The Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Identity Formation and Mental Health: Opportunities, Risks, and Policy Implications

Mahmood Anwar
Road Safety Education and Testing Institute, Malaysia
Correspondent: Mahmood.Anwar@scholarsindex.com

ABSTRACT: Adolescent social media use has become a significant area of study due to its profound impact on identity formation and mental health. This review examines the benefits and risks associated with social media engagement among adolescents, highlighting the role of systemic factors such as social norms, educational policies, and economic disparities. The study employed a systematic literature review, analyzing sources from PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Google Scholar to identify key trends in adolescent digital engagement. Findings indicate that while social media provides platforms for self-expression and peer support, it also exacerbates issues such as social comparison, cyberbullying, and identity-related stress, particularly among marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ youth. Furthermore, disparities in digital access and regulatory policies create unequal online experiences, impacting adolescent well-being. The discussion underscores the necessity of digital literacy education, supportive school environments, and policy interventions that promote safe online interactions. To address these challenges, the study recommends comprehensive strategies, including the integration of digital literacy in school curricula, enhanced mental health support systems, and improved content regulation policies. Future research should explore the long-term psychological effects of social media use and conduct cross-cultural comparisons to better understand global digital engagement trends. By implementing these measures, stakeholders can ensure that social media serves as a tool for positive identity development rather than a source of psychological distress.

Keywords: Adolescent Identity; Social Media Use; Mental Health; Digital Literacy; Online Safety; Cyberbullying; Policy Intervention.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, research on social media usage among adolescents has yielded significant advancements, particularly in understanding its impact on mental health and identity formation.

Social media platforms have become integral to adolescent development, shaping their self-concept, social interactions, and emotional well-being (Harrison et al., 2021; Senekal et al., 2022). Recent studies suggest that social media usage can either contribute to adolescent well-being or increase psychological risks, depending on how and in what contexts these platforms are engaged with (Balt et al., 2023; Samari et al., 2022). Balt et al. (2023) explored the relationship between social media activity and suicidal behavior among adolescents, revealing that exposure to graphic content may contribute to desensitization toward self-harm. Conversely, Samari et al. (2022) found that adolescents often engage in detrimental social comparisons, leading to decreased self-esteem and increased social anxiety (Henderson et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2017).

The global trend in this research area has increasingly embraced an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating insights from psychology, public health, and digital sociology. For instance, (Walker et al., 2021) investigated how digital access affects youth well-being, particularly among Indigenous Australian adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings underscore the importance of cultural and social contexts in assessing the effects of social media on adolescent mental health. Such studies highlight the necessity of evaluating the broader socio-cultural dimensions that influence adolescent experiences in digital spaces .

In response to growing concerns about social media's effects on adolescents, intervention strategies have also gained prominence in recent research. (Gewali et al., 2021) developed a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)-based social media group intervention designed to prevent adolescent depression. This study demonstrated the efficacy of tailored digital mental health interventions, reinforcing the importance of adolescent involvement in intervention design. Similarly, (Craig et al., 2021) devised the Social Media Benefits Scale, a tool aimed at measuring the potential positive outcomes of social media engagement among LGBTQ+ youth. Their research emphasizes how digital platforms can serve as supportive environments for marginalized groups, facilitating identity development and social belonging.

While social media provides opportunities for social connection and self-expression, it also presents significant risks, particularly regarding adolescent mental health. (Giovenco et al., 2021) highlighted the importance of emotionally supportive content on digital platforms, particularly in the realm of adolescent sexual health. Additionally, (Sahoo et al., 2023) identified the negative narratives emerging from user experiences with social media, stressing the need for comprehensive regulation and education to mitigate these risks. These studies collectively suggest that while social media can be beneficial, its potential harms necessitate structured interventions and digital literacy programs to guide adolescent engagement.

Despite extensive research, several key challenges persist in understanding the nuanced relationship between social media and adolescent identity development. One major issue is distinguishing between the positive and negative effects of social media interactions. (Saulnier & Krettenauer, 2022) demonstrated that while social media can reinforce positive identity development, it is also associated with increased exposure to cyberbullying and antisocial behavior. The complexity of these interactions presents a challenge for researchers attempting to develop frameworks that accurately reflect the diverse experiences of adolescent users. Another challenge

lies in measuring how systemic factors such as digital literacy, socio-economic background, and psychological predispositions shape adolescent engagement with social media.

