

Impact of Social Media on Children and Teenagers



Manju Mishra

Associate Professor,
Deptt. of Psychology,
H.R. P.G. College,
Kalilabad (UP)

Abstract

Use of Smartphone and social media by children and teenagers has become very common nowadays. About 50% children have Smartphones and they use it particularly for social networking sites like Facebook, Whatsapp etc. They are wasting too much time on it. Social networking sites provide enormous information and children are unable to handle it. They fail to process information overload created by social networking sites and become victim of many cyber crimes and online harassments. This study is based on review of studies conducted on social media and its impact on children and teenagers. Broadly the study focuses to answer the questions like: (a) main purpose of use of social media by children and teenagers (b) which social networking sites are most popular amongst children and teenagers (c) assessing the positive and negative impacts of use of social networking sites (d) recommendations for parents, teachers and the society.

Keywords: Social Networking, Facebook Depression, Cyberbullying, Information overload, Online safety, Social communication.

Introduction

One of the most significant subjects for debate currently taking place is the explosion in the use of social networking by children and teenagers. Social networking sites become a basic practice in daily routines. Children and teenagers are using different social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Academia, and MySpace, WhatsApp. They spend a long time on such sites. In recent years, there has been an ever-increasing interest in using Smartphone to access these and other social networking sites. The use of Smartphone by them is tremendously increasing and multifold in recent years. The number is expected to keep on growing in the coming years. The rapid changes in the use of social networking via Smartphones are having serious effects on them. Some of these effects are positive, such as the improvement of important communication skills, making students more sociable online. In addition, social networking extends their knowledge and helps them to be active in creating and sharing information. Nevertheless, social networks have been found to have negative effects such as the lowering of students' grades, which could be due to the increased distraction for them, leading to their misuse of time (Wang, Chen et al. 2011).

Aim of the Study

Many studies have been carried out to investigate the impacts of social networking sites on college students but very few have been conducted on children and teenagers. Since children and teenagers are more prone to negative influences of social networking sites, this study investigate the trend of using social media and its effect on children and teenagers. The objective of this study is to explore the advantages and disadvantages of using social media by children and teenagers. Broadly the study is organized in two parts:

1. Trend of using social networking site,
2. Positive and negative effects of social media.

Trend of Use of Social Media

This section answers two questions: 1. For what purposes children and teenagers are using social networking sites and, 2. Which social sites are most popular.

As for as first question is concerned, the main purposes of using social sites by children and teenagers are social connectivity and communication. They learn some technical skills also with the help of sites like YouTube etc. Social media sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp provide many opportunities for connecting with friends, classmates and family. Number of children and teenagers using these sites has been

increased dramatically in last five years. In a national poll conducted by Common Sense Media in 2002, it was found that 22% teenagers log on to their favorite social sites more than 10 times a day and more than half of adolescence log on to social media sites more than 10 times a day. Hinduja and Patchin (2007), found that 75% of teenagers have Smartphones, and 25% of them use for social networking and 54% for texting and 24% use them for instant messaging.

And answer to the second question about most popular sites among children and teenagers is Facebook, Myspace, Instagram and WhatsApp. They use the sites for social connectivity and sharing information, personal pictures and videos particularly on Facebook and WhatsApp. Presently, they are sharing their personal photos and videos and waiting for likes and comments. Recently the phenomena of Facebook depression have become very common in which the symptoms of actual depression develop when children and teenagers spend too much time on Facebook. Stum (2010) has found this depression in children and teenagers.

Positive Impacts of Social Media

1. Social connection and communication:
Boyd D. (2010) has listed the benefits of social media participation in children and teenagers as:
 - a. Opportunities for community engagement through raising money for charity and volunteering for local events, including political and philanthropic events;
 - b. Enhancement of individual and collective creativity through development and sharing of artistic and musical endeavors;
 - c. Growth of ideas from the creation of blogs, podcasts, videos, and gaming sites;
 - d. Expansion of one's online connections through shared interests to include others from more diverse backgrounds (such communication is an important step for all adolescents and affords the opportunity for respect, tolerance, and increased discourse about personal and global issues) and
 - e. Fostering of one's individual identity and unique social skills.
2. Benefits in Home works and Projects:
Children and teenagers use social media to connect with their friends for completing home works and group projects. They collect information and matter on relevant topics and seek assistance for thie lessons (Liccardi, Qunnas et al 2007). Facebook and other social media sites allow them to gather outside of class to collaborate and exchange ideas about school assignments. Some schools successfully use blogs as teaching tools, which has the benefit of increasing skills in English, written expressions and creativity.

