

The Effects of Social Media on Human Beings

AN INSIGHT INTO THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS
OF SOCIAL MEDIA

ENGL BASTIAN

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
1 The Psychological Effects of Social Media on the Social Aspects of an Individual and Mental Health	3
1.1 The positive effects of social media	3
1.1.1 Connectivity and sharing	3
1.1.2 Learning Opportunities	3
1.1.3 Health and awareness	4
1.1.4 Finding oneself and community	4
1.2 The negative effects of social media.....	5
1.2.1 Catfishing	5
1.2.2 Cyber Bullying	5
1.2.3 Terrorism and Criminal Activities	5
1.2.4 Mental Health	6
1.3 Social media's effect on mental health.....	7
1.3.1 Increased usage of social media	7
1.3.2 The social aspect of social media.....	8
1.3.3 The effects of the frequency of usage and investment into social media .	9
Conclusion.....	10
Further Insight	10

Abstract

This paper depicts most of the consequences that can occur through the usage of social media, sometimes in relation to the age of the individual. Although there are many effects, in this work there will be a focus on the psychological effects. That is done by first analyzing the positive and negative consequences of the usage of social media. One of the points discussed is mental health, which then will be one of the major aspects of this paper. In this last paragraph, the increase of usage over the last two decades is portrayed and the reason why adolescents tend to use social media. Furthermore, themes of the need of feedback and the relation between the frequency or investment in social media and mental health will be of significance.

The information displayed in this paper is based on 10 different scientific works. The papers all have a unique way of examining the correctness of the gathered information. Normally many other papers are chosen which then get sorted out until only a small fraction is actually chosen. There are also many studies that have been conducted in the paper. The papers chosen for this work were audited by checking if the provided information can align with the information of another source. If the information was accurate the correlating paper was deemed to be correct (of course also taken into consideration the review process of the information gathering of that specific paper).

1 The Psychological Effects of Social Media on the Social Aspects of an Individual and Mental Health

The usage of social media over the last years has grown a lot and it continues to be like that. Therefore, social media's influence on the world increases too and the question is if that is something to welcome or not. To get a little closer to the answer, the positive and negative aspects of social media will be portrayed.

1.1 The positive effects of social media

1.1.1 Connectivity and sharing

Social media is a tool that offers numerous benefits and can greatly assist individuals in various aspects of their lives. For example, because of it one can be connected to someone else, who might be several kilometres away. Through social media it is possible to share, talk or in general interact with a single person or a larger group. Also, it generates the opportunity for community events like raising money for charity or volunteering for local events. Lastly, another positive aspect of the connectivity is that the creativity of artists can flourish through sharing of opinions and tips for improvement. Some typical forms of such mediums would be blogs, podcasts, videos, gaming sites or the non-digital ones like paintings, music, philosophy and literature. It is also possible that because of shared interests, one can meet new people, where it can also happen that the national prejudices will be overcome.¹

1.1.2 Learning Opportunities

In general, the internet offers almost the knowledge of the entire world at any time, so there are of course many possibilities to improve oneself in certain subjects. And social media can also enhance that effect. For example, as mentioned above it can help to improve someone by criticising and sharing tips. But social media also helps on an academic level. Students of middle or high school "are using social media to connect with one another on home work and group projects."² With the help of programmes like Facebook for example, students can communicate with one another and work

¹ Cf. Damota Mulugeta, 2019

² Damota Mulugeta, 2019

together or help each other with their assignments. There are also schools which use blogs in their english class, which can help increase the writing skills.³

1.1.3 Health and awareness

The availability of reliable health resources on the internet are increasing and adolescents are finding out that they can research their health concerns easily and anonymously. Because of that, it is possible to spread awareness of signs of depression or that stress is bad for an individual and should be reduced. There is also the possibility that if someone has a certain (chronic-) illness, this person can get in contact with other people with similar conditions and it could happen that supportive networks come to be.³

1.1.4 Finding oneself and community

Just as the usage of social media increased over the last years, so did the awareness of everything related with LGBTQ+. Just as mentioned above, social media could help people by educating themselves. In the case of (closeted / unaware) LGB individuals, a potential problem could be the unawareness that things like LGBTQ+ exists or that there are people that feel the same way as them. Such information could be crucial for a (closeted / unaware) LGB individual to find their true self and the courage to also be themselves. Social media can lead to community and social support, especially with LGB people, which is also why LGB individuals often tend to use social media frequently.⁴

³ Cf. Damota Mulugeta, 2019

⁴ Cf. Escobar-Viera CG et al., 2018

1.2 The negative effects of social media

There are several negative sides to social media as well. First, there will be a portrayal of negative impacts of it on social communal grounds and after that its psychological down sides. Therefore here would be some examples.

