UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN's FUND

The role of social media on the social-emotional development of children and young adults.

Research Report

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Fake news

Forum: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Issue: The role of social media on the social-emotional development of children and young adults

Position: President, Deputy President

Introduction

Nowadays, technology has evolved and progressed dramatically, offering the younger generations the opportunity of growing up in a much different environment than the one their parents and grandparents grew up in. Thanks to advances in technology, several new electronic devices have been built that are now used by young adults and teenagers. Whilst they really are helpful in multiple cases such as research for school assignments, remaining in touch with friends through texting and video calling with friends, watching a movie and other entertainment purposes, social media apps like Instagram, Tik Tok, Facebook, Snapchat etc. sometimes can take a huge toll in people's lives, in the most negative way, that is.

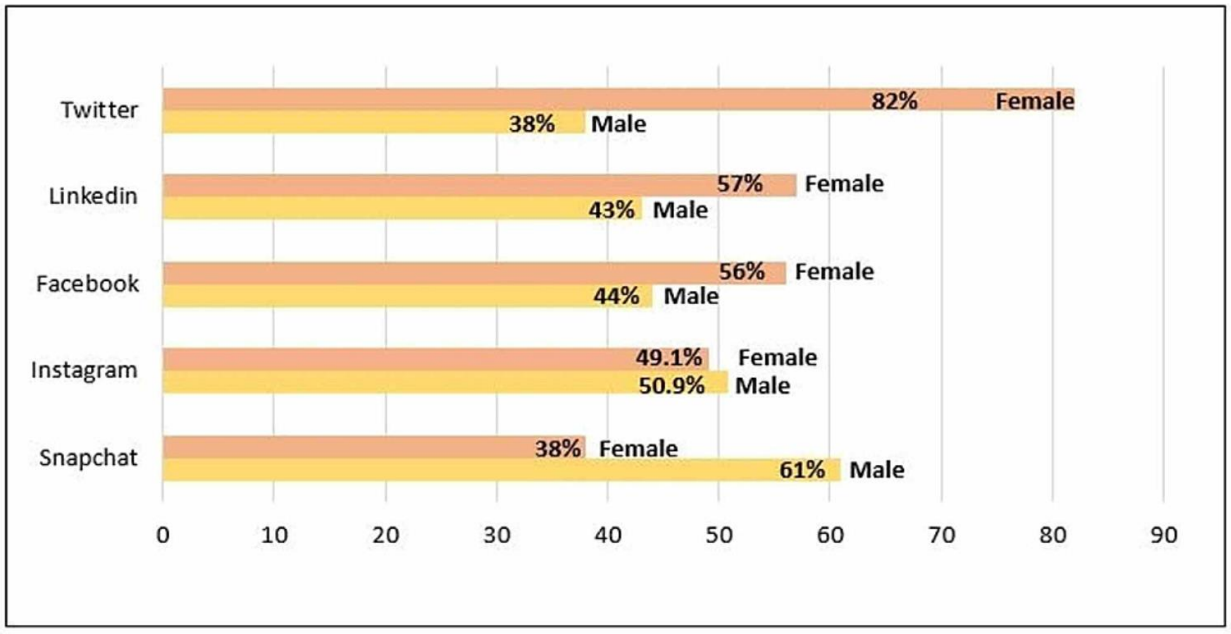
To begin with, social media users tend to get so attached to social media that they start neglecting every other aspect of their lives. Things such as hanging out with close friends and family, having a proper sleeping schedule and even eating a day's worth of food are not only pushed aside, but sometimes they are surprisingly forgotten about. It is because of this that their participation in school decreases and there is literally no connection with the outside world.

At the same time, social media is a way of lowering a teenager's self esteem. To put it in other words, it is very easy for them to start comparing themselves to other users and wishing they would be just like them, which makes them think that they are not good enough in terms of how smart or pretty or sociable they are. These kinds of comparisons have them under the impression that if they change themselves and their personality, they will be more successful, popular, attractive and loved, and people who fit in somewhere. However, that could not be further from the truth.

