

# *The Age of Social Media: Shifts and Challenges in Adolescents' Behavior*

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**Abstract:** Social media has grown in popularity at an alarming rate over the past few years, from simple forms of communication such as text messaging and phone calls to the use of messaging and calling apps, to the rise of short videos, video or photo-sharing platforms, and social network sites. The forms of social media communication have become more diversified and complex. As the cost of communication, media becomes less expensive and more acceptable to the general public. It has also become common for youth to access social media. Social media use (SMU) is now ingrained in adolescent culture. With the influence of Internet Celebrities (ICs), a derivative born along with the growth of social media, adolescents' behavioral changes should not be underestimated due to the high degree of freedom in their communication and the extremely low threshold of the industry. Much of the earlier research has concentrated on the benefits that social media use provides to adolescents, and very little has been explored about the possible effects of SMU and its derivatives (i.e., IC) on adolescents' behavior. A better understanding of the impact of SMU on adolescents' behavior can help families and schools with intervention planning. This review may provide inspiration for future research on factors influencing adolescents' behavior from a social media perspective.

**Keywords:** adolescent behaviour, social media, health, internet celebrity

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Theory of Co-Construction

Co-construction theory was proposed by Subrahmanyam et al. and focuses on the link between online and face-to-face behaviors [1]. The central idea of this theory is that adolescents are not dominated by their external environment but co-create their Internet environment through a process of social interaction. This means that adolescents' behaviors and interactions online are closely linked to their social lives and developmental issues offline.

Underwood and Ehrenreich combine this theory with fundamental psychological theories of development to further assert that the basic developmental issues that adolescents face in their online social lives, such as identity and sexuality, are congruent with the issues that they face in real life. This means that adolescents' social life on the Internet is psychologically continuous with their offline social life. In other words, adolescents' behavior and attitudes in real life may be reflected in their

online behavior [1]. Wright and Li build on this theory to explore whether young people extend their pro-social behaviors from face-to-face interactions to online environments and conclude that the way young adults socialize online mirrors their offline interactions [2]. In addition, co-construction theory emphasizes that Teenagers have access to social media platforms that allow them to discover and express their identities, but at the same time, they are exposed to the same challenges and risks as in real life. This is why research targeting SMU is particularly important.

## **1.2. Importance of Pubescent**

Pubescent is a critical period in life that has a profound impact on the physical, psychological, and social development of an individual. Firstly, puberty is a period of peak growth and development during which the body undergoes significant changes. Secondly, the individual's cognitive abilities, morals, and self-identity are also formed and develop their own values and beliefs. Learning to cooperate with others, build friendships, and deal with conflicts and problems in relationships will also be a brand-new subject. Adolescents face enormous challenges. Overall, pubescent is a period full of challenges and opportunities and is also a critical period for the all-around development and characterization of young people. Proper guidance and support for adolescents to help them pass through this period in a healthy manner is crucial to their future development.

Based on different levels of social media usage, Chao et al. categorized users into three groups: moderate users, addicted users, and non-users [3]. Online and offline surveys were utilized in earlier investigations on How teenagers' use of social media affects and changes their own behavior. Based on the study's findings, they concluded that compared to non-addicted users, addicted users have poorer social and mental health, accompanied by negative feelings of anxiety, sadness, and loneliness. Additionally, academic stress, performance, bullying victimization, parental connections, parenting styles, and parental education were all lower for addicts. Addictive users also had higher academic stress. According to their analysis, it's also probable that addicts' lower mental health and unfavorable settings contributed to their unhealthy usage of social media. Consideration of factors that may have an impact on adolescents, this paper will focus on the impact of SMU and adolescents' social lives, the impact that Internet Celebrities (ICs) have on adolescents, and the impact of SMU on adolescents' mental health. The teenage years are full of changes and challenges, good social relationships and a healthy mental state can provide teens with the emotional support necessary to help them through the difficulties and stresses of this stage. It also reduces the bad behavior of young people and establishes correct values and morals.

## **2. Social Life of Adolescents and Use of Social Media**

### **2.1. The Impact on Shyness in Adolescents**

The current way of using social media by adolescents has long been transformed from a passive mode to an active mode, which is specifically manifested in the fact that social media, as a star product of modern information technology, has been deeply embedded in the daily lives of adolescents. As its popularity among adolescents continues to climb, its impact on adolescents in terms of social competence has sparked widespread concern. Valkenburg and Jochen introduced the concept of Online Self-Disclosure to illustrate that online communication provides a more protected environment for adolescents, especially socially anxious adolescents, to express themselves without the constraints that may be felt during face-to-face communication [4].

Social media removes geographic boundaries and gives teens the opportunity to socialize with their peers across the globe, thus expanding their network and cultural horizons. The shy group of teenagers is more inclined to express their thoughts and negative emotions online. When communicating with their friends, this non-face-to-face approach also helps them to feel more

comfortable in expressing their rich thoughts and emotions. Virtual mode of communication (VMOC) gives easily shy and socially burdened youth a way to have close friendships, satisfying their need for social interactions [5]. However, without knowing how their friends are receiving the messages that are being sent out, too much negative emotion in the messages has the potential to damage the bond between friends, and many shy participants don't even realize this problem. Prolonged immersion in online communication may make teens seem overwhelmed in real social situations, lacking the etiquette and logic required for face-to-face interactions [6].

