



**Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Behavioral Health**

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**ABSTRACT**

Adolescents throughout the world regularly use the internet, cell phones, and video games to gather information and communicate with each other. Using social media Web sites is among the most common activity of today's adolescents. Any Web site that allows social interaction is considered a social media site, including social networking sites such as Face book, Twitter and gaming sites and video sites such as YouTube and blogs. Such sites offer today's youth a portal for entertainment and communication and have grown exponentially in recent years. For this reason, it is important that parents become aware of the nature of social media sites, given that not all of them are healthy environments for adolescents. Adolescent use of social media occurs simultaneously with their developing identity, emerging sexuality, physical development, and moral consciousness. In this paper , we examine how social media impacts the behavioral health of adolescents.

**KEYWORDS :** Facebook, Twitter, social media, adolescents, behavioral health

**INTRODUCTION**

Engaging in various forms of social media is a routine activity that research has shown to benefit children and adolescents by enhancing communication, social connection, and even technical skills. Social media sites such as Facebook and MySpace offer multiple daily opportunities for connecting with friends, classmates and people with shared interests. During the last 5 years, the number of preadolescents and adolescents using such sites has increased dramatically. According to a recent statistics, 22% of teenagers log on to their favorite social media site more than 10 times a day, and more than half of adolescents log on to a social media site more than once a day. Seventy-five percent of teenagers now own cell phones, and 25% use them for social media, 54% use them for texting, and 24% use them for instant messaging. This generation's social and emotional development depends mostly on information from the Internet and the cell phones..

Because of their limited capacity for self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure, children and adolescents are at some risk as they navigate and experiment with social media. Recent research indicates that there are frequent online expressions of offline behaviors, such as bullying, clique-forming, and sexual experimentation, that have introduced problems such as cyber bullying, privacy issues, and "sexting." Other problems that merit awareness include Internet addiction and concurrent sleep deprivation. Many parents today use technology incredibly well and feel comfortable and capable with the programs and online venues that their children and adolescents are using. Nevertheless, some parents may find it difficult to relate to their digitally knowledgeable youngsters online for several reasons. Such parents may lack a basic understanding of these new forms of socialization, which are integral to their children's lives. They frequently do not have the technical abilities or time needed to keep pace with their children in the ever-changing Internet landscape. In addition, these parents often lack a basic understanding that kid's online lives are an extension of their offline lives. The end result is often a knowledge and technical skill gap between parents and youth, which creates a disconnect in how these parents and youth participate in the online world together.

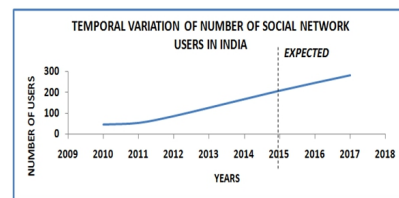
**Most Commonly Used Social Media by Adolescents**

Type	Example	%
Text Messaging	Cell phone feature	74%
Social Networking Sites	Facebook, MySpace	70% of online teens have used a social networking site

Online video sites	YouTube.com	68% of online teens watch online videos
Online gaming	SecondLife.com	61% of online youth play games

**FACEBOOK AND OTHER SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY:**

From the various literature reviews and other source of articles, it has been focused that, users of social networking sites in India are readily increasing which is almost 95 percent in 2015 from 34 percent in the year 2011. However it is expected that (Fig : 1) in the year 2016 the number of Facebook users will be turn into 246 million where in 2017 the number might be more than 282 million which is almost double compared to 2014. Therefore Times of India reveals the fact that, now a days people or teenagers are more seeking about Facebook for chatting with friends and sharing their status regularly and it is quite significant in the case of chennai also where most of the college teen used to access the Facebook on a regular life skill basis.



**Fig: 1 Source: Times of India, 2015**

**Benefits of Social Media on Adolescent Health**

Socialization and Communication Social media sites allow Adolescents to accomplish online many of the tasks that are important to them offline:

- i) staying connected with friends and family, making new friends, sharing pictures, and exchanging ideas.
- ii) Social media participation also can offer adolescents deeper benefits that extend into their view of self, community, and the world,.
- iii) opportunities for community engagement through raising money for charity and volunteering for local events, including political events; .
- iv) enhancement of individual and collective creativity through development and sharing of artistic and musical endeavors; .
- v) growth of ideas from the creation of blogs, podcasts, videos,