Negative Impacts of Social Media

Use of social media by children and teenagers has many negative effects. Wang, Chen et al (2011) have found in a survey that 57% of students admitted that use of social networking sites decrease their productivity. Dyer and Columbia (2010) found that students might disclose home work questions and

interchange course materials which are considered to be academic misconduct. Main negative effects are:

Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

Cyberbullying 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 "cyberbullying," 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, cyberbullying is quite common, can occur to any young person online, and can cause profound psychosocial outcomes including depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and, tragically, suicide.

Sexting

Sexting can be defined as "sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit messages, photographs, or images via cell phone, computer, or other digital devices." Many of these images become distributed rapidly via cell phones or the Internet. This phenomenon does occur among the teen population; a recent survey revealed that 20% of teens have sent or posted nude or seminude photographs or videos of themselves. Some teens who have engaged in sexting have been threatened or charged with felony child pomography charges, although some states have started characterizing such behaviors as juvenile-law misdemeanors. Additional consequences include school suspension for perpetrators and emotional distress with accompanying mental health conditions for victims. In many circumstances, however, the sexting incident is not shared beyond a small peer group or a couple and is not found to be distressing at all.

Facebook Depression

Researchers have proposed a new phenomenon called "Facebook depression," defined as depression that develops when preteens and teens spend a great deal of time on social media sites, such as Facebook, and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression. 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 Facebook 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.

Privacy Concerns and the Digital Footprint

The main risk to preadolescents and adolescents online today are risks from each other, risks of improper use of technology, lack of privacy, sharing too much information, or posting false information about themselves or others. These types of behavior put their privacy at risk. When Internet users visit various Web sites, they can leave behind evidence of which sites they have visited. This

collective, ongoing record of one's Web activity is called the "digital footprint." One of the biggest threats to young people on social media sites is to their digital footprint and future reputations. Preadolescents and adolescents who lack an awareness of privacy issues often post inappropriate messages, pictures, and videos without understanding that "what goes online stays online." As a result, future jobs and college acceptance may be put into jeopardy by inexperienced and rash clicks of the mouse. Indiscriminate Internet activity also can make children and teenagers easier for marketers and fraudsters to target.

Influence of Advertisements on Buying

Many social media sites display multiple advertisements such as banner ads, behavior ads (ads that target people on the basis of their Web-browsing behavior), and demographic-based ads (ads that target people on the basis of a specific factor such as age, gender, education, marital status, etc) that influence not only the buying tendencies of preadolescents and adolescents but also their views of what is normal. It is particularly important for parents to be aware of the behavioral ads, because they are common on social media sites and operate by gathering information on the person using a site and then targeting that person's profile to influence purchasing decisions. Such powerful influences start as soon as children begin to go online and post. Many online venues are now prohibiting ads on sites where children and adolescents are participating. It is important to educate parents, children, and adolescents about this practice so that children can develop into media-literate consumers and understand how advertisements can easily manipulate them.

On Too Young: Mixed Messages from Parents and the Law

Many parents are aware that 13 years is the minimum age for most social media sites but do not understand why. There are 2 major reasons. First, 13 years is the age set by Congress in the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), which prohibits Web sites from collecting information on children younger than 13 years without parental permission. Second, the official terms of service for many popular sites now mirror the COPPA regulations and state that 13 years is the minimum age to sign up and have a profile. This is the minimum age to sign on to sites such as Facebook and My-Space. There are many sites for preadolescents and younger children that do not have such an age restriction, such as Disney sites, Club Penguin, and others. It is important that parents evaluate the sites on which their child wishes to participate to be sure that the site is appropriate for that child's age. For sites without age stipulations, however, there is room for negotiation, and parents should evaluate the situation via active conversation with their preadolescents and adolescents. In general, if a Web site specifies a minimum age for use in its terms of service, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages that age to be respected. Falsifying age has become common practice by some preadolescents and some

parents. Parents must be thoughtful about this practice to be sure that they are not sending mixed messages about lying and that online safety is always the main message being emphasized.

Conclusions

Social media is not bad by itself. It is duty of teachers, parents and community to guide children and students how to use social media. Parents sometimes ignore their children's activities on social networking sites. Although, 13 years the minimum age to sign up and have a profile on Facebook and Whatsapp but children below thirteen years make their accounts on social media by hiding their actual age. Now, it is the responsibility of parent to monitor and guide their children to use Smartphone and social networking sites in their benefits and not indulge in any negative activities. It is recommended that positive use of social media can develop the youth's academic career, their skills, better life styles, to adopt new trends and fashions. Social media is an essential tool for today's children and teenagers but they should use it wisely. They should not share the links and information that can hurt the feelings of others. Only relevant and authenticated information should be shared on social media. There must be watch dog software in the server to monitor to children and teenagers used the sites. Students should avoid excessive use of social media and they should give proper time to their study and co curricular activities.

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