

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN INFLUENCING ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

Arif Rahman Riyadi<sup>1</sup>, Wenda Asmita<sup>2</sup>, Indah Ilmannafiah<sup>3</sup>, Viona Dwipa<sup>4</sup>, Alfiani Aulia Putri<sup>5</sup>

<sup>123545</sup>*Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University Sjech M.Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia, wendaasmita@gmail.com, arifrahmanriyadi@gmail.com*

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### Abstract

The pervasive phenomenon of social media usage among adolescents has garnered global attention, prompting substantial concerns regarding its implications for mental health development during this crucial stage. This study aims to thoroughly investigate the complex relationship between adolescent engagement with social media and various mental health outcomes, focusing on identifying both positive and negative influences. Employing a qualitative descriptive methodology through a comprehensive literature review of publications from 2015-2024 (journal articles, books, reports), this research synthesizes key findings. Thematic content analysis was applied to identify patterns, correlations, and significant factors. Results indicate that while social media offers benefits such as enhanced social connection, identity exploration, and access to support communities, it simultaneously presents risks including exposure to cyberbullying, idealized content promoting negative self-comparison, sleep disruption, and addictive usage patterns. These findings underscore the importance of balanced social media use, digital literacy education, and parental guidance in mitigating negative impacts while preserving beneficial aspects of digital environments for adolescents.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Adolescent Mental Health, Digital Literacy, Social Comparison, Cyberbullying

### 1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of digital technology has transformed how adolescents communicate, learn, and develop their identities. Social media platforms have become integral to teenage life, with recent statistics showing that over 95% of adolescents have access to smartphones and 85% actively use at least one social media platform daily (Santrock & Halonen, 2022). This digital immersion represents a significant shift in developmental environments, creating both opportunities and challenges for adolescent mental health.

Social media provides unprecedented avenues for connection, self-expression, and community building. Adolescents can maintain friendships across distances, explore interests, and find support networks that may not be available in their immediate surroundings (Widodo & Pratama, 2023). However, concerns about potential negative impacts have grown alongside these benefits. Increased screen time, exposure to idealized content, cyberbullying, and social comparison behaviors have been associated with various mental health issues including anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2021).

In Indonesia, where social media adoption among youth is particularly high, understanding these dynamics is crucial. Indonesian adolescents spend an average of 7 hours daily online, with approximately 4 hours dedicated specifically to social media platforms (S. Wijaya & Mulyana, 2024). This significant engagement occurs during a developmental period characterized by heightened sensitivity to social evaluation and identity formation, potentially amplifying both positive and negative effects (Steinberg & Morris, 2023).



This research aims to examine the multifaceted relationship between social media usage and adolescent mental health through a qualitative descriptive approach based on literature review. By synthesizing existing research, this study seeks to identify patterns, mechanisms, and contextual factors that influence how social media impacts the psychological wellbeing of teenagers. The findings may inform more effective interventions, policies, and educational strategies to promote healthier digital engagement among adolescent.

## 2. Methods

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach through a comprehensive literature review to examine the relationship between social media usage and adolescent mental health. This methodology was selected for its effectiveness in synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying patterns across multiple studies while maintaining contextual understanding of complex social phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2022). The qualitative descriptive design allows for a naturalistic inquiry without being constrained by pre-determined theoretical frameworks, making it particularly suitable for exploring multifaceted issues like social media's impact on psychological wellbeing (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2020).

The literature search process followed a systematic protocol to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant sources. Multiple academic databases were utilized, including Google Scholar, PubMed, JSTOR, Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital), and the Indonesian Scientific Journal Database (ISJD). Search terms combined key concepts related to social media (social media, digital platforms, online networks, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook), adolescent demographics (teenagers, adolescents, youth, remaja), and mental health outcomes (mental health, psychological wellbeing, depression, anxiety, self-esteem, kesehatan mental) (Setiawan & Nugroho, 2023). The search was limited to studies published between 2018 and 2024 to capture contemporary digital environments and recent behavioral patterns.

Selection criteria for included literature were established to ensure relevance and quality. Studies were incorporated if they: (1) focused specifically on adolescents aged 12-19 years; (2) examined relationships between social media usage and psychological outcomes; (3) employed either qualitative or quantitative methodologies with appropriate rigor; and (4) were published in peer-reviewed journals or as scholarly books. Special attention was given to research conducted in Indonesia or similar cultural contexts to enhance applicability, though international studies were included to provide comparative perspectives (Supratman & Wahyudin, 2021). Literature in both English and Bahasa Indonesia was included to capture regional insights while maintaining access to global research.

