

## ADDRESSING SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT ON STUDENT IDENTITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

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### Abstract

Social media has emerged as a global phenomenon with a profound influence on students' lives, particularly in shaping their identity and mental health. While it provides opportunities for interaction, self-expression, and easy access to information, it also presents serious psychological challenges. Excessive use of social media is often linked to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and sleep disturbances, mainly due to social comparison, cyberbullying, and the fear of missing out (FOMO). Students, being in a critical stage of identity development, are especially vulnerable to the pressure of crafting an ideal online persona and seeking social validation, which can hinder the formation of a healthy self-concept. This study aims to examine the impact of social media on students' identity development and mental well-being through a comprehensive literature review. It also seeks to identify the underlying factors that influence this relationship and explore practical strategies that can be applied within the educational environment. The research method used is a literature study involving an in-depth analysis of academic sources such as journals, books, research articles, and digital publications. Relevant sources were obtained from academic databases including Google Scholar, PubMed, and ScienceDirect using keywords related to social media, identity, mental health, and students. The analysis was conducted systematically by comparing findings from various studies to draw holistic conclusions. Findings suggest that unregulated social media use correlates with increased psychological distress among students. Nevertheless, when used mindfully, social media can foster identity exploration and social connectivity. Therefore, implementing interventions such as digital literacy education, mental resilience programs, and collaborative support from families, schools, and mental health professionals is essential to mitigate negative impacts and promote students' mental well-being.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Identity, Mental Health, Literature Study

### 1. Introduction

The rapid development of information and communication technology, especially social media, has changed the way teenagers interact, express themselves, and build their identities. Social media has become an integral part of students' daily lives, providing various benefits such as ease of communication, expanding social networks, and being a means of exploring and strengthening self-identity. However, uncontrolled and excessive use of social media also has a significant negative impact on adolescents' mental health. Various studies have shown that students who spend more than three hours per day on social media are at higher risk of experiencing mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression, stress, and self-image disorders. One of the main mechanisms that affects mental health is intense social comparison on social media. Teenagers often compare themselves to the ideal image projected by peers or public figures, which can lead to feelings of inferiority, dissatisfaction with themselves, and pressure to meet unrealistic standards. In addition, the phenomenon of cyberbullying is increasingly widespread, which worsens students'

psychological conditions by causing trauma, anxiety, and social isolation. Dependence on social media also disrupts sleep patterns and concentration in learning, thus impacting students' emotional balance and academic achievement. However, social media also has a positive side that cannot be ignored. Social media can be a space for teenagers to express themselves, get social support, and access useful information. In the context of mental health, social media allows students who are vulnerable to feeling isolated to stay connected to the community and sources of emotional support. Therefore, the role of mentoring and education is very important so that students can use social media in a healthy and responsible way. (Agustin 2023).

In facing this challenge, the role of school counselors is very vital. Counselors function as facilitators who help students recognize the impact of social media on their mental health, develop self-management strategies, and build critical digital literacy. Through counseling services, both face-to-face and online, counselors can help students overcome social pressures, strengthen positive self-images, and improve coping skills to deal with stress related to social media. In addition, counselors also play a role in educating parents and teachers so that they can provide appropriate supervision and support for students in using social media. Overall, the influence of social media on students' identity and mental health is a complex phenomenon and requires a holistic approach. Collaborative efforts between counselors, schools, families, and communities are essential to creating an environment that supports healthy mental and emotional development of students in the digital era. Digital literacy education, managing social media usage time, and developing adaptive guidance and counseling services are key to overcoming negative impacts while maximizing the benefits of social media for adolescent growth and well-being. The development of social media has undergone a very rapid transformation since its emergence in the 1970s with the bulletin board system (BBS) to become a very influential global platform in the modern era today. In Indonesia itself, social media began to be widely known since the early 2000s with the presence of Friendster as a pioneer of social networks that connect users through online friendship networks. Over time, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have increasingly dominated, significantly changing communication patterns, social interactions, and community culture. Social media is now not only a means of communication and entertainment, but also an important tool in education, business, and self-expression. (Awilda 2024). However, the ease of access and massive use of social media has a complex impact on the development of students' identity and mental health. Adolescents as active users of social media are at a vulnerable stage of psychosocial development, where the process of identity formation is greatly influenced by social interaction and self-perception. Social media provides space for them to explore and express themselves, but also presents strong social pressure through mechanisms such as social comparison, the need for validation, and exposure to often unrealistic standards of beauty or success. This phenomenon can trigger feelings of low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and self-image disorders that have a negative impact on students' psychological well-being. In addition, risks such as cyberbullying and the spread of negative information also increase along with uncontrolled use of social media. The psychological impact of negative experiences in cyberspace can be very severe, causing trauma, social isolation, and even suicidal ideation in extreme cases. Dependence on social media also disrupts sleep patterns, learning concentration, and direct social interactions, all of which contribute to a decline in the quality of students' mental health. (Clarke, R. 2024).