These people, whether they are famous or not, have a high chance of becoming teenagers' role models and idols, since they have several traits and characteristics that may be praised by the social media world. For example, they either have a nice personality, a pretty face, a cool fashion sense and there are numerous other factors that can contribute to that, but over all, they can be one of the main reasons why teenagers feel the need to be using social media all the time; because they feel intrigued watching other peoples' lives, despite the fact that they might not even know them, and they start feeding into the thought that they should grow up to be exactly like those people.

It is because of this that they end up getting really depressed and might even reach extreme levels like detaching themselves from everyone. At the same time, spending more time on social media means that they are more likely to experience other symptoms like anxiety and hopelessness, and they might end up becoming obese.

To add in, it is important to mention that the content they might watch on social media can be fairly and at the same time extremely triggering, as celebrities and all kinds of people can promote eating and mental disorders as if it is something that should be put out there. Also, it is likely that people will come across other things such as animals getting butchered and killed, people being killed in war etc. which in some way people think is good because it raises awareness, but it can actually traumatize a user badly.



Definition of Key Terms

Social-emotional development: Social-emotional development includes the child's experience, expression, and management of emotions and the ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others.[1]

Mental health: emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

Social-media: a collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration.

Triggering: causing someone emotional distress (especially of something read, seen, or heard), typically as a result of arousing feelings or memories associated with a particular traumatic experience.

Role model: a person looked to by others as an example to be imitated.

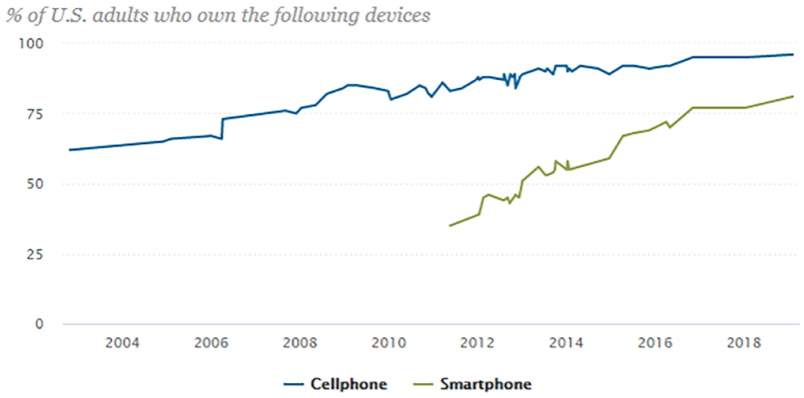
Idole: a person or thing that is greatly admired, loved, or revered.

Trauma: an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster.

Disorder promoting: celebrities or other types of social media users using and promoting serious disorders for their own benefit (e.g; for the purpose of gaining more followers they

[1] "Social-Emotional Development Domain." Social-Emotional Development Domain - Child Development (CA Dept of Education), https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/itf09socemodev.asp.

sympathize with them, more popularity and love).



General Overview

Children nowadays are born and raised in a digital world where they are exposed to and engaged in a life devoured by a variety of digital gadgets and concepts, both at home and in other environments. It is necessary to analyze and investigate the impact and effect that digital technologies and gadgets may have on children and young people since their usage is becoming increasingly widespread and is viewed as a need in households and other places. For students to learn and be taught about a range of subject areas, there are a large number of resources made available online in the form of video lessons, media, interactive games, and chat rooms. Teachers recommend and encourage students to use online resources both at home and in the classroom. It is important to recognise and comprehend the risks that children and young people may experience in the internet environment given the rise in technology and media use among them. We will be able to better understand the influence and impact that media, video games, and toys have on children's and young people's social and emotional development and wellbeing as a result of our careful examination and analysis of this effect, and we will then be better able to support and direct children as they develop in the digital world.

