

The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health Across Generations

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Abstract: *This research paper studies how social media affects the mental health of people from different age groups—teenagers, young adults, middle-aged, and older people. Social media has both positive and negative effects. On one side, it helps people stay connected, raise awareness, and share ideas. On the other side, it creates problems like anxiety, depression, stress, sleep issues, and misuse of information. Recent events in Nepal, where the government blocked platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram for some time, showed how strongly people, especially the youth, depend on social media. Data from our survey, along with real-world examples, shows that each generation experiences different impacts. This paper also gives some suggestions to balance social media use in a healthy way.*

Keywords: Social Media, Mental Health, Generations, Nepal, Youth, Anxiety, Stress, Connection

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media is now a part of daily life for almost everyone. From students to working adults, from morning till night, people use it to connect, share, and learn. But its effect on mental health is not the same for all. Teenagers and young adults often feel pressure due to comparison with others, while middle-aged people face stress from information overload.

The impact of social media on mental health is now a global concern. Many studies suggest that excessive use can disturb sleep, reduce concentration, and increase feelings of isolation. At the same time, positive effects are also visible, like building communities, spreading social movements, and providing emotional support.

The recent case of Nepal in September 2025 highlights this issue. The government blocked several platforms, which immediately caused frustration and protests, especially among young people. This shows that social media is not just about entertainment, it deeply influences emotions, identity, and even political actions.

This research paper studies the impact of social media on mental health across different age groups, based on real-world examples, survey data, and global as well as regional contexts.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

- Teenagers: Studies show that heavy use leads to low self-esteem, addiction, and anxiety.
- Young Adults: They use social media for activism, career building, and relationships, but many report addiction and burnout.
- Middle Age: They often feel stress from constant news updates and workplace comparisons.
- Older People: They benefit from staying in touch with family but can fall victim to misinformation.

III. BACKGROUND

1. Mental Health : Mental health is about how a person thinks, feels, and handles daily life. Issues like stress, anxiety, and loneliness are now very common, especially with increasing social and academic pressure.
2. Social Media Platforms: Like Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp are now part of everyday life. They connect people, spread news, and create trends within seconds.



How Social Media and Mental Health Are Connected

The connection between these two is double-sided.

Positive Side: Social media helps people stay in touch, share achievements, spread awareness (like campaigns on climate change, elections, or mental health itself), and find online communities for support. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, people used social media to share safety tips, attend online classes, and connect with friends, which reduced feelings of isolation.

Negative Side: At the same time, constant scrolling can create comparison, jealousy, sleep problems, and addiction. Online bullying and fake news also increase stress levels. For instance, recently in Nepal, debates have grown over how online platforms spread misinformation and increase pressure on young users. This shows how unregulated use of social media can directly affect people's mental well-being.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Survey: A Google Form was circulated among people of different age groups. The questions asked about daily time spent, emotional state after usage, and benefits or problems they experienced.

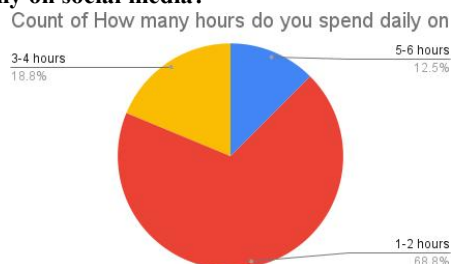
Secondary Sources: News articles, research papers, and case studies were used to compare findings.

Case Study: Nepal's social media ban and the reaction of its people is discussed to show real- world impact.

V. RESULTS

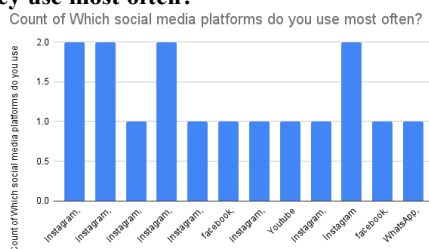
5.1 Survey Findings

How many hours do they spend daily on social media?



The survey indicates that the majority of respondents spend 1–2 hours daily on social media. Around 20–25% use it for 3–4 hours, while only a small percentage use it for 4–6 hours. This highlights that social media is a part of daily routine but not necessarily excessive for most individuals

Which social media platforms do they use most often?

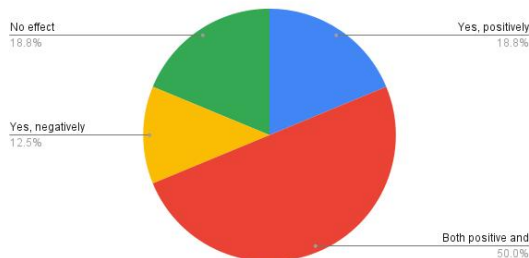


The findings suggest that Instagram is the most widely used platform among participants, followed by WhatsApp and Facebook. Platforms like YouTube and Snapchat were less preferred. This shows a generational trend where visually engaging platforms dominate usage.



