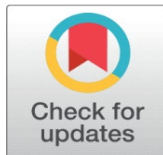


# STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENT IDENTITY FORMATION

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## ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a crucial stage in this formation of identity, and it is usually determined by interactions with relatives, peers, and cultural norms established in the society. However, with the advent of the social media a new dimension has been added to this phenomenon whereby young people have gotten unprecedented opportunities to articulate, discover and affirm themselves. Social media apps like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, or Snapchat allow young people to present and construct their identities to a global audience, experimenting with different identities and receiving an immediate response of their peers. Even though the social media has the prospect of being the medium of empowerment, it also brings with it complications that make formation of stable and consistent self-identity difficult. The constant pressure to meet the unrealistic standards of beauty, the serious emotional consequences of online bullying, and the difficulties connected to the protection of personal privacy may all have a pernicious impact on the mental state and the overall well-being of the younger generation. This academic paper acknowledges the complex role of social media in adolescent identity formation by pointing out the numerous benefits that it can provide as well as the risks that are posed by its use. The study explore the complex psychological and social consequences of the use of social media platforms. It highlights the need to have a balanced approach to this, which means that young people must be equipped with the tools they need to navigating these virtual spaces responsibly. The goal here is to create an environment where young people may use social media as a positive tool of self-discovery, simultaneously minimizing its harmful effects.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Adolescent Identity, Cyberbullying, Self-Expression, Mental Health, Body Image



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence, which is often accompanied by intensive emotional changes, cognitive development, and social interactions, can be regarded as the critical stage in the process of personal identity formation. During this time, individuals are introduced to a process of exploring various roles, values, and beliefs, which take an important role in the development of a coherent sense of identity [Erikson \(1968\)](#). Traditionally this process occurs within the context of family relations, social groups, school, and the broader cultural influences of the society. Over the recent past, the advent of digital technologies and the development of social media platforms have substantially transformed the landscape of identity formation.

Adolescents nowadays are situated in an entirely new terrain in which they can explore and define themselves in entirely new ways and ways that are highly determined by a multitude of digital interactions, techniques of self-representation and feedback loops that have a substantial effect on how adolescents understand themselves. Social interaction platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, and Snapchat have become an inseparable part of the daily life of young people and provide them with an environment to share their lives, seek validation, and manage complex social dynamics [Boyd \(2014\)](#). These online spaces give these young people opportunities to construct and present their personal identities to a broader, often global, audience. The process of identity formation has become more social, interactive and at places fragmented as the young people present refined versions of themselves which at places can be far afield to their actual lives [Livingstone \(2008\)](#). Even though this type of online self-representation may be rather emancipatory, it also instills major concerns about the potential harm, including the consequences of online bullying and criticism of their bodies, and the strong desire to meet the social expectations of success and beauty.

The purpose of the paper is to give a detailed account of how social media influence identity development in adolescents. Through consideration of how adolescents use these sites, the paper will discuss how social media can promote self-exploration, provide venues of self-presentation, and, simultaneously, make formation of a stable and coherent identity more challenging. Besides, the paper will outline the extended psychological and social ramification, including the importance of external approval, the influence of online bullying, and the effect of social networks on mood and well-being. The key to sorting through the dynamics of identity formation in the digital era is having knowledge of the dual role social media plays in the development of adolescents and young adults.

## **2. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN IDENTITY FORMATION**

The emergence of digital social networking platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat has integrated into the very reality of youth life, on which they have unique ways of personal expression and self-realization. The development of the platforms has radically changed the traditional ways in which young people engage in social interactions and figures out their own identities. Unlike previous generations that tended to rely on face-to-face interactions and had a more limited social circle, modern young people have acquired the amazing skill of carefully designing and presenting their lives to a large global community. This aspect allows them to experiment and experience different versions of their identities in a digital space.

