

Exploring the Role of Social Media in Adolescence Ecology

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Abstract

A qualitative study was conducted in Delhi/NCR to understand the role of social media in adolescence ecology. The objectives of the study were to study the change in parenting and teaching styles due to social media, to explore the usage of social networking sites among adolescents and to explore the positive and negative aspects of social media and how it impacts adolescents/students. For the same, research was conducted across adolescents in the age group of 15-19 (questionnaire), few teachers (detailed interviews) and few parents (detailed interviews).

The key findings highlighted that most adolescents find that social media has positive effects on their lives as it helps them academically, maintains social relationships and is a good leisure activity. Most parents think that social media has helped their children in their studies owing to YouTube educational channels and quite a few educational sites. Teachers had mixed opinions on social media usage with the preference being given to conventional classrooms, but they do agree it helps to motivate students. One flip side being observed is the rigour of doing research is reducing among students as social media becomes the norm for research.

Keywords: - social media, Adolescents, Education, Technology, Teachers

Introduction

Adolescence is the period of development and growth that occurs between childhood and adulthood. Any individual between the ages of 10 and 19 is considered an adolescent by the World Health Organization (WHO). This age group falls within the WHO's definition of young people, which includes those aged 10 to 24. Adolescence may be a period of confusion as well as discovery. As teenagers develop their sense of self, they may have to make tough decisions concerning academics, friendship, sexuality, gender identity, drugs, and alcohol. Most teenagers have an egocentric outlook on life, which often fades as they become older. They are frequently preoccupied with themselves and assume that everyone else, from a closest friend to

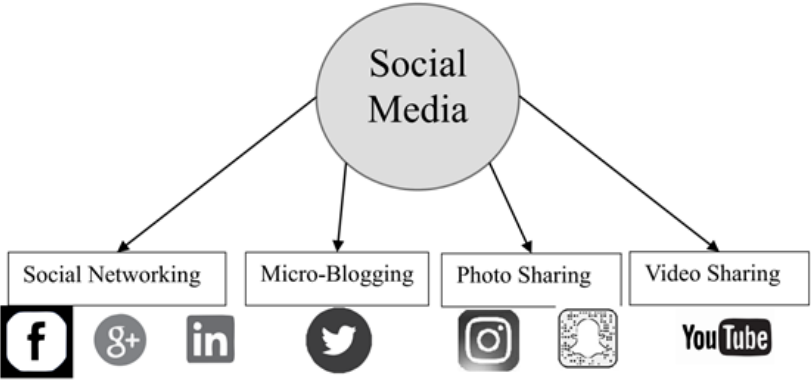
a faraway crush, is also preoccupied with them. Insecurities and emotions of being judged may be prevalent. Peer groups, romantic interests, and appearance, which teenagers regard as increasingly essential during this period, typically take precedence over parental relationships. The goal of adolescence is for a child to grow into a young adult mentally and socially. Breaking out from their childhood bond and stability helps youngsters to grow independently and form their own distinct personalities by gaining freedom and responsibility and differentiating themselves from their parents and upbringing.

Commitments, personal objectives, motives, and psychological well-being are all important parts of forming self and identity during adolescence. Adolescents crave autonomy, especially

from their parents, as well as growing commitments to social aspects of identity and increased needs for peer relationships. Similarly, across roles and relationships, self-evaluations become more diverse and nuanced. Adolescents also frequently report greater self-consciousness and are more concerned with and interested in others' perceptions of self (Pfeifer & Berkman, 2018).

Whether for personal usage, business, education, or job prospects, social networking is the next wave of communication. Individuals or groups in any part of the world can now access someone's information and communicate through social networking sites thanks to technological advancements (SNS). The number of people who utilise social networking sites is steadily increasing. According to the Nielsen Company, global consumers spent more than five and a half hours on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter in December 2009, an increase of 82 per cent from the same time the previous year when users spent just over three hours. There are positive and negative aspects to everything. Even when it comes to social networking, there are benefits

and drawbacks to using the sites. Some of the benefits of using social networks include the ability to communicate with someone who is located thousands of miles away in a matter of seconds if they have an Internet connection and a networking device such as a computer, cell phone, netbook, tablet, or game consoles such as the Xbox or Wii. Another advantage is that a message can be simply communicated to a large audience. One can also send a private message to a single individual or to a specific group of people. One of the most significant disadvantages of utilising social networking websites is that most people are unaware of the risks they face when they disclose personal information on these sites. Strangers, stalkers, and hackers may be able to use personal information for malicious purposes (Miah et al., 2013). Here is the current landscape of social media, as described by Bhusan and Kumar (2018). Social Media can be categorised into four broad areas, namely social networking on platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc. Micro-blogging platforms such as Twitter, photo-sharing apps, and finally video sharing platforms such as YouTube.



