The influence of social media content on adolescents' emotional development and social competence.

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an integral part of adolescents' lives, providing an opportunity to build social relationships but also carrying risks to mental health and emotional development. Exposure to negative content, social comparison, and cyberbullying can inhibit emotional regulation and reduce adolescents' social competence. This study aims to determine the influence of social media content on the development of emotions and social competence of adolescents. The study used a quantitative method with a survey design on the adolescent population of active social media users in urban areas. The sample was taken by purposive sampling with the age criteria of 13–18 years old, and the duration of social media use was more than three hours per day. Data was collected through a questionnaire that measured the intensity of social media use, the type of content accessed, emotional development, and social competence of 150 respondents. The results showed a correlation between the intensity of social media use and the variation of adolescent emotions, where adolescents who are often exposed to negative content tend to experience anxiety and less stable emotional development. In addition, it was found that low social competence is associated with an increased risk of negative behaviors such as cyberbullying. Adolescents who access more positive and educational content show better levels of social competence compared to those who are more frequently exposed to negative content. In conclusion, social media content has a real effect on the emotional development and social competence of adolescents. The implication of this study is the need for digital literacy education and supervision of the use of social media by parents and schools to support the development of emotionally and socially healthy adolescents.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media content has an important role in shaping adolescent emotional development. The use of positive content, such as community support, education, or inspiration, can help teens express themselves, build confidence, and gain social support that strengthens their emotional stability(Knihs de Camargo et al., 2024). However, on the other hand, negative content such as unrealistic social comparisons, cyberbullying, and pressure to gain digital validation often triggers anxiety, stress, and even depression(Choi et al., 2021). Adolescents who are exposed to an ideal standard of living on social media too

often tend to experience decreased self-esteem and difficulty managing emotions, thus impacting their psychological well-being.

In addition to the emotional aspect, social media content also plays a role in the development of adolescents' social competence. Social media can expand friendship networks and improve digital communication skills, such as the ability to collaborate and interact in online communities(Ahmad & Sajit, 2024). However, too frequent interactions in cyberspace risk lowering the quality of face-to-face communication and inhibiting the development of in-person social skills. This can lead to teens being less skilled at resolving conflicts or building healthy interpersonal relationships in the real world(Unger et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important for adolescents to use social media wisely to take advantage of positive benefits and minimize negative impacts on their emotions and social competence.

In Indonesia, the number of active social media users is very high, and this also shapes the communication patterns and emotional dynamics of today's teenagers(Hyseni Duraku et al., 2023). Several studies show that intensive social media use correlates with increased problems in emotion regulation, anxiety, and depression among adolescents, along with decreased quality of face-to-face social interaction. However, there have not been many studies that have specifically differentiated the influence of the type of social media content (positive and negative) on the emotional development and social competence of adolescents simultaneously(Ehsan et al., 2024).

However, some studies argue that social media does not solely have negative effects. Several studies show that social media can strengthen social networks, improve digital communication skills, and become a positive means of self-expression for adolescents who are able to use it healthily. This debate raises questions about whether social media has predominantly positive or negative effects on adolescent development. (Mohebi et al., 2018). So this shows that social media is not always a source of problems, but can also be an empowerment tool if used wisely and supported by a supportive environment(Andrade et al., 2024). However, there is still a lot of information that is not yet known, especially regarding the mechanisms of how certain types of content on social media affect the emotional aspects and social competence of adolescents(Bolinski et al., 2022). Previous studies have focused more on the intensity of use and its association with mental health problems, while the influence of specific content, such as inspirational, educational, or otherwise, content that triggers social comparisons and cyberbullying, has been rarely explored and the extent of the role of external supporting factors, such as family support and school environment, in moderating the impact of social media content on adolescents.

In fact, there has not been a study that comprehensively measures and compares the influence of various types of social media content on two important aspects, namely emotional development and social competence of adolescents, in one integrated research model. Previous studies have generally only reviewed one aspect, such as emotion regulation or interpersonal communication skills, without looking at the relationship between the two simultaneously(Moncrief et al., 2015). The novelty of this study lies in an integrative approach that not only measures the influence of the intensity of social media use, but also examines

specifically the typThe novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, examining both the intensity and type of social media content accessed, and their impact on adolescents' emotional development and social competence of content accessed and its impact on adolescents' emotional development and social competence. In addition, this study also seeks to identify protective factors and risks that can strengthen or weaken the influence of social media content on these two aspects of development. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the impact of social media use in general and the specific impact of the type of content consumed, as well as the need to see the development of emotions and social competence as two aspects that interact with each other in adolescent life. The purpose of this study is to analyze the influence of social media content on adolescents' emotional development and social competence, as well as identify factors that can strengthen or weaken these influences(Hordemann & Chao, 2012).