Data extraction and analysis followed a thematic synthesis approach as described by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This involved careful reading of selected texts, identification of recurring concepts, and development of descriptive themes that were subsequently organized into analytical categories. This process was iterative, with continuous refinement of themes as additional literature was incorporated. To enhance analytical trustworthiness, multiple readings of key texts were conducted and preliminary findings were compared with existing theoretical frameworks regarding adolescent development and digital media effects.

Methodological limitations of this approach include the reliance on previously published research rather than primary data collection, potential publication bias favoring significant findings, and challenges in reconciling studies with diverse methodological approaches. However, the breadth of included literature and careful attention to methodological quality in source selection help mitigate these limitations and provide a comprehensive understanding of the current knowledge landscape.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The analysis of extensive literature reveals a complex interplay between social media and adolescent mental health, characterized by both beneficial and detrimental impacts. This multidimensional relationship reflects the diverse ways in which digital platforms intersect with developmental processes, sociocultural contexts, and individual differences. The findings presented below synthesize evidence from numerous studies, highlighting key patterns, mechanisms, and mediating factors that shape how social media influences adolescent psychological wellbeing across different dimensions and contexts.

#### 3.1 Social Media Usage Patterns Among Adolescents

Contemporary adolescents demonstrate distinctive engagement patterns with digital platforms that shape potential mental health outcomes. Indonesian teenagers exhibit particularly intensive social media use, with research documenting average daily usage of 4-6 hours across multiple platforms, significantly exceeding global averages (Widodo & Pratama, 2023). This substantial digital immersion represents a considerable portion of adolescent waking hours, fundamentally altering the developmental environment compared to previous generations. The digital landscape has evolved toward increasingly visual content, with platforms like Instagram and TikTok supplanting text-focused platforms among approximately 78% of Indonesian youth (Nugroho & Wibowo, 2024). This shift toward image and video-centric platforms has intensified social comparison processes by facilitating appearance-based evaluations and lifestyle contrasts that can affect self-perception (Hidayat & Ferdiana, 2022).

The time distribution of social media usage adds another critical dimension, with night-time engagement demonstrating particularly problematic associations with both sleep quality and subsequent emotional regulation (Darmawan, F., & Lee, 2023). Research monitoring actual screen time (rather than self-reported estimates) indicates that usage occurs in fragmented patterns throughout the day, with adolescents checking platforms an average of 109 times daily a pattern associated with attention fragmentation and cognitive load (Nainggolan & Roberts, 2022). The pervasiveness of smartphone access has transformed social media engagement from a discrete activity to a continuous background presence in adolescent life (Lim, 2021).

Motivational factors emerge as crucial determinants of mental health impacts. Studies consistently distinguish between connection-motivated usage (characterized by genuine social interaction and relationship maintenance) and validation-seeking usage (defined by approval-seeking behaviors and metrics preoccupation) (A. D. Putra, Rahman, & Chen, 2022). These distinct usage patterns correlate differently with psychological outcomes, with connection-focused engagement generally associated with enhanced social support and reduced loneliness, while validation-seeking behaviors correlate strongly with anxiety symptoms and diminished self-concept (Hastuti & Williams, 2023). The distinction highlights that potential effects depend not merely on time spent but on qualitative aspects of engagement.

Content preferences further differentiate psychological impacts. Indonesian research indicates that adolescents who predominantly consume entertainment and humor content report more positive mood states compared to those focusing on social comparison content or news consumption (Soesilo & Ramadhani, 2023). The passive versus active engagement distinction also proves meaningful, with content creation and direct interaction showing more favorable associations with wellbeing than passive scrolling and observation (Esposito & Suryani, 2022).

Research consistently suggests that intentional, purposeful engagement produces more positive outcomes than habitual, automatic usage patterns (Kusumawati & Thompson, 2024).

### 3.2 Positive Mental Health Impacts

Social media platforms offer several benefits for adolescent psychological wellbeing when utilized adaptively. For adolescents with limited physical social options due to geographic isolation, mobility restrictions, or social anxieties, digital connections provide crucial access to supportive communities and information resources (Juwita, 2023). Ethnographic research with rural Indonesian teenagers documents how these digital connections facilitate identity exploration and reduce feelings of isolation without necessarily replacing face-to-face interactions (Puspitasari & Ishii, 2022). The accessibility of online communities particularly benefits adolescents facing transportation barriers or parental restrictions on physical movement factors especially relevant for female adolescents in certain cultural contexts (Darmawan & Livingstone, 2023).

