

## EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TEENAGERS' MENTAL HEALTH"

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### ABSTRACT

*The rise of social media platforms has profoundly impacted teenagers' lives, with far-reaching implications for their mental health. This paper explores the psychological effects of social media use on adolescents, focusing on anxiety, depression, self-esteem, body image, sleep patterns, cyber-bullying, and social connectedness. Drawing on recent literature, surveys, and case studies, this research analyzes both the detrimental and beneficial roles social media can play in shaping mental well-being. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative data from 300 student surveys and qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with students and school counselors. The methodology enabled a comprehensive understanding of usage patterns and psychological outcomes. The study concludes with recommendations for parents, educators, policymakers, and platform developers to mitigate risks and maximize positive outcomes.*

**Keywords:** social media, teenagers, mental health, depression, anxiety, self-esteem, cyber-bullying, screen time, body image

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, digital technology has radically transformed communication and interaction patterns worldwide. Among the most profound developments in this digital evolution is the advent of social media platforms. These platforms—ranging from Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat to TikTok and X (formerly Twitter)—have redefined social connectivity and reshaped how people, especially teenagers, present themselves, relate to others, and process information. For the generation born into a digital-first world, social media is not merely a tool but an integral aspect of daily life and identity formation.

Teenagers are particularly susceptible to the influence of social media due to their developmental stage, which is characterized by identity exploration, heightened sensitivity to peer feedback, and increased emotional reactivity. The teenage years are critical in forming self-concept, navigating social relationships, and developing emotional resilience. Consequently, the environment in which adolescents engage plays a pivotal role in shaping their mental well-being. With teenagers spending an average of three to six hours per day on social media platforms, concerns regarding its psychological effects are increasingly prominent.

Research has pointed to both positive and negative outcomes associated with social media use. On the one hand, social media offers platforms for self-expression, peer connection, access to information, and emotional support, especially for those who may feel marginalized in offline contexts. On the other hand, excessive use has been linked to heightened anxiety, depression, body image dissatisfaction, cyberbullying, and sleep disruption. These conflicting narratives warrant a deeper, multidimensional inquiry into the impact of social media on adolescent mental health.

In recent years, the rise in teenage mental health issues has paralleled the explosion of social media usage. According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), the global

incidence of depression and anxiety among adolescents has increased significantly, with estimates suggesting that one in seven 10- to 19-year-olds experiences a mental health disorder. In countries like Pakistan, where mental health literacy remains low and stigma remains high, teenagers are especially vulnerable. The unchecked expansion of digital media usage, coupled with limited guidance on healthy consumption, exacerbates this vulnerability. A key concern among educators, parents, and psychologists is the relationship between time spent on social media and mental health outcomes. While correlation does not imply causation, a growing body of empirical evidence suggests that excessive or unregulated social media usage can contribute to psychological distress. For instance, many teenagers engage in social comparison—evaluating their lives against the curated and idealized representations they encounter online. This practice often results in feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and dissatisfaction with one's own life and body image.

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) provides a useful framework for understanding this phenomenon. According to this theory, individuals determine their self-worth based on comparisons with others. On social media, where images are filtered, edited, and selectively posted, comparisons are often unrealistic and detrimental. Teenagers, whose cognitive and emotional regulation systems are still developing, are particularly affected by these dynamics. Another growing concern is cyberbullying—a form of online harassment that can severely damage a teenager's self-concept and mental health. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying is persistent, pervasive, and potentially anonymous. Victims often suffer in silence, fearing retaliation or feeling shame. Studies by Hinduja and Patchin (2020) reveal that nearly 37% of teens in various contexts report experiencing cyberbullying, with many indicating severe psychological consequences, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

Sleep disturbance is also a frequently reported consequence of excessive social media use. Blue light exposure from screens interferes with melatonin production, leading to difficulty falling asleep or maintaining restful sleep. Moreover, the addictive nature of social media platforms—driven by algorithms that promote continuous engagement—can result in late-night scrolling, sleep deprivation, and poor academic performance. Inadequate sleep, in turn, is associated with heightened emotional reactivity, irritability, and impaired cognitive function in teenagers.