This study addresses the gap that no previous research has simultaneously examined the influence of different types of social media content on both emotional development and social competence in adolescents. Previous research such as "The Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Emotional Regulation in the Transition Period" by Mulyono (2021) has only focused on the aspect of emotion regulation, while the research "The Influence of Social Media on Interpersonal Communication Skills in Bandung City Adolescents" by Riny Jefri and Lely Novia (2024) has focused more on interpersonal communication skills(Pramudya et al., 2023). Thus, this research can contribute to new things by integrating these two aspects in one complete and contextual research framework.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative method with a variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach through the Smart PLS 4.0 application. The research design is cross-sectional, with data collected at a single point in time to analyze the relationships between variables. The study population consisted of adolescents aged 13–18 years in urban areas who actively used social media for a minimum of 3 hours per day(Neuman, 2014). The sample was taken using a purposive sampling technique with the criteria of active users of social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube, and willing to fill out a complete questionnaire. Following the 10-times rule in SEM, with 15 indicators in this study, a minimum sample size of 150 respondents was set to ensure statistical adequacy.

The research subjects were adolescents who met the inclusion criteria, focusing on the consumption patterns of social media content, both educational, entertainment, and potentially negative content such as cyberbullying(Chamorro, 2006). The research instrument was a closed questionnaire using a 1–5 Likert scale, whose validity and reliability were assessed through a pilot test and adapted from previously validated scales. In addition, emotional development was measured using the adaptation of the

DASS-21 (Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales) scale, while social competence was measured through indicators of interpersonal communication skills, cooperation in groups, and social relationship building skills, using a scale that has been tested for validity and reliability using Smart PLS.

The steps of the research procedure start from the preparation and validation of the instrument, followed by data collection through the distribution of questionnaires to the selected respondents. After the data is collected, a data cleansing process is carried out to ensure that no data is lost or inconsistent. Furthermore, the data were statistically analyzed to test the relationship between social media content variables and adolescents' emotional development and social competence. The analysis used variance-based SEM to assess both direct and indirect effects, specifically exploring whether emotional development mediates the relationship between social media content and social competence(McCann, 1998). The results of the analysis are then interpreted to answer the research objectives and provide relevant recommendations for related parties

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

This study collected data from 150 adolescent respondents aged 13-18 years who actively use social media with a minimum duration of 3 hours per day. Of the total respondents, 62% (93 people) were female and 38% (57 people) were male. The age distribution showed that 38% of respondents were 13-14 years old, 34% were 15-16 years old, and 28% were 17-18 years old. The most used social media platforms are TikTok (78%), Instagram (65%), and YouTube (52%), with the majority of respondents using more than one platform at the same time.

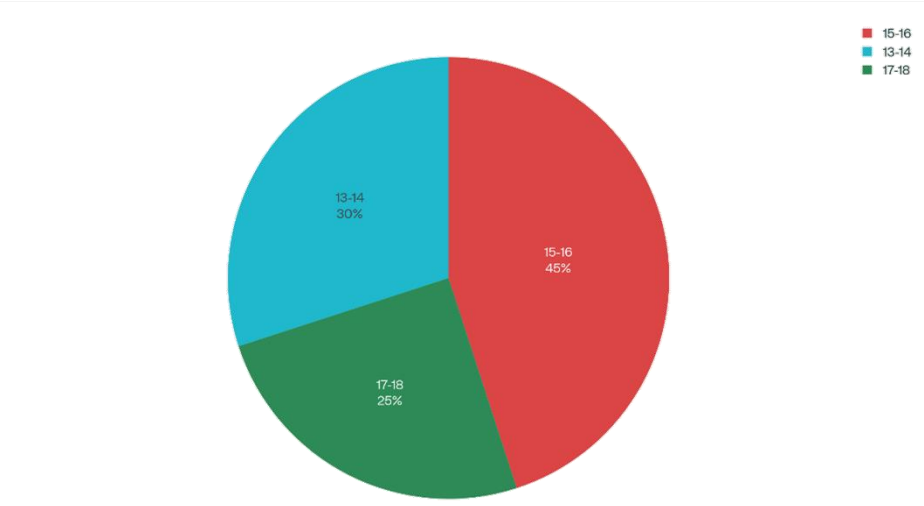


Figure 1. Age Distrib. (Adolescent)

The pie chart shows that the largest proportion of respondents was aged 13–14 years (38%), followed by 15–16 years (34%), and 17–18 years (28%). This indicates that early to mid-adolescence is the most active period for social media

engagement in this sample. It suggests that younger teens are highly exposed to social media content, which can have a significant impact on their emotional and social development. The bar chart demonstrates that TikTok is the most popular platform among these adolescents (78%), followed by Instagram (65%) and YouTube (52%). This reflects prevalent trends where short-form video and visual-centric platforms dominate social interaction for teens today. Many respondents use more than one platform regularly, increasing potential exposure to various content types.