1.2.1 Catfishing

Due to the excessive use of social media and consequently much wasted time real life relationships tend to suffer. This eventually motivates the individual to put even more time into “the illusion of social media”⁵, which again damages the actual relationships. Now the term “catfish” describes a person who uses a fake profile with false or stolen information. Those people then try to deceive strangers and get them to do whatever they want.⁶ “It is a deceptive act and it has ruined marriages, relationships and the emotional wellbeing of many people.”⁵

1.2.2 Cyber Bullying

In the last decades cyber bullying has become a major problem. The term describes bullying through the use of social media, which can happen through for example posting hurtful things and humiliating the victim or just insulting them.⁶ In general, “Bullying is defined as an aggressive act that is carried out by a group or an individual repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself.”⁷ The consequences can be just the same as with regular bullying.

1.2.3 Terrorism and Criminal Activities

Of course, as the usage of social media increased over the last decades, terrorist groups started to use them too. It gives them the possibility to communicate and act globally. Because of this, incidents of Islamic terrorism have not only happened in countries, which mostly consist of muslims, but also in Europe, Russia and the United States. Above in the “Connectivity and sharing” paragraph, it was stated that social media offers a lot of potential for community events like fundraising or meeting new people. But terrorist groups can use that potential too. So, it can happen that such groups use social media to gather information or funding, find new members and post propaganda.

⁵ Escobar-Viera CG et al., 2018

⁶ Cf. Damota Mulugeta, 2019

⁷ Bannik Rienke et al., 2014

There are two groups of people who are likely to easily join radical groups.⁸ The first group consists of people who are isolated and the other one contains of people who suffer of emotional problems like depression. The reason those two groups are vulnerable to be convinced to join certain radical groups is because these radical communities make them feel important.⁹ So, isolation and emotional problems help terrorists to recruit new members. Interestingly enough, social media also tends to turn an individual into a depressive or anxious state that leads to isolation, but that is going to be the theme of the following paragraphs.

1.2.4 Mental Health

The relationship between social media and the state of mental health is already widely known. Yet it is important to mention that there are countless factors that affect mental health and because it offers such a humongous amount of information to discuss, the theme of mental health is devoted several paragraphs.

⁸ Cf. Bhui et al., 2014

⁹ Cf. Damota Mulugeta, 2019

1.3 Social media's effect on mental health

As already mentioned above, social media has a huge impact on mental health and can change the course of an individual significantly. There are many factors that must be taken into account, for example the reason for the urge of adolescents to use social media, or the frequency of usage or investment in social media. Yet the following paragraphs will be introduced by the increased consumption of social media.

1.3.1 Increased usage of social media

As an introduction to this theme here is a fairly short summary of a short story from the author E. M. Forster, which was published in the year 1909. The story is called "The Machine Stops". It is set in an outline of a futuristic world, where a machine is in control of everything, whether it be food supply or information technologies. In this dystopia, meeting up in real life is no longer necessary and all interactions are held remotely. The minds of the humans are controlled by the machine and they completely depend on it.¹⁰

As it has already been said above, there was a dramatic increase in the usage of social media over the last decades. This of course is also to be seen in the activities of adolescents. Therefore, social networking sites (SNSs) like Facebook also experienced an increase of usage. Such SNSs allow individuals to do the following:

- “(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system,
- (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and
- (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”¹¹

In general, the use of SNSs as a leisure activity was picked up quite quickly, which then led to adolescents hardly being capable of imagining their day without the use of any SNSs. For further information, there is a study measuring the average minutes spent on SNSs per day of young people. The first result of the study was an average of about 33 minutes spent per day, yet just one year later this number went up to 54 minutes spent per day.¹²