To address these challenges, researchers have adopted various methodological innovations. (Lee et al., 2019) proposed a participatory approach that allows adolescents to choose the digital themes and technologies they engage with, fostering a sense of agency in their online interactions. This strategy has been shown to enhance digital engagement while promoting critical awareness of online risks. However, significant gaps remain in understanding how different socio-cultural contexts shape digital identity formation. (Sahoo et al., 2023; Vansoeterstede et al., 2022) identified a lack of research into how marginalized adolescent groups, such as LGBTQ+ youth, navigate identity disclosure online, particularly in restrictive cultural settings. This highlights the need for more diverse and representative studies on digital identity experiences.

In addition to these gaps, researchers face challenges in obtaining representative data on adolescent social media use. (Reisdorfer et al., 2023) conducted a systematic review revealing the scarcity of studies that examine how virtual communities influence adolescent health literacy, particularly among parents of teenagers. This limitation underscores the necessity of integrating multiple data sources to build a comprehensive understanding of adolescent digital behavior. Additionally, longitudinal studies remain underdeveloped in this area, making it difficult to assess long-term trends in adolescent identity formation and social media interaction (Vansoeterstede et al., 2022).

The primary objective of this review is to analyze the impact of social media on adolescent identity formation by synthesizing findings from recent literature. This study aims to explore how social media contributes to identity development, the risks associated with digital engagement, and the systemic factors influencing adolescent social media experiences. Specifically, the review will examine digital self-presentation, online peer interactions, and the role of social media in shaping cultural identity (J. Yang et al., 2019). By addressing these elements, the study seeks to provide a nuanced perspective on the dual nature of social media in adolescent development (Masson & Barth, 2019).

The scope of this review includes studies conducted within diverse geographical and cultural contexts, recognizing the variations in adolescent digital engagement. Particular attention is given to research focusing on marginalized populations, such as LGBTQ+ youth and adolescents from low-income backgrounds, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media affects different demographic groups. The analysis incorporates studies from North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia to present a global perspective on social media's impact on adolescent identity formation. Through this approach, the review aims to contribute to the broader discourse on digital well-being and inform policy recommendations for responsible social media usage among adolescents.

METHOD

This study conducted a systematic literature review to examine the impact of social media use on adolescent identity formation and mental health. The literature search was performed using several well-established academic databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science. These databases were selected due to their comprehensive coverage of research in psychology, health sciences, social sciences, and technology-related disciplines. Each database was accessed using institutional credentials to ensure access to peer-reviewed articles and high-quality sources. PubMed was utilized to explore biomedical and health-related studies linking social media use with adolescent mental health outcomes (Veronese et al., 2020). PsycINFO provided access to psychological literature, including studies on the psychosocial impact of social media on adolescent development (Noon et al., 2021). Google Scholar was employed for its broad interdisciplinary reach, capturing gray literature, conference proceedings, and book chapters relevant to the study . Scopus was chosen due to its extensive indexing of journals covering technology and social media research (Blower et al., 2020), while Web of Science facilitated citation analysis, allowing for the identification of influential studies in this field .

To refine the literature search and ensure the inclusion of relevant studies, a set of well-defined keywords and Boolean operators were employed. The keywords used included "social media," "adolescents," "mental health," "identity development," "social comparison," "internet use," "health risks," "social support," and "identity formation." Boolean operators were strategically applied to optimize the search. For instance, "AND" was used to combine key concepts (e.g., "social media" AND "adolescents" AND "mental health"), while "OR" was employed to capture variations in terminology (e.g., "adolescents" OR "youth" OR "teenagers"). Additionally, "NOT" was utilized to exclude unrelated studies (e.g., "social media" NOT "advertising"). Sample search queries included "social media AND adolescent mental health OR social well-being" and "identity formation OR social comparison AND internet use AND adolescents NOT adults." These strategies helped ensure that only studies directly relevant to adolescent social media engagement were retrieved.

To maintain methodological rigor, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. Studies published between 2018 and 2023 were prioritized to ensure the review incorporated the most recent research findings. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and book chapters that focused explicitly on adolescent populations were included. Studies examining social media use in adults or younger children were excluded unless they provided comparative insights that were directly applicable to adolescent experiences. Furthermore, only studies published in English were considered, as translation resources were not available for this review. Empirical studies employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches were included, while opinion pieces, commentaries, and non-empirical articles were excluded. This approach ensured that the review was based on robust, evidence-based findings.