In the field, various studies show that although social media provides students with opportunities to build social connections and emotional support, its negative aspects cannot be

ignored. Research in Makassar reveals that social pressure on social media can cause anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem among children and adolescents (Andi Nurlela & Atma Ras, 2024). Another study in Bandung found that excessive social media use contributes to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness among high school students (Fazrian Thursina, 2023). This aligns with global findings which indicate that social media can affect students' psychological well-being, both positively and negatively. Many studies indicate that social media can cause various mental health problems. Research reported in the journal (Chen et al., 2024) found that adolescents who use social media for more than three hours per day are at higher risk of mental health issues, especially internalizing problems such as self-image. In addition, according to a study conducted by (Primack et al., 2017), high social media use is associated with increased symptoms of depression and anxiety among adolescents. These outcomes are caused by several factors, including social comparison and cyberbullying.

Discussing the impact of social media on student identity and mental health is important because this phenomenon is highly relevant to the current generation of young people who are growing up amid digital technological advancement. Understanding these dynamics can help educators, parents, and policymakers design appropriate educational and intervention strategies to minimize psychological risks while maximizing the benefits of social media as a tool for healthy personal development. (Fazrian Thursina, 2023). Our interest in discussing this topic arises from concern over the increasing number of mental health issues among students related to social media use. Additionally, the development of theory and recent research findings provide a strong foundation for exploring how social media shapes students' identities and deeply influences their mental well-being. We hope this article can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding and serve as a basis for effective preventive efforts in the educational environment.

On the other hand, social media also has significant positive potential. This platform allows students to build a supportive community, access educational information, and express their identity in a wider and more diverse environment. Therefore, it is important to develop a balanced approach to utilizing social media, emphasizing digital literacy and healthy usage management. In this context, the role of school counselors becomes very vital as facilitators and companions for students in facing the challenges of social media. Counselors not only help students overcome psychological problems that arise, but also play a role in digital literacy education, developing coping skills, and forming critical awareness of the impact of social media. Strengthening counseling services that are adaptive to the digital era, including the use of technology in online counseling, is an important strategy to reach students more effectively. Overall, this background confirms that the influence of social media on students' identity and mental health is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. Collaborative efforts are needed between schools, families, counselors, and the community to create an environment that supports healthy mental and emotional development of students in the digital era. Developing digital literacy, managing social media usage time, and increasing counselor capacity are the main keys to overcoming negative impacts while maximizing the benefits of social media for the growth and well-being of adolescents in Indonesia. (Cameron, K. 2023).

## 2. Methods

The method in this article uses library research, which is a method of collecting data by understanding and studying theories from various literatures related to the research. There are four

stages of library research in research, namely preparing the necessary equipment, preparing a working bibliography, organizing time and reading or recording research materials. The data collection uses a method of finding sources and constructing from various sources, for example books, journals and research that has been done. Library materials obtained from various references are analyzed critically and must be in-depth in order to support their propositions and ideas. The data analysis technique in this work uses the content analysis method, which can be used to draw correct conclusions and can be reviewed. In the analysis, selection, comparison, combination and sorting are carried out in such a way that the relevant ones are found. Inter-library checks and consideration of supervisor comments are carried out to maintain consistency in the evaluation, prevention, and elimination of incorrect information, namely human misunderstandings that can be caused by a lack of bibliographic author factors. (Mei Tang. 2019).

### 3. Results and Discussion

Social media has become a global phenomenon that has fundamentally changed the way people interact, communicate, and build their social identities. In Indonesia, with a very large number of social media users, its influence on people's behavioral patterns, especially the younger generation and students, is very significant. Social media facilitates access to information, expands social networks, and provides a wide space for self-expression without geographical and time limitations. However, this convenience and freedom also have complex impacts, both positive and negative, which affect the social, psychological, and cultural aspects of users, especially in the context of identity formation and students' mental health. The positive impacts of social media include the ease of interacting with many people, expanding social circles, and accelerating the dissemination of information at low cost. Social media also plays a role in strengthening civil society and democracy, providing space for freedom of expression and active participation in various social and political issues. However, on the other hand, social media causes social changes that pose serious challenges, such as decreased face-to-face interaction, increased internet addiction, social conflict, and issues of privacy and data security. Furthermore, social media has the potential to disrupt students' mental health through various mechanisms. Exposure to unhealthy content, pressure to project an ideal image, and the phenomenon of cyberbullying can cause stress, anxiety, depression, and impaired self-image. Dependence on social media also affects sleep patterns and concentration in learning, which negatively impacts students' psychological well-being and academic achievement. In addition, the spread of hoaxes and hate speech that is rampant on social media creates tension and social conflict that also worsens the mental condition of users, especially the younger generation who are still in the stage of forming their identity and personality. (European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA). 2022).