The social media is the domain that provides young people with a lively environment to discover and experiment with different aspects of personal identity. Instagram and Tik Tok are social media networks that allow individuals to show themselves through visual media, whereas Facebook and Twitter are more text-oriented platforms where the younger generation can describe their ideas, share their beliefs, and talk about their experiences. Such experimentation process might include exploration of new behaviours, different ideologies, different interests, and even adoption of different personas [Boyd \(2014\)](#). Adolescents are using social media sites as a tool to navigate and redefine their self-identities, often exploring elements of gender identity, sexual orientation, cultural identity and personal interests in a way that they might have not been able to do so in real life. Indeed, social media platforms have become more than merely communication tools, as Boyd puts it in 2014; they are an ever-changing virtual space in which young people

negotiate and test various aspects of their identities. As an illustration, in apps like TikTok, users get a chance to create and share short video clips that introduce different aspects of themselves, often joining popular challenges or memes that allow them to explore and experiment with their self-presentation. By receiving the feedback of their peers and followers in the shape of likes, comments, and shares in a timely manner, young people are able to determine the amount of social validation of their digital selves. Such a reciprocal relationship implies an effective impact on their actual identities [Alhabash et al. \(2021\)](#). A chance meeting with persons sharing similar interests and values offers youths an avenue to explore themselves and form links with any group that validates their identities. Such a level of participation and social validation is often not possible in the traditional, face-to-face context [Livingstone \(2008\)](#).

One of the trademark features of social media websites is the idea of external validation. Adolescents and teenagers seek approval of their peers through the response, reactions, and engagement that their posts and content on social media receive. This continuous loop of feedback plays a large role not only in how teenagers come to understand themselves, but also how they decide to present themselves to the people in their lives. Social networking sites are powerful tools in the hands of the youth as described by Boyd and Ellison in the research they conducted in the year 2008. These platforms give them the power to control and present their own individual identity, but at the same time seek the approval of others, which is demonstrated by the number of likes or comments on the content they post. The motivation achieved through such affirmation can lead to a considerable boost in the self-value of a young individual, whilst the lack of positive comments or the inclusion of negative ones can lead to a feeling of not belonging or being unworthy [Kross et al. \(2013\)](#). The desire to get social acceptance may significantly affect the process of forming the self and the identity of an adolescent. This validation, brought about by social media, has a strong impact on how young people evaluate themselves, and in most cases, they benchmark their self-worth on the praise of the content they post or the number of people following them. The external validation process can provoke young citizens to change their behaviors to meet the expectations of society or their peers, often with the goal of reaching the standards set by influential people, famous personalities, or current trends [Vannucci et al. \(2017\)](#). Take, by way of example, a young person who receives positive feedback on posting images that match conventional standards of attractiveness. This positive reinforcement can motivate them to continue publishing such items thus reinforcing the social constructs of attraction and homogeneity in our societies. Instagram has become one of the most critical spaces in which young people explore and confirm their sexual and gender identities beyond the simple act of self-expression. According to Livingstone as observed in the year 2008, social media sites do offer a special opportunity to the young people to interact with a broader range of people most of whom they may share same experiences, difficulties or even cultural backgrounds. This can create a very strong community and belongingness feeling especially to young people who might be feeling out of place or isolated due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. This ability of communicating openly in digital communities provides these young people with the means and language to describe and explore their identities, which could otherwise be impossible under the constraints of their physical environment [Boyd \(2014\)](#). Consider, for instance, social media apps like Instagram, which offer people the chance to present themselves by means of merging visual imagery and textual expression.

Another crucial aspect of social media, which has a terrific influence on adolescent identity formation, is a strong desire to fit in the society, especially in terms of beauty standard, preferences and ways of living as well as behaving. The need to be accepted and approved by society often forces teenagers to post content that appeals to the latest trends, thus creating a refined image of their lives. According to what [Tiggemann and Slater \(2014\)](#) say, social media (including Instagram and Tik Tok) put a substantial emphasis on aesthetic attractiveness, and influencers and celebrities often present a heavily curated and perfected image of their lives. The effect of this phenomenon on adolescents can be unfavourable comparison with these idealised representations. The need to meet these social standards may be extremely strong, particularly in young women, who may internalize these ideas as measures of their importance or inner worth. According to the studies, exposure to airbrushed images on social networks is associated with body dissatisfaction and growth of concern about appearance [Tiggemann and Slater \(2014\)](#). As a result, young people can do everything to resemble those standards, taking numerous steps such as modifying their appearance using digital filters, photo editing, or even engaging in unhealthy behaviors to fit in among their friends. This comparison and wanting to match others and imitate their qualities may start a vicious circle of needing approval, as a result of which young people may experience pressure to adjust their self-image to the expectations expressed by their peers and the society [Valkenburg and Peter \(2009\)](#).

