

DIGITAL GENERATION: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENT PSYCHOLOGY

Toshpo'latova O'g'loy Baxtiyor qizi

Student of Termiz State University

Scientific Advisor

Sattorova Mahliyo

Abstract: This scientific article explores the psychological profile of modern adolescents growing up in the context of globalization and digitalization. The main objective of the study is to identify the positive and negative impacts of social media on adolescent personality formation, emotional stability, and social communication skills. The article analyzes concepts such as cyberbullying, FOMO syndrome, and digital addiction, providing psychological recommendations to mitigate these risks.

Introduction

Modern society cannot be imagined without information and communication technologies. For adolescents, in particular, the virtual world has become a second reality. In psychology, adolescence is already characterized as a period of crises, physiological changes, and the search for social roles. However, digital technologies have brought a new meaning and pace to this process. Today, an adolescent's socialization takes place not only within the school or family circle, but also in the global internet space. This, in turn, causes new neuropsychological changes in adolescent psychology. Studies show that adolescents spend an average of 5–7 hours a day in front of screens. During this time, they not only receive information, but also create their personal image, compete with peers, and in many cases, fall under the uncontrolled influence of cyberspace. It is worth noting in the introduction that preserving the mental health of the digital generation is a top priority for today's pedagogy and psychology. For the "Z" and "Alpha" generations of the XXI century, the internet is not just a tool for obtaining information, but their lifestyle, communication space, and a platform for displaying their identity. While adolescence itself is a period of biological and psychological crises, the digital world complicates this process further. Today's adolescent "lives" more in the virtual world than in the real world, which directly affects their cognitive development and emotional state.

The impact of social media on adolescent psychology is multifaceted. Drawing upon L.S. Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, an adolescent's mental functions are shaped through the tools (technologies) available in their environment. Today, social networks serve as such a psychological 'tool'. Furthermore, L. Festinger's social comparison theory manifests itself even more clearly in the virtual world. Adolescents compare their ordinary lives with the filtered and decorated photos of others, which fosters low self-esteem.

Scientific Theories And Psychological Foundations

To understand the impact of social networks, it is appropriate to refer to classical and modern psychological theories: Erik Erikson's Theory of Ego Identity: Erikson termed adolescence as a period of "identity versus role confusion". Social networks allow

adolescents to experiment with different identities through various nicknames and profiles. However, the gap between the "ideal Self" and the "real Self" can intensify internal conflict. Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory: Adolescents evaluate themselves by comparing their lives with their peers.

B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory: "Likes" on social networks activate the dopamine system in the brain. This causes the adolescent to become dependent on virtual recognition.

Negative Impacts Of Social Media: Modern Problems

Currently, a number of pathological conditions are observed in the psychology of adolescents. First, the FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) syndrome: The adolescent feels disconnected from social life if they do not constantly check for updates. This leads to chronic anxiety and insomnia. Second, the problem of cyberbullying: Anonymity in the virtual world allows some adolescents to humiliate others, which induces deep depression and self-doubt in the victim. Third, changes in cognitive development: The short and rapid transmission of information causes a decrease in attention span (Attention Deficit) and a decline in analytical thinking among adolescents.

Positive Opportunities And Digital Literacy

The positive aspects of social media cannot be denied either. They serve as a global platform for adolescents to showcase their talents (for instance, in art, programming, or language learning). Additionally, adolescents can overcome feelings of loneliness by finding social groups that match their interests.

Psychological Recommendations: Digital Hygiene

Digital detox: Spending at least 2 hours a day without technology.

Critical thinking: Realizing that real life does not always stand behind every viewed image. Real communication: Prioritizing face-to-face meetings with friends over virtual conversations.

Research Section: Methodology And Analysis

Objective of the study: To determine the impact of social media on the psychological state of adolescents using practical examples.

Object: 8th–11th grade students of general secondary schools in Tashkent city (a total of 100 participants). Methods: Anonymous questionnaire, Spielberger's State-Trait Anxiety Inventory.

Research Results and Discussion:

According to the results of the survey, the activity of adolescents on social networks was distributed as follows:

42% of adolescents spend more than 5–6 hours a day on social media.

35% of adolescents admit to feeling depressed when comparing themselves with their peers.

78% of participants use their phones for at least 30 minutes before going to sleep, which causes morning fatigue and distraction in 60% of them.

During the study, a dependency on the number of "Likes" was also identified among adolescents. A drop in mood and an increase in social anxiety levels were observed in 40% of adolescents who received fewer "likes" on their photos. This demonstrates how closely an adolescent's self-esteem has become tied to virtual validation.

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Conclusion

Based on the analysis and theoretical research conducted, the following conclusions can be drawn: First, social networks serve as a laboratory for identity experimentation for adolescents; however, safety measures in this laboratory are insufficient. Second, digital dependency significantly weakens an adolescent's cognitive processes, especially attention concentration and logical reasoning skills.

Third, the digital divide between parents and adolescents causes mutual mistrust.

To solve these problems in the future, it is essential to introduce "Digital Hygiene" and "Media Literacy" classes in schools, and to organize psychological training sessions for parents. A healthy generation can be raised not by completely depriving adolescents of the internet, but by teaching them to use filters within the information flow. Mental stability means finding the golden mean between the virtual and real worlds. The empirical research shows that social media impacts adolescent psychology as both an opportunity and a threat. The main threat lies in the unjustified comparison of one's life with the virtual lives of others and digital addiction. According to our conclusion, it is necessary to conduct explanatory work on "Digital Hygiene" among adolescents and to direct them toward more real-world social activities (sports, reading, art). Furthermore, parents should show interest in their children's virtual lives, doing so through sincere communication rather than rigid control.

Today, the psychology of adolescence has changed fundamentally. Social networks have become the main factor determining not only an adolescent's leisure time, but also their personal worldview, values, and social relations. For members of the digital generation, the virtual world is a continuation of real life. However, how does this process affect adolescent psychology? In order to find an answer to this question, we combined theoretical analysis with empirical research.

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