

The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families

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Abstract: *By using social media These days, children and teenagers spend a lot of time on websites. A social media website is any website that facilitates social interaction. Examples of such websites include blogs, Club Penguin, Second Life, and the Sims, as well as social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, MySpace, and Twitter. These sites, which have seen exponential growth in recent years, provide a platform for communication and pleasure for today's young. Given that some social media platforms are not suitable for young children and teenagers, it is crucial that parents understand the nature of these platforms. Pediatricians are in a unique position to educate families about these platforms, promote responsible usage, and advise parents to keep an eye out for any issues related to exposure to improper information, cyberbullying, or "Facebook depression."*

Keywords: social media, depressive disorders, cyberbullying, sexting, internet

I. INTRODUCTION

SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY TWEENS AND TEENS

According to research, regularly using social media can help children and teenagers develop their communication, social skills, and even technical abilities. Daily possibilities to connect with friends, classmates, and people who share interests are abundant on social media platforms like Facebook and MySpace. Preadolescents and teenagers who use these kinds of websites have skyrocketed during the past five years. Over half of teenagers log on to a social media site more than once a day, and 22% of teenagers use their favorite site more than ten times a day, according to a new poll. Currently, 75% of teenagers have a cell phone, and of those, 25% use social media, 54% text, and 24% instant message for communication. Therefore, using the Internet and cell phones is how this generation develops socially and emotionally to a considerable extent.

Today's parents are highly proficient in using technology, and they feel confident and at ease utilizing the apps and websites that their teenagers and kids utilize. However, for a variety of reasons, some parents might find it challenging to connect with their tech-savvy children on the internet. These parents might not have a fundamental comprehension of these new socialization methods, which are essential to their kids' development. Their children grow up in an ever-changing Internet world, and often they lack the technical skills or time to keep up. Furthermore, these parents frequently do not have a fundamental grasp that children's online activities are an extension of their offline lives. Ultimately, this leads to a knowledge and technological skill difference between parents and young people, which causes a rift in how these parents and young people engage in the online community together.

THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Socialization and Communication

Social media sites allow teens to accomplish online many of the tasks that are important to them offline: staying connected with friends and family, making new friends, sharing pictures, and exchanging ideas. Social media participation also can offer adolescents deeper benefits that extend into their view of self, community, and the world, including^{1,10} :

1. Opportunities for community engagement through raising money for charity and volunteering for local events, including political and philanthropic events;

2. Enhancement of individual and collective creativity through development and sharing of artistic and musical endeavors;
3. Growth of ideas from the creation of blogs, podcasts, videos, and gaming sites;
4. 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); 11
5. Fostering of one's individual identity and unique social skills.

Enhanced Learning Opportunities

Students in middle and high school are interacting with each other on social media platforms when working on group projects and assignments. For instance, students can get together outside of class to interact and share ideas about assignments using Facebook and other similar social networking platforms. Blogs can be an effective teaching tool in some schools, since they help to reinforce English language proficiency, creative writing, and creativity.

RISKS OF YOUTH USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Adolescents are more frequently at risk from social media use than most adults believed. Peer-to-peer, unsuitable content, ignorance of online privacy issues and external effects from third-party advertising groups are the areas in which the majority of dangers are found.

Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

Cyberbullying refers to the intentional dissemination of untrue, humiliating, or offensive material about another individual via digital platforms. Peer-to-peer risk, it's the most prevalent internet danger for all teenagers.

While the terms "online harassment" and "cyberbullying" are frequently used synonymously, they actually refer to different things. According to recent data, harassment occurs less frequently online than offline¹⁵, and most youngsters who use social networking sites are not at risk of experiencing online harassment.⁽¹⁶⁾ On the other side, cyberbullying is a widespread issue that can affect every young person who spends time online. It can lead to serious psychological consequences like anxiety, sadness, extreme isolation, and, sadly, suicide.

Sexting

Using a computer, mobile phone, or other digital device to send, receive, or forward sexually explicit texts, pictures, or images is known as sexting. Eighteen On the Internet or through mobile devices, many of these photos spread quickly. There is evidence that this phenomena happens among teenagers; 20% of teens who participated in a recent survey sent or posted pictures or videos of themselves in their underwear or semi-underwear. While some states have begun to classify such behaviors as juvenile-law misdemeanors, some teenagers who have engaged in sexting have become the target of threats or are facing felony charges related to child pornography. In addition, victims may experience emotional anguish and co-occurring mental health disorders, and offenders may be suspended from school. Yet, the sexting episode is frequently kept private and isn't considered worrisome at all, even among a small circle of friends or a couple.