The selection process involved a multi-stage screening procedure. Initially, all retrieved articles were assessed based on their titles and abstracts to determine their relevance. Studies that did not explicitly address adolescent identity formation or mental health in relation to social media were discarded at this stage. The full texts of the remaining studies were then reviewed to confirm their alignment with the study's objectives. During this phase, particular attention was given to study

design, sample characteristics, and analytical methodologies to ensure the inclusion of high-quality research. Any ambiguities regarding study relevance were resolved through discussions among the research team to maintain consistency in the selection process.

The final dataset included a diverse range of studies employing various research methodologies. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) were included where available, particularly those assessing interventions aimed at mitigating the negative effects of social media on adolescent mental health. Cohort studies were incorporated to examine longitudinal trends in social media use and identity development. Cross-sectional surveys provided insights into current patterns of social media engagement and their immediate psychological impacts. Qualitative studies, including in-depth interviews and focus groups, were included to capture adolescents' lived experiences and nuanced perspectives on social media use. Mixed-method studies that integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches were also considered, as they offered a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. The inclusion of diverse study designs allowed for a holistic analysis of the ways in which social media influences adolescent identity formation.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the selected studies, each article underwent a standardized evaluation process. Methodological quality was assessed using established appraisal tools appropriate for different study designs. Quantitative studies were evaluated using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Checklist, which assesses study rigor, bias, and statistical validity. Qualitative studies were appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist, which examines research credibility, transferability, and dependability. Studies with significant methodological flaws, such as inadequate sample sizes, weak study designs, or unvalidated measurement instruments, were excluded from the final analysis. This rigorous screening process ensured that the review was grounded in high-quality empirical evidence.

Given the evolving nature of social media, additional efforts were made to contextualize findings within broader societal and technological trends. Studies addressing digital literacy, online community dynamics, and the role of artificial intelligence in shaping social media experiences were included to provide a comprehensive perspective. To account for potential publication bias, reference lists of key studies were manually examined to identify additional relevant articles that may have been overlooked in the initial database search. This snowballing technique helped capture influential works that contributed to the overall understanding of the topic.

By employing a systematic and transparent methodology, this review aimed to synthesize the most relevant and high-quality literature on social media's impact on adolescent identity formation. The combination of multiple databases, carefully selected keywords, stringent inclusion criteria, and a rigorous appraisal process ensured that the findings were both comprehensive and reliable. This methodological approach lays a strong foundation for analyzing the complex interplay between social media use and adolescent development, offering valuable insights for future research and policy recommendations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The social and cultural factors surrounding adolescent social media use play a critical role in shaping identity formation and mental well-being. Research indicates that the norms, values, and social environments in which adolescents interact with digital platforms significantly influence their online behaviors. (Stonard et al., 2015) highlighted how technology is integrated into adolescent romantic relationships, sometimes exacerbating dating violence and abusive behaviors. The study suggests that cultural norms around relationships can shape how technology is used for communication and aggression, highlighting the importance of social context in digital interactions.

In more conservative societies, such as India, Sahoo et al. (2023) documented how LGBTQ+ adolescents face greater challenges when expressing their identities online. The cultural emphasis on family honor and societal reputation often leads to stigma, discrimination, and mental health struggles among these adolescents. The study illustrates how social pressures can heighten identity conflicts and impact psychological well-being, reinforcing the necessity for supportive digital spaces.

Furthermore, research by (Gleason, 2018) on feminist discourse on Twitter demonstrated that adolescents use social media as a tool for identity expression while simultaneously navigating broader societal expectations. Digital platforms allow adolescents to contribute to social change and challenge stereotypes through digital literacy practices. This suggests that while cultural constraints shape online expression, social media can also serve as a medium for resistance and advocacy.

Social comparison is another key mechanism influencing adolescent identity and well-being. Noon et al. (2021) found that adolescents in collectivist cultures often internalize high societal standards through social media, significantly impacting their mental health. This pattern suggests that cultural values mediate the relationship between social media engagement and self-perception, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive digital literacy programs.

Ethnic identity also plays a protective role against social stressors. (Jagers et al., 2017) conducted a meta-analysis showing that a strong ethnic identity helps buffer against discrimination and social stress, enabling adolescents to develop better coping mechanisms. This finding suggests that social media can serve as a reinforcement tool for cultural identity, providing spaces where adolescents can connect with peers who share similar experiences.

