International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)
ISSN: 2319-7064
Impact Factor 2025: 7.089

Social Media and It's Impact on Social Relationships Among Youth

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Abstract: ***Social media has become an integral part of the everyday lives of young people. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube and Snapchat have transformed the ways in which youth communicate, interact and maintain social relationships. These platforms provide opportunities for establishing friendships, sharing experiences, exchanging information and maintaining connections across geographical boundaries. However, excessive and inappropriate use of social media may also create challenges, including reduced face-to-face interaction, misunderstandings, social comparison, cyberbullying and emotional isolation. The present article examines the impact of social media on social relationships among youth through a secondary-data-based approach. It draws upon existing research studies, published reports, academic journals, books and relevant online publications. The article explores both the positive and negative dimensions of social media use, particularly its influence on friendship, family relationships, peer interaction and social connectedness. The discussion indicates that social media can strengthen relationships when used constructively, but uncontrolled engagement may weaken the quality of interpersonal communication. The article concludes that responsible digital behaviour, awareness and a balanced approach to online and offline interaction are essential for maintaining healthy social relationships among young people.***

Keywords: Social Media, Youth, Social Relationships, Online Communication, Friendship, Digital Interaction, Social Connectedness

1. Introduction

The rapid development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes to human interaction and social relationships. Among the various technological developments, social media has emerged as one of the most influential platforms of communication in contemporary society. It has changed the traditional patterns of communication by providing opportunities for individuals to connect, communicate and share information instantly, irrespective of geographical distance.

Social media refers to internet-based platforms that enable users to create, exchange and share information, ideas, photographs, videos and personal experiences. Popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube and Snapchat have become important parts of young people's social and personal lives.

Youth represent one of the major groups actively engaged with digital communication platforms. For many young people, social media is not merely a source of entertainment; it is also a medium for maintaining friendships, expressing personal opinions, developing social identities and participating in different communities.

Social relationships play an important role in the overall development of individuals. They contribute to emotional support, social adjustment, personal identity and a sense of belonging. However, the increasing dependence on virtual communication has raised questions about the quality and nature of relationships among young people.

Although social media provides opportunities for maintaining social connections, its excessive use may affect direct interpersonal communication and meaningful social interaction. Therefore, understanding its influence on social relationships among youth has become an important area of contemporary social research.

2. Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the present article are:

- To examine the role of social media in developing social relationships among youth.
- To analyse the positive impact of social media on friendship and interpersonal communication.
- To identify the negative consequences of social media use on social relationships.
- To examine the influence of social media on family relationships and peer interactions.
- To suggest measures for promoting responsible social media use among young people.

3. Research Methodology

The present article is descriptive and analytical in nature and is entirely based on secondary data.

Sources of Data:
Information has been collected from the following secondary sources:

- Research articles published in national and international academic journals.
- Books and scholarly publications related to social media and interpersonal relationships.
- Reports published by recognised research organisations.
- Previously conducted research studies and systematic reviews.
- Relevant online databases and institutional publications.

Method of Analysis:
The collected information has been examined through a descriptive and thematic approach. The article analyses existing literature under different themes, including friendship, communication, family relationships, social support, social isolation and digital behaviour.

No primary data have been collected through questionnaires, interviews, observations or surveys. The article is based exclusively on the interpretation and synthesis of already published information.

Social Media and the Development of Social Relationships

Social media has introduced new ways of establishing and maintaining relationships. Earlier, social interaction largely depended on physical meetings, telephone conversations and direct communication. Today, digital platforms allow young people to communicate continuously through messages, comments, photographs, video calls and online communities.

Social media enables youth to maintain relationships with school friends, college classmates, relatives and acquaintances even when they live in different geographical locations. It also provides opportunities to develop new friendships with individuals who share similar interests, experiences and opinions.

However, the development of online relationships does not necessarily indicate the development of deeper emotional connections. The quality of a relationship depends on trust, mutual understanding, emotional support and meaningful communication rather than simply the frequency of online interaction.