### **3. BODY IMAGE AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

An important issue associated with the utilisation of social media by teenagers is its deep influence on perceptions of body image. Teenagers, especially young females, frequently encounter meticulously crafted and glorified visuals on social networking sites like Instagram, where public figures and stars commonly endorse unattainable ideals of beauty. These digital arenas are meticulously crafted to showcase refined and curated representations of existence, and this relentless engagement may result in feelings of discontent regarding one's physique, especially when young individuals juxtapose their authentic forms against the frequently altered visuals they come across in the virtual realm. The realm of social media often serves as a reflective surface, showcasing a beauty ideal that is challenging, if not utterly unattainable, thereby establishing a chasm between the actual and the envisioned [Tiggemann and Slater \(2014\)](#). The disparity may result in significant self-worth dilemmas, heightened anxiety levels, depressive episodes, and a myriad of other psychological hurdles, as young individuals grapple with reconciling their self-perception with the curated, frequently unrealistic representations they encounter on their digital devices.

Social media sites that are focused on social interaction, especially Instagram, represent a visual-oriented space where users share photos of themselves in a variety of locations. Being at the complex stage of exploring themselves and their identities, young people are especially susceptible to the effects of ubiquitous imagery and culture that occupies these digital environments. As defined in the study by [Tiggemann and Slater \(2014\)](#), the daily exposure to the images of an impossible ideal of beauty, combined with the ability to edit and improve personal photos, can develop a distorted understanding of reality. The carefully modified photos shared by influencers often create an illusion of "perfection" which does not reflect the diversity of body forms and sizes that exists in the real world. The constant exposure to these perfect images may lead young people to internalise these messages and strive to achieve unattainable body examples, which eventually

results in an increased level of body dissatisfaction [Tiggemann and Slater \(2014\)](#). One of the reasons that make social media powerful in body image perceptions is the rampant sharing of images that promote ideal body images, which in most occasions are unattainable to many people. In the vivid arena of Instagram, influencers often present themselves with flawlessly perfect skin, chiseled bodies and luxurious lives. This imagery storytelling has the potential to drive many of these young users to internalise these depictions in believing that these ideals form the standards that they should aspire to achieve. This perception is especially problematic in teenage years when individuals are exceptionally sensitive about their appearance and more likely to seek validation in the peers [Valkenburg and Peter \(2009\)](#). The endless need to be approved and admired, reflected in the number of likes, comments, and followers, may lead to the harmful obsession with physical attractiveness, therefore, reinforcing the association between social media use and body image blues.

The focus of social media on captivating visual appeal plays a crucial role in amplifying the pressure individuals feel to adhere to societal beauty norms. Instagram, notably, serves as a digital arena that emphasises imagery and visual content, perpetuating a limited and specific ideal of beauty. Public figures, renowned personalities, and fashion icons frequently share images that conform to a specific visual style, causing young individuals to perceive these perfected body shapes as the standard [Boyd and Ellison \(2008\)](#). The unvarnished depiction of "ideal beauty" in these visuals fosters a setting in which young individuals perceive a necessity to conform to specific aesthetic standards to attain attractiveness, receive affirmation, or even be deemed deserving of social engagement. Social media platforms such as Instagram wield significant influence, primarily because they offer users the capability to enhance and modify images. This functionality enables young individuals to curate a portrayal of themselves that might not accurately reflect reality. The capacity to alter one's visual representation through digital means can skew perceptions of self and others, resulting in an exaggerated understanding of what constitutes "normal" [Livingstone and Helsper \(2007\)](#). Young individuals might find themselves driven to replicate these standards of beauty by modifying their own images, participating in extreme workout routines, following restrictive diets, or adopting other potentially detrimental habits in pursuit of the "perfect" body image they come across on the internet [Tiggemann and Slater \(2014\)](#). The intense compulsion to adhere to societal beauty norms is especially strong among teenage girls, who frequently encounter external expectations to align with certain aesthetic ideals. This suggestion is supported by the study performed by Tiggemann and Slater in 2014, which implies that the display of ideal body images on social networking sites intensifies body image concerns in adolescent girls, resulting in the increased feeling of inadequacy and dissatisfaction. The concerns about body image can develop into more serious behavior, such as the development of eating disorders, mainly in teenagers, who embrace these impossible standards of beauty [Tiggemann and Slater \(2014\)](#), [Kross et al. \(2013\)](#). The mentioned behaviours, in turn, add complications to an already complicated process of building a strong and healthy sense of identity, especially at a critical stage when young men and women are also struggling with sweeping emotional and physical changes.