## **2.2. The Impact on The Daily Academic Life of Adolescents**

For teenagers, academics are the single biggest thing they take up at this age. Good or bad academics have a direct or indirect effect on their social skills and personality. The use of social media in an academic setting also provides assistance to adolescents. In a study of 560 Hong Kong teenagers' use of social media while and outside of school, Luo and his colleagues divided the places where mobile phones are used into on-campus and off-campus locations [7]. While the behaviour of mobile phone use in school only has three dimensions—consuming, creating, and sharing—the behaviour on mobile phones outside school contains four: communicating, creating, and sharing. These are the dominant aspects of social media use today. The reason for the lack of a communication component is that in-school social media limits the use of this feature. The experiment confirmed that Inside School Social Media Behaviour (ISSMB) was associated with better academic outcomes among the participants, while the outside SSMB (OSSMB) showed a negative correlation. Team activities or group discussions on social networking platforms allow young people to learn how to collaborate and pursue common goals. These platforms have also become a stage for them to display their talents and shape their personal image, helping them with self-awareness and personality building. Nevertheless, at the same time, it should not be overlooked that bad SMU in specific scenarios can also have a negative impact on teenagers.

## **2.3. Information Cocooning and Cyberbullying**

"Information cocoon" refers to a situation in which an individual is surrounded only by information that conforms to their existing beliefs, opinions, and preferences. This phenomenon is often facilitated by modern technology, especially online algorithms that personalize content based on user behavior. As a result, individuals may become isolated from diverse viewpoints and information that challenges their preconceived notions. As a result, social media algorithms push "tailored" content to adolescents, trapping them in a cocoon of information that makes it more difficult for them to explore and understand voices that differ from their own.

Various moral norms, public order, and good morals in real life have, to a certain extent, obscured the sinister nature of human nature, so that it is not possible to give vent to moral sentiments and arbitrarily carry out certain irrational behaviors. In cyberspace, individuals hiding behind the screen can truly show their evil side, acting arbitrarily, boldly giving moral colors to events, as well as describing events in morally loaded terms, or even wantonly distorting the facts, spreading rumors, or maliciously slandering others without fear of any consequences [8]. Anonymity, a sense of cold distance online, and heavy social media addiction also exacerbate the risk of invisible cyberbullying [3]. Some young people may also inadvertently fall into the role of victim or become accomplices to bullying in situations where they do not understand the causes and consequences. Craig offers a thorough investigation of the cyberbullying that teens may experience when using social media and the current reality of cyberbullying. Stratified analyses among these 42 nations revealed a correlation between SMU and cyber victimization in 19%–45% of nations and cyber perpetration in 38%–86% of nations [9]. Obviously, teenagers are in situations where they may be cyberbullied at times. That

undesirable information may likewise have a negative impact on the values and behavior of young people. While governments have focused on and pushed for a system of legal protection, stamping out social networking harm remains difficult and takes time.

### 3. The Impact of Internet Celebrities on Teens

A century ago, the primary influences on adolescent socialization were peers, relatives, neighbors, and teachers. A great number of ICs have been established as a result of the rapid expansion of the Internet and social media, giving rise to a new social media culture, which has become a unique contemporary industry. Adolescents' attachments to celebrities are termed "secondary attachments". David and John argue that attachment to social celebrities is a response to increased autonomy. During adolescence, adolescents' emotional attachments gradually shift from parents to peers. When the parental figure is no longer idealized, the IC will take over some of the roles played by the parent. Media figures offer adolescents various "possible selves" to explore and give cultural resources for forming gender role identities, attitudes, and beliefs as well as for comprehending romantic comedies [10].

As a new Internet force, its spiritual core is a mixed bag. Some ICs deliberately show their fans extravagant and hedonistic lifestyles on live broadcasting platforms, conveying to them wrong concepts such as money worship and personal hedonism. Exploiting loopholes in the law and targeting young people with unreasonable requests for rewards may even affect the direction of young people's future development. Many teenagers also lose their motivation to fight by becoming ICs and making quick money as their future life goals. Meanwhile, Celebrities, due to their high status, may exacerbate the moral disengagement of teenagers. Adolescents can carry over this pattern of behavior to their peers, making them less empathetic to their peers.

Pubescent is a time when adolescent secondary sexual characteristics emerge, and adolescents do not know enough about their own bodies. They will naturally feel the need to compare themselves to others, including their appearance. This comparison can lead to dissatisfaction if they perceive themselves as falling short of societal ideals. Xin believes this is influenced by the traffic economy and consumerism. Based on the construction of a culture of consumerism, the body has also become a plannable object. Teenagers, as masters of their own bodies, have the ability to adjust and enhance their body image, which sets the stage for image anxiety. Secondly, under the operation of capital and traffic, idealized and unrealistic body images created by social media make adolescents appear to be blind worshippers [11]. The slender female bodies and muscular male bodies often promoted in social media set unrealistic standards for adolescents, as well as homogenizing their aesthetics. Teenagers can immediately compare themselves to ICs on social media, those with a low sense of self-worth may be more detached from body management and have a poorer personal image as a result of negative emotions.