In this context, the role of mentoring and education becomes very important. Parents, teachers, and school counselors have a great responsibility to accompany students in using social media in a healthy and responsible manner. Counselors in particular act as facilitators who help students recognize the impact of social media on mental health, develop self-management strategies, and build critical and adaptive digital literacy. These efforts are important to reduce negative risks while maximizing the benefits of social media as a means of self-development and positive social networking. In addition, global challenges such as the rampant hoaxes and propaganda spread through social media require critical awareness and high media literacy skills so that students are not easily influenced by false information that can trigger conflict and

disinformation. Therefore, the development of a comprehensive and collaborative digital literacy education program between schools, families, and communities is key to building students' mental and social resilience in the digital era. Overall, this background shows that the influence of social media on students' identity and mental health is a multidimensional issue that requires a holistic and synergistic approach. Strengthening digital literacy, managing the use of social media, and increasing the capacity of counselors and educators in facing the challenges of the digital era are strategic steps to create a mentally healthy, critical, and productive young generation in facing the dynamics of social media that continues to develop. (Ernawati, R., Karneli, Y., & Mudjiran. 2025).

**Impact of Social Media on Adolescent Mental Health** Social media has become an integral part of adolescents' lives, affecting various aspects of their psychological and social well-being. Studies show that excessive use of social media, especially more than three hours per day, carries a high risk of developing mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and self-image disorders (internalization) in adolescents. The main factor that triggers this negative impact is intense social comparison, where adolescents compare themselves to the often unrealistic ideal image of their peers or celebrities on social media. This leads to feelings of low self-esteem, dissatisfaction with themselves, and psychological pressure to meet standards that are difficult to achieve.

In addition, the phenomenon of cyberbullying is a serious problem that worsens the mental condition of adolescents. Adolescents who are victims of cyberbullying experience psychological trauma, anxiety, social isolation, and in extreme cases can experience suicidal ideation. Dependence on social media also has an impact on disrupted sleep patterns and decreased concentration in learning, which overall reduces the quality of students' mental health and academic achievement.

#### 1. Positive Impact of Social Media.

However, social media also has a positive side that cannot be ignored. Social media provides a space for adolescents to express themselves, build identity, and gain social support from relevant communities. This platform allows students to expand their social networks, access educational information, and increase social awareness and participation in various positive activities. Therefore, social media plays a dual role as a source of support and a challenge for adolescent mental health.

In the use of social media, there are certainly both positive and negative impacts (Amedie, 2015), as follows:

##### 1. Positive Impacts

- a. It makes it easier for individuals to form communities and express themselves collectively through social media.
- b. With increasingly advanced technology, companies utilize social media as a marketing tool through very attractive advertisements.
- c. It facilitates social media users to spread information quickly compared to traditional media.
- d. Social media enables users to share content easily through applications.



- e. It allows users to interact with friends or family regardless of distance.
- f. It helps users find information about content liked by other users.

## 2. Negative Impacts

### a. Anxiety

Anxiety here refers to the feeling that arises from a person's unrealistic desire to express themselves and to create a perfection that they cannot achieve, which causes anxiety for the user.

### b. Depression

Another impact of social media use is depression, which is triggered by failure in forming intimacy with the opposite sex. Users tend to want to display success rather than being honest about their true selves.

### c. Criminal Activities

Irresponsible individuals use social media as a tool to hide their true identity. They use social media to carry out various criminal acts such as cyberbullying.

2. The Role of Counselors in Dealing with the Impact of Social Media In this context, the role of school counselors becomes very important. Counselors function as companions who help students recognize the impact of social media on their mental health, as well as develop healthy self-management strategies. Counselors provide education on the wise use of social media, teach coping skills to deal with social pressure, and provide counseling services both directly and online (cyber counseling) to reach students in need.
3. Counselors also play a role in improving students' digital literacy, so that they can filter information critically, avoid harmful content, and manage social interactions in cyberspace in a healthy way. This education is not only aimed at students, but also involves teachers and parents to create an environment that supports responsible social media management.
4. Factors Affecting the Impact of Social Media. Some factors that affect the impact of social media on adolescent mental health include how social media is used, social environment, stress levels, dependency, and cultural factors. The use of social media with low and excessive interaction quality can trigger feelings of loneliness and emotional disorders. Stress that arises from social pressure on social media also contributes to mental health disorders. In addition, addictive dependency worsens the condition. Cultural factors that shape family and environmental expectations also influence how adolescents respond to the use of social media.
5. Handling Strategies and Solutions. To overcome the negative impacts of social media, various solutions can be applied, including:
  - a. Increasing student awareness of responsible social media use through digital literacy programs.
  - b. Developing time management and self-control skills in the use of social media.
  - c. Involving parents and teachers in supervising and assisting students' use of social media.