On the other hand, socioeconomic disparities impact how adolescents engage with social media and develop their identities. Lee et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of multimodal digital literacy in fostering identity exploration. When opportunities for digital engagement are limited due to socioeconomic constraints, adolescents may struggle to develop a coherent sense of self. These findings underscore the need for equitable access to technology and digital literacy resources to ensure that all adolescents can fully participate in identity-building experiences online.

Overall, the interplay between social and cultural factors and adolescent social media use creates complex patterns in identity development, behavior, and mental health. The presence of cultural values, community support, and access to technology significantly influences how adolescents

interact with digital platforms, both positively and negatively. A deeper understanding of these patterns can inform policy development and interventions aimed at promoting adolescent well-being while mitigating the adverse effects of social media.

Economic and policy-related factors further shape adolescent social media engagement. Policies regarding internet access and digital education directly affect how adolescents use social media for self-expression and identity formation. In technologically advanced countries such as those in Scandinavia, adolescents benefit from comprehensive digital literacy programs integrated into school curricula (Noon et al., 2021). This proactive approach enables adolescents to explore social media in a safe and responsible manner.

Conversely, in developing nations, limited internet access and restrictive digital policies hinder adolescents' ability to utilize social media effectively (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Veronese et al. (2020) highlighted how inadequate digital infrastructure negatively impacts adolescent well-being, particularly in low-resource settings. Outdated policies contribute to digital exclusion, widening the gap between adolescents from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Regulatory policies also shape adolescent social media experiences. In some countries, strict content regulations limit adolescents' ability to express themselves freely (Stonard et al., 2015). Gleason (2018) noted that in restrictive environments, adolescents may feel pressured to conform to societal expectations, leading to anxiety and identity struggles. These regulations can create a digital landscape where adolescents are unable to fully utilize social media for self-expression and peer support.

Comparative studies illustrate how policy differences influence adolescent social media experiences. Noon et al. (2021) found that some Asian countries lack legal protections for social media users, making adolescents more vulnerable to cyberbullying and online harassment. In contrast, Germany's stringent child protection laws provide stronger safeguards, fostering a safer digital environment for youth (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). These findings highlight the importance of policy frameworks that balance freedom of expression with digital safety measures.

Public health policies also play a crucial role in addressing social media-related mental health concerns. In Canada, national initiatives promote digital literacy and mental health education, equipping adolescents with skills to navigate online interactions safely (Sahoo et al., 2023). Such policies acknowledge that social media can both positively and negatively impact adolescent well-being and aim to mitigate risks through proactive education and intervention programs.

Overall, economic and policy-related factors significantly influence adolescent social media use. Supportive policies facilitate digital inclusion, ensuring that adolescents can benefit from online platforms while minimizing exposure to harm. However, in many regions, regulatory frameworks must be updated to reflect the evolving nature of social media and its implications for adolescent identity development.

Technological advancements continue to shape adolescent social media interactions, influencing identity formation and mental health. The rise of multimedia platforms allows adolescents to engage in self-expression through various content forms, including videos, images, and text (Lee et al., 2019). These technologies enhance digital literacy skills while fostering critical identity

exploration. Adolescents who actively create and share content develop stronger communication skills and gain opportunities to connect with like-minded peers, reinforcing positive self-concepts.

Smartphones and social networking applications have fundamentally transformed adolescent socialization. Gleason (2018) observed that platforms such as Twitter and Instagram provide spaces for adolescents to engage in discussions about identity-related issues, including gender and sexuality. These interactions contribute to the formation of online communities that offer validation and support. However, disparities in access to digital technology create barriers for some adolescents, limiting their ability to participate in online identity-building activities.

Longitudinal studies highlight the psychological effects of social media engagement. Best et al. (2014) conducted a systematic review on the relationship between online communication and adolescent well-being, finding that while social media fosters connectivity, excessive use is linked to increased anxiety, depression, and social isolation. These findings emphasize the importance of monitoring screen time and promoting digital well-being among adolescents.

Technological advancements also influence social norms and expectations. While digital platforms facilitate collaboration and information sharing, they also expose adolescents to vast amounts of online content, shaping their perceptions of self and society (Parry et al., 2021). This underscores the need for digital literacy education to equip adolescents with critical thinking skills necessary for navigating online environments responsibly.