Comparison is an important factor that contributes largely in body dissatisfaction among the youth. The youth often compare their physical appearance with the idealized versions of beauty that are promoted on different social media. Going by what Vannucci, Flannery, and Ohannessian suggested in the research paper they published in 2017, it can be hypothesized that these comparisons can be particularly harmful when young people compare their natural

bodies with the carefully edited images that they encounter in the online space. These judgments in comparison to each other are enhanced by the cyclical nature of interaction promoted by social media sites in which young people post photos and receive likes, comments, and new followers. As a result, they may develop feelings of dissatisfaction with their physical appearance in relation to when it does not meet the idealised form of perfection that is presented on their social media platforms. The fascinating phenomenon of so-called social comparison, or the process, due to which people evaluate their personal worth in the social context by contrasting themselves with others, obtains particular relevance in the period of adolescence. According to a study carried out by Joinson in 2008, it was found out that young people tend to compare themselves with their peers in social media sites and they do so actively seeking affirmation and approval by the feedback and reactions that they get on their contemporaries. These comparisons are often unrealistic and may lead to unhealthy standards, as is often the case where young people compare their own bodies with the idealized bodies they see online. The ability to filter, edit, and enhance photos creates a warped idea of beauty that contributes to unhealthy comparison. The pressures of living up to these social perceptions and expectations may have an immeasurable influence on the self-esteem and general feeling of self worth among youths who are trying to find their way through their early years.

The effect of body image as shaped by the social media platforms can have significant mental health implications on young minds going through their early developmental stages. Constant pressure to conform to social standards of beauty and the continued comparison with idealized images may lead to low self-esteem, increased anxiety, and a sense of hopelessness. The psychological weight of such comparisons, as [McHugh \(2024\)](#) remarks, can be rather heavy, especially when it comes to young people who may already experience a range of pressures, such as societal expectations, family issues, or academic performance pressures. Adolescents who embrace the idea that their self-value depends on their physical appearance can face more emotional distress as they feel that they fail to meet the social standards. What is more, body dissatisfaction and mental health issues can create a reinforcing cyclic relationship. Adolescents dissatisfied with their physical images may engage in unhealthy behaviours, such as severe calorie limitation or over-exercising, which could further hurt their health, both physically and mentally. These behaviours may have the possible effect of developing a heightened feeling of inadequacy and further fuel a deep feeling of dissatisfaction with personal physical appearance thus leading to the continuation of the cycle of body dissatisfaction. Psychological challenges associated with the effect of social media on body image are particularly worrying, because they are likely to have a drastic effect on the overall well-being of a young individual. This involves their social connections, academic performances, and self-esteem [Valkenburg and Peter \(2009\)](#); [Odgers and Jensen \(2020\)](#).

The role that social media plays in shaping the body image in adolescents is indisputably huge and highly complex. On the one hand, social media is an interactive platform of self-expression and self-exploration where young people could find the words to express their ideas, connect with their peers, and explore the ins and outs of their identities. On the other hand, however, it also introduces an impressive number of challenges, particularly concerning the unrealistic standards of beauty that are all over social media apps like Instagram. The continuous exposure to the airbrushed images, along with the ability to edit and improve photos, creates a distorted view of the reality and leads to unhealthy comparisons. Young girls, especially those of the female sex, are in a vulnerable position of being adversely affected by societal beauty standards. It might result in serious body

dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and other mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders. It is important to understand the immense effect that social media platforms have on the body image and general mental health of young people as they continue to engage with them. Moreover, it is high time to promote more healthy and natural images of beauty in the online environment.