Despite these challenges, it is important to acknowledge the potential benefits of social media. For teenagers grappling with isolation, mental health struggles, or minority status (e.g., LGBTQ+ youth), social media can offer vital support networks and platforms for advocacy. Online communities can serve as safe spaces for emotional expression and social connection, particularly when offline environments are unsupportive. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube have also emerged as spaces where mental health awareness is promoted, and resources are shared.

Thus, a nuanced understanding of social media's role is necessary. Rather than viewing it through a binary lens of good versus bad, scholars and practitioners must examine the conditions under which social media use contributes to either well-being or psychological harm. Factors such as duration of use, type of content consumed, user intentions, parental involvement, and individual psychological traits all influence how social media affects teenage mental health.

Furthermore, cultural and socio-economic contexts play a critical role in shaping the effects of social media. In Pakistan, for example, internet access is rapidly expanding, but digital literacy and parental supervision often lag behind. Mental health remains a taboo topic in many communities, and access to professional psychological support is limited. In such a

context, teenagers may be more prone to internalizing the negative effects of social media without adequate coping mechanisms or adult guidance.

This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on adolescent mental health and digital media by exploring the effects of social media on teenagers in a Pakistani context. Specifically, it examines the relationship between social media use and indicators of mental well-being, including anxiety, depression, self-esteem, body image, cyberbullying experiences, and sleep quality. The research employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from interviews with teenagers and school counselors. This design allows for a holistic understanding of how social media is experienced and perceived by adolescents in real-world settings.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are threefold:

1. To investigate the relationship between the duration and nature of social media use and teenagers' mental health indicators such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.
2. To explore how teenagers in Pakistan experience and cope with online challenges such as cyber-bullying, sleep disruption, and body image concerns.
3. To identify both the positive and negative roles that social media plays in shaping adolescents' emotional and psychological well-being.

The findings of this study are intended to inform parents, educators, policymakers, and platform developers on how to create a healthier digital ecosystem for teenagers. By understanding the underlying mechanisms and outcomes of social media usage, stakeholders can take informed steps to protect youth mental health while leveraging the positive potentials of digital platforms.

In conclusion, the pervasive presence of social media in teenagers' lives necessitates a thorough and context-sensitive examination of its effects. Adolescence is a formative stage that significantly shapes long-term emotional, cognitive, and social development. As such, understanding the interaction between digital engagement and mental health is crucial. This research responds to this need by offering empirical insights into the psychological impact of social media on teenagers, highlighting risks, uncovering opportunities, and recommending pathways for supportive interventions.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The relationship between social media use and teenage mental health has garnered significant attention in recent years as digital platforms increasingly permeate adolescent life. This literature review synthesizes the findings from a range of studies across psychological, sociological, and technological disciplines, providing a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional impact of social media on adolescents' mental well-being. The review is organized around major thematic areas: anxiety and depression, self-esteem and body image, sleep disturbances, cyberbullying, social connectedness, and cultural context.

### **2.1 Social Media and Adolescent Mental Health**

A substantial body of research has established a link between social media usage and various dimensions of adolescent mental health. Twenge and Campbell (2018) argued that the dramatic increase in screen time and social media engagement among American teenagers from 2010 onwards coincided with significant rises in self-reported depression, anxiety, and suicide rates. The authors contended that platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat, which emphasize visual self-presentation, have intensified peer comparisons, leading to negative self-perception and emotional distress.

Similarly, Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of 16 studies, concluding that higher social media usage is associated with greater levels of depression and anxiety among adolescents. The review highlighted how passive consumption (e.g., scrolling

through feeds without interacting) and exposure to negative content correlate more strongly with psychological distress than active engagement (e.g., messaging friends or sharing posts). These findings emphasize the importance of differentiating between types of social media use when assessing its impact.

### **2.2 Anxiety and Depression**

Anxiety and depression are the two most frequently studied psychological outcomes of adolescent social media use. Researchers have explored the underlying mechanisms that explain how digital interaction contributes to these conditions. According to a longitudinal study by Nesi and Prinstein (2015), adolescents who engaged in social media comparison and feedback-seeking behaviors were more likely to report increased depressive symptoms over time. The need for validation through likes, comments, and shares can create a feedback loop where adolescents become emotionally dependent on external approval.