4. Positive Impact of Social Media on Social Relationships among Youth

Strengthening Friendship

Social media helps young people maintain friendships beyond educational institutions and geographical boundaries. Through instant messaging, group conversations and video calls, friends can remain connected even after completing their education or moving to different places.

It also enables individuals to reconnect with old friends and maintain relationships that might otherwise become difficult to sustain.

Improving Communication

Social networking platforms provide convenient and immediate communication facilities. Young people can exchange information, discuss personal matters and share their experiences without facing geographical limitations.

These platforms are particularly useful for maintaining communication among students, classmates and members of different social groups.

Developing Social Support Networks

Social media provides opportunities for young people to seek emotional support, guidance and encouragement from friends and online communities.

Zhou and Cheng (2022), in their systematic review and meta-analysis, identified a positive association between online social support and adolescents' self-esteem. Their findings suggest that supportive online interactions may contribute positively to young people's psychological well-being.

Promoting Social Awareness

Social media exposes young people to different cultures, traditions, lifestyles and social issues. Through online discussions and awareness campaigns, youth can participate in conversations concerning education, environmental protection, gender equality and social development.

It also provides opportunities to understand different perspectives and develop awareness about contemporary social challenges.

Encouraging Self-Expression

Social media provides a platform for young people to express their ideas, opinions, talents and personal experiences. They can share creative content, participate in discussions and communicate their viewpoints.

Such opportunities may encourage confidence, creativity and participation in social activities.

5. Negative Impact of Social Media on Social Relationships among Youth

Reduction in Face-to-Face Interaction

One of the major concerns associated with excessive social media use is the possible reduction in direct interpersonal communication.

Young people may spend considerable time communicating through digital platforms while giving less attention to physical interactions with friends and family members.

As a result, opportunities to develop communication skills, understand non-verbal expressions and build deeper interpersonal connections may become limited.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

Although social media connects individuals digitally, it does not always eliminate feelings of loneliness.

Excessive dependence on online interaction may create a gap between virtual connections and meaningful emotional relationships. Young people may have numerous online contacts but still experience a lack of genuine companionship and emotional support.

A systematic review and meta-analysis by Feng et al. (2026), involving 81,344 adolescents and young adults, reported an association between social media use and loneliness. The relationship was more consistent for problematic social media use than for time spent online alone.

Social Comparison and Relationship Dissatisfaction

Social media often presents carefully selected images of people's personal lives, achievements and social experiences. Young users may compare their own lives with the apparently successful lives of others.

Such comparisons may create feelings of inadequacy, jealousy and dissatisfaction. These emotions can negatively influence friendships and interpersonal relationships.

Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

Cyberbullying is another significant challenge associated with digital communication. It includes sending abusive messages, spreading rumours, sharing embarrassing content and deliberately humiliating individuals through online platforms.

Such experiences may damage trust among friends and create conflicts within peer groups. They may also discourage young people from participating in online social interactions.

Misunderstanding and Relationship Conflicts

Digital communication sometimes lacks the emotional expressions, tone and body language available in face-to-face conversations.

Consequently, a simple message, comment or delayed response may be misunderstood. Misinterpretation of online activities, photographs and conversations may also create unnecessary disagreements among friends and partners.

Impact of Social Media on Family Relationships

Family relationships are important for emotional security, socialisation and personality development. Social media has influenced the ways family members communicate and interact with one another.

On the positive side, digital platforms help young people remain connected with parents, siblings and relatives, particularly when family members live in different places. Video calls and messaging applications provide opportunities for regular communication.

On the negative side, excessive engagement with social media may reduce the time available for family conversations and shared activities. Young people may become more involved in online interactions while paying less attention to family members.

Therefore, maintaining a balance between digital communication and direct family interaction is important for strengthening family relationships.

Impact of Social Media on Peer Relationships

Peer relationships play an important role in the social and emotional development of youth. Social media has expanded the possibilities of peer interaction by allowing young people to communicate through group chats, online communities and social networking platforms.

It enables students to share academic information, discuss common interests and provide support to one another. It can also encourage collaboration and participation in group activities.