#### 4. CYBERBULLYING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Even though social media networks provide young people with opportunities to connect with others, self-expression, and self-exploration, they also expose them to significant harm, especially the growing threat of online bullying. The cloak of anonymity and the wide reach that digital medium affords gives an atmosphere that invites malicious activities, such as bullying, ostracism, and the spreading of damaging gossip. Being at the complex stage of self-exploration, young people are particularly vulnerable to the emotional and psychological effects of cyberbullying. The given type of harassment might be even more intense than the traditional bullying due to its persistent and ubiquitous nature. The consequences of cyber bullying extend far beyond temporary emotional distress; they are capable of causing long lasting damage to the psychological health, self esteem and very identity of the youth.

In today's world, the surge of various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat has created a digital environment for young people where the issue of bullying extends far beyond the traditional confines of the schoolyard. According to [Boyd \(2014\)](#), the realm of social media provides a platform where individuals can partake in bullying actions devoid of the direct, personal interaction that is typically associated with conventional bullying practices. Cyberbullying encompasses the utilisation of online platforms to inflict harm upon individuals, which includes actions like dispatching menacing messages, publishing damaging remarks, disseminating humiliating images or videos, and circulating unfounded gossip. In contrast to conventional bullying, which often has specific locations and timeframes, cyberbullying possesses the ability to manifest at any moment and in any setting. This pervasive nature significantly complicates the ability of young individuals to find refuge from such harassment [Patchin and Hinduja \(2015\)](#). The digital existence of teenagers is now profoundly intertwined with their perceptions of self-worth and personal identity, with their self-esteem being significantly influenced by encounters with cyberbullying. According to [McHugh \(2024\)](#), the mental repercussions of experiencing online bullying can result in various psychological conditions, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This situation raises significant alarm as it has the potential to disrupt a young person's capacity to establish a consistent sense of self during a vital phase of their growth and development. For a multitude of teenagers, social media acts as a reflection of their social status, and adverse encounters in the digital realm can profoundly impact their emotional and psychological health.

The psychological effects stemming from cyberbullying frequently surpass those associated with conventional bullying methods. According to [McHugh \(2024\)](#), the veil of anonymity afforded by the online realm empowers cyberbullies to exhibit heightened levels of aggression and tenacity, far surpassing what they might display in direct, personal encounters. Young individuals who fall victim to cyber harassment often endure profound loneliness, overwhelming embarrassment, and deep-seated feelings of inferiority, especially when the harassment includes direct assaults on their looks, social standing, or sense of self. This particular manifestation of harassment tends to be unyielding, given that online material can be disseminated

broadly and persistently available for an unlimited duration. The ramifications of cyberbullying extend far beyond the immediate emotional turmoil it inflicts. Extended encounters with digital bullying can result in increasingly serious psychological challenges, including heightened anxiety, deep-seated depression, and, in the most severe situations, thoughts of self-harm or suicide. As highlighted by [Odgers and Jensen \(2020\)](#), young individuals who encounter cyberbullying are exposed to a markedly elevated likelihood of developing mental health challenges in contrast to their peers who do not endure online mistreatment. In certain situations, the repercussions on mental well-being are exacerbated by harassment occurring in the physical realm, resulting in a continuous loop of emotional turmoil that young individuals struggle to break free from.

A significant element contributing to the detrimental effects of cyberbullying is the veil of anonymity that digital platforms afford individuals. In contrast to in-person encounters, where the aggressor faces repercussions for their behaviour through nonverbal signals like facial expressions and physical gestures, cyberbullying can transpire without prompt ramifications. The absence of face-to-face engagement enables individuals who bully to partake in harmful actions without confronting the emotional consequences they would encounter in a physical setting [Boyd and Ellison \(2008\)](#). This separation fosters an increased capacity for malevolence, as tormentors might experience diminished compassion for their targets when they are absent in a physical sense. Furthermore, the virtual essence of cyberbullying signifies that the damage endured by a young individual is enduring and relentless. According to [Livingstone \(2008\)](#), in contrast to conventional bullying that typically manifests at designated times (such as within the school environment), cyberbullying possesses the capability to transpire incessantly, around the clock, without any temporal restrictions. Even in instances where a young person is not directly participating in social media platforms, they can still encounter detrimental messages, visuals, or clips that persistently undermine their self-worth. The continual encounter with such circumstances may result in increased feelings of unease, tension, and melancholy. Moreover, as highlighted by [Vannucci et al. \(2017\)](#), young individuals encountering cyberbullying frequently struggle to break free from these detrimental exchanges, resulting in an overwhelming feeling of helplessness.

