PSYCHOLOGICAL SECURITY OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract: The investigation into the issue of psychological well-being for children and adolescents represents a critical domain within the realm of contemporary science and practice. In order to provide children and adolescents with timely psychological, educational, and informational support in situations that pose a threat to their security, it is essential to devise more comprehensive and cohesive strategies and interventions. Nowadays, social media platforms have emerged as a crucial avenue for both subsistence and interpersonal interaction. The younger generation has been brought up in a society where technology is an inextricable part of our existence, and this state of perpetual connectivity is known as "being always on". Moreover, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the cultural paradigm of constant online interaction: they establish virtual environments that fulfill their desire for affiliation, security, esteem, admiration, control, and acknowledgement, which manifests itself in the behavioral, emotional, and intellectual dimensions of their communication with others. Social media platforms cater to fundamental human needs by providing opportunities for social interaction and self-expression. This may serve as a plausible explanation for their widespread popularity and the comparatively high level of adolescent engagement with these platforms in contemporary society. Currently, there is a demand for problem-oriented research in the field of digital technologies, with a particular emphasis on analyzing individual interactions with digital devices through the lens of user requirements, psychological state, and security considerations. The study into the impact of social media on various facets of a child's mental well-being and security, as well as the exploration of the elements of the digital landscape that contribute to fostering a sense of psychological security in online platforms, remains a largely unexplored territory, akin to the shortage of instruments designed to gauge the psychological security of adolescent users. In this respect, research on behaviour and patterns of interaction of children and adolescents in social media exposes novel facets of exploring psychological security as a sociopsychological phenomenon in the lives of contemporary children in the age of digital reality.
Keywords: psychological security, social networks, children and teenagers, well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of information technologies across the globe is occurring at an unprecedented rate, permeating every sphere of life, from the economic landscape to political discourse, from service delivery to governmental administration, from educational institutions to everyday interactions. The employment of social media platforms has evolved into a significant form of leisure activity, enabling individuals to engage in virtual communication with others beyond the limitations of time and distance. Nonetheless, the swift integration of information technologies associated with internet usage into our daily lives not only presents a multitude of novel technological possibilities but also introduces new risks, including those that pose a threat to an individual's mental well-being.

Another critical aspect of this matter is delving into the intricacies of how Internet technologies impact diverse age groups, with a particular emphasis on children and young adults. The process of shaping the identities of contemporary children and adolescents, encompassing their attitudes, motivations, value systems, and behavioral patterns, is predominantly formed at the juncture where the virtual realm intersects with the physical world. On the one hand, in reality, children and adolescents express themselves by manifesting their individuality through distinctive attire, conduct, and association with specific, "their own" groups. On the other hand, this crucial process of socialization, essential for personal growth, is now increasingly shifting to the digital realm.

The field of social network psychology is a relatively new discipline that has emerged over the past 15 to 20 years in parallel with the development and proliferation of social media platforms. Virtual social media platforms represent a relatively recent development, with the official inception of social media networks being traced back to 2004 when Facebook was established. Consequently, the ongoing psychological research remains in its nascent phase, yet even at this point, numerous facets of the influence exerted by social media on children and adolescents have been explored (Orben, 2020).

2. MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

The findings of the research indicate that adolescents who engage in excessive social media usage, exceeding three hours per day, are significantly more prone to developing mental health issues, specifically, heightened symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders (Riehm et al., 2019). The excessive use of platforms such as TikTok and Instagram has been linked to a decline in life satisfaction, impulsive behavior, and a heightened risk of developing mental health issues (Jacqueline, 2020). Although social media and technological innovations such as artificial intelligence (AI) provide opportunities for creativity and social interaction, the findings suggest that their influence on adolescent mental well-being is complex and necessitates a nuanced analysis of both the advantages and potential risks they pose. Simultaneously, a review of the scholarly literature reveals a dearth of conclusive data regarding the precise duration of time spent online without incurring the risk of developing an addiction. For instance, for certain individuals, "normal" may imply abstaining from the use of the internet altogether. According to Leonard Holmes, "...the content of individual's online activity is often more significant than the amount of time spent on it" (Holmes, 2017). Certain activities may be inherently more engaging for a person, thereby potentially becoming more "addictive". From the perspective of L. Holmes, there exists a singular means of identifying whether or not the use of the internet is leading to addiction: it is the delicate balance between "normal" and "addictive" internet usage that is determined by the extent to which it interferes with an individual's overall life (Soldatova et al., 2011).

