

The Impact of Social Media on the Decision Making of Youth: A Survey-Based Analysis**Saara Elwadhi ***E-mail: elwadhisaara@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.36676/irt.v10.i2.08>

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Abstract

The growth and popularity of social media has skyrocketed over the last decade, so much so that people are being pushed to accept alternate lives. Despite the fact that almost everyone in the community has access to at least one social media platform, youth and teenagers are the most active and passionate users of these sites. Social media plays a massive role especially in Youth Culture to the point that it has been an inseparable and an integral part of their everyday lives. The sole purpose of this paper is to therefore shed light on The Impact of Social Media on the Decision Making of Youth. This paper dives deep into the vast discussion of social media as the need of the hour as well as its adverse effects. The method used is data collected through questionnaires. The overall findings of this study is that social media highly impacts various aspects of one's life, most importantly; decision making. The average person spends about 145 minutes on social media every day. While Instagram being the most actively used platform. This research not only helps to fill the gaps but to add to the existing knowledge on the same.

Keywords

Social media, Youth decision-making, Questionnaire survey, Education decisions, Career choices, Consumer behavior, Social interactions, Mental health, Digital literacy, Information overload

1.Introduction

The prospect of Social Media is ever-shifting, especially among teens who are on the leading edge of this space. There are a multitude of social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Whatsapp, Facebook and the list goes on. The number of social media users worldwide has swelled to a record 4.9 billion people globally. What's more, this number is expected to jump to approximately 5.85 billion users by 2027. All of these modernised platforms possess a potential to have an impact on the decision making of youth in a wide-ranging variety of aspects, from personal to political aspects and everything in between. In the plethora of Gen-Z slangs, a term popularly known as 'FOMO' has been coined which translates to 'Fear of Missing Out'. In the entirety of slang, this particular slang brings about impulsive decision making among youth. It can also cause to be problematic, leading to anxiety, interrupted sleep, lack of concentration and dependence on social media to generate gratification. Social media is a complex web for today's teens: Individuals use social media sites that provide tools that allow people to earn others' approval for their appearance and the possibility to compare themselves to others. It can be associated with body image concerns. The "selfieholics" and people who spend most of their time posting and scrolling are the ones



most vulnerable to this. In fact, most college girls who use Facebook at least five times a day are likely to link their self-worth to their looks. That doesn't mean that the main problem is social media; it only provides a medium for it, which further elevates the problem.

On the bright side, social media has moulded the way individuals interact. On the other hand, it has provided new means to strengthen relationships which in turn facilitates social interconnectedness, regardless of time and location. This paradigm has only been achievable by dismissing geographical boundaries. Online learning, banking and bill pay at our fingertips, profession building through content creation and much more, constitutes the silver lining of social media usage

2.Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To assess the extent of social media usage among youth.
- To evaluate the influence of social media on educational and career decisions.
- To analyze the impact of social media on consumer behavior and social interactions.
- To identify any potential negative consequences of social media on youth decision-making.

3.Literature Review

3.1 Social Media and Youth

Previous research indicates that social media significantly impacts the cognitive and emotional development of youth. Studies have shown that social media can both positively and negatively affect self-esteem, body image, and mental health. The constant exposure to curated content can lead to unrealistic expectations and peer pressure.

There is a popular notion associated with fitness, wherein six-pack abs are viewed as a marker of a fit body whereas it is more valuable to focus on overall strength, endurance, flexibility. "While societal norms have placed great emphasis on visual appeal and have positioned the abdominal definition as a symbol of fitness, it's vital to note that a toned midsection does not necessarily mean optimal health. It's also essential to consider cardiovascular health, muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, mental wellness, and other physiological markers like protein, blood sugar, blood pressure, lipoprotein and cholesterol levels. These are equally if not more essential biomarkers of overall health and fitness," says Vijay Thakkar, functional medicine expert and celebrity trainer. Sadly, this does not mark an end to the cons of social media list. Suicide remains among the leading causes of death of children under age 14. Suicide rates among 10- to 14-year-olds have grown more than 50 percent over the last three decades, according to the American Association of Suicidology.