Social media is one of the most popular types of media that most children and young people use almost daily and has ingested its way into lifestyles and informal interactions of everyday life. Social media is viewed as a platform where people may establish an online identity and use it to interact, publish material, blog, and access social gaming environments. The social media platforms that are available online are made so that many kids and teenagers may interact with their friends and family and support any on-going education in the classroom.According to research studies like Valkenburg and Peter's (2009), social media and digital communication are crucial for deepening and establishing long-lasting friendships. There are worries that kids and young people are less connected to society and those around them as a result of the rise in communication through digital media. It is also a worry that many children's socioemotional and

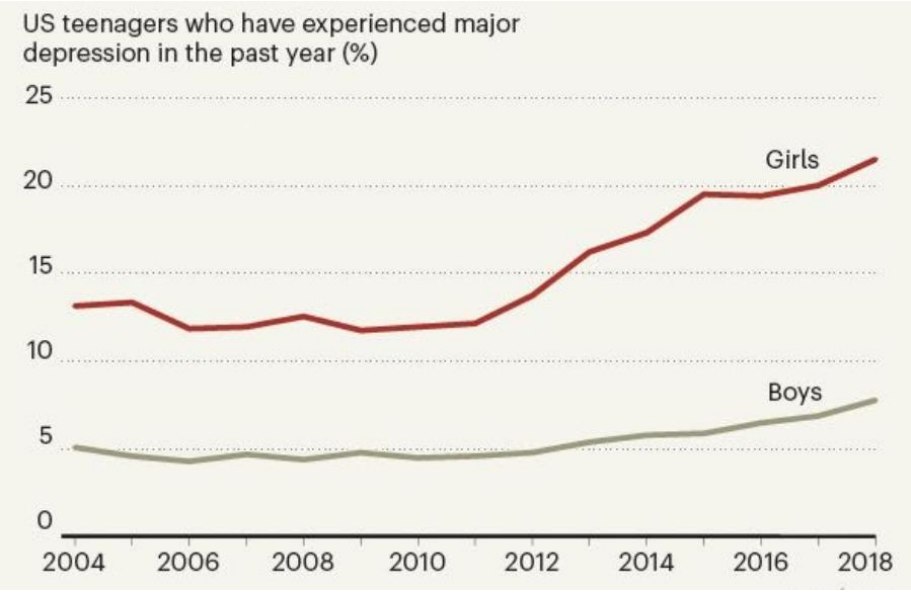
empathic growth and development may be hindered by a lack of in-person contacts as a result of social media being one of the major sources of communication. One of the major turning points in a child's life is their social development, which helps them grasp good and bad social norms, attitudes, and actions. Numerous studies have shown that the brain is most receptive to learning throughout the early years of life, which is when it is at its optimum. Additionally, it is believed that a child's early experiences mold their thoughts and direct them towards realizing their full potential as adults. Through interactions with peers and exposure to situations outside of the home, children start to develop their social awareness and understandings. Children who do not acquire social skills may experience exclusion from many of their classmates and display disruptive and antisocial behavior. According to a recent study by Sherman, Michikyan, and Greenfield (2013), there has been a severe decline in children and young people's capacity and awareness of social cues and skills being formed as a result of their usage and exposure to media and other technology. Children and young people are reportedly lacking in social and bonding skills due to the increase in media use since they aren't having the in-person contacts necessary to help them build the abilities they'll need to survive and adapt in everyday life.

Cyberbullying is another aspect of social media use that causes worry about the potential impact it may have on children and young people's social and emotional development and wellness. Cyberbullying is the primary threat to children and young people's general welfare in the modern world. According to research, cyberbullying has been more pervasive in many schools over the past ten years and poses a greater threat to children and young people. It is also now recognised as a serious worry in today's society. Cyberbullying is another facet of social media use that causes worry about the potential impact it may have on children and young people's social and emotional development and wellness. Cyberbullying is the primary danger to children and young people's wellness worldwide today. According to research, cyberbullying has been more pervasive in many schools over the past ten years and poses a greater threat to children and young people. It is also now recognised as a serious worry in today's society. Bullying and cyberbullying's aggressiveness and victimization might jeopardize children's and adolescents' safety and development. Bullying can indicate probable psychiatric illnesses in both the bully and the victim, and it can also worsen mental health in some situations.