However, online competition, social exclusion, negative comments and misunderstandings may create conflicts among peers. The pressure to receive likes, comments and followers may also influence the way young people evaluate their friendships.

Thus, social media can both strengthen and challenge peer relationships depending on the nature and quality of online interaction.

6. Review of Existing Literature

Existing research provides important insights into the relationship between social media use and interpersonal connections among young people.

Zhou and Cheng (2022) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on online social support and adolescents' mental health. Their study indicated a positive association between online social support and self-esteem, highlighting the potential benefits of supportive digital relationships.

A systematic review published in 2022 on social media and adolescent psychosocial development also discussed the influence of social networking platforms on interpersonal relationships, social support and well-being. The review highlighted that maintaining existing friendships through social media may support relationship quality, whereas certain forms of online engagement may be associated with negative social experiences.

Faverio, Anderson and Park (2025), in a Pew Research Center report based on a survey of 1,391 American teenagers and their parents, found that 74% of teenagers felt more connected to their friends through social media. At the same time, the report identified concerns regarding social media-related stress, exclusion and other negative experiences.

More recently, Feng et al. (2026) examined the relationship between social media use and loneliness through a systematic review and meta-analysis of 59 studies involving 81,344 adolescents and young adults. Their findings indicated that problematic social media use had a stronger association with loneliness than time spent on social media alone.

The reviewed literature suggests that social media has a complex relationship with youth social development. Its influence depends not only on the amount of time spent online but also on the purpose, nature and quality of digital interactions.

7. Major Findings and Discussion

Based on the analysis of available secondary literature, the following major observations can be identified:

1) Social media has transformed traditional patterns of communication and interpersonal relationships among young people.
2) It provides opportunities to maintain friendships and develop social connections across geographical boundaries.
3) Supportive online interactions can contribute to emotional support, self-expression and social connectedness.

4) Excessive and problematic use may be associated with loneliness, social comparison and reduced opportunities for direct communication.
5) Social media can influence the quality of family relationships by changing the amount of time devoted to face-to-face interaction.
6) Online conflicts, cyberbullying and social exclusion may negatively affect peer relationships.
7) The impact of social media is not entirely positive or negative; it depends on users' behaviour, intentions and patterns of engagement.

Overall, the literature indicates that the quality of social media engagement is an important factor in understanding its influence on social relationships among youth.

8. Suggestions for Responsible Social Media Use

To promote healthy social relationships among young people, the following suggestions may be considered:

1) **Maintain a balance:** Young people should balance online activities with face-to-face communication.
2) **Promote digital awareness:** Educational institutions should organise awareness programmes on responsible social media use.
3) **Encourage meaningful communication:** Youth should prioritise genuine conversations over superficial online interactions.
4) **Avoid unnecessary comparison:** Individuals should understand that social media content often represents selected aspects of people's lives.
5) **Prevent cyberbullying:** Young users should be encouraged to report online harassment and respect the privacy and dignity of others.
6) **Strengthen family interaction:** Families should encourage shared activities and regular conversations without digital distractions.
7) **Develop digital self-control:** Young people should avoid excessive and compulsive social media engagement.
8) **Promote critical thinking:** Users should evaluate online information carefully and avoid spreading misleading content.

9. Conclusion

Social media has become an influential part of contemporary youth culture and has significantly transformed the nature of social relationships. It provides valuable opportunities for communication, friendship, emotional support, self-expression and social participation. At the same time, excessive and inappropriate use may create challenges such as loneliness, cyberbullying, social comparison, misunderstanding and reduced face-to-face interaction.

The analysis of secondary literature suggests that social media itself cannot be considered entirely beneficial or harmful to social relationships. Its influence largely depends on how young people use digital platforms and how they balance online communication with real-life relationships.

Therefore, the need of the hour is not to completely avoid social media but to encourage its responsible and meaningful use. Educational institutions, families and society should work together to develop digital awareness and healthy communication habits among youth.

Ultimately, social media should function as a medium for strengthening human relationships rather than replacing genuine human interaction. A balanced approach towards digital and face-to-face communication can help young people develop meaningful, supportive and healthy social relationships.

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