The influence of social media on adolescents' eating behavior patterns may also contribute to poor outward appearance. Information on unhealthy food and dietary behaviors is disseminated on the Internet in the form of text, pictures, and videos, and the forms of dissemination are more insidious and diversified, such as discussion forums, videos, fun tips, soft articles, emoticon packs, snacks quizzes, and discount messages, etc. The likelihood that adolescents would grasp and imitate such information increases when poorly regulated material leads to the widespread transmission of information involving harmful foods and negative dietary behaviors [12].

## **4. The Effects of Social Media Use on Adolescents' Mental Health**

### **4.1. Poor Quality of Sleep**

It was argued that high-intensity use of social media and over-attention to specific online objects may cause adolescents to develop internet addiction, reduced physical fitness, and other problems [7]. Heavy social addicts are at a greater mental health disadvantage than non-users and moderated users, Prolonged and intense use of social media can significantly increase users' psychological stress, decrease concentration, and develop a tendency to headaches and depression, the most common of which is insomnia [3]. Bergfelda and Bulck recruited 410 high school students from Long Island, New York via an online questionnaire on their propensity to use social software, the main social media content they viewed, and their use of social media at night [13]. Sleep quality was evaluated using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI). Sleep length, subjective sleep quality, sleep efficiency, sleep latency, sleep disorders, daytime dysfunction, and usage of sleep medicine are the seven components of the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index. The results of the experiment suggest that if they stare at a screen for long periods of time and habitually use social media at night, adolescents may experience decreased sleep quality and insomnia, which further affects their health and academic performance. Poor sleep can also be a trigger for psychological problems in teenagers.

### **4.2. Low Self-Esteem and Depression**

On public social media, "likes" and "comments" have become a new social currency, and if addicted to them for a long time, adolescents may gradually become overly reliant on external affirmation, thus lowering their self-worth, fearing negative evaluations from others, and experiencing social avoidance behaviors. Social media mostly showcases the most exciting moments of people's lives, which often sends teens into a whirlwind of comparing themselves to others, which can lead to feelings of lack of self-worth and unfulfilled lives. While some adolescents respond adaptively to negative comments online, such as minimizing exposure to content or seeking support from peers, others experience maladaptation.

It is widely accepted that there are two classical models of depression and low self-esteem to illustrate their relationship. One is the vulnerability model, which contends that depression is caused by poor self-esteem, and the other is the scarring model, which contends that trauma brought on by depression causes low self-esteem to develop. In order to research how sadness and low self-esteem are related, Kircaburun recruited 1130 students aged 12 to 18 years from different schools in the Southern Aegean region, and Relevant scales such as the Child Depression Questionnaire were used as a source of data for the study, which will be used to analyze the relationship between depression in adolescents and factors such as self-esteem [14]. The results of the study said that the research supporting the fragile model is much more than the scarred model. Depression was also found to be adversely associated with low self-esteem and favorably associated with everyday social media use. The more time spent on social media each day, the higher the level of depression and the larger the risk of depression. This conclusion may contradict some of the conclusions reached in previous studies, Kircaburun gives his explanation. According to him, human beings need physical communication, and although social media provides a platform for verbal exchange, a single form of communication cannot fulfill the emotional needs of normal people. That is why it is even more important for researchers to pay attention to the influence that social media may have on young people.

## **5. Conclusions**

Social media use has a complicated effect on adolescents' behavior, and adolescence is also an important stage in which adolescents live. According to the co-construction theory proposed by



previous scientists, it is acknowledged that teenagers and social media have an interactive relationship and co-developing. This article summarises previous studies on different behaviors of adolescents that measure social media use, social skills, mental health status, and the manifestation of some related problems, such as the level of insomnia, possible cyberbullying, and so on. For adolescents, social media has helped to alleviate the problem of being too shy to socialize and has given adolescents a platform to buffer themselves. At the same time, social media has also helped with academics and enhanced access to information, provided that it is used wisely. Internet celebrities on social media provide teenagers with a place for emotional transference and support. With regard to social media, it is important not only to recognize it as a platform for self-expression and communication but also to pay attention to the negative impacts of SMU. Big data algorithms make teenagers always exposed to the same information as their own perception when using social media, and it is difficult to exchange and collide with diversified views. The likelihood of being cyberbullied also increases dramatically when using social media. The values conveyed by ICs to adolescents are also difficult to judge the pros and cons, which may cause adolescents' moral disengagement. At the same time, the ideal image of the virtual world can bring anxiety to adolescents and make them feel dissatisfied with their self-image. Unhealthy use of social media such as staying up late can reduce the quality of sleep in adolescents. Addicted populations may even experience low self-esteem and depression. Some of the related conclusions need more empirical support. In order to ensure that teens can use social media in a healthy way, it requires the concerted efforts of parents, educators, and the community to provide more mental health education and offer support and proper guidance.

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