

## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUNGSTERS ATTENTION, CONFIDENCE, AND EMOTIONAL STABILITY

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to investigate how the widespread growth of social media and the integration of AI-generated materials in digital platforms have affected the cognitive, emotional, and practical development of young people. In particular, this research focuses on emotional instability due to low -focus spans, the revival of confidence and digital dependence during the early years of development. The purpose of the study is to find out how online engagement changes traditional educational and developmental routes and identifies potential interventions within educational settings. This qualitative study employed a multi-dimensional approach, including semi-composed interviews with teachers, and an online survey distributed to students between the age of 18–25 years. The data collection focuses on attention, emotional regulation and behavioral indicators of self-esteem. Additionally, students were analyzed on social media use habits, including frequency, favorite platforms and intended interactions on self-presentation and verification.

The study revealed a consistent pattern of decrease in the duration of attention, while the teachers reported that the students often disrupted learning to check their phones or respond to information. Emotional reactions were found to be rapidly reactive, with a significant number of students indicating that the online response affected their mood throughout the day. Conclusions show that social media and AI-related materials are re-shaping young people to process information and regulate their feelings. Traditional teaching structures are under dynamic changes, as students find it difficult to engage rapidly in continuous and concentrated academic work. Emotional welfare is also at risk, as young people rely greatly on external verification through social platforms, which reduces the development of internal self-values and flexibility.

Educational institutions should incorporate digital and media literacy as well as emotional intelligence into their curricula, focusing on helping students develop self-awareness, attention control, and critical thinking. Implementing structured digital detox practices in classrooms can help rebuild students' capacity for better focus. Parental and educator involvement in setting boundaries for social media use is also essential. Encouraging offline achievements and real-world feedback mechanisms can help shift the focus from external validation to intrinsic growth and self-confidence. Mental health support systems within schools should address the emotional strain induced by social media pressure.

**Keywords:** digitalization, addiction, education, youth

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid rise and widespread integration of social media into everyday life has profoundly transformed the cognitive and emotional development of today's younger generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). What once served primarily as a means of casual communication has now evolved into a dominant force that shapes identity, relationships, and even worldview. As digital platforms become increasingly central to the routines and social interactions of young people, educators, mental health professionals, and parents alike are observing concerning shifts in attention span, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills (Andreassen, 2015; Keles et al., 2020). One of the most noticeable changes is a marked decline in the ability of young individuals to concentrate for extended periods. Constant exposure to bite-sized content, notifications, and the expectation of instant responses has led to a fragmented attention span, making sustained focus on academic tasks or deep thinking more challenging (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Emotionally, the digital environment can create a heightened state of reactivity. The curated and often idealized nature of social media feeds fosters unrealistic comparisons, leading to increased anxiety, low self-esteem, and mood swings (Balta et al., 2020; Alonzo et al., 2021).

### 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The immediacy of online interactions can make it harder for young people to pause, reflect, and process their feelings in healthy ways. Instead of working through emotions or disagreements constructively, many resort to avoidance, online venting, or passive-aggressive behaviors. Moreover, the constant pursuit of online validation, through likes, shares, and comments, has cultivated a form of digital dependency where self-worth becomes tied to external feedback. This can block authentic self-expression and reduce resilience in the face of criticism or failure.

The ability to engage in meaningful, face-to-face conflict resolution is also diminishing, as many young people find it more comfortable to express disagreement behind screens rather than through direct, empathetic conversation. For this analysis qualitative study was used with a multi-method approach, including semi-structured interviews with educators, and an online survey distributed to students aged 18–25. Data collection focused on behavioral indicators of attention, emotional regulation, and self-esteem. Additionally, content analysis was performed on students' social media use habits, including frequency, preferred platforms, and interactions focused on self-presentation and validation.

### 3. RESULTS

One of the most striking and concerning effects of the digital media landscape is the noticeable decline in young people's attention span (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). In an environment where instant gratification is the norm, young minds are being trained to process information in short, rapid bursts (Andreassen, 2015). The constant influx of push notifications, quick-scrolling social media feeds, and the popularity of short-form content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram have significantly reshaped the way students interact with information (Samet & Wright, 2022). Instead of engaging deeply with a subject, they are often compelled to jump quickly from one distraction to the next. This shift in cognitive behavior is not just incidental. Many educators across different educational levels report a growing difficulty in keeping students' attention during lessons or readings. A common observation is that young learners struggle to read even a single paragraph of text without experiencing an almost reflexive urge to check their phones, respond to messages, or engage with whatever digital distraction is most immediately available. It is particularly diverted how this ecosystem discourages the development of patience, persistence and critical thinking. The scan, ability to swipe and scroll, in most cases, substitute for desire, sit with complex thoughts, brood over them and make deep understanding. Such tendencies weaken the foundations of deep education, which are based upon reflection, mental endurance and ability to grapple with uncertainty and complexity.