The process of finding a personal identity in the fascinating but also revolutionary years of adolescence is closely connected with the patterns of relationships between equals or different social groups. This phenomenon is considerably boosted by the sphere of social media which gives people the opportunity to present themselves and get feedback. However, when such digital identity is threatened or lost as a result of the malignant behaviour of cyberbullying, it may result in a feeling of identity crisis and devastation. According to [Drogos \(2015\)](#) the phenomenon of cyberbullying can easily disrupt a delicate balance that teenagers seek to achieve between the public and the private aspects of their identities. When young people are harassed in the online environment, in the cases where this can happen, they may begin to question not only their self-worth but also their place in the social structure and even the authenticity of their offline self. The battle between digital persona and the real life counterpart in an adolescent mind can make a tornado of emotional stress that makes self exploration more difficult in the adolescent life. As it has been noted by [Livingstone and Helsper \(2007\)](#), the need to maintain a particular image in the online environment may contradict the experiences of adolescents in the offline world, leading to the feeling of alienation and self-doubts. The psychological and emotional stress caused by these

interactions is immense and capable of worsening the already complex process of identity formation, which is already a complicated process at the adolescent age.

A significant hurdle associated with cyberbullying lies in the fact that young individuals often struggle to break free from the antagonistic atmosphere once they have become victims. The digital realm has significantly intertwined with the physical world, resulting in instances of harassment and bullying transcending their traditional boundaries and infiltrating both virtual and real-life environments. According to [McHugh \(2024\)](#), young individuals subjected to online harassment often face similar mistreatment in their everyday lives, especially when the material disseminated online is observed by classmates or within various social environments. The indistinct line complicates the quest for solace among teenagers facing harassment, perpetuating a continuous loop of psychological turmoil. Furthermore, due to the inherently open and accessible characteristics of social media platforms, instances of cyberbullying frequently transform into a widely observed phenomenon. Young individuals who find themselves subjected to online scrutiny might experience the sensation that their intimate challenges are being observed by a vast crowd, intensifying emotions of embarrassment and degradation. According to [Joinson \(2008\)](#), the self-esteem of adolescents is particularly vulnerable to outside opinions, and the overtly visible aspect of bullying can greatly erode their confidence and feelings of safety.

Despite the fact that the issue of cyberbullying may have significantly disastrous effects on the lives of young people, strong support systems comprising of relatives, friends, and psychological experts are imperative in helping teenagers to wade through such challenges. As [Patchin and Hinduja \(2015\)](#) state, it is of utmost importance to make young people experience nurturing environments both in the digital and real worlds, where they may share their experiences and seek guidance. Moreover, a study performed by Moreno and other researchers in 2016 points to the fact that a young person who has access to mental health resources and is willing to share his or her feelings openly is better at coping with the psychological consequences of cyberbullying. The need to empower teenagers with tools to deal with and address online bullying cannot be over emphasized by guardians and teachers. These include the promotion of digital literacy, which allows young people to navigate the virtual world safely and responsibly, as well as offering self-care methods and ways of managing mental health. Working toward creating open and approachable avenues of discussion about digital interactions and relations may go a long way in helping young people feel less isolated and more empowered about raising awareness of instances of harassment whenever they happen.

Cyberbullying is an issue that is spread alarmingly in our modern digital environment, and its effects on the psychological health of young people are deeply important. The shroud of secrecy and the unblinking 24/7 existence of digital bullying creates a dangerous environment where young people can experience severe emotional and psychological anguish. The experience of online bullying can greatly damage the self-esteem of a young individual, disrupt the process of self-exploration, and contribute substantially to the development of such psychological issues as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Cyberbullying also comes with a significant mental toll that can be particularly harmful at the adolescent age, when exploring the world and developing emotionally is crucial. By promoting safe online environments, building robust support systems, and normalising open discussions about cyberbullying, we can help young people navigate the intricacies of the online world, without compromising their mental health and well-being.