Adolescents' learning and daily experiences have been profoundly altered by social media (Lu, Hao, & Jing, 2016), posing enormous difficulties

and opportunities in terms of health and education (Radesky, Schumacher, & Zuckerman, 2015). According to a recent meta-analysis, current studies all

pointed to a minor deleterious impact of social media on adolescent academic achievement (Huang, 2018). However, this finding may not be universal or cross-cultural (e.g., Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Junco, 2012b; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011). For example, a recent study found that Facebook participation had both positive and negative effects on Asian college students' academic engagement (Luo et al., 2020).

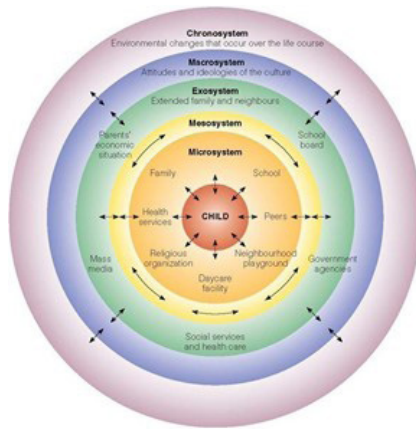
According to Sebre & Miltuze in 2021, Erik Erikson, known as the "godfather of identity theory," developed his theories on identity development after working with traumatized war veterans who had lost their sense of psychological completeness, coherence, and consistency—in other words, their identity. Erikson then applied his findings from his work with war veterans to the adolescent's desire for identity formation (Erikson 1959). "The conscious sensation of having a personal identity is founded on two simultaneous observations: the perception of oneself sameness and continuity in time and space, and the awareness that others recognize one's sameness and continuity," he speculated (Erikson 1968, p.50). James Marcia (1966) operationalized Erikson's theoretical framework, developing a model that can be tested in empirical investigations and is based on two specific elements of identity development: self-exploration and commitment.

Self-exploration is the process of considering and evaluating many ideas and alternatives. Commitment is defined as having a somewhat steady sense of one's own self-defining ideas, values, and ambitions, which are frequently examined in relation to one's professional aspirations. The period of exploration that precedes commitment is known as a "moratorium," and it is during this time that one can explore and experiment with several potential identities.

The impact of social media on youth extends to a crucial aspect of adolescent development: the building of one's own distinct identity. As a result, social media gives adolescents a place to practice skills relevant to identity development. Researchers discovered that students who voiced their thoughts on social media were happier, according to a longitudinal study of 219 freshmen at a state university. Another study discovered that adolescents who communicated more online had more "self-concept clarity," or a better understanding of who they were. This self-awareness is beneficial to one's mental health. Because social media gives teens the "autonomy to explore and experiment with their identities in a space of their own, where they have control over what, how, and with whom they share information," a 2020 research article on teens and social media concluded that it had the potential to be especially important during COVID-19, when real-life opportunities for identity formation were limited. Many of the technologies that adolescents use is connected to social media, which can be divided into two categories: social networking (e.g., Facebook) and virtual communication (e.g., Twitter) (e.g., gaming). "A growing body of research has provided support for reciprocal links between media use and user characteristics (which can include developmental phases),"

As per Bronfenbrenner (1977), child development can be divided into 5 ecological systems namely Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Chronosystem. As per this model of child development, Microsystem has the most profound impact on a child (in this case adolescent) which includes family members (parents, siblings), school and most importantly teachers and nearby environment.

Figure-1: Bronfenbrenner Ecological systems for Child Development



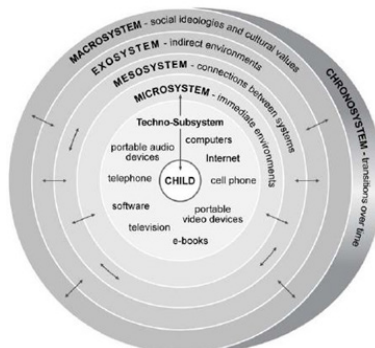
According to Zhou et al., in 1970, through seamless access to information in learning groups and other educational institutions, social media platforms played a critical role in education (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Even while the personalisation of these services got 'little' or 'no' research to impart soft and practical skills to freshmen teens, the usage of social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube for learning has attracted attention. Several studies have found a beneficial link between social media use and academic achievement (Kolhar et al., 2021; Lavuri et al., 2019).