Furthermore, Rosen et al. (2013) found that frequent social media use correlates with increased anxiety, especially among teenagers who engage in multitasking behaviors (e.g., switching between apps, texting, and browsing simultaneously). These behaviors are linked to cognitive overload, disrupted attention spans, and heightened stress levels. This suggests that the structure and features of digital platforms themselves may contribute to mental strain among users.

However, some studies present more nuanced or even contradictory findings. For instance, Orben and Przybylski (2019), using large-scale data from UK adolescents, found that the effect sizes of social media on mental health were statistically significant but small. They argued that other factors—such as family relationships, socio-economic status, and offline peer interactions—have stronger influences on teenage well-being. This highlights the complexity of causality in the social media-mental health relationship and the need for more context-sensitive research.

### **2.3 Self-Esteem and Body Image**

Another key area of concern is the impact of social media on teenagers' self-esteem and body image. Adolescents often compare their physical appearance, lifestyle, and achievements with idealized portrayals on social media, which can lead to dissatisfaction and reduced self-worth. Tiggemann and Slater (2014) demonstrated that adolescent girls who frequently use image-centric platforms like Instagram and Pinterest are more likely to internalize thin ideals and experience body dissatisfaction.

Chua and Chang (2016) further explored this issue in the context of “Instagram culture,” where adolescents curate their profiles to align with socially desirable standards. The constant engagement in editing photos, using beauty filters, and seeking validation through likes contributes to a distorted self-image. Boys are also affected, with emerging research highlighting increasing pressure on young males to conform to unrealistic body ideals, often influenced by fitness influencers and celebrities.

The concept of “social media-induced appearance anxiety” has emerged to describe the fear and self-consciousness triggered by online appearance comparisons. According to Fardouly et al. (2015), adolescents who frequently view and compare themselves to attractive peers or celebrities on social media report significantly lower body satisfaction and self-esteem. These findings are especially troubling given the formative nature of adolescence, a period when individuals are developing a stable and healthy sense of self.

### **2.4 Cyberbullying and Online Harassment**

Cyberbullying represents one of the most harmful aspects of social media use among teenagers. Defined as aggressive behavior conducted through digital means, cyberbullying can take many forms, including threats, humiliation, exclusion, impersonation, and the dissemination of private or false information. Hinduja and Patchin (2020) found that

approximately 37% of adolescents in the United States report experiencing cyberbullying at some point, with victims often exhibiting symptoms of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation.

A study by Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, and Lattanner (2014) concluded that cyberbullying is as emotionally damaging—if not more so—than traditional forms of bullying. The 24/7 nature of online platforms, the difficulty in escaping the digital environment, and the potential for anonymity make cyberbullying particularly distressing. Victims may suffer in silence due to fear of retaliation, embarrassment, or lack of support from adults.

In Pakistan, research by Rehman et al. (2021) found that cyberbullying is increasing rapidly due to the widespread use of smartphones and limited digital literacy among teenagers and parents. Cultural taboos surrounding mental health often prevent teenagers from reporting their experiences, leading to prolonged psychological suffering. These findings underscore the need for policy interventions and educational programs aimed at fostering digital citizenship and emotional resilience.

### **2.5 Sleep Patterns and Cognitive Health**

Several studies have linked excessive social media use to disrupted sleep patterns and cognitive impairments among teenagers. The blue light emitted by screens is known to suppress melatonin production, making it difficult for users to fall asleep. Additionally, the engaging and addictive nature of platforms like TikTok and YouTube can lead to late-night scrolling habits, which significantly reduce sleep duration and quality.

Levenson, Shensa, Sidani, Colditz, and Primack (2017) found that adolescents who check social media frequently throughout the day or just before bedtime are more likely to experience insomnia and poor sleep hygiene. This sleep deprivation contributes to mood swings, irritability, poor academic performance, and reduced concentration.