## 5. PRIVACY, INTIMACY, AND SELF-EXPRESSION

The emergence of social media platforms has brought about profound transformations in the ways young individuals cultivate connections, articulate their identities, and manage their personal privacy. These digital arenas function not merely as venues for outward self-expression but also cultivate a setting in which young individuals can delve into their personal realms and forge deeper, more meaningful relationships. According to [Livingstone \(2008\)](#), platforms for social networking are frequently utilised by young individuals not solely for the purpose of crafting public personas, but also for the expression of deeper, more intimate thoughts and feelings. Platforms for social interaction provide young individuals with a distinctive chance to engage in closeness and articulate emotions that they might not readily convey face-to-face. Nonetheless, these identical platforms introduce complexities into the intricate journey of identity development, especially regarding the delicate equilibrium between closeness, confidentiality, and the demands of showcasing a polished version of oneself to the digital realm.

The period of adolescence marks a significant phase during which young individuals embark on a journey of self-discovery, navigating their identities in connection with those around them. At this pivotal juncture in one's existence, the significance of friendships among peers escalates, while digital platforms emerge as crucial arenas for teenagers to navigate their social exchanges. Digital communication platforms, particularly those such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, empower young individuals to forge connections with their contemporaries in manners that are unattainable through conventional in-person exchanges. Through the act of sharing experiences, reflections, and emotions in the digital realm, young individuals have the opportunity to forge more profound relationships and delve into the intricacies of their emotional worlds [Boyd and Ellison \(2008\)](#). This holds significant relevance since young individuals frequently engage with these platforms to traverse emotional hurdles, pursue companionship from peers, and validate their sense of self. For instance, a young individual may disclose intimate anecdotes on their social networking account, encompassing difficulties associated with academic life, relationships with peers, or even struggles pertaining to emotional well-being. According to [Livingstone \(2008\)](#), the act of sharing plays a crucial role in the process of self-expression. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter function as digital journals, allowing individuals to articulate their innermost feelings, dreams, and sentiments to a broader community. Such expressions possess the potential to be profoundly empowering, providing young individuals with a valuable chance to express and contemplate their unique experiences while also gaining insights or affirmation from their contemporaries. Through this mechanism, social media serves as a conduit for fostering closeness, enabling young individuals to engage with peers who resonate with their shared experiences or emotions, thereby nurturing a profound sense of community and encouragement [Joinson \(2008\)](#). Nonetheless, these platforms bring forth a myriad of intricacies, especially regarding the differentiation between public and private forms of expression. Young individuals are tasked with the intricate challenge of managing the delicate equilibrium between fostering genuine emotional bonds and crafting a polished, frequently theatrical, representation of themselves for the spectators around them.

During the transformative years of adolescence, individuals embark on a journey of discovering intimacy and articulating their emotional selves. However, this exploration is often accompanied by considerable hurdles concerning the

preservation of their privacy. The limits of what is deemed suitable for online sharing frequently remain ambiguous, and young individuals might find it challenging to navigate the open and public aspects of their social media engagements. According to [Boyd and Ellison \(2008\)](#), social networking platforms provide young individuals with the chance to forge relationships, yet they simultaneously present various dangers, including breaches of privacy, the potential for identity theft, and the inadvertent dissemination of private data. Young individuals often find themselves driven to divulge intimate information as a means to uphold their social reputation or gain validation from peers. However, this tendency can result in a confusing overlap between private matters and those exposed to a wider community. The necessity to uphold a digital identity that resonates with societal standards or the anticipations of one's peers can feel incredibly burdensome. Young individuals often perceive a need to showcase themselves in a particular manner, frequently crafting content that aligns with societal norms or is deemed appealing ([Livingstone & Helsper, 2007](#)). The overwhelming influence to adhere to societal ideals of beauty, popular trends, or specific conduct can compel young individuals to alter their digital personas, occasionally distorting their authentic identities along the way. The occurrence of crafting a perfected version of oneself in the digital realm is intensified by the capacity to modify and enhance visuals, resulting in a skewed perception that can significantly diverge from their real-world personas ([Tiggemann & Slater, 2014](#)). Moreover, the enduring nature of digital material introduces an extra dimension of intricacy. According to [Livingstone \(2008\)](#), young individuals often lack a comprehensive understanding of the enduring consequences associated with their online presence. Upon dissemination, various forms of content—be it a social media post, an image, or a video clip—can persist indefinitely, creating difficulties for young individuals in their attempts to erase traces of their former identities. The enduring characteristic of digital material can evoke feelings of unease, particularly among young individuals who might be concerned about potential repercussions or feelings of remorse regarding the content they have disseminated. During the tumultuous journey of adolescence, young individuals often grapple with the delicate balance of yearning for self-expression while simultaneously recognising the importance of safeguarding their personal privacy. This internal conflict can lead to a state of bewilderment regarding which facets of their existence ought to be shared openly with the world and which should be carefully shielded from public view. The emergence of platforms featuring intricate privacy configurations, like Instagram and Snapchat, can significantly complicate this endeavour, as individuals are required to consistently oversee their settings and determine who is permitted to access particular posts ([Valkenburg and Peter \(2009\)](#)). The open and visible aspect of numerous social media exchanges can render young individuals susceptible to examination and criticism, especially when they disclose intimate or contentious material.