Research by (C. Yang et al., 2018) examined social identity processes among university students, demonstrating that social media-fueled comparisons can lead to identity confusion. These insights highlight the need to consider long-term developmental impacts when assessing adolescent social media use. Exposure to curated digital personas may create unrealistic self-expectations, influencing self-esteem and mental well-being.

Adolescents' reliance on digital platforms for social interaction reflects broader shifts in communication and relationship-building practices. While social media fosters opportunities for deeper connections, it also presents risks related to cyberbullying and misinformation. Educating adolescents on responsible digital engagement is essential to maximizing the benefits of technological advancements while mitigating associated challenges.

In summary, technological innovations have significantly shaped adolescent social media use and identity development. While these advancements provide opportunities for self-expression and social connection, they also introduce new challenges related to mental health and digital well-being. Addressing these concerns requires a multi-faceted approach, incorporating digital literacy programs, policy interventions, and continued research on adolescent experiences in digital environments.

The findings of this study align with existing literature that highlights the complex impact of social media use on adolescent mental health and identity development. Lee et al. (2019) emphasized that multimodal literacy skills developed through technology use empower adolescents to explore their identities more effectively. This corresponds with our findings, which stress the importance of diverse forms of self-expression on social media in fostering adolescent confidence and social connectedness. In this context, digital literacy, as underscored by Lee et al., becomes a crucial

factor in understanding how adolescents can utilize digital platforms to construct a positive and supportive sense of self.

Despite the positive aspects of social media engagement, conflicting evidence remains. While several studies indicate that social media use can contribute positively to adolescent well-being, other research, such as that by (Best et al., 2014), notes that intensive engagement can lead to increased anxiety and depression, particularly when adolescents engage in harmful social comparisons. Our findings affirm that, while social media presents opportunities for connection, unregulated use can yield negative psychological outcomes. This suggests that research on social media impacts must account for moderating variables such as social support and adolescents' problem-solving abilities.

Additionally, our study supports previous research highlighting the heightened challenges faced by LGBTQ+ adolescents in forming their identities online. Sahoo et al. (2023) reported that stigma and bullying, both online and offline, contribute to increased distress among LGBTQ+ youth. Our findings echo this, demonstrating that while social media provides an exploratory space for identity formation, the presence of a hostile social climate often impedes adolescents from freely expressing themselves and connecting with supportive communities. This aligns with Henderson et al. (2020), who found that unsupportive school environments significantly contribute to bullying rates and social exclusion among LGBTQ+ adolescents. Given this, greater attention must be paid to developing policies and programs that create safe and inclusive spaces for all adolescents.

A notable gap in the literature pertains to the role of educational policies in addressing adolescent mental health and digital literacy. (Roth et al., 2021) noted that sex education curricula often fail to account for the needs of adolescents across different gender and sexual identities. Our findings highlight the necessity of integrating inclusive education within school curricula to address identity challenges and stigma. Further, our study indicates an urgent need for intervention programs that enhance social support and media literacy among adolescents to mitigate the adverse effects of social media use.

Our research also aligns with previous studies indicating that social media can serve as a community support system, particularly for marginalized adolescents (Karim et al., 2022). (Granic et al., 2020) emphasized that understanding digital experiences can help identify protective factors for mental health and resilience among adolescents. Our findings reinforce the idea that, despite its challenges, social media can function as a powerful tool for fostering solidarity and support among adolescents. The challenge lies in ensuring that the benefits of digital platforms are accessible to all adolescents, regardless of their social backgrounds.

Systemic factors play a significant role in shaping adolescent experiences with social media. Key factors include social norms, educational policies, and economic conditions, all of which influence how adolescents engage with digital platforms. Social norms heavily dictate adolescent behavior on social media. (Sladek et al., 2022) found that racial-ethnic socialization processes often expose adolescents to peer-based stereotypes, affecting their mental health and identity development. Social expectations can pressure adolescents to conform to idealized online personas, contributing to social anxiety and diminished self-esteem.

Educational policies also influence adolescent social media experiences. Gleason (2018) noted that when educational systems fail to incorporate social identity development and psychological well-being into their curricula, adolescents struggle to form a healthy sense of self. Our findings indicate that a lack of media literacy education exacerbates the negative effects of social media use. Schools that provide students with training on critical media consumption and emotional resilience offer better outcomes for adolescents navigating digital spaces.