In addition to cyberbullying, media may also have an impact on young people's social and emotional growth through bad body image or dissatisfaction with one's looks, which is an increasing issue for young girls in the UK, US, and Australia. According to sociocultural theory, perceived environmental pressure to adhere to a culturally determined body and beauty ideal leads to the development of negative body image. The mainstream media, which promotes an idealized and manufactured perception of female beauty that is unattainable for the majority of women, may be considered the single largest promoter of this ideal. Meta-analyses of data, mostly from the UK, USA, and Australia, show convincingly that exposure to slim "body perfect" ideals

in the media is substantially correlated with poor body image in women and girls, with teenage girls appearing to be especially susceptible to its harmful effects.

The very existence of children under 13 utilizing social media is concerning, according to Ms. Graber. Social media sites frequently feature disturbing and gory information that is inappropriate for young children. She remarked, "I used TikTok this morning, and live footage of the Ukraine battle is all over that app. Dr. Heitner warned that children could run across pornographic material, depictions of self-harm, or messages that encourage disordered eating. Even Roblox, a game that many younger children play, has recently experienced issues with adult material. According to Ms. Graber, another issue is the prevalence of false information on social media sites like YouTube. A small youngster has no concept of the difference between reality and fiction, she remarked. "So they may become lost in this maze of false information and discover a very perplexing world before them." She mentioned that a particularly unsettling algorithm on YouTube was created to gradually expose users to increasingly extreme stuff. Younger children shouldn't be exposed to the social intricacies that are inherent in social media, according to Dr. Heitner. She remarked that social comparison and the possibility of seeing activities that you aren't a part of or miss out on might be upsetting.



Major Parties Involved

United States of America

According to the findings of a poll released on Wednesday, children and teenagers in America are using screens and social media more than ever before, with the amount of time spent online dramatically increasing during the week. According to a poll conducted by the nonprofit research group Common Sense Media, screen time among teenagers and tweens grew overall by 17% between 2019 and 2021, expanding more quickly than it had the previous four years. Average daily screen time increased for adolescents (ages 13 to 17) to eight hours and 39 minutes from seven hours and 22 minutes, and for tweens (ages 8 to 12) to five hours and 33 minutes from four hours and 44 minutes (ages 13 to 18). The problems families faced with school, child care, and social engagement throughout the epidemic, experts noted, are certainly reflected in the increases that the study revealed. A rise in social media use among children aged 8 to 12 on websites like Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook is of particular concern to those who monitor screen time, despite the fact that such websites require users to be at least 13 due to a law that forbids businesses from collecting data from children. It's important to consider what kids are not doing when they spend so much time on screens. "You worry if it's replacing activities, like sleep, family time, reading, chores — other things that are positive for kids," Dr. Heitner said. "That's definitely a real concern."

China

In China, social networking applications are evolving quickly. Leading Chinese companies have made some significant changes in response to a government initiative to reduce app addiction, particularly among children. The Chinese counterpart of TikTok, Douyin, has been particularly forceful, making time limitations, built-in pauses, and blackout hours common features on its app. After observing how social media applications reduced children's time spent on socializing and homework, the Chinese authorities ordered these modifications. It is betting that the children will make up for any lost creativity and computer literacy with increased attention span and ambition by pushing them forwards. Therefore, we're going to see an unheard-of, uncontrolled trial regarding whether unrestricted social media access benefits or harms children.