¹⁰ Cf. Korte M., 2020

¹¹ Corey J. Blomfield neira, Bonnie L. Barber, 2014

¹² Cf. Ellison Nicole B. et al., 2007

1.3.2 The social aspect of social media

Earlier it was stated as a positive aspect of social media was the fact that it can be used to get in touch with other people sharing the same interests as oneself and therefore potentially making new friends. This is not untrue but based on a reasearch in the USA and Australia, it is possible to tell that adolescents tend to stick to communicating with their already existing friends.

Another thing social media offers is that it allows adolescents to display some kind of résumé of themselves publicly. This displayal can then lead them to be guided by a certain group of people who are similar to them. In this résumé, adolescents are mostly presenting the things they are most proud of. The problematic aspect here is that their online friends are doing the same thing. This entails everyone being exposed to the positive self-presentations of everyone they know which undoubtably causes the adolescent to read about all the great things their friends achieved or are going through. This dynamic most likely leads to a constant social comparison between oneanother.¹³ An example that portrays this principal well would be from the work of Chou and Edge, who found out that the more time that was spent on Facebook, the more the individual perceived that other people live a better and happier life.¹³

Another point where comparison comes into play is simply the publication of works of one own. In doing so, it is possible that the publisher is provided with feedback from other people. In the specific case of social media, if something is posted, there is feedback through comments, likes or other ways to express one's opinion. Adolescents are especially involved in such schemes. Through the use of social media, feedbacks can be received much faster and there are a lot more feedbacks than one would receive during offline interactions.¹³ There are several indications that young people seek feedback. Additionally, according to a study by Valkenburg et al., one of the primary motivation to use social media is to explore themselves and gain more knowledge.¹⁴ As a result, comparison and feedback are essential for the self-evaluation of adolescents¹⁵. However, this connection could eventually, depending on the involvement in SNSs, possibly create and/or exacerbate personal problems with the social self-concept, self-esteem and mood (it could change to a depressive tone).¹³

¹³ Cf. Corey J. Blomfield neira, Bonnie L. Barber, 2014

¹⁴ Cf. Valkenburg et al., 2005

¹⁵ Cf. Harter S., 1999

1.3.3 The effects of the frequency of usage and investment into social media

In general, several studies found out that the most common outcome of social media were anxiety and depression. Those symptoms correlate with the time spent with activities and addiction to social media. Considering the theme of the constant need of feedback discussed above, it is quite logical that, in the modern world, anxiety is a common mental health condition. Another factor adding to this anxiety would be the fear of loss or missing out, which leads to the individual trying to check their messages regularly.¹⁶

Another aspect of social media, which has already been discussed earlier, is the social support it can offer. This can also be a protective factor for depression. Overall on that topic, social media is seen as something between positive and negative, because there are studies showing that an individual is more prone to have mental health problems, but there are also studies stating the opposite, meaning that some individuals improved upon themselves due to the social interaction.¹⁷

Intriguingly, there are studies that found out that there is no inherent relationship between the state of one's mental health and the frequency of the usage of social media. Rather the investment into social media is the key aspect. Another thing that has been confirmed in many studies was the relation between the time spent on Facebook and depression¹⁶ or the perception of an individual that other people live better lives than them.¹⁸

A good showcase of the investment is the portrayal of two individuals one being highly invested and the other one not. Those two individuals use SNSs (social networking sites) frequently. If both of them were to lose their access to SNSs, the highly invested one would strongly endorse "statements such as 'SNSs are part of my daily routine'"¹⁹ or report "feeling 'out of touch'"¹⁹. On the other hand, the individual with little investment would not feel uncomfortable in that scenario.¹⁸