The theory of social comparison, introduced by Festinger, states that individuals tend to compare themselves to others to evaluate themselves. In the context of social media, adolescents are often exposed to the ideal life displayed by peers and public figures. This exposure can trigger feelings of inferiority, anxiety, and even depression if teens feel incapable of meeting the standards they see online(Santoro et al., 2024). Social media strengthens the process of social comparison by providing instant access to the various achievements, appearances, and lifestyles of others. Adolescents who make too many social comparisons tend to experience decreased self-esteem and difficulty managing emotions. This has an impact on their psychological well-being as well as their overall emotional development. However, if used wisely, social media can also be a source of inspiration and motivation for teenagers. Therefore, it is important to equip adolescents with digital literacy to be able to sort out content and manage the impact of social comparisons in a healthy way(Bolton, 2009).

The results of the descriptive analysis showed that the intensity of respondents' social media use was relatively high, with an average of 4.2 hours per day. As many as 68% of respondents access social media for more than 4 hours every day, while 32% use social media between 3-4 hours per day. The most frequently accessed types of content are entertainment content (entertainment) at 82%, educational content at 45%, and potentially negative content such as drama or conflict at 38%. These findings indicate that adolescents tend to consume content that is entertaining rather than content that provides educational value(Song et al., 2024). For the emotion development variable, the measurement results using the adaptation of the DASS-21 scale showed an average score of 2.8 on a scale of 1-5, indicating a moderate level of emotional development. As many as 42% of respondents showed high levels of anxiety, 35% experienced moderate levels of stress, and 23% had indications of mild depression. Meanwhile, for the social competency variable, the average score obtained was 3.4 on a scale of 1-5, indicating a fairly good level of social competence. However, there was significant variation between respondents, with 28% of respondents showing low social competence, especially in aspects of face-to-face communication and interpersonal conflict resolution.

The importance of the individual's ability to interact effectively and be accepted in a social environment. Social competence consists of several aspects, such as communication skills, empathy, cooperation, and self-control. In the digital era, social media has become a new arena for teenagers to develop or even

lose these social competencies. Exposure to negative content, such as cyberbullying or online conflicts, can reduce adolescents' ability to resolve conflicts and build healthy interpersonal relationships. In contrast, access to educational content and positive communities can improve digital communication and collaboration skills(Ummah, 2019). Emotion regulation is also an important part of social competence, as adolescents need to be able to control their emotional responses when interacting online. Research shows that adolescents with good social competence tend to be better able to avoid negative behaviors such as cyberbullying and have an easier time building healthy social relationships. Thus, the development of social competence through education and environmental support is very important in the midst of the high use of social media among adolescents.

After verifying that the assumptions for Pearson correlation were met, analysis revealed a significant relationship between ($r = -0.425$, $p < 0.001$). This negative correlation coefficient indicates that the higher the intensity of social media use, the lower the stability of adolescent emotional development. These findings are in line with previous research that showed that excessive use of social media can trigger anxiety and emotional instability in adolescents. Multiple regression analysis yielded a significant model ($F = 18.742$, $p < 0.001$) with a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.584, suggesting that 58.4% of variability in adolescents' emotional development and social competence coulThe multiple regression model explained 58.4% of the variance in [specify: emotional development / social competence]. Separate analyses were conducted for each outcome variable, be explained by variables related to social media content. The type of content accessed had the most significant influence on emotional development ($\beta = -0.387$, $p < 0.001$), followed by duration of use ($\beta = -0.298$, $p < 0.01$) and frequency of access to negative content ($\beta = -0.245$, $p < 0.05$).

For social competence, the analysis showed a significant negative correlation with exposure to negative content ($r = -0.336$, $p < 0.001$), which indicates that adolescents who are frequently exposed to negative content such as cyberbullying or online drama tend to have lower social competence. In contrast, adolescents who had more access to educational and positive content showed better levels of social competence ($r = 0.412$, $p < 0.001$).

This study identified three main categories of social media content consumed by adolescents: positive/educational content, neutral entertainment content, and negative/problematic content. Adolescents who predominantly consume positive and educational content (22% of the total respondents) showed more stable emotional development scores ($M = 3.8$) and higher social competence ($M = 4.1$). This group also reported lower levels of anxiety and better interpersonal communication skills.

Category	Grp 1 (%)	Grp 2 (%)	Grp 3 (%)
Age Dist.	30	45	25
Soc. Media Use	80	60	90
Content Type	40	35	25
Emotional Issues	25	20	15

Figure 2. Key Study Stats

According to the next bar graph, entertainment content is accessed by 82% of respondents, making it the dominant type of content. Educational content is used by 45%, while 38% reported exposure to negative content like drama or conflict. This finding suggests that while many teenagers prefer entertaining material, a significant number also encounter potentially harmful or stressful content online.