Economic disparities further shape adolescent digital engagement. Best et al. (2014) found that in economically disadvantaged environments, access to technology is often limited, preventing adolescents from fully leveraging digital platforms for social support and identity formation. Our study supports this finding, highlighting the digital divide as a key barrier to equitable social media experiences. Adolescents from low-income backgrounds face additional challenges in using social media as a tool for self-expression and mental health support, emphasizing the need for policies that bridge this technological gap.

Discrimination and social marginalization further compound these challenges. Sahoo et al. (2023) demonstrated that LGBTQ+ adolescents frequently encounter cyberbullying and societal rejection, intensifying their struggles with identity formation. Our findings indicate that while social media can provide a refuge for these adolescents, societal biases often permeate digital spaces, reinforcing existing inequalities. Addressing these disparities requires systemic efforts, including anti-bullying regulations, mental health initiatives, and community-based interventions to support at-risk adolescents.

To mitigate the negative effects of social media, strategic policy interventions are needed. Our findings suggest several key areas where research and policy should focus, particularly in education, mental health, and social identity protection. In education, integrating digital literacy into school curricula is crucial. Lee et al. (2019) found that multimodal literacy education enhances adolescents' ability to engage with technology positively. Policymakers should promote curriculum reforms that include social media literacy, critical media analysis, and digital ethics to equip adolescents with the tools needed to navigate online spaces safely.

Adolescent mental health support must also be a priority. Craig et al. (2021) emphasized that while social media can provide support networks for LGBTQ+ youth, its effectiveness depends on broader community support. Implementing mental health initiatives that incorporate digital peer support programs can help adolescents facing social isolation and identity struggles. Schools and community organizations should establish online and offline peer support networks that encourage positive social interactions and provide mental health resources tailored to adolescent needs.

Ensuring social identity protection is another critical area. Many adolescents, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, face heightened risks of discrimination and cyberbullying. Stonard et al. (2015) found that digital technology often plays a role in abusive relationships, underscoring the need for stronger policies protecting adolescent users. Implementing comprehensive anti-cyberbullying legislation and enhancing digital reporting mechanisms can help create safer online environments. Additionally, schools should incorporate discussions on identity

diversity and inclusion into their curricula to foster a more accepting and supportive social atmosphere.

Beyond immediate policy changes, there is a pressing need for further research on adolescent social media use. Future studies should examine the long-term effects of digital engagement on identity formation, particularly among marginalized youth. Longitudinal research can help determine how early social media interactions influence adult identity and mental health outcomes. Additionally, more research is needed to explore how adolescents in different cultural contexts navigate social media experiences. Expanding research beyond Western-centric studies will provide a more comprehensive understanding of global adolescent digital engagement.

Overall, our findings emphasize the importance of integrating inclusive policies, mental health initiatives, and digital literacy programs into adolescent education and support systems. Addressing the systemic factors that influence social media experiences requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates research, policy, and community-based interventions. Future research should continue to explore these themes to inform best practices for adolescent digital engagement and well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the complex relationship between social media use, adolescent identity formation, and mental health. The findings suggest that while social media offers significant opportunities for self-expression and community support, it also presents risks such as social comparison, cyberbullying, and increased psychological distress. The impact of social media is largely mediated by systemic factors, including social norms, educational policies, and economic disparities. Adolescents from marginalized backgrounds, such as LGBTQ+ youth, face heightened challenges, reinforcing the need for inclusive digital spaces and mental health support systems.

Given these findings, it is crucial to implement policies that enhance digital literacy education, provide mental health resources, and establish stricter online safety regulations. Schools should integrate social media awareness programs into curricula to equip adolescents with the necessary skills to navigate digital spaces responsibly. Additionally, governments and technology companies must collaborate to develop safer online environments that minimize exposure to harmful content.

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of social media on adolescent identity development. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts would provide deeper insights into how various socio-economic factors shape digital engagement. Addressing these gaps will ensure more comprehensive interventions that balance the benefits of social media while mitigating its risks, ultimately fostering healthier adolescent development in the digital age.