In addition, AI-generated algorithms contribute to this cognitive change, which prioritize content and provide immediate emotional or visual gratifications. Such systems are designed to capture our attention, not by stimulating thoughtful reflections, but by engaging our most immediate desires and interests. As a result, young people are rapidly drowning in digital experiences that reward rapid consumption and passive interactions rather than intellectual curiosity and significant analysis. To combat this, teachers, parents and policy makers must recognize the importance of focusing as a fundamental life skills in young people. This may mean implementing technical-free teaching places, teaching digital literacy and mindfulness, and encouraging habits that support continuous attention. Only by doing this can we expect to restore the cognitive depth required for young people to flourish both academic and individually in the digital age.

Traditionally, confidence was nurtured through a gradual process, which included skills, coherent efforts and development of tangible real-world achievements (Balta et al., 2020). This type of confidence was in personal development and satisfaction from overcoming challenges, learning new abilities and achieving goals through firmness. Whether he is mastery in a game, excellent in academics, or making a meaningful contribution to a community, self-value was deeply bound by internal progress and internal inspiration. However, in the digital age, this fundamental model of confidence has been interrupted by the widespread impact of social media. A new form of verification has surfaced, a one which is obtained online on approval and attention. Instead of measuring their value through internal benchmark or individual development, many youth now look at social media platforms for confirmation. Matrix such as choice, shares, comments and followers have become symbolic indicators of popularity, success and even identity (Andreassen et al., 2012).

It can prevent authentic self-expression and reduce flexibility in front of criticism or failure (Pontess, Griffith, 2015). This change has a deep implications for the development of self-esteem and emotional flexibility. The pressure to present the online personality and an ideal image cuisted can cause frequent contact with unrealistic expectations and inadequacy feelings. As a result, the self-value depends on how others consider and response on the online appearance of someone. A picture that attains many choices can temporarily promote confidence, while a post that is ignored or criticized can trigger anxiety, self-doubt and low sense of value. Instead of creating confidence through meaningful achievements and individual reflections, many young people experience short-term burst of verification that provide very little in the way of permanent self-observation. These passing moments of online approval often fail to translate into deep, authentic confidence, leaving individuals in a constant cycle of formation, reaction and emotional vulnerability.

Another pressure in the digital age has a profound effect of social media on shaping the emotional reactions of young people. These platforms immerse users in the continuous flow of emotionally charged materials, including global crises and individual tragedies (Ryan et al., 2014; Saatho et al., 2021), and the stories and comic memes. This can dull their ability to constant switching emotions in a meaningful way, and they might find themselves in

emotional overstimulation, fatigue, or numbness (Balta et al., 2020). However, the speed and amount of consumption of this content allow for little space for meaningful emotional processing or reflective thinking. Instead of stepping away to sit with their emotions, learn their origins, and become emotionally literate, many young users are quickly swept into a cycle of shallow reactions. When a post elicits a reaction, it is quickly replaced by another, summoning a new emotional shift. This can desensitize their ability to switch feelings constantly in any real sense, leading to emotional exhaustion, weariness, or numbness. This is aligned with a reactive philosophy, in which feelings are readily experienced but briefly, with minimal introspection needed for change and self-understanding.

In addition, this surface-level relationship with the emotions can hinder the development of emotional intelligence, a life skill of a very critical nature that includes one's capacity to recognize, know, and control his own emotions. Without it developing, young people can struggle with complex mutual situations or dealing with genuine emotional issues. Their emotional reactions tend to be demonstrator, and this gives more shape than online attention or approval than real, inner perception. This phenomenon also exaggerates an overarching cultural problem: illusion of understanding. Viral content and flashy online persona often presents tough issues such as mental health, politics, climate change or social justice, straightforward or emotionally evocative hard issues. While these messages are able to create awareness, they are able to discourage critical thinking by offering emotionally gratifying narratives, which require little effort to consume. As a result, young viewers can create strong opinion or emotional reactions based on trending hashtags or affected comments, which misunderstand this risk for informed engagement.

