

Effect of Social Media on Teens

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Abstract

This paper explores the effect of social media on teenagers mental health, self esteem, and social skills. I also delve into what are the most common mental health issues from the increased use of social media and how it compares to the teens that I surveyed. Also the effect of social media on teens social skills and how it compares to the teens I surveyed. In this experiment I surveyed 10 male teenagers and 10 female teenagers, ranging from the ages of thirteen to eighteen. Before conducting this experiment I predicted that the higher the exposure to social media the more mental health issues, self esteem issues, and communication problems that they would have. I also predicted that females would be more prone to having mental health and self esteem issues because of social media use. I was unsure which gender would have a harder time approaching a stranger in a public setting.

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Sociological research has numerous approaches such as interviews, surveys, and field research. But most sociological research stems from the same principal, the Scientific Method. Probably most people have heard about the scientific method from seventh grade science class but it is a little different when put in a sociological setting it is a little different. It starts with asking a question, in this case I asked the question does social media have an affect on teens mental health, self esteem, and communication skills.

The next step is researching existing sources. At first I wanted to do some research about how often do teens really use social media is it as often as society really thinks. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “22% of teenagers log on to their favorite social media site more than 10 times a day, and more than half of adolescents log on to a social media site more than once a day. Seventy-five percent of teenagers now own cell phones, and 25% use them for social media, 54% use them for texting, and 24% use them for instant messaging.” This paper also brings up how the increase use of social media can increase the likeliness of being cyberbullied and how it can cause can cause psychosocial problems like depression and anxiety which can lead to severe isolation and suicide.¹ I then looked into the effects of social media on teens mental health. I found an article from Good Morning America that references a study from

¹ <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/127/4/800.full.pdf>

the University College London. They tracked the social media use of around 13,000 U.K. teens from the time they were thirteen to sixteen years old. They then used the teens' own reports about their own well-being, cyberbullying exposure, and how much time spent sleeping and being physically active. From this study they found that 27% of frequent users of social media reported high psychological stress and those who were infrequent users only 17% reported high psychological stress. Which are not very high numbers and the researchers said these numbers were results of lack of sleep and physical exercise. But I can't help but wonder are children staying up late and not making time to exercise because they are distracted by social media. Lack of sleep can also lead to mental health issues. This GMA article also brings in a study from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) which states that, "Among middle and high school students, 21% of girls say they have been bullied online or by text messages, compared with less than 7% of boys." Which puts girls at an increased risk for the psychological effects of cyberbullying.² When I looked into the effects of social media on teens communication I found an article from Time magazine which says back in 2012 teens favored face to face contact with friends but now they prefer methods like texting, video chatting, and instant messaging. According to a study included in this article 54% of surveyed teens admit to they get distracted by social media rather than paying more attention to the people that they're with. Also one-third of surveyors said that they hardly ever put their phones away when visiting family, doing homework or having a meal with someone; and 55% say that their phones are almost always out when spending time with friends.³

²<https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/wellness/story/social-media-harmful-teen-girls-mental-health-64964978>

³ <https://time.com/5390435/teen-social-media-usage/>

The next step of the scientific method is to formulate a hypothesis. A hypothesis is “ is an assumption about how two or more variables are related.” This consists of independent variables, which is the cause of the change, and dependent variables, which is the effect or the factor that is changed.⁴ For my research paper the hypothesis would be that social media affects teens mental health, self esteem, and communication skills. The next few steps consist of design and conduct a study, draw conclusions, and report results, which I will be doing in the remainder of this essay.

Method

Participants

Teen A who is a caucasian, seventeen year old male. Teen B who is a caucasian, eighteen year old female. Teen C who is a caucasian, sixteen year old female. Teen D who is a caucasian, fourteen year old male. Teen E a caucasian, fifteen year old female. Teen F who is a caucasian, thirteen year old male. Teen G who is a caucasian, eighteen year old female. Teen H who is a caucasian, seventeen year old male. Teen I who is a caucasian, seventeen year old female. Teen J who is a caucasian, eighteen year old male. Teen K who is an african american, sixteen year old male. Teen L who is a caucasian, fifteen year old female. Teen M a caucasian, sixteen year old male. Teen N who is a caucasian, fifteen year old male. Teen O who is an african american, eighteen year old male. Teen P who is a caucasian, seventeen year old male. Teen Q who is a caucasian, fifteen year old female. Teen R who is a caucasian, fifteen year old female. Teen S who is a caucasian, sixteen year old female. Teen T who is a caucasian, eighteen year old female.

