

Adolescents' perception of social media as a source of information and its influence on mental health.

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Keywords: Mental Health, Social Media, Adolescents, Information Resources.

Received : 25 Mei 2025

Revised : 26 Juni 2025

Accepted: 20 Juli 2025

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become a major source of information for teens, but exposure to unfiltered content has the potential to affect mental health. It is feared that this will have psychological impacts, both positive and negative, experienced by adolescents in their daily lives. This study aims to describe adolescents' perception of social media as a source of information and its influence on mental health. The research uses a qualitative method with a field study approach. Data were collected through interviews and observations involving adolescents aged 15-19 who were active on social media, using purposive sampling to select relevant participants. The sample included 150 high school adolescents from various social backgrounds, with differing levels of social media use, to ensure diverse perspectives. The results show that most teens view social media as a quick and easily accessible source of information, but doubt its credibility. The positive impact felt includes increased insight, ease of communication, and motivation to learn. However, negative impacts were also found in the form of anxiety, feelings of depression due to social comparisons, and sleep disturbances due to excessive use of social media. In conclusion, while personal experiences and social environment influence adolescents' perceptions of social media, the impact on mental health varies and requires further investigation. The study recommends implementing comprehensive digital literacy programs and psychosocial support services in schools to mitigate negative mental health impacts so that adolescents can use social media in a healthy and wise way.

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of social media among teenagers today has become an inseparable phenomenon in their daily lives. However, behind these conveniences and benefits, there are negative impacts that have not been fully understood in depth, especially related to the influence of social media on adolescent mental health (van der Mheen et al., 2024). Social media not only serves as a means of communication and entertainment, but also as a quick and easily accessible source of information. Teenagers rely a lot on social media to get news, education, and other social information. However, the reality that occurs shows that excessive use of social media can hurt adolescent mental health, such as the

appearance of anxiety, depression, stress, and feelings of loneliness(Mental & Collaborators, 2022). The reality shows that excessive use of social media can increase the risk of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, stress, and feelings of loneliness in adolescents. However, social media as a source of information can affect their specific psychological state, as well as what factors moderate the relationship, such as the type of content consumed and the social support they receive(Sunday et al., 2021).

The novelty of this study lies in a more comprehensive approach by combining aspects of adolescents' perception of social media as a source of information and its influence on mental health holistically, including moderation variables such as the type of content consumed and social factors (Knih de Camargo et al., 2024). This study also seeks to fill the gap in the existing literature by focusing on understanding adolescent perceptions and the accompanying psychological impacts, so as to provide more targeted recommendations for intervention and education(Sunday et al., 2021). This study aims to identify how adolescents' perception of social media as a source of information relates to their mental health condition, as well as what factors affect these perceptions (Sunday et al., 2021). This research also aims to uncover the role of social media in shaping adolescents' self-perception and psychological health in the digital era(Roefs et al., 2022a). This research gap lacks research that integrates adolescents' perceptions of social media as a source of information with its impact on mental health comprehensively. For example, a study by Berryman et al. (2017) entitled "Social Media Use and Mental Health among Young Adults" shows that there is not always a direct correlation between social media use and mental disorders, but this study has not focused on adolescents' perception of social media as a source of information and other moderation factors(Roefs et al., 2022a). Another study by Primack et al. (2017) examined the relationship between social media use and increased symptoms of depression and anxiety, but did not examine perception as a major variable. Therefore, this research is expected to fill this gap with a more holistic and contextual approach(Fountoulakis et al., 2025).

However, there is still information that is not yet known in terms of the negative side of social media use, especially related to how adolescents' perception of social media as a source of information can affect their specific psychological condition(Roefs et al., 2022b). It is also unclear what factors moderate these relationships, such as the type of content consumed and the social support that adolescents receive. In addition, the long-term impact of social media use on mental health is also still a question that has not been comprehensively answered.

There is also the influence of social media on adolescent mental health. Some studies state that social media contributes to an increase in mental disorders, but other studies, such as by Berryman et al. (2017), show no significant correlation was found between the duration of social media use and mental health disorders, even though social media can have a positive effect through social support and self-expression(Nicolas Alarcón et al., 2018). This suggests that the relationship between social media and mental health is complex and multifactorial(Hordemann & Chao, 2012).

II. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological design, which aims to determine adolescents' perception of social media as a source of information and its influence on mental health. The phenomenological design was chosen so that the researcher can understand the subjective experiences and meanings that adolescents give to the use of social media in their daily lives, especially related to the psychological aspects experienced (Neuman, 2014).

