

The Effects of Social Media On Identity Construction in Adolescents

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DOI: 10.26821/IJSRC.10.9.2022.100905

ABSTRACT

Social media is increasingly becoming more significant in the modern world, with greater societal influence than traditional media. Social media promotes identity expression, discovery, and exploration. This dramatically influences adolescents, who comprise a significant proportion of social media users. A considerable amount of research has been conducted on the effects of social media on the construction of identity among adolescents. Most studies show that social media has positive and negative effects on adolescents. These effects can be explained in terms of identity- achievement, postponement, closure, and dispersion. Parents and relevant authorities should regulate the access and use of social media to protect adolescents from harmful content. Future research in this area should look into how the use of social media and the accuracy of the information can be improved for adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is increasingly becoming more significant in the modern world, with greater societal influence than traditional media. The content on social media platforms reflects the various aspects of people's position in their physical and online social life (Elsayed, 2021). Social media promotes identity expression, discovery, and exploration. This dramatically influences an adolescent, who forms a significant part of the social media users. This population of social media users has increased due to the expansion of internet access, increased speed, and availability of computer software and hardware. As a result, the excitement and complexity of information technology are part of adolescents in today's world (Elsayed, 2021). They must manage social media usage while coping with bodily changes, evolving relational expectations, and identity development.

Theoretical approach: Using James Marcia's Theory Of Identity Formation Social identity is a part of an individual based on the influence of a specific social group. One must go through different life experiences and interactions to form a social identity, while some are entirely innate. According to James Marcia's theory of identity formation, there are four stages: identity achievement, identity moratorium, identity disclosure, and identity diffusion. Identity achievement is when one sets and fully commits to their individual goal or belief (Marcia, 2001). This is achieved through multiple life experiences, trials, and errors. However, this can be hindered through an identity moratorium. This term refers to ongoing exploration and new opportunities for individuals; while this may sound like a good way to experiment constantly, it causes uncertainty and prevents one from concluding as they are exposed to new ideas regularly. Identity foreclosure

causes one to accept cultural and traditional norms and limit the exposure to new ideas and a chance to build their own beliefs. Ultimately, if one is affected by a moratorium or disclosure, one will fail to achieve identity achievement, leading one to fail in committing to their beliefs and goals. This will obscure one's sense of self-concept and confuse their ability to understand oneself. Studies have shown that adolescents tend to oscillate between the moratorium and identity achievement stages more than usual due to the upsurge in social media use and complexity. For instance, in a study on students in the adolescent stage, identity achievement students were more likely to utilize social media, particularly Facebook, to research their future goals (Valdez, 2016). These students believed Facebook strengthened their interests in certain facets of their identities and frequently utilized Facebook to keep track of their classwork and homework. Additionally, easy access to information on social media facilitates identity moratorium (Valdez, 2016). Due to the large quantity of information on social media, adolescents' exploration is increased, with new and sometimes inaccurate information coming up. This stage involves high reconsideration with low commitment.

Literature review

The topic of the effect of social media on adolescents' identity construction has attracted a large number of researchers. According to a recent study by CNN, teens spend more than seven hours a day on social media, and the pandemic has nearly doubled the average amount of time spent in front of a screen (Rogers, 2019). AACAP (2018) states that Seventy-five percent report having at least one active social media profile, and 51% report visiting a social media site at least daily. Two-thirds of teens have their own mobile devices with internet capabilities. Social media is widely used for entertainment and as a platform for open communication. They can choose to interact with various communities while also allowing one to express their identity through experimentation and exploration. Joining 5 virtual groups and being exposed to a desirable environment of one's choice might help in the natural or purposeful creation of one's own virtual identity.

How Social Media Influences Identity Construction

Since technology has become more widespread, the reliance on social media has also gradually increased. While there are many definitions of social media, most researchers define social media as a technological interactive platform that facilitates the sharing of information and ideas and helps disseminate to a broad audience (Elsayed, 2021). The most common forms of social media include Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat. Due to its prevalence, it has been a big part of identity construction, which is one's sense of belonging to a specific social group. Some aspects of our identity are predetermined by our culture, gender, and age, while our experiences and interactions shape others.

Opportunities and Risks of Social Media to Identity Construction

Several studies have shown that social media presents both opportunities and risks to adolescents. Doble (2018) asserts that social media positively and negatively influences adolescents. They influence a child's life behaviourally, socially, cognitively, or even physically. According to Doble (2018), understanding the social and environmental factors that influence how people describe themselves implies the importance of ecology in identity formation. He argues that social to the list of social and ecological factors that influence identity formation include culture, school, family, community, and church. Like these institutions, social media helps adolescents discover their identity through different interactions and relationships. Further research should be