⁴ <https://cnx.org/contents/AgQDEnLI@9.6:uu5Nth4o@7/Approaches-to-Sociological-Research>

Procedure

First I had my girlfriend sister find twenty people that would be willing participants that ranged from the ages of thirteen and eighteen. I told her to reassure them that this would be anonymous and gave them a printed out survey. Then to submit it they could either drop it off at my mailbox or email it to me from a fake account, to assure privacy. Each person surveyed was given a questionnaire that consisted of basic mental health questions that are used to identify depression and anxiety. There were 5 questions in the questionnaire focused on self esteem issues. Lastly the final question asks how would the person would feel when introducing themselves to a stranger in a public setting. All surveys were anonymous and submitted online, the only personal questions asked where their age, gender, and race. After the results were collected I grouped them by gender and then split them by the results and be able to provide statistics. The questionnaire included these questions: What is your age? What is your gender? What is your race? How many hours do you spend on your phone per day? How many hours do you spend specifically on social media? What types of social media do you use (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok, Snapchat) Which social media is your favorite? Have you ever felt hopeless or helpless? Have you ever lost interest in things you used to love? Do you ever find yourself not wanting to leave the house and isolating yourself? How confident are you about how you look? How do you feel when you look at yourself in the mirror? Do you ever doubt your own abilities? Do you feel confident in the person you are? Do you find yourself comparing yourself to others? Do you experience anxiety when out in public having to talk to strangers? Are you comfortable with talking to strangers in public? Are you comfortable with approaching a stranger in public?

Are you comfortable with talking to customer service workers in person? Do you find yourself avoiding talking to strangers in public?

Apparatus

For this experiment I used a computer to make and print my questionnaire. I also used my computer to organize my data.

Results

In the study of 10 males and 10 females I found that out of the ten males only four showed signs of impacted mental health due to anxiety and depression. Out of the ten females seven of the showed signs of impacted mental health due to anxiety and depression. This test also showed that females had a higher propensity towards mental health issues with them having more answers on the negative side about themselves and how they felt. This also showed that people of high school age spend a large amount of time on their phones averaging 5-6 hours a day. In fact only one of the teens surveyed said they spent 3-4 hours on their phone and the rest said 5-6 hours. In this study the higher the phone usage the harder it was for people to potentially handle a face to face conversation with a stranger. In this study males appeared to have a better idea on how to approach a stranger and engage in a social situation. With more of them answering that they would be comfortable having a conversation with a stranger or being able to ask a stranger a question.

Discussion

As predicted the females were more prone to having mental health and self esteem issues. But all seemed to be exposed to the same amount of social media time but not all were effected the same way. Women were by far way more effected. But I am wondering if this is because of the crazy amount of pressure young women have on them to look a certain way and having to portray that on social media. Since I was unsure which gender would have a harder time approaching a stranger in a public setting, when finding out that according to my research that males felt more comfortable. I think that this is not totally influenced by social media affecting communication but that maybe females feel less comfortable because they have been educated and exposed to more and more about the dangers of rape, sexual assault, and sex trafficking.

But I still had some issues with this testing methodology. For example the small sample size. I was only able to survey twenty teenagers and if I wanted more accurate results I should have surveyed up to 100 or 150. The other issue with this testing is the fact that it is really hard to gauge social skills without seeing someone's social interactions first hand. This was a toss up because my topic dealt with mental health issues and I wanted the teens to be honest so I had to do the survey anonymously, so I was not able to do a field experiment and see them interacting in public because that would have corrupted their privacy. Lastly the other issue with this test methodology is the small questionnaire. I did not want the teenagers to be overwhelmed with the size of the survey so I kept it to a smaller amount of questions. But what comes with a smaller questionnaire is not as in depth and accurate results. If I decided to do more testing on this

specific subject in the future the questionnaire would probably be twice as long. In the future if I decide to continue with this topic I would also look at a lot more factors than just the time spent on social media. For example, the effects of lack of sleep, physical exercise, grades in school, nutrition, exposure to cyber bullying, and high school environment, public school versus private school. So in conclusion I believe this was a good start with looking into this particular topic but in the future it would have to be way more detailed.

Sources

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