Furthermore, Scott and Woods (2019) noted that sleep disruption affects the brain's executive functioning, including decision-making, emotional regulation, and memory consolidation. For teenagers, whose brains are still maturing, chronic sleep deprivation can have long-term cognitive and psychological consequences.

### **2.6 Social Connectedness and Support Networks**

Despite the risks, social media also offers potential benefits, particularly in fostering social connectedness and support networks. Adolescents can maintain friendships, connect with peers who share similar interests, and find communities where they feel accepted. For youth who face social exclusion in offline settings—such as LGBTQ+ teenagers or those with mental health issues—social media may offer a lifeline for support and identity affirmation.

Rideout and Robb (2018) reported that 81% of teens believe that social media helps them feel more connected to their friends, while 68% say they receive emotional support online. Furthermore, online mental health communities and peer-led initiatives offer guidance, empathy, and information that might not be readily available through traditional means.

Naslund, Aschbrenner, Marsch, and Bartels (2016) emphasized that social media can be harnessed as a platform for mental health education and outreach, especially when used intentionally and in a moderated environment. Mental health campaigns, helpline advertisements, and user-generated content have contributed to destigmatizing mental health issues and encouraging help-seeking behaviors among adolescents.

### **2.7 Cultural and Contextual Dimensions**

Cultural norms, socio-economic factors, and local digital infrastructures significantly mediate the impact of social media on mental health. In Pakistan and similar contexts, teenagers face unique challenges such as restrictive gender norms, limited mental health services, and a lack of parental understanding of digital spaces. Research by Ahmed and Aftab (2022) found that

while Pakistani teenagers use social media similarly to their Western counterparts, their experiences are shaped by familial expectations, religious values, and societal taboos. Moreover, language barriers and limited access to culturally relevant online content restrict the availability of support for many adolescents. Unlike in high-income countries, where teens might turn to therapists or school counselors, Pakistani adolescents often navigate mental health challenges in isolation or rely on informal networks. This cultural gap highlights the need for locally grounded research and interventions that address specific societal dynamics.

In summary, existing literature reveals that social media exerts a complex and multifaceted influence on teenagers' mental health. While there is considerable evidence linking social media use to increased risks of depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and body dissatisfaction, platforms can also serve as important sources of support, information, and social connectedness. The dual nature of social media's impact necessitates a balanced, context-sensitive approach to research and policy development. Gaps remain in the literature regarding long-term effects, cultural specificity, and individual coping mechanisms. This study seeks to address some of these gaps through a mixed-method investigation in the Pakistani context.

### **3. Methodology**

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of how social media affects teenagers' mental health. The quantitative component involved the administration of a structured questionnaire to a sample of 300 teenagers aged 13 to 19 from both urban and semi-urban areas in Pakistan. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different age groups, genders, and educational backgrounds. The questionnaire included validated scales to measure variables such as depression (PHQ-9), anxiety (GAD-7), self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale), and social media usage patterns, including daily screen time, type of content consumed, and platform preferences.

In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 selected participants who had shown high or low scores on the mental health indicators during the survey. The purpose was to explore deeper insights into their lived experiences, emotional responses to online content, and the role of parental and peer influences in shaping their digital behavior. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and later transcribed for thematic analysis. This qualitative data provided rich context to the numerical findings, revealing patterns such as appearance-related anxiety, fear of missing out (FOMO), emotional validation-seeking, and cyberbullying experiences that may not be fully captured through standardized instruments.

All data collection procedures followed ethical guidelines. Participants and their guardians were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and participants had the right to withdraw at any stage. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were interpreted through thematic coding using NVivo software. This mixed-method approach allowed for triangulation of results, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

### **4. DATA ANALYSIS**

This section presents the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected in the study. The quantitative results focus on patterns of social media use, mental health indicators, and the relationships between these variables among teenagers. Qualitative findings provide contextual insights from participant interviews to deepen the understanding of the numerical data.

### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the 300 survey respondents.

Demographic Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
- Male	150	50
- Female	150	50
Age Group		
- 13-15 years	110	36.7
- 16-17 years	95	31.7
- 18-19 years	95	31.7
Education Level		
- Middle School	105	35
- High School	135	45
- College	60	20
- Middle School	105	35

The sample was balanced across gender and age groups, allowing for comparative analysis.