3.2 Decision Making and Social Media

Decision-making processes are inherently complex and can be influenced by various external factors, including social media. Information overload, echo chambers, and the bandwagon effect are common phenomena on social media that can sway the decisions of young individuals. Additionally, influencers and targeted advertisements play a significant role in shaping opinions and choices.

. In the world of influencer era, Half of millennials trust influencers' product recommendations. Overall 76% of social media users have purchased something they saw on social media. Due to the same reason



Influencer marketing took a quantum leap in 2022. A study predicts that social commerce in India will witness a compound annual growth rate of 55-60% between FY 2020-2025, expanding the current market size from \$1.5-2 billion to \$16-20 billion.

4. Methodology

4.1 Survey Design

This study employs a retrospective research design to explore the relationship between social media usage and the decision-making ability of young individuals.

A structured questionnaire was developed to collect data. The questionnaire comprised multiple sections, including demographic information, social media habits, and specific decision-making scenarios related to education, career, purchasing, and social interactions.

4.2 Sample Population

The survey targeted individuals aged 15-25, encompassing high school students, college students, and young professionals. A total of 200 respondents were selected through random sampling from various educational institutions and online platforms.

Inclusion criteria: Participants aged between 18 to 25 years old and regular users of social media platforms.

Exclusion criteria: Individuals with pre-existing cognitive impairments or diagnosed mental health disorders were excluded from the study.

4.3 Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed both online and offline to ensure a diverse and representative sample. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses to encourage honest and accurate reporting.

The questionnaire comprised two sections:

Section A: Demographic information (age, gender, education level, etc.)

Section B: Questions related to social media usage frequency, duration, types of platforms used, decision-making scenarios, and perceived impact of social media on decision-making abilities.

4.4 Data Analysis

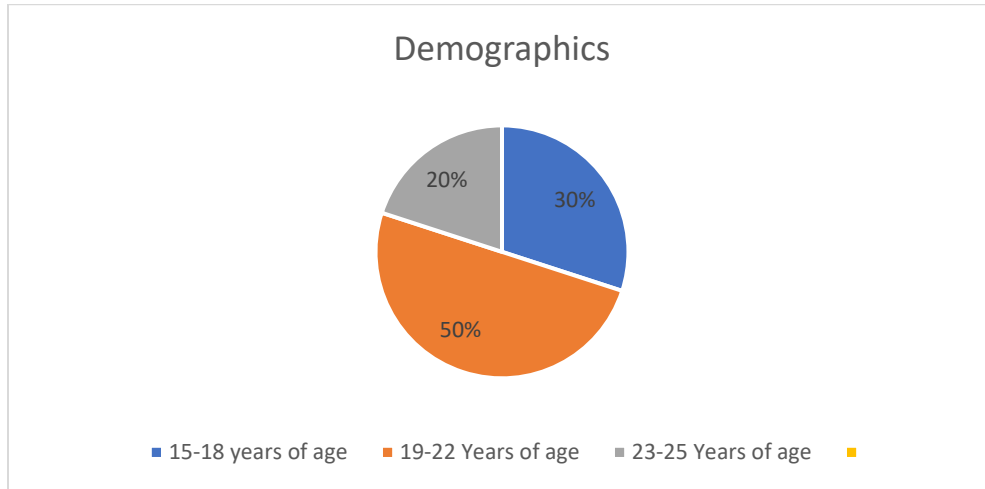
The collected data were analyzed using statistical tools such as SPSS. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were employed to interpret the findings and draw meaningful conclusions.

