

## THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BEHAVIOR AND CHARACTERISTICS OF TEENAGERS

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### Abstract

Social media use in the current digital era is widespread among all groups, especially teenagers. Social media certainly influences the behavior and characteristics of its users, both positively and negatively. This paper aims to examine the effects of social media use on the behavior and characteristics experienced or acquired by adolescent users. This paper was conducted using a literature review method sourced from several journals and articles circulating online. The results of several journals and articles regarding the influence of social media on the behavior and characteristics of adolescents indicate that social media has both positive and negative effects. Some positive effects include expanding friendship networks, improving communication skills, and serving as a forum for interpersonal discussion. Some negative effects include making adolescents addicted to social media, leading to cyberbullying, and triggering deviant behavior. Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that social media does indeed have both positive and negative effects on the behavior and characteristics of adolescent users. Positive effects include improving communication skills and expanding relationships, while negative effects include addiction and triggering deviant behavior.

**Keywords:** behavior, characteristics, influence, social media, teenagers

### Introduction

The digital era has brought many changes and developments to life, particularly in the field of information technology. Social media is one of the most significant and widely used developments in information technology, utilized by everyone from young people to adults. According to data from We Are Social, as of January 2025, approximately 143 million people in Indonesia use social media, with the highest number of users falling within the 18-34 age range. This phenomenon demonstrates how social media has become an inseparable part of social life for Indonesian society, especially for the younger generation.

Social media is a digital platform that enables individuals to communicate and interact with other users virtually. In the past, human interaction was limited to face-to-face meetings and direct communication. Now, geographical and time constraints are no longer barriers. A person can connect with anyone, at any time, and from anywhere with just the touch of a finger. However, this ease of access and high intensity of social media use bring complex consequences for the formation of



individual behavior and characteristics, especially among the younger generation or teenagers who have grown up as digital natives (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Adolescence is a critical phase in the formation of personality, values, and social skills. During adolescence, individuals begin to develop self-concept, explore identity, and develop critical thinking skills. However, the presence of social media has created a complex new developmental environment, where the boundaries between the real and virtual worlds are increasingly blurred. Constant exposure to content, pressure to keep up with trends, and an instantaneous digital culture have raised important questions about how social media actually influences adolescent character and behavior.

Social media use by adolescents has complex and multifaceted impacts. On the one hand, social media provides opportunities for adolescents to connect with friends, express themselves, and access information. However, on the other hand, excessive use can lead to various psychological and social problems, including addiction, cyberbullying, and unwanted behavioral changes. Recent research shows that cyberbullying is becoming a widespread phenomenon among Indonesian adolescents, with a prevalence reaching over 60% among social media users (Marsinun & Riswanto, 2020).

This paper aims to further explore the influence of social media on adolescent behavior and characteristics through a literature review. By analyzing various scientific journals and research articles, this paper will identify the positive and negative effects of social media on adolescents. Through this review, it is hoped that suggestions can be provided to consider the choice of attitudes in using social media so as to minimize its negative impacts and be able to utilize social media well.

### ***The Positive Influence of Social Media on Teenagers***

Social media offers significant benefits for adolescents' social and personal development. One of the most prominent positive influences is the expansion of their social network. Through social media, adolescents can connect with friends from diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds, without the constraints of time or place. This global connection allows adolescents to build meaningful friendships with individuals who share similar interests and values.

Social media has many benefits for adolescent development, both socially and personally. Expanding friendship networks is one of the most prominent positive effects of social media use. Teenagers using social media can connect with friends from diverse cultural and geographic backgrounds without the constraints of time or place. They have the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with people who share their values and interests through social media.

Social media is also useful for helping teenagers improve their communication skills. Teens learn to express their ideas clearly and persuasively through interactions with posts, comments, and messages. They also learn to understand others' opinions through discussions and debates on social platforms. This process helps improve their digital literacy and ability to communicate effectively with others, which are crucial in this modern era.

Social media also serves as an effective platform for conversation and information sharing. Teenagers can participate in discussion groups on platforms focused on topics they care about, such as academics, arts, and sports, as well as

contemporary social issues like politics (Rheingold, 2020). Actively participating in these forums also helps them develop critical awareness of social issues and provides a platform for voicing their opinions. Social media can also help teens express themselves creatively. They can express their identity and celebrate their uniqueness by sharing photos, videos, and stories with their online friends. This is especially important during adolescent identity development, a crucial stage in the journey to adulthood.