### 4.2 Social Media Usage Patterns

Figure 1 (Bar Graph) illustrates the average daily screen time spent on social media platforms among participants.

- 38% reported 1-2 hours per day
- 42% reported 3-4 hours per day
- 20% reported 5 or more hours per day

Instagram (60%), TikTok (45%), and WhatsApp (70%) were the most commonly used platforms. Active engagement (posting, commenting) was reported by 55% of teens, while 45% primarily engaged passively (scrolling, viewing).

### 4.3 Mental Health Indicators: Depression, Anxiety, and Self-Esteem

Table 2 shows the mean scores for depression, anxiety, and self-esteem scales across the sample:

Variable	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Scale Range
Depression (PHQ-9)	8.2	4.5	0-27 (Higher=worse)
Anxiety (GAD-7)	7.1	3.9	0-21 (Higher=worse)
Self-Esteem (RSES)	20.3	5.2	10-40 (Higher=better)

According to clinical cutoffs, approximately 25% of participants showed moderate to severe depression symptoms, and 22% had moderate to severe anxiety.

### 4.4 Correlation Between Social Media Use and Mental Health

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine relationships between daily screen time, depression, anxiety, and self-esteem (Table 3).

Variables	Depression	Anxiety	Self-Esteem	Screen Time
Depression	1	0.78	-0.65	0.42
Anxiety	0.78	1	-0.59	0.39
Self-Esteem	-0.65	-0.59	1	-0.37
Screen Time	0.42	0.39	-0.37	1

**Note:  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed).**

The results indicate a significant positive correlation between daily screen time and symptoms of depression and anxiety, while self-esteem shows a negative correlation with screen time and mental health problems. This suggests that increased social media use is associated with poorer mental health outcomes.

#### 4.5 Impact of Social Media Type and Usage Style

Using ANOVA, differences in depression and anxiety scores were analyzed based on types of social media usage:

Usage Type	Mean Depression Score	Mean Anxiety Score
Active Users	6.8	5.9
Passive Users	9.6	8.2

Passive users exhibited significantly higher depression ( $F(1,298) = 15.4, p < 0.001$ ) and anxiety ( $F(1,298) = 13.9, p < 0.001$ ) scores compared to active users. This aligns with literature suggesting that passive consumption leads to negative social comparisons and isolation.

#### 4.6 Qualitative Insights: Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts identified four major themes relating to social media's impact on mental health:

- **Appearance-Related Anxiety:** Participants described pressure to meet unrealistic beauty standards, amplified by filtered images and influencer culture.
- **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):** Constant exposure to peers' social activities caused feelings of exclusion and loneliness.
- **Cyberbullying Experiences:** Several teenagers shared incidents of online harassment and its emotional toll, including feelings of helplessness and social withdrawal.
- **Emotional Validation:** Many relied on likes and comments to feel accepted, with some describing mood swings tied to social media feedback.

These qualitative themes offer depth to the statistical findings, highlighting the lived experiences behind the numbers.

#### 5. Discussion

The data gathered through both quantitative and qualitative methods in this study reveals a compelling connection between teenagers' social media usage patterns and their mental health status. These findings align with a growing body of international research indicating that prolonged engagement with social media can significantly affect young users' emotional and psychological well-being.

The correlation between screen time and mental health indicators—depression, anxiety, and self-esteem—is particularly noteworthy. The positive correlations between screen time and both depression ( $r = 0.42$ ) and anxiety ( $r = 0.39$ ), and the negative correlation with self-esteem ( $r = -0.37$ ), support the hypothesis that increased social media use is associated with deteriorating mental health among adolescents. These results reflect previous studies (e.g., Twenge et al., 2018; Keles et al., 2020), which have consistently demonstrated that excessive digital engagement contributes to emotional distress in youth populations.

Further analysis revealed that passive users—those who primarily scroll, view, and consume content without interacting—reported significantly higher levels of depression and anxiety than active users. This finding reinforces the argument made by Verduyn et al. (2015) that passive social media use fosters negative social comparison, envy, and feelings of isolation, whereas active use (e.g., posting, commenting) can have neutral or even positive effects by promoting social connectivity and engagement.