5. Results

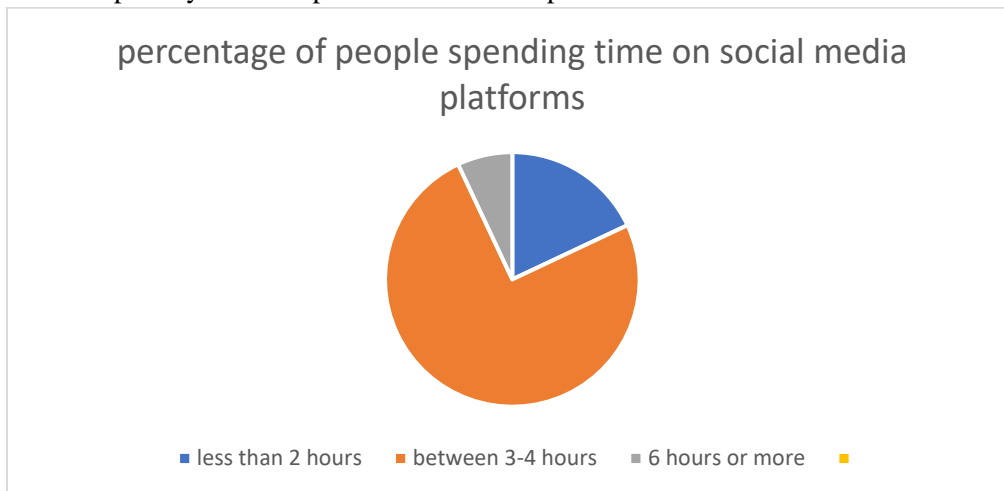
5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The survey sample consisted of 55% females and 45% males. The age distribution was as follows: 30% were aged 15-18, 50% were aged 19-22, and 20% were aged 23-25. The respondents were from diverse educational backgrounds and geographical locations.

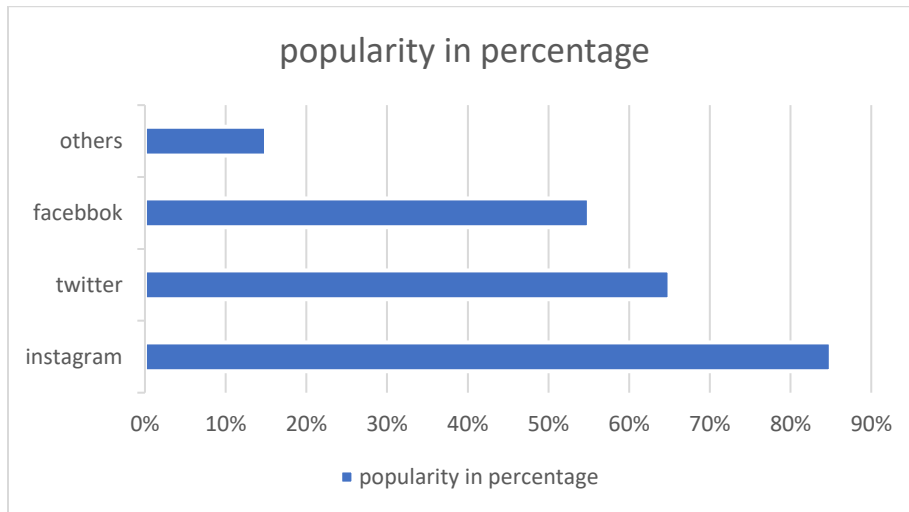




5.2 Frequency of Use: 95% of respondents reported using social media daily, with 75% spending between three to four hours per day on these platforms and 7 % spent more than six hours.



5.3 Popular Platforms: Instagram (85%), twitter (65%), and Facebook (55%) were the most frequently used social media platforms.

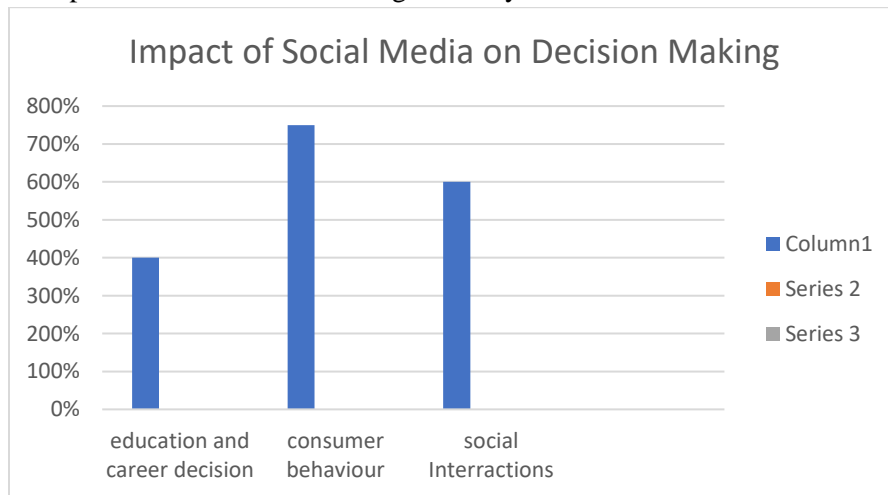


5.4 Impact on Decision Making

Education and Career Decisions: 40% of respondents indicated that social media influenced their choice of educational courses and career paths. Information from educational influencers and career guidance pages played a significant role.