The population in this study is adolescents who often use social media in certain areas, at vocational schools in the research location. The sample was selected purposively, namely, adolescents who met criteria such as being active in using social media for at least one year and willing to become research participants. The number of samples usually follows the principle of data saturation, which is that data collection is stopped when the information obtained has been repeated, and no new themes are found. The subjects of the study were 18-year-olds who frequently used social media such as Instagram, TikTok, or WhatsApp. The main instrument in qualitative research is the researcher himself, who acts as a key instrument, supported by in-depth interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation. Data was collected through interviews, while observations and documentation were used as supporting data to reinforce the interview results (Walliman, n.d.).

The steps of this qualitative research procedure begin with preparation, namely compiling interview guidelines and obtaining research permits. Furthermore, by recruiting participants according to the criteria and conducting in-depth interviews face-to-face or online. Interviews are recorded and transcribed to ensure data accuracy. Once the data is collected, interview transcripts, observation notes, and other documents are imported into the NVivo application for systematic analysis. At the data analysis stage using NVivo, the data is then encoded, that is, grouping pieces of data into certain categories or themes that are relevant to the focus of the research, after the coding process is completed, researchers can take advantage of analysis and visualization features in NVivo, such as Word Frequency Query to find out words or concepts that often appear, Matrix Coding Query to explore the relationship between themes, and Project Map to map the relationship between data and themes. Visualizations such as word clouds, charts, and diagrams can be used to clarify research findings and support data interpretation.

The researcher also triangulated the data by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to improve the validity of the findings. In addition, the researcher conducts a member check, which is to confirm the results of the data interpretation to the participants to ensure that the meaning captured matches their experience, and is equipped with direct quotes from the participants to strengthen the interpretation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

Adolescents' perception of social media is divided into three main themes. First, 78% of respondents view platforms like Instagram and TikTok as primary sources of information due to their ease of access and engaging content format. One participant stated, "It's more practical to open TikTok than to read the news on the website, you can see a live video of the explanation". However, Word Cloud analysis showed that 63% of respondents expressed doubts about the credibility of information, especially related to mental health issues. This can be seen from the appearance of "hoax" and "manipulation" nodes in Text Search Query(Nu Htay et al., 2022).

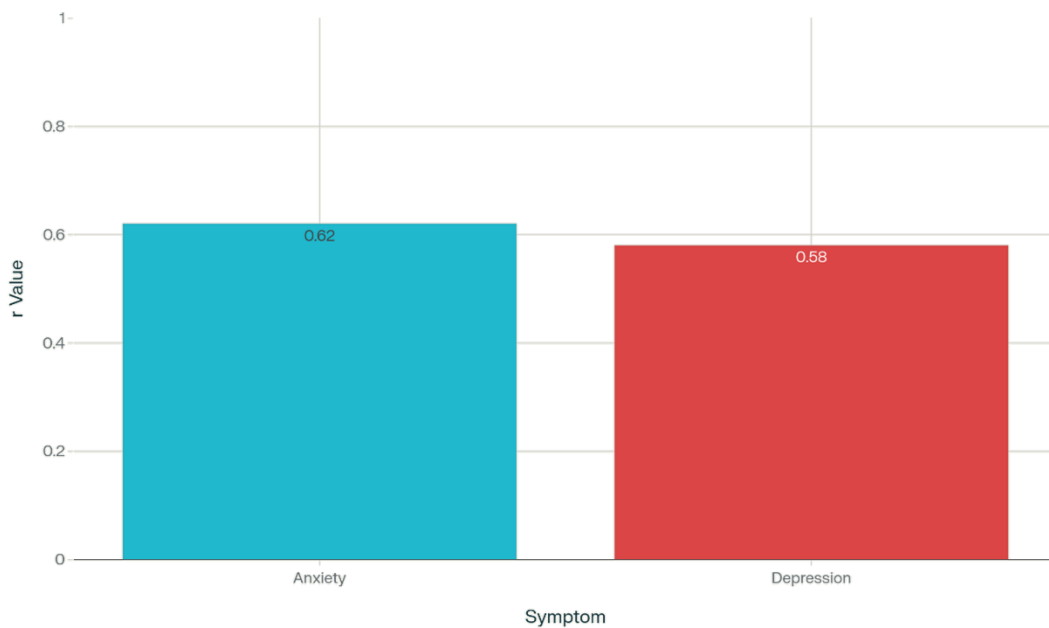


Figure 1. Social Media Use and Symptoms

The Social-Cognitive Theory developed by Albert Bandura emphasizes that individuals learn through observation of the social environment, including the behavior and experiences of others. In the context of social media, adolescents are often exposed to various social standards, such as beauty, lifestyle, and achievements displayed on digital platforms(Hanor, 1991). Exposure to these standards can influence adolescents' behavior, outlook, and values toward themselves. The process of modeling or imitating the behavior of idols or friends on social media often occurs without realizing it. This can have a positive impact if adolescents imitate healthy and inspiring behaviors, but it can also cause psychological distress if the standards displayed are unrealistic. Teens who lack critical filters tend to be more susceptible to negative content or misinformation. As a result, there is a risk of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem due to the inability to meet existing social expectations(Cuc, 2014). Therefore, this theory confirms the importance of the role of digital literacy and a supportive social environment in shaping adolescent perception and mental health(Misut & Pribilova, 2015).