### ***The Negative Influence of Social Media on Teenagers***

Social media has many advantages and positive impacts, but excessive and uncontrolled use can have detrimental effects. Social media addiction is one of the most dangerous effects. Social media is highly addictive because of algorithms designed to increase user engagement. Teenagers who are addicted to social media will spend excessive time on it, ultimately neglecting more important offline activities, such as studying, exercising, or interacting directly with friends and family.

Social media addiction can also harm teens' mental health. Excessive social media use has been linked to anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances in adolescents (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Teenagers, especially those who often lack self-confidence, will be vulnerable to experiencing significant psychological stress due to continuous exposure to content that is intended to gain attention and appreciation through the use of likes, comments, and shares.

Another serious negative impact of social media use is cyberbullying. Social media provides anonymity and distance, allowing people to engage in bullying behavior without fear of repercussions (Tokunaga, 2010). Teenagers who are victims of cyberbullying can experience several psychological traumas, such as an increased risk of depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts. According to research by Marsinun and Riswanto (2020), cyberbullying negatively impacts adolescents' mental health, with symptoms such as depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic performance.

Social media use can also lead to deviant behavior in adolescents. Strong peer influence on social media can encourage other adolescents to imitate the negative or risky behavior they see there. Adolescents, who are still in an immature cognitive development stage, are vulnerable to negative influences and lack the ability to evaluate the long-term impact of their behavior.

Furthermore, social media can also contribute to self-confidence and body image issues for teenagers. Unrealistic beauty standards, such as extremely fair skin, a small waist, a thin face, long legs, and so on, can be created by content filled with heavily filtered and edited photos (Grabe et al., 2008). Teenagers, especially girls, who compare themselves to these curated and polished photos may experience feelings of dissatisfaction with their own appearance, which can lead to eating disorders and other health problems.

### **Method**

This paper uses a comprehensive literature review method. This method was chosen because it allows the author to collect and analyze information from various sources relevant to the research topic. Data sources for this study come from

international and national scientific journals, research articles, textbooks, and published research reports.

The data collection process was conducted through searches in leading academic databases, including Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Elsevier, PsycNet, and Sage Publications, as well as local databases such as those maintained by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and journal websites from various universities. The search was conducted using predetermined keywords, both in English and Indonesian, such as: "social media and adolescent behavior", "social media and adolescent behavior", "cyberbullying and social media", "social media addiction and adolescents", "social media addiction and teenagers", and other relevant keyword combinations. Inclusion criteria in source selection included: (1) research published in the last five to ten years; (2) articles written in English or Indonesian; and (3) research discussing the influence of social media on adolescent behavior and characteristics.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach, where the authors identified key themes emerging from various literature sources. These themes were grouped based on the positive and negative influences of social media on adolescents. Each theme was then analyzed in depth to understand the mechanisms, influencing factors, and implications for adolescents' lives.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Based on the literature review, the authors identified important findings regarding the influence of social media on adolescent behavior and characteristics. These findings demonstrate consistent patterns across studies, despite variations in magnitude and context.

### ***Expanding Social Networks and Global Connections***

One of the most significant findings is that social media helps teenagers significantly expand their social networks. According to the literature, teenagers who are active on social media have an average of between 150 and 300 connections, far exceeding Dunbar's cognitive capacity, which suggests that people can maintain approximately 150 social connections (Lindenfors et al., 2021). Social media platforms allow teens to build and maintain relationships with people from diverse cultural and geographic backgrounds.

This global connection also impacts adolescent development. On the one hand, it enables language learning, the development of a global perspective, and cultural exchange. Adolescents can learn about perspectives and ways of life from people around the world. Conversely, too broad a connection can also lead to a lack of depth in relationships with those around them and make it difficult to maintain them.