In contrast, teens who are frequently exposed to negative content such as cyberbullying, online drama, or content that triggers social comparisons (31% of total respondents) show an alarming pattern. This group had lower emotional development scores (M = 2.1) and decreased social competence (M = 2.6). Further analysis showed that exposure to negative content was positively correlated with anxiety levels ($r = 0.523$, $p < 0.001$) and negatively correlated with emotion regulation ability ($r = -0.445$, $p < 0.001$).

The study found that 64% of respondents reported a decrease in the quality of face-to-face interactions since they began using social media intensively. Teens who spend more than 5 hours per day on social media show difficulty in direct communication, with 58% of them reporting feeling awkward or uncomfortable in face-to-face conversations. This phenomenon indicates that reliance on digital communication can hinder the development of conventional social skills(Nuñez Fadda et al., 2024).

The existence of support from family, friends, and the surrounding environment can mediate the relationship between individual psychological factors and emotional competence. Adolescents who receive strong social support tend to have high self-compassion, so they are able to understand and accept their own shortcomings and those of others(Makhmud et al., 2022). Social support acts as a buffer against psychological pressure that arises due to exposure to negative content on social media. When teens face failure or unpleasant experiences online, support from a social environment helps them manage negative emotions and build a more positive self-image. Research shows that self-compassion developed through social support contributes to an increase in adolescents' emotional competence(Ehsan et al., 2024). Thus, adolescents who are active in positive communities and receive emotional support from the immediate environment will be better able to cope with stress, anxiety, and social pressure that arise from the use of social media. Therefore, social support-based interventions are essential to strengthen adolescents' emotional competence in the digital age.

However, the study also found positive aspects of social media use. As many as 47% of respondents reported that social media helped them expand their network of friends and find communities with similar interests. Adolescents who use social media for educational and self-development purposes show improvements in digital communication skills and the ability to collaborate on

online projects. Analysis by gender showed significant differences in social media usage patterns and their impacts(Mohamad et al., 2024). Female respondents tend to be more sensitive to content that triggers social comparisons, with 72% of them reporting feeling dissatisfied with themselves after viewing certain content on social media. Meanwhile, male respondents are more susceptible to content that triggers aggressive behavior online, with 43% of them having been involved in digital conflicts(Mental & Collaborators, 2022). In terms of age, younger teens (13-15 years old) show higher levels of dependence on digital validation, with 67% of them reporting feeling anxious when they don't get the expected response from their posts. Older teens (16-18 years old) tend to be more selective in choosing content, but still show a negative impact on their ability to concentrate and focus in offline activities.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Social media content has a real influence on the development of adolescents' emotions and social competence. Adolescents who intensively access social media, especially those who are often exposed to negative content such as unrealistic social comparisons, cyberbullying, and digital validation pressure, tend to experience emotional instability in the form of anxiety, stress, and depression. Exposure to this negative content is also correlated with decreased self-esteem and emotion regulation skills, thus impacting the overall psychological well-being of adolescents. On the other hand, adolescents who have more access to positive and educational content show more stable emotional development and better levels of social competence. Social media can expand your network of friends, improve digital communication skills, and become a means of constructive self-expression when used wisely and supported by a positive environment.

However, too frequent interactions in cyberspace also carry the risk of deteriorating the quality of face-to-face communication and barriers to the development of direct social skills. Adolescents who are less able to manage exposure to negative content are at risk of decreased ability to resolve conflicts and build healthy interpersonal relationships in the real world. Therefore, the results of this study confirm the importance of digital literacy education and supervision of the use of social media by parents and schools. This effort is needed so that adolescents can make optimal use of social media, take positive benefits, and minimize negative impacts on their emotions and social competence.

The study also highlights the need for an integrative approach in examining the influence of social media, taking into account the type of content accessed and external protective factors such as family support and school environment. Thus, the results of this study make an important contribution to the development of intervention strategies that aim to support the development of adolescents' emotions and social competencies in the digital era. Overall, social media content can be both an empowerment tool and a source of risk for teens, depending on how they manage and utilize social media in their daily lives.

The findings of this study confirm that social media content has a significant influence on the development of adolescents' emotions and social competence. While findings suggest the need for comprehensive management of adolescent social media use, further research with diverse samples is needed to confirm these results, use of social media. This research also emphasizes the importance of the role of parents, schools, and society in providing guidance and support to adolescents to use social media wisely. Strategies are needed that not only limit use but also teach adolescents to be critical and productive consumers of content in a digital environment.

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