conducted to determine how social media use directly affects adolescents' changing relationships. Various studies have shown that a conflict of values related to adolescents' ongoing desire for identity and a sense of belonging is one of the major challenges they face. Research by Elsayed (2021) revealed a range of detrimental effects of social media on adolescents' 6 social identities in terms of "achievement - postponement - closure - dispersion". Social media identity achievement shows a high level of experimentation as well as a high level of commitment. It is believed that adolescents develop their identity through active discovery and a solid commitment to a distinct set of values and life objectives that come from this active investigation and analysis. Postponement of social identity is characterized by high levels of exploration but low levels of commitment (Elsayed, 2021). Adolescents are currently going through an identity crisis, which has led to them exploring and experimenting with different values, beliefs, and aspirations. However, they have not made any firm conclusions about what values and principles should govern their life. As a result, they have not yet committed to a particular identity and remain open to all possibilities. Social identity closure denotes a limited awareness but a high level of commitment. Adolescents do not intentionally try to determine what is valuable to them in this identity state. There is no questioning the values and convictions they find. Instead, these adolescents develop their sense of identity by unambiguously accepting their families' and local cultures' ideas and values. They sort of unconsciously accept the personality that has been given to them. Adolescents who fall under the social identity dispersion category have neither committed to nor explored their true selves (Elsayed, 2021). Thus, this state of identification implies a lack of exploration and a lack of commitment. Uhls et al. (2017) studied the costs and benefits of social media on adolescents. They argue that social media allows one to create an entirely new identity however they want. They can choose to be true to their physical identity or establish it solely based on their desire. They can freely join online groups, which are easily accessible to everyone, creating widespread diversity in the groups (Uhls et al., 2017). Also, because identity is constructed based on one's own beliefs influenced by communication and interaction with their social group, joining certain groups will affect one's ideas and beliefs, ultimately creating an identity. For adolescents, they are merely in their beginning stage of identity construction, meaning that peer support and interaction between peers are critical (Uhls et al., 2017). Adolescents also reported that media could help them feel more connected and understand friends much better; 90% report that they make new friends online. So, maintaining and developing friendships, even through social media, can be a valuable part of constructing adolescents' identities. Since social media enables one to browse and experiment freely, it will help them understand themselves better and have a better sense of self-clarity and concept. This can ultimately help one solve the problem of struggling with their identity. For example, sexuality is one factor that can be perplexing to adolescents. However, by joining LGBTQ+ groups and others who are struggling, they can not only get advice but feel comfortable as they are around people who are experiencing the same thing (Uhls et al., 2017). On the contrary, in real life, they might not be able to comfortably talk about it to their peers or their parents as they are scared of judgment and disapproval. While social media positively influences identity construction, it also has its negative aspects. Since social media is not limited and has endless content, it leads to overexposure (Uhls et al., 2017). Therefore, this can lead to cyberbullying, depression, social anxiety, and exposure to developmentally inappropriate content (Eichhorn, 2019). Also, online posts of celebrities and influencers can create impossible standards teenagers will try to achieve. Ultimately, this will cause an extreme decrease in self-esteem, self-objectification, and body standards. Factors That Influence

Identity Construction Some studies have identified the factors that influence identity construction. Many factors influence identity construction. Best (2014) states that family and peer surroundings are pivotal in guiding an adolescent to move away from identity diffusion. Parents are responsible for supervising and educating their children to better their future. On that account, parents influence many adolescents' attitudes and regulate what they are exposed to. Teenagers' identities are heavily influenced by their parents, whether basing their identity on their parents or constructing an identity opposite to that of their parents (Marcia, 2001). Furthermore, because teenagers spend most of their days in school and around peers, socializing helps them explore new possibilities and opportunities while also needing to deal with peer pressure; in other words, they are heavily influenced by what their peers do or say. However, in recent days, also due to Covid, socializing with peers in real life has become extremely rare. Rather than socializing with peers in real life, teens these days use social media to communicate with each other. According to A.C.C.A.P., 90% percent of adolescents between 13-17 have some form of social media, and over 51% percent report visiting social media daily. Additionally, 45% are on social constantly. These forms of social media include Snapchat, Instagram, and, more recently TikTok. Through these platforms, people can enjoy the convenience of browsing and entertainment while also using it as their main form of communication.

Opportunities For Future Research

While there is a large body of research on the effects of social media, there is limited research that focuses on the impact it has on adolescents. This presents an opportunity for future research in this area. Since research has shown that the use of social media presents both opportunities and challenges for adolescents, future research should look into how its use and the type of content consumed can be regulated to protect adolescents. As such future research should find out how resources and information accuracy can be improved for adolescents.

Critique

The topic is thoroughly researched, with references to relevant scientific journals and social and behavioral theories. Peer-reviewed articles are carefully chosen to provide appropriate knowledge of the subject. For instance, the American Academy for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry is a reputable source of information concerning children and adolescents. To get a meaningful conclusion, accurate statistical data is analyzed. The study also assists in explaining real-world societal issues affecting adolescents. Some articles provide practical recommendations to enhance positive identity construction for adolescents through social media.

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