Consumer Behavior: 75% of respondents reported making purchasing decisions based on social media advertisements and influencer recommendations. Fashion, electronics, and beauty products were the most affected categories.

Social Interactions: 60% of respondents stated that social media influenced their social interactions and relationships. Peer opinions and online trends significantly affected their social behavior.



6. Negative Consequences

6.1 Mental Health:

30% of respondents reported experiencing anxiety and depression. This can be attributed to several factors:



6.1.1 Comparison and Self-Esteem: Social media platforms often feature highly curated and filtered images and posts, which can create unrealistic standards of beauty, success, and lifestyle. Youth may compare themselves to these idealized portrayals, leading to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

6.1.2 Cyberbullying: About 20% of respondents reported experiencing cyberbullying, which includes harassment, threats, and negative comments. Cyberbullying can have severe psychological effects, causing stress, anxiety, and depression. Victims may feel isolated and helpless, as cyberbullying can occur continuously and anonymously.

6.1.3 Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): Social media can exacerbate FOMO, where individuals feel anxious about missing out on experiences shared by others. This constant need to stay updated and connected can lead to chronic stress and a sense of dissatisfaction with one's own life.

6.2 Information Overload:

Social media exposes users to a vast amount of information, which can be overwhelming. About 25% of respondents indicated that they experienced information overload, which can lead to:

6.2.1 Decision Fatigue: The sheer volume of information can make it difficult for youth to process and make decisions effectively. This can result in decision fatigue, where individuals feel mentally exhausted and struggle to make choices.

6.2.2 Confusion and Misinformation: The prevalence of misinformation and fake news on social media can confuse users, making it challenging to discern credible information from falsehoods. This confusion can impair decision-making and lead to misguided beliefs and actions.

6.3 Addiction:

Social media addiction is a significant issue, with 40% of respondents reporting symptoms of compulsive behaviors. Social media addiction can manifest in various ways:

6.3.1 Compulsive Checking: Many youth feel compelled to check their social media accounts frequently, disrupting daily activities, academic performance, and personal relationships. This constant checking can become a habit that is difficult to break.

6.3.2 Time Management: Excessive social media use can lead to poor time management, where youth spend more time online than on productive activities such as studying, exercising, or engaging in face-to-face interactions.

6.3.3 Neglect of Responsibilities: Addiction to social media can cause youth to neglect responsibilities, including schoolwork, chores, and personal health. This neglect can have long-term consequences on their academic and personal lives.

6.4 Cyberbullying:

20% of respondents experienced cyberbullying, which negatively impacted their self-esteem and the mental and emotional well-being of youth. Key aspects include:

6.4.1 Anonymity and Reach: The anonymity provided by social media platforms can embolden bullies to harass and intimidate others without fear of repercussions. Additionally, the widespread reach of social media means that harmful content can quickly spread and be seen by a large audience.



6.4.2 Long-Term Impact: Victims of cyberbullying often suffer long-term psychological effects, including increased anxiety, depression, and in severe cases, suicidal thoughts. The public nature of social media means that the harmful effects of bullying can persist over time, affecting the victim's reputation and self-esteem.

6.5 Unrealistic Expectations:

35% of respondents felt pressured to meet unrealistic standards set by influencers and peers on social media related to lifestyle, body image, and success, leading to dissatisfaction and stress.

6.5.1 Pressure to Conform: Youth may feel pressured to conform to the standards and trends set by influencers and peers. This can result in unhealthy behaviors such as extreme dieting, cosmetic procedures, or risky activities to gain social approval.

