

Social Media: The Impact on Teenagers

Beep. Beep. Beep. As I reach to turn off my alarm, I grab my phone and check the notifications. In the morning, the first thing I do is look at social media to see if there are any new posts, snaps, or videos. Before school starts, I sit in my car and respond to Snapchat. Later, when I am bored in class, I open my phone to Instagram. At home, I watch YouTube before doing my homework. I go over all my notifications and respond to everything before I sleep, just to hear the “beep, beep, beep” the next morning and do it all over again. My life has become dictated by likes, comments, videos, pictures, and posts. Social media defines more aspects of my life than I care to admit, but this is not just limited to me. The first thing 69% of people do in the morning is check their phone. Social media has an overall negative impact on the young minds of teenagers. Social media has changed the way that teens create connections and relationships along with contributing to issues in mental health and self-image.

Human connection is one of the most crucial parts of life; however, receiving this connection or relying on it through a screen has actually created a complex disconnect. Using emojis, gifs, and pictures to express emotion results in anxiety and an inability to read social cues in real life. Fundamental life skills of communication are being stripped away by the overuse of social media. Communicating through a screen will create ingenuine relationships instead of filling the human necessity of face-to-face connection. In the article, “How Using Social Media Affects Teenagers,” Rachel Ehmke describes the negative consequences of social media on the development of youth. Ehmke cites clinical psychologist Catherine Steiner-Adair EdD, stating, “As a species we are very highly attuned to reading social cues... There’s no question kids are missing out on very critical social skills. In a way, texting and online communicating... puts

everybody in a nonverbal disabled context, where body language, facial expression, and even the smallest kinds of vocal reactions are rendered invisible” (Ehmke). The nonverbal aspects of communication and social cues are one of the most important parts of forming connections with others. Social media attempts to substitute this with emojis and videos. However, this takes away the ability to learn and process these non-verbal cues. In addition to nonverbal aspects of communication, social media has changed the way that teenagers interact with others. In a scientific report on face-to-face communication in comparison to digital communication, professor of psychology and psychodynamics, Stefan Stieger, states, “the degree of nonverbal cues (especially the immediacy) is the most important prerequisite whether or not people build relationships through technology...the social presence of the communication partner is vital for building interpersonal relationships” (Stieger). Face-to-face human interaction is unable to be substituted by online connections. Social media places a barrier between people. With more and more relationships sparking on Snapchat, it is hard to establish a genuine connection. Instead of going on dates and getting to know each other in person, hours are spent texting over an app using abbreviated conversations. Without the social skills to handle communication in person, teenagers are faced with unsatisfying relationships and a void that only true understanding from face-to-face connection could fill.

Teenagers are young; they are still creating their perceptions about the world and social media has created unrealistic expectations that often damage self-image. For example, Elia Abi-Jaoude, from the Canadian Medical Association, describes the relationship between social media and mental health in the article “Smartphones, Social Media Use, and Youth Mental Health” stating, “A systematic review of 20 studies found that use of social media was associated with

body image concerns and disordered eating. In a randomized study, female participants reported a more negative mood after just 10 minutes of browsing their Facebook account compared with those who browsed an appearance-neutral control website” (Abi-Jaoude). Everything posted on social media has been filtered, edited, and altered in some way. Social media is not a correct portrayal of life, but teenagers build unrealistic perceptions and expectations of how life is supposed to be. Additionally, the article, “The Social Dilemma: Social Media and Your Mental Health” from McLean Hospital, explains how social media contributes to a larger awareness of social events and in turn a larger awareness of being excluded, explaining that, “FOMO—fear of missing out—also plays a role... Missing experiences can create anxiety and depression. When people look online and see they’re excluded from an activity, it can affect thoughts and feelings, and can affect them physically” (The Social). The fear of missing out or having a life similar to those portrayed on social media platforms can be isolating and result in depression and anxiety. Social media can make it appear as if everyone is always doing something. This unrealistic perception can easily be portrayed and altered through simple clicks of a button resulting in an isolating environment. Lastly, an article from the American Psychological Association, “Reducing Social Media Use Significantly Improves Body Image in Teens, Young Adults” cites Gary Goldfield, Ph.D. from Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute who states, “Youth are spending, on average, between six to eight hours per day on screens, much of it on social media. Social media can expose users to hundreds or even thousands of images and photos every day, including those of celebrities and fashion or fitness models, which we know leads to an internalization of beauty ideals that are unattainable for almost everyone, resulting in greater dissatisfaction with body weight and shape” (Reducing). Social media is not real life. However,

consuming massive amounts of media online contorts the way that one views themselves. Within a short amount of time on social media, one can compare their own life and body to those of thousands of others, often which have been edited to be “socially acceptable”. This creates a negative self-image if one does not meet these social media standards and creates a never-ending cycle of self-doubt, negative self-image, and overall damaged mental health.

Social media consumes everyday life and has changed the way teenagers look at the world. Not only has communication and human interaction changed, but teenagers' perception of both their own lives and others has been altered as well. The world is constantly progressing and social media is not going away. It will only continue to grow and gain a stronger presence in our lives. Therefore, the implications of social media on teenagers is a crucial issue that must be addressed. Understanding the factors that influence not only our current generation, but the future of the world is crucial for success. Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “We can not always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future”. To thrive as a people, we must be aware and willing to help teenagers deal with the consequences of the growing use of social media to create a better world for all. So next time the “beep, beep, beep” of the alarm goes off, one should take a second to think before jumping online.

Word Count: 1199

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