- and gaming sites; expansion of one's online connections through shared interests to include others from more diverse backgrounds.
- vi) Middle and high school students are using social media to connect with one another on homework and group projects. For example, Facebook and similar social media programs allow students to gather outside of class to collaborate and exchange ideas about assignments. Some schools successfully use blogs as teaching tools, which has the benefit of reinforcing skills in English, written expression.
  - vii) Accessing Health Information Adolescents are finding that they can access online information about their health concerns easily and anonymously. Excellent health resources are increasingly available to youth on a variety of topics of interest to this population, such as sexually transmitted infections, stress reduction, and signs of depression. Adolescents with chronic illnesses can access Web sites through which they can develop supportive networks of people with similar conditions.
  - viii) The mobile technologies that adolescents use daily, namely cell phones, instant messaging, and text messaging, have already produced multiple improvements in their health care..
  - ix) Given that the new social media venues all have mobile applications, teenagers will have enhanced opportunities to learn about their health issues and communicate with their doctors. However, because of their young age, adolescents can encounter inaccuracies during these searches and require parental involvement to be sure they are using reliable online resources, interpreting the information correctly, and not becoming overwhelmed by the information they are reading. Encouraging parents to ask about their adolescents' online searches can help facilitate not only discovery of this information but discussion on these topics.

Overall, social media use is associated with many benefits for adolescent health and development.

Adolescents look to social networks as a key source of information and advice in a critical developmental period with 57% of adolescents social networkers saying they look to their online social network for advice (Nielsen, 2009).

Adolescents also use *online searches to gain answers to many of their health concerns* with 31% of online adolescents getting health, dieting, or physical fitness information from the internet. Seventeen percent of adolescents who use the internet report they use it to gather information about health topics that are hard to discuss with others, such as drug use and sexual health (Lenhart, 2010).

Cell phones and features, such as texting, are very popular with teens and parents. Over 90% of parents and teens backed the assertion that they like cell phones because they can "keep in touch no matter where I am" (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell & Purcell, 2010). Teens have found that they *gained more independence and freedom* through owning a cell phone that allows them to communicate with their parents and that they often use voice calling *to seek out social support* when needed to discuss personal matters (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell & Purcell, 2010).

### RISKS OF ADOLESCENT USING SOCIAL MEDIA

While media use is an integral part of the daily life of adolescents, there are a number of risks associated with social media use, specifically, negative effects on mental health, cyber bullying, texting/sexting, dangers of sexual solicitation, and exposure to problematic and illegal content

#### Cyber bullying and Online Harassment

Cyber bullying is deliberately using digital media to communicate false, embarrassing, or hostile information about another person. It is the most common online risk for all teens and is a peer-to-peer risk. Although "online harassment" is often used interchangeably with the term "cyber bullying," it is actually a different entity. Current data suggest that online harassment is not as common as offline

harassment, and participation in social networking sites does not put most children at risk of online harassment. On the other hand, cyber bullying is quite common, can occur to any young person online, and can cause profound psychosocial outcomes including depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and, tragically, suicide.

#### Cyber bullying and suicide

Studies show that bullying causes major emotional distress for young people who have survived a suicide attempt (Fekkes, Pijpers & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005). While bullying is often discussed alongside youth suicide, the evidence does not support the assumption that bullying specifically causes youth suicide (Kim & Leventhal, 2008). Media outlets often declare that bullying led to a youth taking their life, but there are usually more variables involved. Bullying is not thought to be part of normal development and exposure to bullying is known to be harmful and can increase the risk of suicidal ideation and behaviours in youth (Kim & Leventhal, 2008), even though it does not cause suicide on its own.

#### Cyber bullying interventions

It is essential to address bullying and cyber bullying at individual, peer group, school and community levels. Community efforts should aim to foster positive relationships among young people and create a community environment that is responsive to bullying incidents and intolerant of bullying behaviour (Pepler, n.d.). While strategies to address cyber bullying are still emerging, many school and community-based programs use education and awareness initiatives to inform children and youth about online dangers, the consequences of participating in cyber bullying behaviour and strategies to block offensive material and involve adults (Snakenborg, Van Acker & Gable, 2011). Parents are advised to monitor their children's online activities regularly and encourage open discussion with their children around safety and responsible internet use (Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). More information on resources and supports can be found in the additional resources section at the end of this summary.