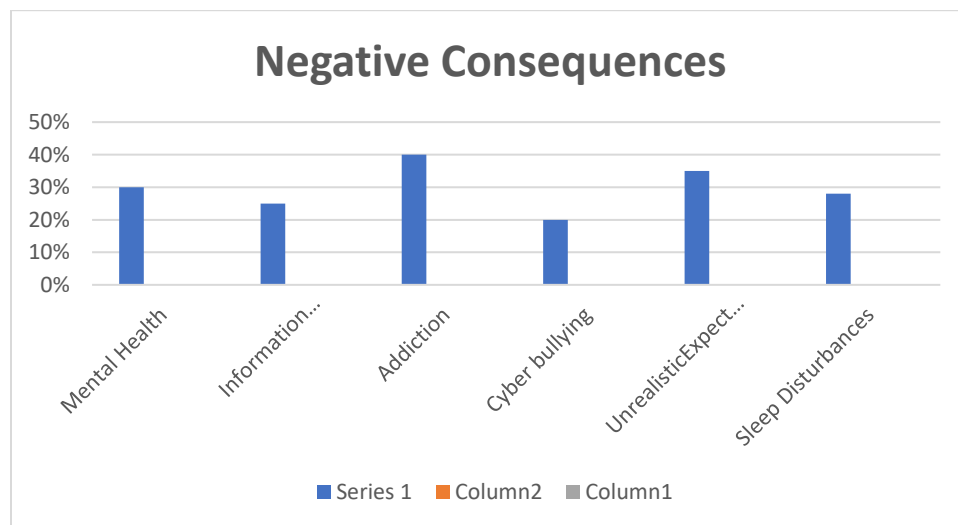
6.5.2 Disappointment and Dissatisfaction: When reality fails to meet the expectations set by social media, youth may experience disappointment and dissatisfaction with their own lives. This gap between perceived and actual life can contribute to feelings of failure and inadequacy.

6.6 Sleep Disturbances:

Excessive social media use, particularly before bedtime, can lead to sleep disturbances. The study found that 28% of respondents reported poor sleep quality due to social media use. This can impact:

6.6.1 Sleep Onset and Quality: The blue light emitted by screens can interfere with the production of melatonin, a hormone that regulates sleep. This can delay sleep onset and reduce sleep quality, leading to fatigue and reduced cognitive function.

6.6.2 Daytime Performance: Poor sleep quality can affect daytime performance, including academic achievement and concentration. Chronic sleep disturbances can also impact overall health and well-being.



7. Positive Influences

7.1 Educational Enhancement



Social media has become an invaluable resource for educational advancement among youth. The study revealed that many young individuals use platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn to access educational content, follow influencers who are experts in their fields, and join communities centered around specific academic interests. This access to diverse learning materials helps students gain knowledge outside traditional classroom settings. For instance, educational channels on YouTube offer tutorials on a wide range of subjects, from mathematics and science to humanities and the arts, providing supplemental learning resources that can enhance understanding and performance in school.

7.2 Career Guidance and Opportunities

Social media platforms also play a crucial role in career planning and development. Many respondents indicated that they follow career guidance pages and influencers who provide insights into different professions, skills required, and career progression tips. LinkedIn, for example, serves as a professional networking site where youth can connect with industry professionals, join groups related to their career interests, and stay informed about job openings and internships. This exposure helps young people make informed decisions about their career paths and prepare adequately for the job market.

7.3 Consumer Behavior and Informed Decision-Making

The influence of social media on consumer behavior is profound. A significant number of respondents reported using social media to gather information on products and services before making purchasing decisions. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook are popular for discovering new products through advertisements, influencer endorsements, and user reviews. This helps youth make more informed decisions, as they can compare different products, read reviews, and even seek advice from their social network. The availability of user-generated content and peer reviews provides a level of transparency and trust that traditional advertising often lacks.

7.4 Social Connectivity and Support

Social media enhances social connectivity, allowing young individuals to build and maintain relationships across geographical boundaries. Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Snapchat enable youth to stay in touch with friends and family, share experiences, and participate in social activities online. This connectivity is especially valuable for those who live far from their loved ones or have mobility issues. Social media also provides support networks where youth can seek advice, share their problems, and find comfort in knowing they are not alone. Groups focused on mental health, study groups, and hobby-based communities offer a sense of belonging and support that can positively impact emotional well-being.

7.5 Exposure to Diverse Perspectives and Cultures

Another significant positive influence of social media is the exposure it provides to diverse perspectives and cultures. Youth can follow global news, participate in international discussions, and learn about different cultural practices and viewpoints. This exposure fosters open-mindedness, empathy, and a broader understanding of the world. Engaging with diverse content helps young people appreciate different cultures and ideologies, promoting tolerance and reducing prejudice.

