

## Impact of Social Media on Self-Esteem of Pre-Teens and Adolescents

Bhavya Gupta<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

In today's technologically advanced society, Social media has a big influence on how preteens and teenagers view themselves and their environment. At this crucial stage of identity formation, platforms like Instagram, Tik-Tok, and Snapchat often act as “mirror” - highlighting not just creativity and social interaction, but also subjecting young users to judgment, peer comparison, and societal pressure. This article examines the impact of social media on self-esteem throughout these crucial developmental years, incorporating perspectives from psychological theories and contemporary research. Social networks can foster a feeling of belonging and offer platforms for personal expression, but they can also expose people to unrealistic expectations, cyberbullying, and a dependence on outside approval. To assist young people develop a strong and resilient self-image in the digital age, parents, educators, and mental health professionals must have a thorough knowledge of this dual influence.

**Keywords:** *Self-Esteem, unrealistic expectations, cyberbullying, innovative thinking, acceptance, dependence, digital literacy*

In modern digital era, social media has grown into an important part of our daily life, particularly among youngsters. Pre-teens and adolescents, who are at a crucial stage of development in discovering their identity, roles, self-perception, and emotional regulation, are particularly exposed to the psychological consequences of ongoing internet use. With apps like Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Twitter and TikTok creating standards related to looks, popularity, acceptance and self-worth, there is an increase in concern among mental health professionals about the possible negative impact on self-esteem of these children. The internet world can serve as a battlefield for self-esteem and a playground for acceptance for preteens and teenagers, who are at a crucial period in the development of their self-concept.

Nowadays, teens spend a lot of time on social media, with sites like YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok serving as the foundation for their social interactions. Children as young as 9 to 12 years old, who were once thought to be too immature to handle complicated interpersonal situations, are now interacting with filters, viral trends, designed digital identities, and react in the form of likes, shares, and comments. This increasing dependence

<sup>1</sup>Student, Mahatma Jyoti Rao Phoole University, Jaipur

\*Corresponding Author

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on digital validation from outside sources is closely linked to the psychological need for acceptance, acknowledgment, and a sense of belonging. It brings up a crucial query: How are these young users' internet experiences influence, encourage, or destroy their self esteem?

One of the most important aspects of teenage development is self-esteem, which is the total perception of their own worth and value. It affects social interactions, academic achievement, emotional resilience, and overall mental health. Adolescents and Pre-teens are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure, validation seeking behaviour and social comparison, which are now highly controlled through digital involvement. Thus, social media has turned into a mirror and an illustration of how people see themselves. While social media can promote social connection, imagination, innovative thinking, and a feeling of acceptance & belonging, but it may also encourage unrealistic expectations, cyberbullying, and a consistent need for approval from others, all of which may impact a teenager's self-esteem. These factors can contribute to increased anxiety, body image concerns, and lowered self-esteem.

### *Developmental Theories on Adolescents and Preteens Self-Esteem*

- **The Psychosocial Theory of Erikson**

Erik Erikson highlighted that the "Identity vs. Role Confusion" stage is what characterized adolescence. During this time, people try to establish a solid sense of who they are. Social media serves as a modern platform for this investigation, since followers, likes, and comments shape young users' perceptions of their identity and worth.

- **Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development**

Adolescents reach the formal operational stage, which facilitates self-reflection and abstract thinking, according to Jean Piaget. This cognitive development heightens their awareness of peer opinions and social comparisons, making them more susceptible to online criticism and idealized content.

- **Social and Emotional Growth**

Adolescents and preteens both expect acceptance and approval from their peers. During this phase, the demand for social validation increases, and social media offers continuous, yet frequently shallow, feedback. Because of increased emotional dependence, negative online interactions (such as rejection and cyberbullying) can have significantly negative consequences on self-esteem.

- **Peer Influence's Impact**

Peer groups become more significant for self-evaluation during adolescence than family. Peer pressure is increased by social media, which exposes young people to idealized pictures and ways of life that can cause irrational comparisons and self-doubt.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD**

#### *Positives: possibilities for expression and a sense of community*

- **A place for expressing oneself:** enables young people to express their ideas, opinions, and accomplishments, which boosts self-esteem and identity formation.
- **A Feeling of Acceptance:** Teenagers can interact with like-minded classmates through online forums, which lessen feelings of loneliness and fosters acceptance.

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- **Positive Comments from Peers:** Feelings of worth and appreciation can be strengthened by encouraging remarks and likes.
- **Availability of Motivational Content:** Success stories, mental health awareness, and inspirational articles can increase emotional fortitude and self-belief.
- **Identity exploration:** Exploring various roles or participating in online advocacy can help foster a confident and autonomous self-identity.

### **Negative effects: pressure, comparison, and cyber-harm.**

- **Self-evaluation against more successful others:** Feelings of inadequacy and body dissatisfaction can result from continuous exposure to idealized images.
- **Cyberbullying:** Self-worth is seriously harmed by online harassment and isolation, which can also lead to anxiety or despair.
- **Dependency on Validation:** Self-esteem can become fragile and subject to outside control if it is dependent on likes, following, or views.
- **FOMO, or the fear of missing out:** Observing the social activities of others might cause low self-esteem, envy, and feelings of isolation.
- **Pressure for Perfection:** Stress, in authenticity, and emotional tiredness can result from the pressure to maintain a perfect digital image.

### **Recommendations**

- **Include digital literacy as a part of school learning**  
Students should be taught to assess social media content critically and comprehend how it affects their sense of self.
- **Promote healthy and moderate use of social media**  
Encourage screen time limitations and offline pursuits that boost self-esteem and confidence in the real world.
- **Encourage open communication in family**  
Children should have regular, judgment-free conversations with their parents regarding their internet experiences.
- **Incorporate Social Media Practices into Psychological Evaluations**  
Digital behavior should be examined by mental health providers during admission and treatment sessions.
- **Create Initiatives for Peer Support**  
Establish peer-led, safe spaces for conversation, support, and sharing about digital stress and self-image in schools.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, preteens and adolescents' identities and sense of self are greatly influenced by social media, which presents both chances for development and psychological hazards. Although it promotes advocacy, connection, and self-expression, it also exposes adolescent users to online criticism, artificial validation, and unrealistic comparisons. Therefore, encouraging critical thinking, balanced usage, and digital literacy are crucial elements in educating young people in accessing the digital world in a way that is both healthy and empowering.

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## Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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