Ecological system theory provides a conceptual framework to organise and understand the role of social media in adolescent ecology. Ecological framework is a prerequisite of the

techno-subsystem to explore the role of internet usage during childhood.

Recent research conclusions support the ecological assumption that childhood Internet use varies as a function of context. Murphy and Beggs (2003) concluded that home-based computer use was child-centred, gave space for exploration, resulted in incidental learning, also gained expertise in some areas, and occurred in a context with consistent access to technology. whereas school-based computer use, in contrast, was teacher-directed, which did not allow for exploration, as it was focused on purposeful learning as there was limited access to technology. In the recent times of pandemic, children engagement in online communication increased manifolds.

Figure-2: Ecological Techno-subsystem



The ecological techno – subsystem, emphasizes the role of technology in child development, encourages holistic exploration of the use of Internet . This will provide a theoretical framework for examining the role and impact of technological advances especially after pandemic times in the coming years.

Rationale of the study

Social media has become an important component of today's generation's daily lives social media has both beneficial and negative effects on a teen's identity, academics, and relationships; it is up to future generations to ensure that it does not become a dominating force. During COVID time, social media became a norm in the lives of adolescents and as we are coming out of the COVID pandemic, it is very hard to disassociate it from the life of children now. Hence, the present study will try to find out the role of social media in adolescence ecology now that we are coming out of COVID-19 pandemic.

Operational Definition

For the study, the age of adolescence is defined as 15-19 years.

Research objectives

- To study the change in parenting and teaching styles due to social media.
- To explore the usage of social networking sites among adolescents.
- To explore positive and negative aspects of social media.

Primarily, the focus of research and the lens for adolescence is on Micro-system affecting child development where researchers have interviewed students themselves, their parents, and teachers in school.

Research hypothesis

These were some of the primary

research hypotheses that were evaluated using the research.

- Adolescents do not realize the negative effects of social media and feel that it has had only a positive influence.
- Teachers have a strong belief that social media has a lot of negative effects on adolescent students.
- Parents have a cautious approach to social media, and whether it is helpful or not still needs a lot more exploring.

Research Methodology

For the study, adolescents were defined as individuals in the age of 15-19 years. The study investigated the usage of social networking sites by adolescents and the positive and negative aspects of social media. The study also explores the change in parenting and teaching styles due to social media. This research is a qualitative study where data was collected and verbatim analysed.

Description of Sample

The sample consisted of 30 adolescents, irrespective of their gender, in the age group of 15- 19 years; 05 parents and 05 teachers were selected from Delhi and NCR. The total sample size constitutes 40 participants. The schools chosen for this study were primarily private schools in the Delhi/NCR region. The adolescents should have used social media, irrespective of whether they sign in through their parents' ID or any other family member or any known. The participants from the higher and middle-income groups are selected for the study. This research was conducted at the beginning of the year when primarily students were studying from home or partially going to school. Most data collection has been influenced by the same and leverages online

interviews and questionnaire filling up by the participants (adolescents, parents, and teachers).

15- 19 years. Online mode was primarily used for data collection.

Pilot Study

Prior to the full research study being undertaken a short pilot study was undertaken, which helped standardise the interview and questionnaire guides. This was conducted on a small sample of 3 students, one teacher and one parent.

Observations and Interpretation

In the present study, an attempt has been made to understand the role of social media by gathering information from adolescents, parents and teachers using interview schedules and questionnaires. The present study was designed to study several variables related to adolescents in a sample of 40 participants where 30 were adolescents in the age range of 15-19 years, 5 were parents and 5 were teachers, irrespective of their gender. The data was analyzed qualitatively, and the findings were categorized below.

Tools used for Data Collection

Interview Schedule: To collect the data for the present study, two structured interview schedules were developed for the parents and teachers respectively. For the parents, 10 questions were framed to study the changing pattern in parenting style due to social networks to fill the generation gap. 8 questions were prepared for the teachers to study the change in teaching strategies due to social media influence. These were qualitative questions where in answers were sought from the teachers and parents respectively.