In the year 2019, the Mediascope research company conducted a study among residents of urban areas in Russia with a population exceeding 100000 individuals, specifically focusing on the online activities of their children. According to the survey data, 93 percent of children between the ages of 5 and 11, 89 percent of children aged between 5 and 7, and 97 percent of children aged 8 to 11 use the internet. The increasing rate of internet usage among today's children is a matter of concern. Whereas just a few years ago, individuals began to engage with the internet at the age of 6 or 7, now it has become a common occurrence for children as young as 4 or 5 to start using it. What is more, according to the observations of some psychologists, this begins at the age of two. Between the ages of five and seven, children independently spend approximately 39 percent of their time online. By the time they reach eight to eleven years of age, this proportion increases to 55 percent. As children grow older, their frequency of internet access and time spent online increase. With the passage of time, children become more and more independent in their use of the internet, relying less on parental guidance or supervision. This trend is facilitated by the proliferation of internet-enabled devices such as smart phones, which are increasingly accessible to young people. Today's adolescents engage in a remarkable feat of digital engagement, checking their smart phones an astonishing 90 times per day, and devoting up to seven hours of their daily time to this activity (Mediascope, 2019).

Thus, social media platforms have become an inextricable part of the everyday existence of contemporary children. It is not surprising that parents, scholars, and policy-makers are preoccupied with the impact of social media on the well-being and psychological security of children. Despite a significant corpus of research on this subject, the findings remain inconclusive, giving rise to intense discussions about the impact of social media on children's mental health, with some arguing that it is detrimental, others maintaining that it is irrelevant, and still others contending that it can be beneficial. A number of scholars have cast doubt on the credibility of the current body of evidence, emphasizing that the extant research fails to establish a causal link between social media usage and mental well-being. Furthermore, the body of literature presents a variety of contradictory findings (Valkenburg, Meier & Beyens, 2022). Not only have scholars engaged in a discussion about the absence of longitudinal or causative evidence (Odgers & Jensen, 2020), but there has also been a divergence of opinions regarding the significance of effect sizes (Orben & Przybylski, 2019, 2020; Twenge et al., 2020). Additionally, there is a lack of consensus on how to account for substantial individual variations, such as those related to age (Orben et al., 2022), gender (Booker, Kelly, & Sacker, 2018; Kelly et al., 2018), and ethnicity (Ghai et al., 2023).

In the process of human adaptation to new technological innovations, individuals develop a symbiotic relationship with their digital gadgets. Consequently, a smart phone ceases to be merely a tool, transforming into an integral part of one's identity. Digital devices are evolving into a form of "psychological instruments", transforming the qualitative attributes of mental phenomena and processes. Social media platforms provide users with a unique avenue for self-expression. The capacity to establish multiple accounts and curate content within one's profile has granted users unparalleled opportunities to cultivate diverse online personas. These newly digitalized avatars may align with, augment, or diverge from the users' authentic identities.

The satisfaction derived from social interactions can serve as a protective shield, offering emotional support and fostering a sense of belonging, security, and well-being (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013). To illustrate, a longitudinal investigation conducted by S. B. Rafnsson, A. Shankar, and A. Steptoe (2015) revealed that the magnitude and frequency of an individual's social network interactions serve as predictors of their future well-being and life satisfaction. Conversely, toxic or neglectful relationships can significantly affect adolescents' self-perception of

their own worth and may contravene the standards of trust, esteem, and mutual benefit that are typically upheld in social interactions (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999).

The use of social media has been shown to disrupt the natural course of family life, particularly in terms of impeding effective communication between parents and their children (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). The impact of social media on interpersonal connections has been a subject of extensive research. Ahn and Shin (2013) suggest that social media usage can contribute to feelings of social isolation, potentially leading individuals to avoid confronting problems in the physical world (Kim, LaRose, & Peng, 2009). This lack of meaningful offline interactions is linked to depression and further exacerbates feelings of isolation (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011), creating a vicious cycle that hinders personal well-being.

In the contemporary world, there is a great deal of focus on the safe and responsible use of the internet, as well as on the health, well-being, and psychological security of the vast majority of its users – children and adolescents. The research into the psychological effects of digital media on society has primarily focused on the potential risks and negative consequences of social media for adolescents, but it is essential to also consider the factors, criteria, and indicators that contribute to the positive aspects of digital engagement, which can foster a sense of psychological well-being in children.

Psychological security is a condition of an individual's existence, in which they can meet their fundamental requirements for self-protection and perceive their own defensiveness within society (Zotova, 2012).

The concept of psychological security entails a multifaceted array of elements, encompassing aspects such as life satisfaction, resilience, resourcefulness, and more. Scholars who delve into the realm of assessing the psychological well-being of children and adolescents within virtual environments and social media platforms primarily approach this from the standpoint of identifying potential risks associated with the misuse of online technologies and the emergence of addictive behaviors.