United Kingdom

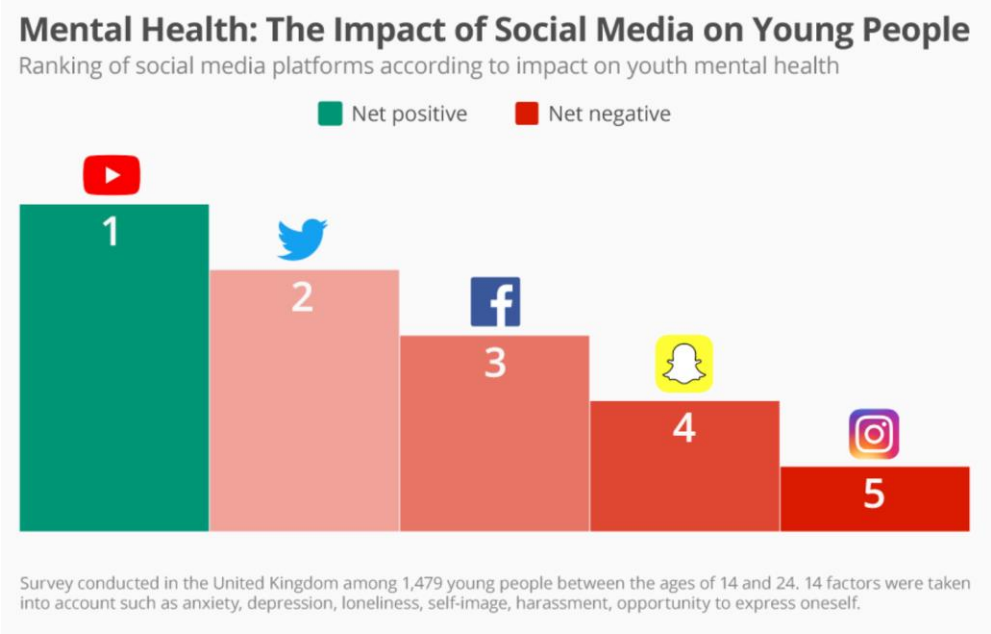
Over one-third of 15-year-olds in the UK are "severe internet users," which means they spend more than six hours every typical weekend day online, per Frith's research. In addition, one-third of UK residents first accessed the internet when they were six years old or younger (ibid). The vast majority of 15-year-olds (94.8%) utilized social media before and after school in 2015. (ibid).

Australia

Nearly all Australian children use the internet on a daily basis by the time they are five years old, and by the time they are adolescents, they are devoted users of social network services (SNS), online games, chat rooms, forums, and instant messaging. As more people use the internet using a phone or mobile device, their access has become more individualized, frequent, and accessible in a variety of public and private locations. In consultation with over 3,700 young people and families, ARACY (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth) identified the vital role supportive systems and environments play for child and youth wellbeing. The Mission Australia Youth Survey (Fildes et al., 2014) highlights how friend/s, parent/s and relatives/family friends were the top three sources of help – with over half of respondents indicating they would access the internet for help regarding important issues in their lives. Whilst 99 per cent of young Australians are online daily (Burns et al., 2013), quality access to technology remains an outstanding issue for many young Australians, limiting their capacity to access the benefits of social media (Blanchard et al., 2008; Humphry, 2014). Access issues are often most acute in marginalized or 'vulnerable' communities (Blanchard et al., 2008; Humphry, 2014). For example, the 29.7 per cent of Western Australian children and young people (aged 0-17) from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) ancestry (Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, 2013) are less likely to access the internet than their peers (Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, 2014: 245).

South Africa

According to the "SA Kids Online Study," published by UNICEF last year, more than 95% of South African children have regular access to the Internet. However, due to their dangerous online behavior, they may be subject to online abuse, exploitation, and violence. The 'SA Kids Online Study' shows that children primarily use the Internet to learn something new, to do schoolwork, or to watch video clips. However, a lack of awareness about the dangers online and access without parental consent present a risky scenario where vulnerable children can be exposed to online violence, exploitation and abuse. "The online world for children presents many positive opportunities, from accessing educational resources to connecting with peers," said Christine Muhigana, UNICEF South Africa Representative. "But online abuse can, as we too often tragically witness, have a devastating impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of children and young people," added Muhigana.