Adolescents

Adolescents can use social media to establish online identities, engage with others, and form social networks. These networks can be a significant source of support for teenagers, especially for those who are excluded. Social media is also used by teenagers for entertainment and self-expression. Furthermore, the platforms can educate teens on a range of topics, including healthy behaviors, by exposing them to current events, allowing them to interact across geographic barriers, and exposing them to current events. Humorous or distracting social media, as well as social media that gives a genuine connection to peers and a large social network, may even help young people avoid many mental illnesses (Staff, 2022).

Questionnaire: A questionnaire was made containing two sets of questions. Section one contains questions related to demographic and usage of social networking applications among adolescents while the second set of questions were related to how social media affects (positive and negative impacts) adolescents and their surroundings. The data was collected through Google Form (no sign-in needed) by adolescents ranging from

Table-1: Reactions of adolescents to some questions to assess their viewpoint on social media

S. No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Didn't respond
1.	Do you think social networks helps you in some studies?	12 (40%)	6 (20%)	9 (30%)		3 (10%)

2.	Do you think using social networks has any positive impact on your life?	18 (60%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)		6 (20%)
3.	Do you think social media impact your life negatively?		6 (20%)	9 (30%)	15 (50%)	

Table above gives reactions of adolescents to some of the questions around the social media. Specifically, their agreement or disagreement to statements such as “social media impact on students, life and any side effects or negative effects students may have noticed”. Section below covers this area in more detail.

Dependency on technology

Most of the participants responded that they spend around 4-5 hours on social media. More than 50 per cent responded that they mostly use Instagram among other social media apps. The other social media application among adolescents which is very popular is WhatsApp. Most of the participants (50 per cent) responded that they don't get affected when they don't use social media while some responded (30 per cent) that they feel relaxed and use social media as leisure. Only 20 per cent responded that they feel anxious when they don't use social media.

Awareness among parents

Great advancements and unforeseen challenges have come with modern technology. One of the most difficult of these challenges is ensuring that our children understand how to use the internet in a safe and productive manner. In this process, the question of whether parents should supervise their children's internet usage is important (Capriola, 2019). Most of the participants said that their parents are aware of

which social media applications they operate.

Reasons for usage of social media

Social media is a platform for socially connecting with friends and family. Social media not only plays a role for entertainment but also plays an important role in academics. Most of the participants responded that they use social media for academic purposes as well. 60 per cent of them responded that social media does help them with their studies as well; however 30 per cent of them disagreed with this aspect of social element.

Positive impact of social media

Most of the participants responded positively to this part. They strongly agree that social media has positive effects on their life. They all agreed on the following statements:

- Meeting new people helps you socialize
- Keeping in touch with friends is convenient
- Learning technology becomes easier and flexible
- You are never alone and have a social presence.

Negative effects of social media

Most of the participants responded that social media has not affected them negatively while six participants agreed

that social media has negative effects too. The following are the statements that they have agreed on to:

- Reduction in focus
- Decreases/ destroys social skills
- There is no concept of privacy
- Mental health issues
- Over-reliance on social media identity and loss of self-identity
- Social Media addiction

Teachers

The relationship between a teacher and a student was generally defined as a formalized interpersonal association between an authority figure and a subordinate who interact on nearly a day-to-day basis (Larson, Wilson, Brown, Furstenberg, & Verma, 2002; Bartlett, 2005).

In the past two decades, classroom management has gone from a recognition-and-punishment intervention-based paradigm to a focus on prevention through the development of classroom communities in which norms are established, and academic routines promote constructive work. The present study has examined the five aspects of teachers' point of view regarding teaching style and the effects of social media on adolescents' identity.

Preference of classrooms

In traditional classrooms, student-teacher interaction is more, and the classes have more hands-on activity while in online classes, face-to-face interaction does not take place, and the classes are less engaging. According to the teachers, conventional classrooms are more preferred with the use of technology in physical mode instead of solely depending on the online classrooms.

Positive effects of social media

Social media plays an important role in today's world. It has impacted society positively, and as far as adolescents are concerned, social media has a positive impact on them as well. The teachers feel that students get motivated and fostered to learn. One of the teachers believes that social media improves the creative element among students. According to the teachers, social media adaptation in learning helps boost the academic performance of students.

Negative effects of social media

Regardless of the positive effects, social media affects students negatively on a larger scale. Teachers feel that social media causes distraction as students lose their concentration on their studies and enjoy browsing social media. Two of the teachers believe that social media reduces the learning and research capacity of students as students use social media extensively and gather information instead of looking for it in books and journals. In addition, it affects the health of the students as well (both physical and mental health).