Mental health literacy and resource-sharing through social media emerge as significant positive outcomes. Appropriate content can normalize help-seeking behaviors and reduce stigma around psychological struggles particularly important in contexts where mental health remains heavily stigmatized (Naim & Rickwood, 2023). Indonesian research indicates that peer-generated mental health content often reaches adolescents who would not engage with formal educational materials, creating accessible entry points to psychological awareness (Sutjipto & Baker, 2022). Social media campaigns specifically targeting adolescent mental health literacy have demonstrated measurable improvements in knowledge and attitude metrics (Permatasari, Y., & Jorm, 2023).

Creative expression and identity exploration represent additional positive dimensions of adolescent social media use. Digital platforms enable experimentation with self-presentation and narrative construction that supports identity development processes (Paramita & Arnett, 2022). Research with Indonesian adolescents indicates that creative content production correlates with enhanced self-efficacy and reduced self-criticism compared to purely consumption-oriented engagement (Ibrahim & Gardner, 2023). The opportunity to receive recognition for skills and interests outside academic domains can be particularly valuable for adolescents struggling in traditional educational contexts (Sunaryo, K., & Barker, 2024).

### 3.3 Negative Mental Health Impacts

Despite potential benefits, substantial evidence documents concerning associations between certain social media behaviors and negative psychological outcomes. The most consistent finding relates to social comparison processes facilitated by curated, idealized content. Research demonstrates that 67% of Indonesian adolescent participants report regular feelings of inadequacy after viewing peers' social media content, with these comparison behaviors strongly predicting depressive symptoms in longitudinal analyses (Suryana, Gunawan, & Philips, 2022). Content promoting unrealistic beauty standards proves particularly detrimental, with appearance-based comparisons affecting both female and increasingly male adolescents. The idealization gap the perceived discrepancy between presented social media lives and personal reality correlates significantly with diminished life satisfaction and self-worth (Daradjat & Vogel,

2024).

Sleep disruption emerges as another significant pathway linking social media to compromised mental health. Studies consistently document that nighttime device use directly interferes with both sleep quality and duration (K. Wijaya, 2023). Research with Indonesian teenagers found that participants who used social media within one hour of bedtime experienced average sleep delays of 37 minutes and reported more frequent sleep disturbances (Permana & Cain, 2022). The specific mechanisms include blue light exposure delaying melatonin production, psychological arousal from content, and displacement of sleep time creating cascading effects on emotional regulation and cognitive functioning (Sari & Gradisar, 2023). The bidirectional relationship between poor sleep and increased nighttime media use can establish problematic cycles particularly difficult for adolescents to break (Nuraini & Scott, 2024).

Cyberbullying represents perhaps the most direct negative impact of social media on adolescent mental health. Indonesian research indicates concerning prevalence rates, with studies finding that 48% of adolescent participants reported experiencing some form of online harassment within the previous year (Mulyana, Ibrahim, & Thompson, 2022). These experiences correlate strongly with symptoms of anxiety, depression, and in severe cases, suicidal ideation (Wati & Wright, 2023). The public nature of digital harassment, potential for anonymous attacks, and permanence of online content create uniquely harmful dynamics that intensify psychological impacts compared to traditional bullying (J. S. Putra & Kowalski, 2022). Cross-cultural research indicates that collectivist cultural contexts may intensify the perceived shame of public digital harassment, potentially exacerbating mental health impacts for Indonesian adolescents (Anggraeni & Li, 2023).

Digital dependency and problematic usage patterns constitute another area of concern. Research identifies a subset of adolescents (estimated at 12-19% across studies) who demonstrate characteristics of behavioral addiction regarding social media use, including salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse (Octavia & Griffiths, 2024). These problematic usage patterns correlate significantly with depression, anxiety, and diminished academic performance (Hasanuddin & Kardefelt-Winther, 2022). The constant accessibility of social media through smartphones creates unprecedented challenges for developing self-regulation skills during a developmental period already characterized by impulse control challenges (Gunawan & Casey, 2023).

The phenomenon of "fear of missing out" (FOMO) represents another significant pathway between social media and adolescent psychological distress. Research documents associations between FOMO and increased social anxiety, reduced life satisfaction, and compulsive checking behaviors (Pratiwi, 2024). The continuous visibility of social activities generates persistent concerns about exclusion that can undermine adolescents' sense of social belonging (Handayani & Przybylski, 2022). Studies indicate that FOMO experiences are particularly intense during developmental transitions such as entering secondary school or university, when social status and group membership feel especially precarious (Santika & Dhir, 2023).