### ***Impact on Communication Skills***

The results of a literature review related to the influence of social media on adolescents' communication skills. According to some literature, social media use can help adolescents express their ideas in writing. Adolescents can learn to write well, become more creative, and can learn to change their way of speaking for different audiences when they create content for social media uploads. This aligns

with digital literacy theory, which emphasizes that active participation in digital media is an important way to learn in the modern era (Jenkins, 2006).

However, literature also indicates that excessive social media use is often associated with a lack of ability for teenagers to communicate directly or personally with those around them. Teenagers who spend too much time communicating digitally through social media are likely to miss out on opportunities to learn important skills in communicating with others directly, such as reading body language, handling conflict directly, and understanding empathy in face-to-face interactions (Turkle, 2011).

### ***Social Media Addiction and Mental Health Impacts***

Several studies have shown that social media addiction is a significant problem for adolescents. Social media addiction refers to excessive or uncontrolled social media use that negatively impacts various aspects of life. A study by Twenge and Campbell (2018) found that adolescents who spend more than five hours daily on social media have 71% higher rates of depression and anxiety compared to adolescents who spend only one hour daily.

Social media addiction can be linked to a variety of mental health issues, including sleep disturbances, body dissatisfaction, and low self-esteem. Social media algorithms create a highly addictive environment to increase user engagement and time spent on the platform. Combining reward systems in the form of likes, comments, and shares stimulates the release of dopamine in users' brains. This creates an addictive cycle similar to gambling or other substance use. Furthermore, social media use increases narcissistic behavior among adolescent users (Wibowo & Silaen, 2018).

### ***Cyberbullying and Digital Violence***

Cyberbullying has become increasingly prevalent in the social media era. An article by Marsinun and Riswanto (2020) defines cyberbullying as the use of digital technology to engage in repeated intimidating and bullying behavior against an individual or group. According to the article, more than 60 percent of Indonesian adolescents have experienced or witnessed cyberbullying on social media.

Cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying in several ways. First, cyberbullying can occur anytime and anywhere because social media platforms are accessible 24/7. Second, bullying content can be seen by hundreds or thousands of people and remains online indefinitely. Third, some platforms offer anonymity, making it easier for cyberbullies to hide their identities (Siegle, 2010).

Cyberbullying has serious psychological effects on adolescents. A significant relationship between cyberbullying and adolescent anxiety levels was found in research conducted by Baranandita and Asfari (2022). Adolescents who are victims of cyberbullying are also more likely to experience social isolation and depression, even suicide attempts (Baranandita & Asfari, 2022).

### ***Influence on Self-Identity and Self-Confidence***

Social media plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' complex identities. These platforms also allow teens to explore various aspects of their identities and gain feedback from their peer groups (Bobkowski et al., 2016).

Teenagers can try on different personas, styles, and principles while remaining anonymous.

On the other hand, excessive use of social media can lead to false self-presentation and comparison traps. The social comparison theory created by Festinger (1954) states that people will tend to compare themselves with others to evaluate themselves (Festinger, 1954). Teenagers do this on social media by comparing themselves to content that has been filtered and curated by others, which often only shows the best parts of their lives (Vogel et al., 2014).

According to research conducted by Grabe et al. (2008), there is a significant link between social media use and body dissatisfaction among adolescents, especially girls. If they see edited and filtered images or photos on social media, they will naturally develop unrealistic beauty standards and become dissatisfied with their own appearance. This can develop into more serious health problems, such as eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorder (Grabe et al., 2008).

Erikson's theory emphasizes that adolescence is a critical phase in the formation of personality, values, and social skills. During this period, individuals explore identity, develop self-concept, and face the identity crisis. The developmental outcomes related to self-identity, social networking, and mental health found in the literature review are directly relevant to this stage.

Adolescence is conceptualized by Erikson as a psychosocial moratorium or a sanctioned intermediary period during which society allows the individual time to experiment with various roles and achieve a synthesis of previous identifications. Social media platforms allow teenagers to explore various aspects of their identities and gain feedback from their peer groups. This environment provides opportunities for self-expression, which is crucial during adolescent identity development. The expansion of social networks to diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds allows adolescents to build meaningful relationships with people sharing similar interests and values, providing broader cultural input necessary for identity construction. Excessive social media use complicates this process, leading to false self-presentation and comparison traps. The concept of ego identity requires a sense of self that is temporally continuous and possesses socially validated defining characteristics. However, when teenagers are continuously exposed to filtered and curated content, they rely on Festinger's Social Comparison Theory, comparing themselves to unrealistic standards. This results in dissatisfaction with their own appearance and can lead to serious health issues like eating disorders. This inability to reconcile internal self-perception with external, curated social standards contributes to identity confusion, which manifests as contradictory self-images or a loss of center.