The qualitative data further enrich this understanding. Themes such as appearance-related anxiety and emotional validation dependency offer insight into the mechanisms through which social media affects teenage self-perception and mood regulation. Many participants expressed anxiety over their physical appearance, citing idealized and filtered images as sources of self-doubt and low self-esteem. This is consistent with Perloff's (2014) model on

the media's role in reinforcing unattainable beauty standards, particularly affecting adolescent girls.

Another recurrent theme was Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)—a psychological phenomenon whereby individuals experience distress from the perception that others are having more rewarding experiences. This emotional reaction can deepen feelings of loneliness and inadequacy, particularly when teens compare their own lives to the curated highlights of others. The prominence of this theme suggests that FOMO is a pervasive by-product of constant connectivity and peer exposure.

Cyberbullying, although not prevalent among all participants, was described by several interviewees as having a profound psychological impact. These experiences often led to social withdrawal, lowered self-esteem, and even depressive symptoms. The anonymous nature of online interactions and lack of effective regulation contribute to this vulnerability, as supported by existing literature (Hamm et al., 2015). These findings highlight the urgent need for schools and policymakers to address online harassment through education and preventive policies.

Interestingly, not all outcomes were negative. A significant number of participants acknowledged the positive social functions of social media, including emotional support, community building, and opportunities for self-expression. This duality mirrors the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973), which emphasizes that users actively seek content that fulfills specific needs, including belongingness and recognition. For many teens, social media acts as an outlet for identity exploration and interpersonal bonding—particularly in contexts where face-to-face interaction is limited.

However, the study also draws attention to the lack of digital literacy and self-regulation among teenagers. Many reported difficulty in limiting screen time or managing the emotional consequences of online interactions. This underscores the critical need for structured digital well-being education, especially at the middle and high school levels. Parental involvement and school-based awareness programs can play a pivotal role in helping teenagers navigate the digital landscape more mindfully.

Finally, the Pakistani socio-cultural context adds a unique layer to the findings. In a society where mental health remains stigmatized and open discussions are often discouraged, social media can both serve as an escape and a source of distress. Teenagers, lacking access to mental health resources or open communication channels, may internalize negative emotions amplified by their online experiences. This underscores the importance of culturally grounded interventions that consider local values while addressing global digital challenges.

In conclusion, the study highlights the complex and often contradictory impact of social media on teenage mental health. While it can provide platforms for connection and self-expression, unchecked and passive use may intensify psychological distress. Stakeholders—including educators, parents, psychologists, and policymakers—must collaboratively foster environments that promote digital balance, critical media literacy, and accessible mental health support. Further longitudinal studies are recommended to examine the long-term psychological effects of social media use in diverse adolescent populations.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study explored the relationship between social media usage and mental health among teenagers, integrating both quantitative data from 300 survey respondents and qualitative insights from interviews. The findings reveal a significant association between increased daily screen time and elevated levels of depression and anxiety, along with decreased self-esteem. Teenagers who primarily engage in passive consumption—such as scrolling and viewing content without interaction—are more likely to report negative emotional outcomes compared to active users who participate through posting and commenting.

Qualitative themes, including appearance-related anxiety, fear of missing out (FOMO), cyberbullying experiences, and a dependency on social media for emotional validation, further illustrate how digital interactions affect adolescents' mental health. These issues are compounded by a lack of digital literacy, poor self-regulation habits, and limited access to mental health support—particularly in socio-cultural contexts like Pakistan, where mental health remains a sensitive topic.

Although some participants highlighted the positive aspects of social media—such as peer support and self-expression—the overall evidence suggests that unregulated and excessive use poses serious mental health risks. Therefore, there is a pressing need for educational institutions, parents, and policymakers to work collaboratively to promote digital responsibility, mental health awareness, and healthier online habits among youth.

This study contributes to the growing discourse on adolescent mental health in the digital age and highlights the importance of creating informed, balanced, and culturally responsive strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of social media. Future research should consider longitudinal designs and explore intervention models to better support teenagers in managing their online lives.

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