The vital aspect of identity development in adolescence is that the relationships, whether in real or digital space, have a significant impact on how the individual perceives the self. Social interaction websites provide the youth with unique opportunities to develop and maintain social ties that otherwise might not be possible. As an example, young people can get in touch with friends in different geographical locations, form online communities and have a shared experience that transcends the boundaries of physical space. [Joinson \(2008\)](#) reports that notwithstanding the fact that relationships developed in social media may lack face-to-face interaction, they still may have a deep emotional significance to young people. The relationships formed in the online space can offer dramatic feeling of

belonging and emotional support, particularly to the young people who may feel lonely within their offline environments. However, relationships that young people develop in the online space sometimes lack any depth or authenticity. Social media applications allow people to be connected and interact with each other; however, they often fail to provide the richness and colorfulness of face-to-face communication. Many of the interactions via social media sites are based on the notion of performative self-representation, where participants post statuses and other updates that reflect an idealized version of their lives or selves [Joinson \(2008\)](#). Therefore these interactions might as well be very superficial in nature and as such young people may find it very difficult to filter out the differences between real relationships and those that are merely designed to appear online. The dramatical nature of social media can oftentimes lead to confusion in the mind of young people, who may not be able to tell the difference between their online relationships being real or false fronts. This issue of distinguishing between authentic relationships and superficial engagement may also create emotional stress as young people may develop uncertainty about the genuineness of the relationships they build within the online space. The uncertainty related to this position can produce psychological discomfort concerning the maintenance of the proper image and meeting the expectations of co-workers and hence introducing another levels of complication into the process of self-identity development [Kross et al. \(2013\)](#). Moreover, the ability to communicate with the people in the virtual world, without any personal contact, can lead to the misinterpretation of messages and emotions. As the analysis conducted by Vannucci and the group of researchers in 2017 suggests, the absence of non-verbal cues in online communication can lead to misunderstandings, which can negatively affect the relationships with other people as well as the self-perception of the individual. It is possible that young people who mainly interact through online means may have problems with working with their emotions and the feelings of others and this may hinder their ability to successfully deal with interpersonal relationships in real life scenarios.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The social media is now a large aspect of adolescent life which has had an in depth effect on their identity developments. On the one hand, these platforms provide adolescents with self-expression, creativity, and the ability to connect with others, allowing them to explore the different aspects of themselves. Conversely, social media is also associated with some considerable dangers, including the necessity to meet the beauty standards established in society, the emotional depressions caused by cyberbullying and privacy issues. These complications may help make the development of an integrated and consistent self-concept difficult. The teenagers are especially susceptible to the harmful impact of these sites, which may result in psychetti such as anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction. Therefore, even though social media offers adolescents an arena to interact with others and express themselves, it also needs direction and assistance, so that they can utilize such digital platforms without any harm. Parents, teachers, and mental health professionals should collaborate and find a solution so that teenagers could utilize social media in a healthy and responsible manner, fostering self-awareness and resilience in the face of further growth and identity formation during the digital era.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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