The findings linking excessive social media use to high rates of depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbances indicate significant psychological stress. Erikson describes the identity crisis as a turning point that can result in prolonged identity confusion. The mental health issues observed suggest that for many adolescents, social media use contributes to an aggravated identity crisis. This is particularly true for those who often lack self-confidence and are highly vulnerable to the psychological stress derived from seeking digital attention and appreciation. The lack of depth in relationships resulting from overly broad global connections may also hinder the establishment of stable, supportive relationships necessary to validate a positive ego identity (Côté & Levine, 1987).

Bandura's theories emphasize that learning occurs via observation, imitation, and modeling in a social context. SCLT focuses on how human thought processes are central to understanding behavior, involving a reciprocal interaction between personal factors, behavior, and the environment (triadic reciprocity). The finding that strong peer influence on social media can encourage adolescents to imitate negative or risky behavior is a direct application of Bandura's theories. Social media platforms provide symbolic models, displaying behaviors through real or fictional characters, videos, or posts. Aggression and moral behavior can be learned through such models. Because adolescents are still in an immature cognitive development stage, they are particularly vulnerable to these negative influences and lack the ability to evaluate the long-term impact of the modeled behavior.

Cyberbullying is characterized by repeated intimidating behavior using digital technology. This behavior is learned and sustained partly through the observation of consequences. Social media facilitates bullying due to anonymity and distance. This aligns with the concepts of response facilitation effect (increased frequency of learned behavior after a model is reinforced) or, inversely, the response inhibition effect (decreased frequency after observing a punished model). When users observe bullying without immediate negative repercussions, the behavior is more likely to be imitated.

The highly addictive nature of social media is linked to algorithms designed to maximize engagement and time spent on the platform. This is explained by Bandura's concept of intrinsic reinforcement, which refers to internal rewards such as pride, satisfaction, and a sense of accomplishment. The reward systems on social media (likes, comments, and shares) stimulate the release of dopamine in the brain, creating an addictive cycle. This external reinforcement (likes/comments) leads to internal satisfaction (intrinsic reinforcement), motivating users to continuously engage in the behavior (posting/sharing). Furthermore, reinforcement and punishment are critical components of motivation in modeling. The desire to receive likes and affirmation reinforces the presentation of a "best parts only" curated self, which can contribute to the noted increase in narcissistic behavior among adolescent users.

If the developmental journey of a teenager is like building a house (Ego Identity Formation), social media acts as a vast, unregulated public market (psychosocial moratorium) where the teenager gathers materials (role experimentation). Bandura's theory dictates that if the teenager sees others rewarded (intrinsic reinforcement/likes) for acquiring fragile or damaging materials (deviant behavior/false self-presentation), they will be motivated to choose those too, potentially leading to a flawed structure that cannot withstand the pressures of adulthood or Identity Confusion (Nabavi & Bijandi, 2012).

## **Conclusion**

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that social media influences adolescent behavior and traits in a complex and bidirectional manner. Social media has many benefits, such as expanding social networks, helping people communicate better in certain situations, and providing opportunities for self-expression and discussion on important issues. Social media provides adolescents with the opportunity to access important information, strengthen their identity, and connect with communities worldwide.

However, the negative impacts of social media cannot be ignored. Significant negative impacts experienced by adolescents include social media addiction, cyberbullying, mental health issues, and body dissatisfaction. Excessive social media use can reduce important face-to-face interactions, increase levels of anxiety and depression, and create an environment prone to negative behavior.

The impact of social media on adolescents largely depends on how they use it. Conscious use can maximize benefits while minimizing risks, while excessive and uncontrolled use can have significant negative effects. Therefore, ensuring that adolescents can use social media safely, healthily, and beneficially for their development requires collaboration between various parties, including parents, educators, policymakers, and social media platform providers.

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