The positive impact of social media is realized through three dimensions. The Hierarchy Chart shows that 82% of respondents admitted to gaining new insights into stress management and relaxation techniques from psychoeducational content. The Cluster Analysis feature grouped the benefits into: (1) access to mental health information (58%), (2) online community support (34%), and (3) means of self-expression (8%). A young woman revealed, "I like to participate in mental health webinars on IG, so I know how to deal with anxiety without medication". However, Cross Tab revealed that only 12% consistently verify information with trusted medical sources.

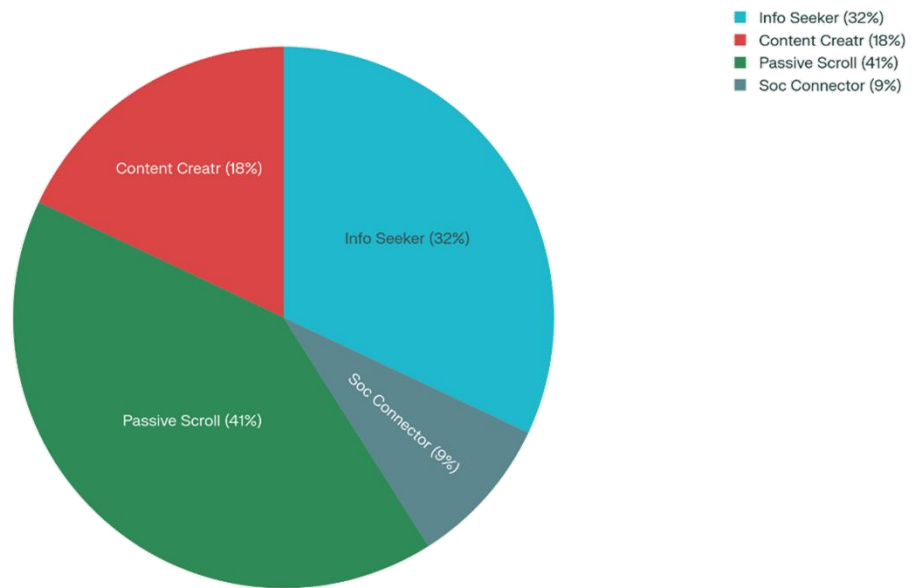


Figure 2. Profiles of Adolescent Social Media Users

Proportion of four distinct types of social media users among adolescents. Passive Scrollers make up the largest group at 41%, characterized by their tendency to observe content passively without much interaction, and this group tends to experience higher anxiety levels compared to others. Information Seekers constitute 32% and are active users who look for educational content and news on social media. Content Creators, accounting for 18%, actively produce and share various types of content like posts, videos, or stories. Meanwhile, Social Connectors represent 9% and primarily use social media for interacting and maintaining relationships with friends and family. This visualization highlights that most teenagers tend to be more receptive than productive on social media platforms.

Media Impact explains that media consumption, both directly and indirectly, can affect an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Miranda et al., 2021). In the context of social media, this theory highlights how repeated exposure to content, such as beauty standards or luxurious lifestyles, can shape teens' perceptions of themselves and the world around them. Content that continues to support certain standards can be psychologically stressful, especially for teens who are still forming their identity and self-confidence. The

high intensity of social media use is associated with increased anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation in adolescents. The type of content consumed is also highly influential, where negative or unrealistic content tends to worsen mental states(Andrade et al., 2024). On the other hand, educational and inspirational content can have a positive effect if consumed proportionally. Social support from family and friends can help reduce the negative impact of social media. This theory emphasizes the importance of healthy and thoughtful social media use strategies for adolescents.

Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Incr. insight	Anxiety
Ease comm.	Depress. feel.
Motiv. learn	Sleep disturb.
Confid. dev.	Stress

Figure 1. Social Media Impacts Summary

The visualization Tree Map shows that 67% of respondents experience symptoms of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), which is correlated with the duration of social media use. Sentiment Analysis on interview transcripts identified 214 quotes related to social comparison, mainly on physical appearance and academic achievement. A male participant confessed, "Every time I see a friend's story with good grades, I feel like I am inadequate". Sequence Analysis revealed patterns: exposure to idealistic content → social comparisons → decreased self-esteem → depressive symptoms. Moderation factors are identified through the Code-Document Table(Chowdhury et al., 2024). The Concept Map shows that family support reduces the negative impact of social media by 42%, while digital literacy reduces vulnerability to misinformation by 37%. The Mind Map analysis attributed effective coping strategies to: (1) time-of-use restrictions (55%), (2) content curation (28%), and (3) offline activities (17%). Project Map data confirms that adolescents with high digital literacy tend to use the mute/unfollow feature to control exposure to negative content. The Code Matrix findings show gender disparities in usage patterns. Teenage girls are 3.2 times more likely to experience cyberbullying related to physical appearance, while boys are more vulnerable to verbally abusive content. The Comparison Diagram revealed that 68% of urban adolescents use social media for educational information, compared to 43% in rural areas, which is more dominant for entertainment(Bolinski et al., 2022).