#### Face book Depression

Researchers have proposed a new phenomenon called "Face book depression," defined as depression that develops when preteens and teens spend a great deal of time on social media sites, such as Face book, and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression. 22–27 Acceptance by and contact with peers is an important element of adolescent life. The intensity of the online world is thought to be a factor that may trigger depression in some adolescents. As with offline depression, preadolescents and adolescents who suffer from Face book depression are at risk for social isolation and sometimes turn to risky Internet sites and blogs for "help" that may promote substance abuse, unsafe sexual practices, or aggressive or self destructive behaviors.

#### Adolescent Relationship Abuse and Social Media

Adolescent relationships may also receive nude pictures or be pressured to send nude pictures of themselves to a partner. Relationship abuse can also include sending nonstop text messages or posting cruel comments on a boyfriend's or girlfriend's Facebook. Cell phones, instant messaging, and social networking websites are all increasingly being used to monitor, threaten, and harass relationship partners.

#### Online Sexual Solicitation and Predation

Unwanted online sexual solicitation is defined as "the act of encouraging someone to talk about sex, to do something sexual, or to share personal sexual information even when that person does not want to" (Ybarra, 2007). Online sexual predation occurs when an adult makes contact with a minor with intent to engage in sexual activities that would result in statutory rape. Youth are much more likely to receive sexual solicitation between same-age youth than sexual predation and most of these solicitations come from same-age peers who are known offline.

#### Privacy

Most studies show that teens do care about privacy. When teens are concerned about risks, they will engage in privacy protecting behaviors, such as adjusting their profiles to “private” from “public” access, refusing to provide identifying information or false information, and avoiding certain websites. However, most youth do not read websites privacy policies or may be unaware that their information is at risk of disclosure to third parties like advertisers. Though concerned about talking to people they don't know online, teens appear to be less worried about posting information about themselves. Twenty-one percent of teens say it is safe to post personal information, including photos, online to a public profile (Cox, 2007).

The risk profile for the use of various types of social media depends on the type of risk, a adolescent's use of the media, and the psychological makeup of the teen using them. It is important to note that adolescents most at risk often engage in risky behaviors offline and also have difficulties in other parts of their lives (Berkman, 2010).

### Recommendations

1. Parents and caregivers need to educate themselves about social media and the ways their adolescent may use it, as well as the common risks, to help them understand and navigate the technologies.
2. Family discussions are positive for adolescent and can result in less risky online behaviors—more of those adolescents who said their parents have talked to them “a lot” reported: (Cox, 2007)
  - a) Greater concerns about online safety and sharing of personal information and photos,
  - b) More limited sharing of information/pictures via the internet,
  - c) Lower incidence of public online profiles, and
  - d) Lower incidence of talking or meeting people they only know from online.

3. For parents and caregivers, discussing media content with their adolescent can be an effective strategy to reduce the amount of personal information disclosed—more so than prohibiting access, as teens often perceive monitoring as a violation of their privacy (Ito, 2008). Adolescents are more receptive to user empowered strategies or even some form of industry protections.

4. *Technological solutions* Internet providers such as Google and Yahoo, and social networking sites, such as Face book and YouTube, need to continue to work with parents and policy makers to create awareness and opportunities for privacy protection of youth and to develop technologies that can assist teens in staying safe.

5. *Health providers* Medical and mental health providers need to include routine screenings to assess risk for depression that consider a teen's social media use. For example, assessing the amount of time spent using media including online activities or inquiring about online contacts (close friends vs. strangers, teen's willingness to meet someone offline, incidence of being harassed, harassing others). Tools should be developed to help providers engage in these conversations.

6. *Schools* need to update media literacy guidelines to include explicit information on successful participation with new media forms, online risks, and education about consequences of their media use, including laws that pertain to them. *Non profits* need to maximize the opportunity to reach teens through social networking that teens are already using (e.g. social networking sites, video and gaming sites, and blogs) to share their own content. *Research* Evaluation research is needed on the success of social media-based interventions, particularly those focusing on urban and rural teens from low income families and those with poor home environments.

### Conclusion

Many social media sites display multiple advertisements such as banner ads, behaviour ads that target people on the basis of their

web-browsing behaviour and demographic-base ads that target people on the basis of a specific factor such as age, gender, education, marital status that influence not only the buying tendencies of preadolescents and adolescents but also their views of what is normal. It is also important for parents to be aware of the behavioural ads because they are common on social media sites and operates by gathering information on the person using a site. Precaution should be used to educate children and adolescents about online world and how to manage and avoid its hazards. A prime concern of parents is that the internet affects the social skills of children. There are two ways of looking at this; the internet critics would say that children tend to spend less time in social activities or communicating with family and friends. On the other hand the internet enables them to make new friends who are situated in distant places.

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