- d. Providing adaptive and easily accessible counseling services, including through digital platforms.
- e. Encouraging students to develop positive activities outside of cyberspace to maintain a balance in life.
- f. Implementing these strategies can help reduce the risk of mental health disorders while maximizing the benefits of social media as a means of self-development and positive social networking. (Hardt, D., & Narayanan, A.. 2023).

There are several steps in overcoming the effects of social media addiction, as follows : (Darajat, Zakiyah,1983).

1. Limit Social Media Usage

To overcome social media addiction, users should limit the amount of time they spend on social media each day by using an alarm or stopwatch to control their usage. Once users get used to setting boundaries on their social media use, they will be better able to control themselves and avoid addiction. Then, redirect attention to direct interactions with others, such as family or friends.

2. Seek Information from Other Sources Besides Social Media

Social media is often used to find information. If the purpose of using social media is to obtain information, try switching to other sources such as reading newspapers or watching news on television.

3. Engage in Positive Activities

To limit social media use, users need to find positive activities. The busier someone is, the less time they will spend on social media. Replace social media time with activities like exercising or spending time with family. Increase activities that provide comfort to both the body and mind, such as meditating, exercising, going outside for fresh air, or doing outdoor activities.

4. Use Social Media Wisely

Limiting social media usage does not mean reducing all social media activity or viewing social media as something negative. Social media can have benefits if used wisely and responsibly.

5. Disconnect and Delete

This option is for those who truly want to free themselves from social media use. Delete social media applications from the phone, avoid purchasing data packages, or disconnect from Wi-Fi networks so that the intensity of social media use will decrease.

Social media has a complex influence on students' mental health and identity. Negative impacts such as anxiety, depression, cyberbullying, and self-image disorders are very real, especially for excessive users. However, social media also provides opportunities for social development and emotional support. Therefore, the role of counselors is vital in providing education, mentoring, and adaptive counseling services to help students manage the influence of social media in a healthy way.

Collaboration between counselors, schools, families, and communities is the key to success in creating an environment that supports mental well-being. (Sinaga, R. E., Karneli, Y., Mudjiran, & Ramdani. 2025).

#### 4. Conclusions

The influence of social media on students' identity and mental health is a very complex and multidimensional phenomenon, which has both positive and negative impacts on adolescent psychosocial development. Social media provides a wide space for students to express themselves, build social networks, and access various information that can support their academic and social development. However, on the other hand, excessive and poorly managed use of social media can cause various mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, stress, self-image disorders, and even the risk of cyberbullying which can worsen students' psychological conditions. Intense social comparison and exposure to unrealistic ideal images on social media are among the main factors that trigger psychological stress in students. Dependence on social media also disrupts sleep patterns and concentration in learning, thus negatively impacting mental well-being and academic achievement. Amid these challenges, social media also still has positive potential as a means of social support and healthy identity exploration if used wisely and responsibly. The role of school counselors is vital in helping students deal with the influence of social media. Counselors not only function as companions who provide psychological support, but also as educators who equip students with digital literacy skills and effective self-management strategies. Through face-to-face and online counseling services, counselors can help students recognize signs of mental disorders, develop positive mindsets, and improve coping skills in dealing with social pressures in cyberspace. Digital literacy education involving students, teachers, and parents is also key to building critical awareness of information and interactions on social media.

In addition, collaboration between counselors, schools, families, and communities is essential to creating an environment that supports students' holistic mental and emotional development. School policies that support guidance and counseling services, counselor training in the use of technology, and active parental involvement in assisting children's use of social media are important factors in the success of interventions. The development of preventive and promotive programs that are adaptive to digital dynamics must also be a priority in efforts to maintain students' mental health. Overall, dealing with the influence of social media on students' identity and mental health requires a comprehensive and sustainable approach. Strengthening the capacity of counselors, increasing digital literacy, and synergy between stakeholders are the main foundations in creating a young generation that is mentally healthy, resilient, and able to utilize technology positively. Thus, students are not only able to survive the negative impacts of social media, but can also grow and develop optimally in this ever-evolving digital era.

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