Do they feel that social media affects their mood or emotions?

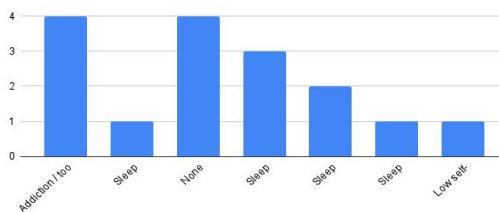
Count of Do you feel that social media affects your mood or emotions?



Most people (50%) feel social media affects their mood both positively and negatively, while 21% say positively, 17% say negatively, and 12% feel it has no effect.

What negative effects have you experienced due to social media?

Count of What negative effects have you experienced due to social media?

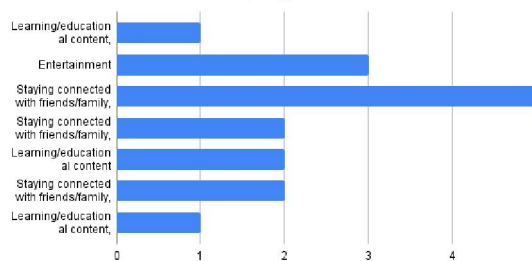


Count of What negative effects have you experienced due to social media?

The above table shows the negative effects of social media as reported by the respondents. The numbers indicate how many people experienced each problem. Addiction was the most common issue, followed by sleep problems.

Count of What benefits have they gained from social media?

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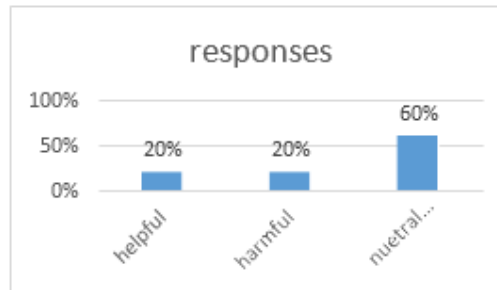


Count of What benefits have you gained from social media?

The graph shows the benefits gained from social media by different age groups. While entertainment is the primary use across all ages, younger users (15–25) also use it for learning, education, and career development. Users above 30 primarily use social media to stay connected with family.



In their opinion, is social media overall more helpful or harmful for mental health?



Most respondents (60%) felt the impact of social media on mental health depends on usage, while 20% saw it as helpful and 20% as harmful.

5.2 Observations

The survey findings reveal that social media impacts users in both positive and negative ways. Addiction and sleep problems were the most commonly reported negative effects, showing how excessive usage can disturb daily routines. At the same time, entertainment emerged as the primary benefit across all age groups. Younger respondents (15–25 years) used social media not only for entertainment but also for learning, education, and career development, whereas respondents above 30 years mainly valued it for staying connected with family. When asked about its overall impact on mental health, most participants (60%) felt it depends on usage, while smaller groups (20% each) considered it entirely helpful or harmful.

5.3 Real-World Example: Nepal

- In September 2025, Nepal's government banned platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram.
- Young people protested because they felt their voices were being silenced.
- Many reported feeling anxious and disconnected during the ban.
- After the ban was lifted, usage increased quickly, showing how dependent people have become.

VI. DISCUSSION

The results clearly show that social media's influence is not uniform across generations. Teenagers and young adults face higher risks of stress, anxiety, and comparison pressures, even as they benefit from awareness and career-related opportunities. Middle-aged respondents experienced stress primarily from political and news overload, suggesting that content type is as important as time spent. Older adults reported social benefits such as staying connected with family but simultaneously faced risks of misinformation. The Nepal case illustrates the depth of reliance on social platforms, when suddenly removed, people experienced frustration, helplessness, and collective unrest.

This emphasizes that mental health and social media are now deeply interconnected, shaping not only individual well-being but also broader social dynamics.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Students and Young People: Establish screen-time limits, take regular digital breaks, and cultivate offline hobbies to balance online activity.
2. For Parents and Teachers: Provide guidance on safe digital practices, balanced use, and the psychological effects of overuse.
3. For Middle-aged Adults: Reduce stress by filtering news sources, relying on credible outlets, and scheduling limited time for news consumption.
4. For Older Adults: Conduct awareness programs to help them identify misinformation and safely navigate social platforms.



5. For Social Media Companies: Integrate features like time-use reminders, clearer fact-checking labels, and promotion of constructive, positive content.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

This research concludes that social media is both a source of connection and a potential risk to mental health. Its impact varies by age group, teenagers and young adults struggle with stress and anxiety, middle-aged adults with news-related overload, and older adults with misinformation, while each group also benefits in unique ways. The Nepal case demonstrates how deeply society relies on these platforms, and how sudden removal can disrupt emotional stability and social functioning.

Ultimately, social media should not be viewed as entirely harmful or entirely helpful, but rather as a tool whose impact depends on balanced use, digital literacy, and conscious engagement.

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