In the previous generations, conflict and disagreement were generally addressed through face-to-face dialogue, active hearing and desire to compromise (American Psychiatric Association, 2024). Whether among friends, family members, or colleagues, to resolve differences, often confront the opinion also requires the ability to communicate with patience, sympathy and respect. These digital copy provide immediate relief from mechanism discomfort or conflict, but they come at the expense of long -term relationships and emotional development (Kail et al., 2020). Instead of engaging in direct interaction to solve misunderstanding or disagreement, it is common to rely on strategies to escape to participate in obstruction, ghostly or canceled culture. These digital copy systems provide immediate relief from discomfort or conflict, but they come at the cost of relationships and emotional development for a long time. By avoiding uncomfortable interactions or biting them with anti -dase, young people recall opportunities to make flexibility, refine their communication skills and learn the art of compromise. They are less likely to develop hard relationships, manage creative conflict or to deal with a healthy way. Over time, this avoidance may have low capacity for sympathy and tolerance for various approaches may be reduced.

Ultimately, the decline of creative conflict solution in digital locations is serious implications for the emotional development and social harmony. If the youth are not given equipment, or encouragement, then they can fight to face conflict with openness and maturity, they can struggle to create healthy relations, effectively cooperate, or contribute to inclusive and balanced communities. Refusing the value of dialogue, disagreement and respectable interaction, both online and offline, is required to promote more emotionally intelligent and socially connected generations.

#### **4. DISCUSSIONS**

Paradoxically, despite living in an era with unprecedented access to information about mental health, young people today report alarmingly high levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress (Alonzo et al., 2021). Awareness of psychological well-being has undoubtedly increased, students can readily define terms like trauma, burnout, depression, and anxiety, and they frequently encounter mental health discourse through social media, educational programs, and public campaigns. However, this rise in mental health literacy has not necessarily translated into greater emotional resilience or improved coping strategies.

Many young individuals can articulate their emotional states using clinical vocabulary, yet they often lack the practical tools to manage those emotions effectively. The ability to name a psychological experience is important, but it does not automatically equip a person with the capacity to navigate adversity, regulate stress, or rebound from setbacks. Emotional resilience, the inner strength to adjust under duress, is built by experience, good effort and establishment of healthy inclinations. These skills are far too frequently, however, not exercised in the context of presentness and continual electronic stimulation. Social media, while it may be a space for consciousness and social support, also serves to decrease mental welfare. Warning contact for effective curated images of success, beauty and happiness can feed sustenance to inappropriateness feelings of deficit and comparison. Even well-meant mental health materials sometimes may be caring for hard emotional experiences or facilitating self-diagnosis without guidance. As a result, young people can feel more overwhelmed by their feelings, despite being a broad mental health terminology, no less. Moreover, the culture of immediacy promoted by digital life discourages patience, perseverance, and delayed gratification, qualities essential for building psychological endurance. When everything from entertainment to social approval is available at the tap of a screen, it becomes harder to tolerate frustration,

boredom, or failure. Emotional discomfort, instead of being seen as a natural part of growth, is often met with avoidance or distraction. This makes it difficult for students to develop the resilience required to face life's inevitable challenges with confidence and clarity.

Despite the tireless efforts of educators to cultivate knowledge, critical thinking, and intellectual curiosity in the classroom, social media has emerged as the dominant force shaping the worldviews of today's youth (Twenge, Campbell, 2018). Teachers work diligently to strengthen environments that encourage open dialogue, nuanced understanding, and evidence-based reasoning. Yet, outside the classroom, young people are immersed in digital ecosystems where information is not evaluated by its truthfulness or complexity, but by its shareability, emotional appeal, and viral potential. Social media platforms, with their algorithm-driven content curation, play a powerful role in constructing the reality that many young people perceive. Influencer narratives, short-form videos, trending topics, and emotionally charged headlines often capture more attention than textbooks or thoughtful classroom discussions. These digital effects are accessible, attractive and sometimes exist, not only offering entertainment, but a framework, through which identification, values and beliefs are formed and reinforced. The result of this is that when teachers introduce students to important approaches, many people have already given the opinion of uncomfortable materials or charismatic personalities rather than carefully analysis or living experience. This presents an important and immediate challenge: traditional educational methods and ways to connect with increasing disconnections, confidence and information among young people. In classrooms, students are encouraged to question sources, examine references and consider several approaches. Online, they are often aligned with quick reactions, trends and popular ideas. As a result, the basic goals of education, such as developing independent ideas, nurturing respectable debate, and developing lifelong love of learning are decreasing.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The influence of social media on young people is undisputed, it explains how they focus, process emotions, resolve conflicts, and create confidence. Teachers face a difficult fight in competition with ubiquitous attraction of digital platforms. However, despite the challenges, the role of teachers is important. Although they may not be able to rival the continuous engagement of social media, they can provide some irreplaceable, real, in-tradition human connections. By strengthening authentic relations, encouraging deep thinking and promoting emotional flexibility, teachers can unbalance the negative effects of social media and help students navigate the complexities of the digital age with greater awareness and self-existence.

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