective, ongoing record of one's web activity is called the digital footprint, one of the biggest threats to young people on social media sites. Due to the lack of an awareness of privacy issues, they often post inappropriate messages, pictures, and videos, which in turn may affect their college acceptance, future reputations and jobs.

Advertisements and buying tendency: Many social media sites display multiple advertisements such as banner ads, behavior ads and demographic-based ads that influence not only the buying tendencies of preadolescents and adolescents but also their views of what is normal. Such powerful influences start as soon as children begin to go online and post.

Body Dysmorphia: Body dysmorphia is another area which has been affected by social media. A study conducted by Dr. Bryony Bamford indicates that high amounts of time spent on Facebook may lead to body image insecurity, which can also lead to depression.

Other effects: Some of the signs of the adverse effect of social media are low self esteem, envy of other people's lives, finding social media as one's first and only choice of activity done for enjoyment, being unable to do anything, unless sharing it first online and not having as many face to face conversations with one's relatives and friends and feeling disconnected.

SUGGESTIONS

Build connections with caution: There are many opportunities to engage in dialog via social media websites. It is very exciting and beneficial to know the fact that there are so many ways to connect with like-minded individuals online but it's essential to proceed with caution as everyone who shows up on a social media website may not be the one he or she who claims to be.

Take the responsibility for one's own safety: When using any social media platform, one needs to take responsibility for one's own safety and never join a group just because it is trendy or all friends are doing it. One should exercise caution and closely guard the personal information whenever engage in social networking activities, regardless of the kind of social utility that one is using.

Be a media-literate consumer: It is important to educate children and adolescents about the practice of advertisements and buying tendencies so that children can develop into media-literate consumers and understand how advertisements can easily manipulate them. Also, beware of targeted advertising.

Avoid inappropriate and socially useless posts: Be careful with what you post and treat others as if you were in a face-to-face situation. Keep the mental disposition of being a useful person to all that and all that you do. Allow the values of democracy and peace rule your attitude and behaviour.

Keep up self esteem and be an optimist: Acceptance by and contact with peers is an important element of adolescent life. The intensity of the online world can be a factor that triggers depression and low self esteem in some adolescents. Therefore it is necessary to keep up one's self esteem and be an optimist.

Open discussions: Arranging open discussions about social network protocols and etiquettes would go a long way in establishing global digital citizenship and healthy behavior. Family discussions are positive for teens and can result in less risky online behaviors.

CONCLUSION

Social media forms have altered how adolescents socialize and learn, raising a new set of issues and concerns for educators, parents, researchers and policymakers to consider. Though a large part of present generation's social and emotional development is occurring while on the internet and on cell phones, there are many risks as they navigate and experiment with social media.

Parents and teachers can be on constant watch and help them think about online presence in moral and ethical ways. It helps the young in understanding the consequences for themselves and others of participation in the socially networked world.

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