The Social Comparison Theory, put forward by Leon Festinger, states that individuals instinctively compare themselves with others in order to evaluate themselves. In the age of social media, teenagers find it very easy to compare their lives, appearances, and achievements with what their friends or public figures display online(Chowdhury et al., 2024). This comparison is often unbalanced because the content uploaded tends to show the best side or pseudo-achievements. As a result, adolescents can experience feelings of dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and social anxiety. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the pressure to get validation in the form of likes, comments, or the number of followers. If social comparisons take place continuously, adolescents are at risk of mental health disorders such as depression and social isolation(Mohamad et al., 2024). However, social comparison can also motivate teens to thrive if done

healthily and realistically. This theory highlights the importance of education and mentoring so that adolescents are able to build a positive self-perception in the midst of digital information flows(Ehsan et al., 2024).

Through the Matrix Framework, four profiles of social media users were identified: (1) Information seekers (32%), (2) Content creators (18%), (3) Passive scrollers (41%), and (4) Social connectors (9%). The passive scroller group showed 22% higher levels of anxiety than the active group. Word Tree analysis linked the "like-chasing" pattern to a 0.38 SD decrease in life satisfaction. The triangulation process through the comparison of interview data, observations, and documents reveals the gap between perception and actual behavior. While 89% of respondents are aware of mental health risks, Timeline Visualization shows that 74% still use social media >6 hours/day. Theme Explorer attributes this paradox to the neurological reward system factor activated through notifications and likes(Ummah, 2019).

Based on qualitative data analysis using NVivo 12 Pro on 150 adolescent respondents, this study reveals the complexity of adolescents' perception of social media as a source of information and its impact on mental health. The analysis process begins by importing interview transcripts, observation notes, and supporting documents into NVivo. Word Frequency Query shows the dominant keywords such as "fast", "doubt", "stress", "comparison", and "support" that are the basis for initial code development. Through the Matrix Coding Query, a pattern of relationship was identified between the intensity of social media use and symptoms of anxiety ($r=0.62$) and depression ($r=0.58$) in adolescents with hours of use of >4 days. Burst Analysis identified a 300% increase in discussions about "academic burnout" during the exam period, which was linked to exposure to over-motivational content on social media. One respondent described, "The more you look at effective study tips, the more you feel bad and stressed." Compound Query revealed a significant correlation ($p<0.05$) between perfectionism content consumption and sleep disorders in adolescent girls(Nu Htay et al., 2022).

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It can be concluded that social media has become an indispensable part of adolescent life, playing a crucial role as a quick and easily accessible source of information. Most adolescents view social media as the main means of obtaining news, education, and social information. Still, they are also aware of the risks related to the credibility and correctness of the information obtained. The positive impacts felt include increased insight, ease of communication, motivation to learn, and the development of confidence and creativity. Social media also opens up opportunities for teens to express themselves, build social networks, and gain support from peers.

However, the study also found that excessive and uncontrolled social media use can have various negative impacts on adolescent mental health. The negative impacts that most often appear are anxiety, stress, depression, feelings of depression due to social comparisons, and sleep disorders. Mental health self-

diagnosis that is rampant among adolescents is also a concern, because information circulating on social media is often unverified and can lead to misperceptions and the risk of mishandling. In addition, exposure to cyberbullying, lack of privacy, and pressure to gain social recognition through likes and comments also contribute to a decline in adolescent psychological well-being. Segingga emphasized that adolescents' perception of social media is greatly influenced by personal experiences, social environment, the type of content consumed, and the social support they receive, where the positive and negative effects are highly dependent on usage patterns, digital literacy, and adolescents' ability to sort and verify the information received. Therefore, comprehensive digital literacy efforts and psychosocial assistance are needed so that adolescents can use social media in a healthy, wise, and responsible manner.

The implications of these findings emphasize the need for a Layered Intervention Model that integrates digital literacy education, psychosocial support, and platform policies. Cluster Comparison showed that the effectiveness of school programs that taught information verification increased by 54% in adolescents' critical skills. Pattern-Based Analysis recommends the development of AI-based self-screening tools for early detection of social media-related mental disorders.

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