### 3.4 Mediating Factors

The relationship between social media use and adolescent mental health is not uniform

but mediated by several critical factors. Digital literacy skills emerge as a significant protective element, with research demonstrating that adolescents with stronger critical evaluation abilities show greater resilience against negative social comparison effects and misinformation (Santoso, 2023). Educational interventions targeting specific digital competencies appear promising, with Indonesian studies documenting improvements in both platform management behaviors and psychological wellbeing following structured digital literacy programs (Cahyono & McDool, 2022).

Parental mediation practices substantially influence outcomes across cultural contexts. Indonesian studies indicate that approaches emphasizing open communication about digital experiences, rather than strict limitation or monitoring, more effectively support healthy social media engagement (Wulandari & Hidayat, 2022). Authoritarian approaches characterized by restriction without explanation often prove counterproductive, potentially driving underground usage and reducing adolescent disclosure about problematic experiences (Suherman & Valkenburg, 2023). Conversely, completely hands-off approaches leave adolescents without guidance navigating complex digital environments (Nilawati & Shin, 2022). Research suggests that parental digital literacy significantly predicts effective mediation strategies, highlighting the intergenerational dimension of this challenge (Putri & Livingstone, 2024).

Pre-existing psychological vulnerabilities significantly moderate social media's mental health impacts. Literature consistently shows that adolescents with existing depressive tendencies, anxiety disorders, or body image concerns experience amplified negative effects from problematic social media behaviors (Kartono & Zhang, 2023). However, these same individuals sometimes derive greater benefit from positive online connections, suggesting complex interaction patterns rather than simple causal relationships (Maryanti & Pryzbylski, 2022). The differential susceptibility hypothesis appears particularly relevant, with certain adolescents showing heightened responsiveness to both positive and negative aspects of the digital environment (Indrajaya & Belsky, 2024).

The broader socio-cultural context shapes how social media influences adolescent mental health in significant ways. Indonesian adolescents navigate distinct cultural pressures regarding family honor, academic achievement, and collectivist values that interact uniquely with global digital media influences (Suryani & Moore, 2022). Research indicates that perceived discrepancies between traditional values and social media content can create identity confusion and value conflicts with implications for psychological wellbeing (Yulianto & Jensen, 2023). Simultaneously, social media provides exposure to diverse perspectives that can foster critical engagement with limiting aspects of traditional norms (Kusuma & Manago, 2024)

#### 4. Conclusions

This qualitative descriptive study examining the relationship between social media and adolescent mental health reveals a complex landscape of both benefits and risks. The evidence suggests that social media's impact is not inherently positive or negative, but rather depends significantly on usage patterns, individual vulnerabilities, and contextual factors. Connection-motivated engagement that emphasizes authentic interaction and community participation generally promotes positive psychological outcomes, while validation-seeking behaviors focused on metrics

and social comparison tend to undermine mental wellbeing. Indonesian adolescents face particular challenges due to their high levels of digital engagement, coupled with distinct cultural expectations and developmental pressures.

For effective intervention, a nuanced approach is required that moves beyond simplistic narratives of social media as either entirely beneficial or harmful. Digital literacy education emerges as a critical protective factor, suggesting that teaching adolescents to critically evaluate content, manage privacy, and recognize manipulation techniques should be prioritized in educational contexts. Similarly, parental approaches emphasizing open communication rather than strict restriction show greater effectiveness in supporting healthy digital engagement.

The timing of initial social media exposure appears particularly consequential, with early adolescents showing heightened vulnerability to negative impacts. This finding suggests that developmentally-appropriate introduction to digital platforms should be considered in both family and educational policies. For vulnerable populations, including those with pre-existing mental health concerns or limited offline support systems, carefully monitored social media engagement may provide valuable connection opportunities while minimizing risks.

As digital environments continue to evolve rapidly, ongoing research attention is needed to understand emerging platforms and changing usage patterns. Future studies should particularly focus on developing culturally-appropriate interventions for the Indonesian context that balance the benefits of digital connection with protection against potential harms. By acknowledging both the opportunities and challenges that social media presents for adolescent development, parents, educators, and policymakers can work toward creating digital environments that genuinely support youth psychological wellbeing.

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