PRIVACY CONCERNS AND THE DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

Nowadays, the biggest risks that preadolescents and adolescents face online are those posed by one another, by inappropriate technology use, by a lack of privacy, by sharing too much information, or by publishing inaccurate information about themselves or others. These kinds of actions jeopardize their privacy. Online visitors have the ability to leave traces of the websites they have visited behind. The "digital footprint" is the collective, continuous record of an individual's online activities. Their digital footprint and potential reputations are among the biggest risks that young people face when using social media.

Adolescents and preadolescents who are ignorant of privacy issues frequently share offensive images, videos, and messages online without realizing that "what goes online stays online." Therefore, careless and inexperienced mouse

clicks could endanger future employment opportunities and entrance into education. Additionally, irresponsible Internet use might make it simpler for scammers and marketers to target kids and teenagers

INFLUENCE OF ADVERTISEMENTS ON BUYING

Numerous social media platforms feature a variety of advertisements, including banner ads, behavior ads (which target users based on how they browse the Web), and demographic-based ads (which target users based on a particular attribute like age, gender, education level, marital status, etc.). These ads not only affect preadolescents' and adolescents' purchasing tendencies but also their perceptions of normalcy. Parents in particular need to be wary of behavioral ads, which are prevalent on social media platforms and work by obtaining user data before focusing on the user's profile to sway judgments about what to buy. These potent affects begin the moment children start using the internet and posting.

These days, a lot of online spaces forbid advertisements on websites where minors and young adults interact. In order to help kids become media-literate consumers and comprehend how readily commercials can control them, it is crucial to teach parents, kids, and teenagers about this behavior.

ON TOO YOUNG: MIXED MESSAGES FROM PARENTS AND THE LAW

While most social media platforms have a 13-year-old minimum age requirement, many parents are unaware of this and wonder why. There are principally two causes. First off, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), established by Congress, sets a 13-year-old threshold at which Web sites are not allowed to gather personal data on children under 13 without consent from their parents. Second, the official terms of service for a lot of well-known websites now stipulate that a user must be 13 years old to register and create a profile, in line with COPPA laws. The minimum age required registering on websites like Facebook and MySpace is this.

In order to ensure that a website is age-appropriate for their child, parents should assess the websites their child wants to use. However, there is room for discussion when it comes to sites that do not have age restrictions, so parents should actively discuss the matter with their preadolescents and adolescents in order to assess the situation.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) generally advises that users follow any minimum age requirements stated in terms of service on websites. A prevalent behavior among some preadolescents and parents is to inflate their age. In order to ensure that they are not giving conflicting messages about lying and that internet safety is always the primary lesson being highlighted; parents need to be mindful of this behavior.

THE ROLE OF PEDIATRICIANS

Pediatricians encourage families to address the fundamental issues of bullying, popularity and status, depression and social anxiety, risk-taking, and sexual development. By doing so, they can educate families about the complexities of the digital world as well as the difficult social and health issues that online youth face. Pediatricians can assist parents in realizing that what is happening online is merely an outgrowth of these fundamental problems, and that parents are most beneficial when they comprehend these problems and have coping mechanisms for whether they arise online, offline, or, more often, both.

Some specific ways in which pediatricians can assist parents include:

1. Suggest to parents that they have a conversation with their kids and teenagers about the challenges that modern online youngsters are facing as well as how they utilize the internet.
2. Give parents advice on how to close the participation gap in their own homes by learning more about the various technologies their children are utilizing.
3. Discuss with families about the requirement for a family internet usage policy that includes talking about online issues at regular family gatherings and monitoring privacy settings and online personas for offensive content. If necessary, punitive action should not be taken; instead, the focus should be on good citizenship and behavior.
4. Discuss with parents about how important it is to supervise their children's online behavior through active involvement and communication rather than through remote monitoring using a "net-nanny" tool (software that watches children's websites when parents are away).

To assist families in discussing the more challenging issues that kids face online, pediatricians can provide families with reputable online resources, including “Social Media and Sexting Tips” from the AAP (www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/june09socialmedia.htm),³⁰ the AAP Internet safety site (<http://safetynet.aap.org>),³¹ and the AAP public education site, HealthyChildren.org.

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