Timeline of Key Events

1999-2016: The BBC has reported that the American suicide rate has risen by 25 percent between 1999 and 2016.

2012-2017: Data shows that global daily use of social media sites has increased from 90 minutes per day to 135 — over two hours per day — in 2017.

2013: The 18 – 24 age group is the heaviest user of social media: 80 percent use Facebook, 78 percent use Snapchat, 71 percent use Instagram, and 45 percent use Twitter.

2013: A study found that older adolescents who used social media passively, such as by just viewing others' photos, reported declines in life satisfaction. Those who used social media to interact with others or post their own content didn't experience these declines.

2015: A study found that social comparison and feedback seeking by teens using social media and cell phones was linked with depressive symptoms.

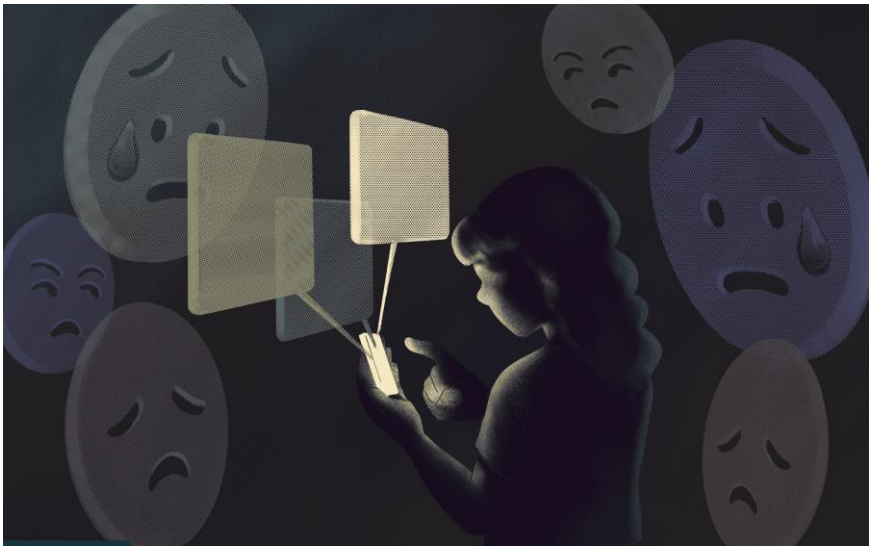
2016: Facebook is still the most heavily used social network, with 68 percent of Americans reporting that they use the site.

2016: A study of more than 450 teens found that greater social media use, nighttime social media use and emotional investment in social media — such as feeling upset when prevented from logging on — were each linked with worse sleep quality and higher levels of anxiety and depression.

2018: Pew Research Center survey of nearly 750 13- to 17-year-olds found that 45% are online almost constantly and 97% use a social media platform, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat.

2019: A study of more than 6,500 12- to 15-year-olds in the U.S. found that those who spent more than three hours a day using social media might be at heightened risk for mental health problems.

2019: Another study of more than 12,000 13- to 16-year-olds in England found that using social media more than three times a day predicted poor mental health and well-being in teens.



Possible Solutions

UN members need to come together and host a meeting in order to raise awareness for the subject. They can agree to create flyers with basic information and statistical facts in schools in

order for students to be able to have a deeper understanding of the matter and realize the importance of spending time off of social media.

Another proposal could be psychologists and counselors coming into schools to explain the benefits of not spending more than a certain time on your phone. They should explain the negative impact it has on one's mental health and how difficult it is for them to detach themselves from their phones.

Teachers and parents have to remind the students that they can spend their free time taking up other, more valuable activities such as sports, going on a walk, hanging out with friends and family, reading books, studying, cooking, or even learning a new foreign language. These activities are not only fun and beneficial for mental health, but they can also help us gain knowledge that would not be learned otherwise.