The influence of social media on the psychological well-being of children is multidimensional and reciprocal. On the one hand, social media serves as a platform for children to maintain connections with their peers, which in turn can mitigate feelings of isolation and unease to some extent. This, in turn, contributes to their overall sense of happiness and contentment with life. On the contrary, studies demonstrate that an excessive dependence on social media platforms can exacerbate negative emotions in children, resulting in heightened symptoms of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress. This ultimately leads to a substantial decline in psychological well-being (Shoshani, Kor & Bar, 2024).

Despite the inherent risks associated with the use of social media, it has also been linked to positive outcomes such as enhanced creativity, increased self-expression (Collin et al., 2011), and improved peer relationships with otherwise inaccessible groups. These developments, in turn, may contribute to enhanced well-being (Collin et al. 2011) and increased feelings of psychological security. In light of the fact that the risks and possibilities associated with social media platforms are intrinsically interconnected (Collin et al., 2011), it becomes imperative to equip young individuals with the ability to effectively navigate these digital landscapes, thereby enabling them to fully leverage the myriad benefits that these platforms have to offer.

Children and adolescents often fail to appreciate the perils and hazards associated with the internet, rendering them among the most unprotected and vulnerable digital users. To fully utilize this tool, one must possess not only the ability to operate it, but also a wealth of life experience that enables them to identify potential dangers in a timely manner. The reality is that evaluating the peril inherent in any given situation is a function of an individual's life experiences. These experiences empower us to foresee potential harm and adverse outcomes, allowing us to swiftly assess the level of threat and risk.

Moreover, the correlation between social media usage and a child's emotional well-being is contingent upon a multitude of variables, such as gender, familial support, and household income (Napoli, 2019). Parents play a significant role in ensuring the safe use of social media. A plethora of research demonstrates that parental involvement, communication, and monitoring while using social media can substantially reduce the adverse effects of problematic online activities. For instance, parental involvement and open communication can be instrumental in preventing issues such as cyber bullying, while fostering positive social interactions among children and contributing to the development of psychological security (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Fardouly et al., 2018). Parents ought to strive for media literacy in order to assist their children in recognizing the dangers and possibilities associated with social media platforms. Parental guidance and emotional support can substantially enhance a child's capacity for emotional resilience in the face of online stressors and social comparison dynamics (Yust, 2014). This, in turn, bolsters an individual's sense of psychological security.

Educational institutions also contribute significantly to the development of healthy social media practices among children. Through the implementation of media literacy and mental health initiatives, educators can empower children with the abilities to effectively manage stress associated with social media use and foster positive online

experiences (Donelle et al., 2021). Furthermore, educational institutions must create a nurturing and secure atmosphere that promotes healthy digital practices and reduces feelings of loneliness and unease (Lahti et al., 2024).

3. CONCLUSION

The provision of interpersonal support within the school environment, particularly in the form of positive interactions between educators and learners, can serve as a means of addressing the potential absence of emotional support experienced by some students in their home lives (Guo et al., 2024).

The collaboration between parents and educators is of paramount importance in fostering a child's wholesome development and contributing to enhancing their sense of psychological security. When families and educational institutions work together to establish guidelines for social media usage and maintain vigilance through consistent communication, it can lead to a substantial enhancement in children's overall well-being and mental health (Shoshani, Kor & Bar, 2024). The regular communication between parents and educators not only serves as an effective measure to prevent the adverse effects of excessive social media usage, but also fosters collaborative efforts aimed at addressing more intricate psychological and behavioral challenges, such as cyber bullying, with greater efficacy. Through these cross-disciplinary joint efforts, parents and educators can offer more holistic support to children, assisting them in maintaining their mental well-being and social equilibrium in an ever-evolving digital environment (Twigg, Duncan & Weich, 2020).

Therefore, social media platforms cannot be considered independently or removed from the context of daily life. The manner in which a child utilizes these, the part they play in their existence, and the impact they exert on their development are shaped by an extensive array of factors, ranging from the intimate micro system in which the child resides to the macroscopic indicators of the broader societal landscape.

A deeper exploration into the impact of social media on the development of psychological security among children and adolescents within online platforms will enable us to pinpoint vulnerable populations. Grasping the essence of adolescents' psychological security in social media platforms can prove invaluable for professionals in the realm of education administration, pedagogy, parenting, and child psychology. Given the complex nature of this phenomenon, in-depth qualitative research into individuals' experiences with social media and their subjective perceptions of its influence on their psychological security can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms. In clinical settings, this knowledge can also assist healthcare professionals in identifying both the "protective" and "risky" aspects of social media usage, thereby facilitating the development and implementation of targeted psychological interventions.

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