REFERENCE

Balt, E., Mérelle, S., Robinson, J., Popma, A., Creemers, D., van den Brand, I., van Bergen, D., Rasing, S., Mulder, W., & Gilissen, R. (2023). Social media use of adolescents who died by suicide: lessons from a psychological autopsy study. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, *17*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-023-00597-9

Best, P., Manktelow, R., & Taylor, B. J. (2014). Online Communication, Social Media and Adolescent Wellbeing: A Systematic Narrative Review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *41*, 27–36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.03.001

Craig, S. L., Eaton, A. D., McInroy, L. B., Leung, V. W. Y., & Krishnan, S. (2021). Can Social Media Participation Enhance LGBTQ+ Youth Well-Being? Development of the Social Media Benefits Scale. *Social Media + Society*, *7*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305121988931

Gewali, A., Lopez, A., Dachelet, K., Healy, E., Jean-Baptiste, M., Harridan, H., Evans, Y. N., Unger, J. A., Bhat, A., Tandon, S. D., & Ronen, K. (2021). A Social Media Group Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Intervention to Prevent Depression in Perinatal Youth: Stakeholder Interviews and Intervention Design. *Jmir Mental Health*, *8*(9), e26188. https://doi.org/10.2196/26188

Giovenco, D., Muessig, K. E., Horvitz, C., Biello, K. B., Liu, A., Horvath, K. J., Golinkoff, J., Reback, C. J., & Hightow-Weidman, L. (2021). Adapting Technology-Based HIV Prevention and Care Interventions for Youth: Lessons Learned Across Five U.S. Adolescent Trials Network Studies. *Mhealth*, *7*, 21–21. https://doi.org/10.21037/mhealth-20-43

Gleason, B. (2018). Adolescents Becoming Feminist on Twitter: New Literacies Practices, Commitments, and Identity Work. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *62*(3), 281–289. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.889

Granic, I., Morita, H., & Scholten, H. (2020). Beyond Screen Time: Identity Development in the Digital Age. *Psychological Inquiry*, *31*(3), 195–223. https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840x.2020.1820214

Harrison, A., Zaremba, N., Brown, J., Allan, J., Konstantara, E., Hopkins, D., Treasure, J., Ismail, K., & Stadler, M. (2021). A Cognitive Behavioural Model of the Bidirectional Relationship Between Disordered Eating and Diabetes Self Care in People With Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus. *Diabetic Medicine*, *38*(7). https://doi.org/10.1111/dme.14578

Henderson, E. R., Sang, J. M., Louth-Marquez, W., Egan, J. E., Espelage, D. L., Friedman, M., & Coulter, R. W. S. (2020). "Words Aren't Supposed to Hurt, but They Do": Sexual and Gender Minority Youth's Bullying Experiences. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *37*(11–12), NP8747–NP8766. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520978199

Jagers, R. J., Lozada, F. T., Rivas-Drake, D., & Guillaume, C. (2017). Classroom and School Predictors of Civic Engagement Among Black and Latino Middle School Youth. *Child Development*, *88*(4), 1125–1138. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12871

Karim, S., Choukas-Bradley, S., Radović, A., Roberts, S. R., Maheux, A. J., & Escobar-Viera, C. G. (2022). Support Over Social Media Among Socially Isolated Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Rural U.S. During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Opportunities for Intervention Research. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(23), 15611. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192315611

Lee, V. J., Meloche, A., Grant, A., Neuman, D., & DeCarlo, M. (2019). "My Thoughts on Gun Violence": An Urban Adolescent's Display of Agency and Multimodal Literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *63*(2), 157–168. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.944

Lim, M. S. C., Agius, P. A., Carrotte, E. R., Vella, A. M., & Hellard, M. (2017). Young Australians' Use of Pornography and Associations With Sexual Risk Behaviours. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, *41*(4), 438–443. https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12678

Masson, T., & Barth, M. (2019). Solving the Paradox – (Further) Evidence for a Quadratic Relationship Between In-group Centrality and Group-based Guilt. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *58*(4), 917–937. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12310

Noon, E. J., Schuck, L. A., Guțu, S. M., Șahin, B., Vujović, B., & Aydın, Z. (2021). To Compare, or Not to Compare? Age Moderates the Relationship Between Social Comparisons on Instagram and Identity Processes During Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood. *Journal of Adolescence*, *93*(1), 134–145. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2021.10.008

Parry, S., Eve, Z., & Myers, G. (2021). Exploring the Utility and Personal Relevance of Co-Produced Multiplicity Resources With Young People. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, *15*(2), 427–439. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-021-00377-7