Furthermore, all parties must come together to build a support system for teenagers that may feel the need to reach out and talk to somebody about social media and its impact on their mental health. Said support system could come in several forms, such as podcasts, group therapy, online support sites where they can chat with expertees, hotlines made exclusively for teenagers and this particular matter etc.

Last but not least, it is very important that each school hires a time management specialist that gives advice to teenagers on how to manage their anxiety and time and how to set weekly goals that can help them focus on other aspects of life and keep their minds off of social media for a while.

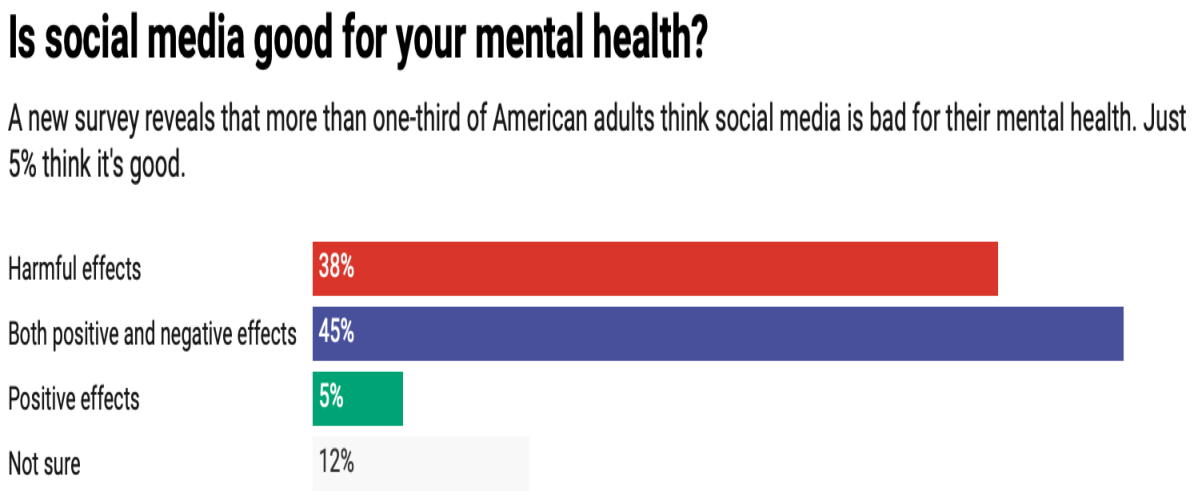
If teenagers ever happen to see racist comments, hate speech, sexual harassment, or bullying on social media, their parents should walk them through steps they can take. They can ignore the person, take screenshots for evidence, block the person on the platform, and report it to an adult. Parents, teachers or whoever is aware of this must tell them they can always come to them when something upsets them.

Parents should think twice before taking away the phone. Before they shut off the phone or tablet as a consequence for their behavior, think about whether they're using the device to cope with mental health problems. The online world -- despite its faults -- can help kids stay connected with friends, find a supportive community, and get trustworthy health information. If parents still need to take away the device, they have to make sure they have access to alternative resources.

Parents must pay close attention to social media if their kid is already struggling offline; they must watch for warning signs of mental health problems. These might include drug/alcohol abuse, loss of energy, frequent sadness, or avoiding contact with others. It is crucial that they

create a family media agreement. This can help the parents set expectations for what they do online and how much access they have to their social media accounts, and guide their decisions when you aren't around. Parental controls can help guardians manage what they do when the teenagers are not there.

Parents should set and have 'detox' periods. Schedule regular multi-day breaks from social media. Several studies have shown that even a five-day or week long break from Facebook can lead to lower stress and higher life satisfaction. Teenagers can also cut back without going cold turkey: Using Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat just 10 minutes a day for three weeks resulted in lower loneliness and depression. It may be difficult at first, but teenagers should be seeking help from family and friends by publicly declaring that they are on a break. And delete the apps for their favorite social media services.



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