

## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TEENAGERS

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*This article explores the influence of social media on teenagers' mental health, behavior, and communication. It examines both the positive aspects—such as creativity, self-expression, and connection with others—and the negative impacts like anxiety, poor sleep, and low self-esteem. Based on real-life cases and research findings, the article aims to raise awareness about the balanced use of social media among young people and suggests practical tips for healthy usage.*

**INTRODUCTION.** In the 21st century, social media has become an inseparable part of teenagers' everyday life across the globe. From chatting with friends to sharing photos, from watching short videos to following global trends, platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook influence how young people think, feel, and behave. While social media offers various benefits such as creativity, fast communication, and global awareness, it also raises serious concerns regarding teenagers' mental health, self-esteem, attention span, and sleep quality. Importantly, the effects of social media on teenagers are not the same everywhere. In countries like the United States and South Korea, where technology is deeply integrated into daily life, teenagers often report higher levels of social anxiety, cyberbullying, and screen addiction. On the other hand, in countries like Finland or Japan, where digital education and online responsibility are more structured, the risks are comparatively lower. Cultural values, parenting styles, school systems, and national policies all play key roles in shaping how teenagers interact with social media. This article aims to explore the positive and negative effects of social media on teenagers while comparing international perspectives. Through global examples and recent studies, we will analyze

how teenagers are affected in different societies and suggest practical ways to promote healthy and balanced use of social media worldwide.

**Positive Impacts of Social Media on Teenagers:** Social media platforms offer numerous advantages to teenagers around the world. First and foremost, they enable young people to stay connected with their friends and family regardless of distance. Teenagers can share their thoughts, emotions, and daily experiences instantly, which enhances their sense of belonging and emotional support. For example, in countries like the United Kingdom and Canada, teenagers frequently use platforms like WhatsApp and Snapchat to maintain long-distance friendships or stay in touch with relatives abroad.

Secondly, social media encourages creativity and self-expression. Apps such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube allow teenagers to create and share videos, photos, and artwork with a wide audience. In the United States, many teenagers have turned their hobbies into successful online businesses or careers thanks to social media exposure. Similarly, in South Korea, K-pop fan culture has driven many young people to learn new skills such as video editing, graphic design, and even foreign languages. In addition, social media provides educational opportunities. Pages, channels, and influencers often share content related to science, languages, history, and mental health. For instance, in India, many students follow educational YouTube channels to prepare for exams, while teenagers in Germany often use Instagram pages run by psychologists or teachers to get advice about study habits and mental well-being. These examples show that when used wisely, social media can be a powerful learning and personal development tool for teenagers.

#### **Negative Psychological and Social Effects**

Despite the benefits, social media also presents serious challenges, especially to teenagers' mental health. One of the most commonly reported issues is low self-esteem. Teenagers tend to compare themselves to the idealized lives and appearances they see online. In the United States and Brazil, studies have found a strong connection between social media use and feelings of inadequacy and depression among teenage girls. The constant exposure to filtered images and perfect lifestyles creates unrealistic standards that are often impossible to meet.

Cyberbullying is another major concern. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can happen anytime and anywhere, making it difficult for teenagers to escape. In countries like Japan and South Korea, where online activity is very high, cyberbullying has been linked to increased rates of anxiety, social withdrawal, and even teen suicides. Schools and governments in these countries have started implementing strict anti-bullying policies and online monitoring systems, but the problem still exists.

Furthermore, excessive screen time affects teenagers' sleep patterns, physical activity, and academic performance. Teenagers in countries like the United States, Australia, and Saudi Arabia often report staying up late at night browsing social media, which leads to sleep deprivation and poor concentration at school. A study conducted in Australia revealed



that students who spent more than three hours a day on social media had significantly lower grades and attention spans. Clearly, uncontrolled use of social media can have long-lasting negative consequences on young minds.

**Cultural and Educational Differences in Social Media Usage:** How teenagers use and are affected by social media often depends on cultural norms and education systems. In Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Norway, schools integrate digital literacy into their curriculum from an early age. Teenagers are taught how to use social media responsibly, how to spot misinformation, and how to protect their privacy. As a result, these countries report fewer cases of online harm and a more positive attitude toward digital technology.

In contrast, in some developing nations where internet access has grown rapidly but digital education has not kept pace — such as Nigeria or the Philippines — teenagers may be more vulnerable to online scams, fake news, and privacy violations. In these places, lack of parental supervision and weak cyber laws contribute to the risk.

Family culture also plays a crucial role. For example, in countries like Italy and Turkey, where family ties are traditionally strong and parents are more involved in their children's daily lives, teenagers tend to have more regulated screen time and emotional support, which helps reduce the negative effects of social media. In contrast, in countries where parents work long hours or where teen independence is highly valued, such as the UK or urban China, teenagers may have more unsupervised access to digital platforms.

**Strategies for Healthier Use of Social Media:** To reduce the negative impact of social media, a global effort is needed to promote healthy digital habits among teenagers. Firstly, digital education should be a part of every school's curriculum, regardless of country. Teaching students how to critically evaluate online content, recognize harmful behavior, and set time limits can empower them to make smarter choices. Countries like Finland and South Korea are already leading in this area.

Secondly, parents need to be more engaged. Open communication between parents and teenagers about online experiences can build trust and awareness. Tools such as screen-time trackers, parental controls, and tech-free family time can be introduced. In Canada and Germany, public campaigns have encouraged parents to monitor screen usage and to spend more face-to-face time with their children.

Finally, tech companies and governments also have responsibilities. Social media platforms should improve their algorithms to reduce harmful content exposure and offer more tools for users to report abuse. Governments should enforce policies that protect teenagers' mental health and data privacy. Some countries, like France, have even banned smartphones during school hours to minimize distractions and promote real-life interaction.

These combined strategies show that through education, parental involvement, and stronger policies, the risks of social media can be managed, and its benefits can be maximized for the healthy development of teenagers.

To sum up, social media has become an important part of modern teenage life. It helps teenagers stay connected, express their creativity, and access educational content. These positive aspects can support personal growth and learning when social media is used in a responsible way.

However, the negative effects—such as anxiety, low self-esteem, cyberbullying, and poor sleep—cannot be ignored. These problems are especially serious in countries where digital education is weak or where teenagers spend too much time online without guidance or limits.

The comparison of different countries shows that culture, family involvement, school policies, and government actions all influence how teenagers experience social media. In nations with strong digital literacy and active parental support, teenagers are better protected from online harm.

Therefore, schools, parents, and governments around the world must work together to teach teenagers how to use social media wisely. More awareness, digital education, and strict online safety rules can help reduce the risks and increase the benefits of social media in young people's lives.

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