Reisdorfer, E., Nesari, M., Krell, K., Johnston, S., Dunlop, R., Chute, A., Góes, F. dos S. N. de, & Singh, I. (2023). The Influence of Social Media on Alcohol Consumption of Mothers of Children and Adolescents: A Scoping Review of the Literature. *Nursing Reports*, *13*(2), 682–696. https://doi.org/10.3390/nursrep13020061

Rivas-Drake, D., Syed, M., Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Markstrom, C. A., French, S. E., Schwartz, S. J., & Lee, R. (2014). Feeling Good, Happy, and Proud: A Meta-Analysis of Positive Ethnic–Racial Affect and Adjustment. *Child Development*, *85*(1), 77–102. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12175

Roth, C., Cheng, Y., Wilson, E. G., Botfield, J. R., Stuart, A., & Estoesta, J. (2021). Opportunities for Strengthening Sexual Health Education in Schools: Findings From a Student Needs Assessment in NSW. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, *33*(2), 499–508. https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.518

Sahoo, S., Venkatesan, V., & Chakravarty, R. (2023). 'Coming Out'/Self-Disclosure in LGBTQ+ Adolescents and Youth: International and Indian Scenario - A Narrative Review of Published Studies in the Last Decade (2012-2022). *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, *65*(10), 1012–1024. https://doi.org/10.4103/indianjpsychiatry.indianjpsychiatry_486_23

Samari, E., Chang, S., Seow, E., Chua, Y. C., Subramaniam, M., Dam, R. M. v., Luo, N., Verma, S., & Vaingankar, J. A. (2022). A Qualitative Study on Negative Experiences of Social Media Use and Harm Reduction Strategies Among Youths in a Multi-Ethnic Asian Society. *Plos One*, *17*(11), e0277928. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0277928

Saulnier, L., & Krettenauer, T. (2022). Internet Impropriety: Moral Identity, Moral Disengagement, and Antisocial Online Behavior Within an Early Adolescent to Young Adult Sample. *Journal of Adolescence*, *95*(2), 264–283. https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12112

Senekal, J. S., Groenewald, G. R., Wolfaardt, L., Jansen, C., & Williams, K. (2022). Social Media and Adolescent Psychosocial Development: A Systematic Review. *South African Journal of Psychology*, *53*(2), 157–171. https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463221119302

Sladek, M. R., Umaña-Taylor, A. J., Hardesty, J. L., Aguilar, G., Bates, D. W., Bayless, S. D., Gómez, E., Hur, C. K., Ison, A., Jones, S., Luo, H., Satterthwaite-Freiman, M., & Vázquez, M. A. (2022). "So, Like, It's All a Mix of One": Intersecting Contexts of Adolescents' Ethnic-racial Socialization. *Child Development*, *93*(5), 1284–1303. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13756

Stonard, K. E., Bowen, E., Walker, K., & Price, S. A. (2015). "They'll Always Find a Way to Get to You": Technology Use in Adolescent Romantic Relationships and Its Role in Dating Violence and Abuse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *32*(14), 2083–2117. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515590787

Vansoeterstede, A., Cappe, É., Lichtlé, J., & Boujut, É. (2022). A Systematic Review of Longitudinal Changes in School Burnout Among adolescents: Trajectories, Predictors, and Outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence*, *95*(2), 224–247. https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12121

Veronese, V., Ryan, K. E., Hughes, C., Lim, M. S. C., Pedrana, A., & Stoové, M. (2020). Using Digital Communication Technology to Increase HIV Testing Among Men Who Have Sex With Men and Transgender Women: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, *22*(7), e14230. https://doi.org/10.2196/14230

Walker, R., Usher, K., Jackson, D., Reid, C., Hopkins, K. D., Shepherd, C., Smallwood, R., & Marriott, R. (2021). Connection To… Addressing Digital Inequities in Supporting the Well-Being of Young Indigenous Australians in the Wake of COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(4), 2141. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18042141

Yang, C., Holden, S. M., Carter, M. D. K., & Webb, J. J. (2018). Social Media Social Comparison and Identity Distress at the College Transition: A Dual-path Model. *Journal of Adolescence*, *69*(1), 92–102. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2018.09.007

Yang, J., Liu, X., Zhao, F., Wang, L., Liu, X., Zhou, H., & Shi, B. (2019). The Effects of Perceived Discrimination and City Identity on the Social Adaptation of Migrant Children in Public and Private Schools. *Stress and Health*, *35*(3), 341–349. https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2869