

Deeksha Annam

Dr. Ramos

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### Effects: The Negative Impact of Social Media on Young Adults' Mental Health

In today's interconnected society, the prevalent use of social media platforms has fundamentally altered human interaction, changing the way we interact, communicate, and perceive the world around us. The widespread influence of social media has become an integral part of the lives of teenagers and young adults, profoundly shaping their perceptions, behaviors, and mental well-being. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat have integrated themselves into the everyday lives of young people, making a profound impact on their perceptions, behaviors, and most importantly, mental well-being. The allure of constant connection and curated content has introduced a set of challenges for young people- social media's impact on mental health. Due to the usage of social media, the youth of today's society confront problems such as having comparison affect their self-esteem, having a distorted and unrealistic standard for body image, and a cognitive impact on attention spans. The increasing use of social media among youths has caused significant concerns about its profound impact on their mental health.

First, the constant exposure to social media's curated, filtered, idealized, and perfect portrayals of others' lives creates a culture of comparison, impacting how individuals perceive themselves, making teenagers feel like their own lives and appearance are inadequate compared to the person on their screen. This comparison isn't just about material possessions or physical appearance; it extends to every aspect of life, from relationships and achievements to experiences

and successes. Endless streams of seemingly perfect images and lifestyles create an unrealistic standard that individuals feel compelled to measure up to and often lead to a spiral of self-doubt and lowered self-esteem. Witnessing the apparent achievements, travels, and seemingly flawless appearances of others triggers an irresistible urge to compare one's own life, appearance, or accomplishments, resulting in feelings of not measuring up. Engaging in this comparison while using social media leads to young adults and teenagers diminishing self-worth, fueling and intensifying insecurities and having a constant need for validation, all of which collectively make a profound and far-reaching impact on their mental well-being in ways that can be detrimental and enduring.

Second, the influence of social media on mental health, particularly concerning body image, creates a distorted reality where individuals perceive an unattainable standard of physical perfection, not only among the personalities on screen, but also in their real-life social circles.

The constant exposure to meticulously curated and digitally altered images on social platforms fosters a perception that the idealized bodies showcased online represent the norm in reality. This distortion blurs the lines between virtual and real life, leading individuals to believe that the flawless physiques seen on their screens are reflective of what they should expect in their day-to-day interactions. As a consequence, there arises a pervasive belief that people in their real-life social spheres also possess perfect bodies akin to those depicted on social media. This skewed perception cultivates unrealistic expectations, causing individuals to feel inadequate or dissatisfied with their own bodies when confronted with what they perceive as the standard. The prevalence of such digitally enhanced representations perpetuates an unattainable beauty ideal, contributing to a widespread misconception that perfect bodies are commonplace, thereby fueling dissatisfaction and fostering a continuous cycle of negative body image perceptions.

Addressing this issue requires a concerted effort to promote awareness of digital manipulation, encourage body positivity, and emphasize the diversity of real bodies beyond the filtered narratives presented on social media.

Finally, the widespread use of social media is also having a cognitive impact on our attention spans, changing how we think and pay attention. Among young people, platforms like Instagram and TikTok are affecting our ability to focus with its quick, flashy content. The constant flow of quick and attention-grabbing content has significantly challenged individuals, making it harder for people, especially the younger generation, to concentrate for long periods of time and maintain prolonged focus. It has been proven numerous times, and easily experienced by others and myself, that spending too much time on social media contributes to shorter attention spans and difficulty focusing on tasks that demand sustained concentration. The constant barrage of information also overwhelms people, leaving them mentally fatigued. Social media's influence on mental health goes beyond emotions -- it affects how we think and focus too. It influences our brain's chemistry with its constant stream of quick, attention-grabbing content and constant stimulation triggers our brain's reward system and can mess with our dopamine sensors ("Are You Addicted to Social Media"). It conditions our brains to seek a quick reward, making it harder to focus on things that don't offer immediate gratification. Over time, this can affect our ability to concentrate and engage deeply with tasks that require more sustained attention. The relentless stimulation from social media has a cognitive impact on our attention spans, not only reshaping our brain's reward system but also detrimentally impacting our mental well-being.

In conclusion, the influence of social media on the mental health of young individuals cannot be overstated, showcasing a concerning set of challenges that affect their self-perception,

body image, and cognitive functions. Social media platforms have seamlessly integrated into lives and lead to a culture of comparison that undermines self-esteem, having a distorted perception of body image, the cognitive impacts on attention spans, and the toll on mental well-being is evident. The constant exposure to idealized lives and unrealistic bodies sets unattainable standards, causing feelings of inadequacy and negative body image. There is also a cognitive impact, altering teenagers' attention spans and rewiring reward systems. This poses significant challenges for sustained focus and mental clarity. As these concerns grow, it's imperative to recognize the need for awareness and promote healthier digital habits, and self-acceptance beyond what is perpetuated by social media. Social media has caused a negative impact on the mental health of young adults and teenagers, and only by acknowledging and addressing these various challenges, can we strive towards a more balanced and mentally healthier relationship with social media among the youth of today's society.

#### Work Cited

“Are You Addicted to Social Media.” *Lee Health*, Lee Health, 2023, [www.leehealth.org/health-and-wellness/healthy-news-blog/mental-health/are-you-addicted-to-social-media](http://www.leehealth.org/health-and-wellness/healthy-news-blog/mental-health/are-you-addicted-to-social-media). Accessed 19 Nov. 2023.