¹⁶ Cf. Karim F. et al., 2020

¹⁷ Cf. Escobar-Viera CG et al., 2018

¹⁸ Cf. Corey J. Blomfield neira & Bonnie L. Barber, 2014

¹⁹ Corey J. Blomfield neira & Bonnie L. Barber, 2014

Conclusion

Social media can be a useful tool and has revolutionized our way of living. It opens up many opportunities, but there potentially are many potential consequences that come along with it, which is why all interaction on social media should be dealt with rather critically. It is also important not to rely on the opinions of other people, especially strangers and not feel the need of constant feedback. Another point to mention is that not the frequency of the social media consumption is the relevant factor, but rather the investment of an individual into social media, in which case one must control and check on themselves, because only they can know what the actual situation is. In general, because there are many risks that go along with social media, there must be more regulations towards it. It is also the duty of a parent to make the right call, which in this paper, statistically speaking, would mean a rather late introduction to social media for the youth. Finally, with just the right balance of regulation, carefulness and self-awareness, social media can be a very powerful tool which offers a lot of opportunities.

Further Insight

Sadly this paper is limited to time, which is why it was not possible to go into depth in every aspect. And there are several more topics that could be interesting, for example the neuroscientific effects of social media, which has a connection to the psychological ones, but still is quite different. So, if one is interested in learning more about the effects of social media, here would be two articles, that came along while researching for this paper, but didn't get included due to the limitations of time. The first one is still focused on rather psychological effects. In this case, it is about the relationship between social media and cognitive functioning, where it is analyzed if there is any relation at all. Here the full citation: Rachel S. Lara, Rebecca Bokoch: Cognitive functioning and social media: Has technology changed us?. *Acta Psychologica*. Volume 221:2021. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0001691821001797>. The second article is about the neuroscientific aspects. It depicts many different studies on the changes that can occur in the human brain if social media is used, sometimes in relation to age. Here is the full citation: Korte M.: The impact of the digital revolution on human brain and behavior: where do we stand?. *Dialogues Clin Neurosci*. 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7366944/>. Furthermore, if there is sufficient interest it is also recommended to look up the cited articles, because there is much information that was not included in this work.

Sources

- Damota Mulugeta: The Effect of Social Media on Society: 2019.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342145135_The_Effect_of_Social_Media_on_Society/download [access: 10.05.2023]
- Escobar-Viera CG, Whitfield DL, Wessel CB, Shensa A, Sidani JE, Brown AL, Chandler CJ, Hoffman BL, Marshal MP, Primack BA: For Better or for Worse? A Systematic Review of the Evidence on Social Media Use and Depression Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Minorities. JMIR Ment Health: 2018.
<https://mental.jmir.org/2018/3/e10496/> [access: 10.05.2023]
- Bannik Rienke, Broeren Suzanne, van de Looij – Jansen, Petra M.: Cyber and Traditional Bullying Victimization as a Risk Factor for Mental Health Problems and Suicidal Ideation in Adolescents. PLoS ONE: 2014, Vol. 9 Issue 4, p. 1-7
- Bhui Kamaldeep, Brian Everitt, Edgar Jones: Might Depression, Psychosocial Adversity, and Limited Social Assets Explain Vulnerability to and Resistance against Violent Radicalisation?. PLoS ONE: 2014.
<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0105918> [access: 15.05.2023]
- Korte M.: The impact of the digital revolution on human brain and behavior: where do we stand?. Dialogues Clin Neurosci: 2020.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7366944/> [access: 17.05.2023]
- Corey J. Blomfield neira & Bonnie L. Barber: Social networking site use: Linked to adolescents' social self-concept, self-esteem, and depressed mood, Australian Journal of Psychology.: 2014.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1111/ajpy.12034> [access: 17.05.2023]
- Ellison Nicole B., Steinfield Charles, Lampe Cliff: The benefits of Facebook 'friends': Social capital and college students' use of online network sites. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication.: 2007.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x>
[access: 31.05.2023]

- Valkenburg P. M., Schouten A. P., Pete, J.: Adolescents' identity experiments on the internet:2005. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444805052282> [access: 31.05.2023]
- Harter S.: The construction of the self. A developmental perspective. New York: The Guilford Press: 1999
- Karim F, Oyewande AA, Abdalla LF, Chaudhry Ehsanullah R, Khan S.: Social Media Use and Its Connection to Mental Health: A Systematic Review.Cureus: 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7364393/> [access: 10.05.2023]