Student-teacher relationship

For engaging and interactive classrooms, a positive student-teacher relationship is a key factor. Also, adolescents who share a positive bond with teachers may interact more freely and comfortably with them. According to the teachers, social media has a negative impact on student-teacher relationships in terms of interaction, as well as student behavioural and learning outcomes. One of the teachers feels that social media impacts the student-teacher relationship positively, as out-of-class communication and support are present through social media.

Safeguard measures for students

Measures suggested by teachers to safeguard students from getting influenced by social media include:

- Encourage non-media activities/ plan more physical activities.
- Accompanying and discussing the media content (including sensitive issues such as substance abuse and other inappropriate content) with adolescents.
- Limiting the time duration for usage of social media by adolescents.
- Connect physically (face-to-face) with adolescents and have meaningful interactions.
- Conduct self-appreciation activities to boost adolescents' confidence.

Parents

Parenting styles and the qualities of parent-child relationships have long been researched areas in developmental and family psychology. Parenting styles, according to a previous study, are important family context elements that are linked to parent-adolescent relationships (Shek, 2002). The present study has examined the five aspects of parents' points of view regarding the effects of social media on adolescents' identity.

Awareness about child-friendly networking sites

In today's environment, it's difficult to avoid social media. Everyone, from children to the elderly, uses social networking sites. Social media sites are now mostly used to scroll through for entertainment and information. People built social networking sites to enable them to communicate and interact more with one another through the internet. It has since been proven to be a vital instrument for global communication.

All five parents were aware of the social networking sites that their children use.

Positive effects of social media

The availability of social media has a positive impact on adolescents according to the parents. They said that during COVID-19, social media helped their children to continue their studies. Two of the parents mentioned that their children get help from YouTube when they have doubts in any topic. One of the parents mentioned that social media helps their child to gain knowledge and create awareness of the world.

Negative effects of social media

Even with its positive effects, social media can have a negative effect, too. According to the parents, their children are neither negatively impacted by social media nor do they feel they are missing out on their parenting while comparing it to social media. They think that social media may have a negative impact in the following aspects:

- less quality time with family
- less concentration in studies
- more screen time, as some of the social sites are very engaging

Parent-child relationship

The parent-adolescent relationship is one of the most important relationships in the life of an adolescent. During this stage, many changes take place in the parent-adolescent relationship. Differences in opinion may at times exacerbate conflict between adolescents and their parents. Most of the parents reported that their relationship gets affected with their children due to social media. The reasons added by them are (a) advancement in cognitive skills so parents have to have more knowledge to overcome the gap, (b) parents

themselves remain busy in social media, (c) Adolescents themselves get involved in social media and give less time to the family.

Safeguard Measures for adolescents

Measures given by the parents to save their children from excessive use of social media are as follows:

- A schedule should be made for every family member to use social media as the leisure time
- check their phones on a regular basis
- educate children the difference between real and fictional world
- set an age-limit for children to use social media
- keep one-dialogue with the children about their daily life, romantic relationships, peer relationship, social media sites and app usages

Conclusion

In this research, the role of social media in was examined and facts related to the positive and negative effects of social media on adolescents, change in parenting and teaching styles due to social media and the usage of different social media networks by adolescents were looked at.

According to the data collected, it can be concluded that with the evolution of social media and technology, a varied range of change could be seen in parenting styles, teaching styles

and children's preferences. Though parents and teachers do not promote extensive use of social media among adolescents, they themselves use it for various purposes. Both the research hypotheses of teachers and parents namely, "Teachers have a strong belief that social media has lot of negative effects impact adolescent students" and "Parents have a cautious approach to social media and whether it is helpful or not still needs lot more exploring" both stand true and there needs to be more observations and time gapped studies to truly understand the impact social media has on students.

Adolescents use social media extensively and with no time as a limitation for other purposes such as social media scrolling, entertainment, etc., rather than study. The use of social media for long hours may distract their focus from their studies, and eventually affect their academic performance. As per the research, the hypotheses "Adolescents do not realize the negative effects of social media and feel that it has had only a positive influence" stands false and there are a few students who do realize the negative effects of social media though the degree of the realization may be different.

Some ways to safeguard adolescents from getting influenced or addicted to social media were also mentioned in the study. Though social media has both positive and negative impacts, if used properly and appropriately can turn out to be a boon for society and the education sector at large.

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