7.6 Opportunities for Creativity and Self-Expression

Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube offer young individuals opportunities to express themselves creatively. Whether through art, music, writing, or video content, these platforms provide a stage for youth to showcase their talents and gain recognition. The feedback and validation received from their online communities can boost self-esteem and motivate further creative endeavors.



Additionally, social media can serve as a portfolio for young artists and creators, helping them build an audience and even monetize their talents through sponsorships and collaborations.

7.7 Civic Engagement and Activism

Social media has empowered youth to become more active in civic and social issues. Platforms like Twitter and Instagram are often used to raise awareness about social justice issues, organize events, and mobilize support for causes. The study found that many young individuals use social media to stay informed about political developments, participate in discussions, and advocate for change. This engagement fosters a sense of agency and responsibility, encouraging youth to take an active role in shaping their communities and society at large.

8. Discussion

8.1 Interpretation of Findings

The survey results highlight the profound impact of social media on the decision-making processes of youth. While social media provides valuable information and connectivity, it also poses challenges such as information overload and mental health issues. The influence of social media on education, career choices, and consumer behavior underscores the need for digital literacy and critical thinking skills among youth.

8.2 Implications for Stakeholders

The findings of this study have significant implications for various stakeholders:

8.2.1 Educators and Parents: There is a need for guidance and education on responsible social media use. Educators and parents should foster digital literacy and critical thinking skills to help youth navigate social media effectively. Encouraging open discussions about the potential pitfalls and promoting balanced use can mitigate negative impacts.

8.2.2 Policymakers: Policymakers should consider implementing regulations to protect young users from harmful content, misleading advertisements, and privacy breaches. Policies aimed at promoting digital wellness and mental health support are essential to safeguard the well-being of youth.

8.2.3 Businesses: Ethical marketing practices and transparency in social media advertising are crucial. Businesses should be mindful of the influence they wield and strive to promote positive and realistic portrayals. Collaborating with mental health experts to create awareness campaigns can also contribute to mitigating the negative impacts.

9. Future Research Directions

9.1 Longitudinal Studies

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to better understand the long-term effects of social media on youth decision-making and mental health. Longitudinal studies can track changes over time, providing insights into how prolonged exposure to social media impacts various aspects of life, such as educational attainment, career development, and psychological well-being. These studies can help identify patterns and causal relationships that are not apparent in cross-sectional studies, offering a more comprehensive understanding of social media's influence.

9.2 Intervention Strategies

Developing and testing intervention strategies is crucial for mitigating the negative impacts of social media. Future research should explore various approaches to promote healthy social media use, such as:



9.2.1 Digital Literacy Programs: Investigating the effectiveness of educational programs that teach youth critical thinking skills, digital literacy, and responsible social media use.

9.2.2 Mental Health Support: Examining the role of mental health interventions, such as counseling and support groups, in addressing issues like anxiety, depression, and cyberbullying associated with social media use.

9.2.3 Parental and Educational Guidance: Assessing the impact of parental controls, guidance, and school-based programs on moderating social media use and fostering a balanced digital life.

9.3 Impact of Different Social Media Platforms

Not all social media platforms have the same impact on youth. Future research should explore the specific effects of different platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Snapchat. This includes examining how the unique features and cultures of these platforms influence behavior, mental health, and decision-making. Understanding these differences can help tailor interventions and guidelines for specific platforms, making them more effective.

9.4 Demographic and Cultural Differences

Youth are not a homogeneous group, and the impact of social media can vary based on demographic and cultural factors. Future research should investigate how variables such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural background influence the effects of social media. This can help identify vulnerable populations and develop targeted interventions. For example, the experiences of rural youth may differ from those in urban areas, and tailored approaches may be needed to address their unique challenges.

9.5 Role of Influencers and Advertising

The influence of social media influencers and targeted advertising on youth decision-making is a critical area for future research. Studies should examine:

9.5.1 Influencer Impact: Investigating how influencers affect youth's attitudes, behaviors, and self-perception. This includes looking at the authenticity and relatability of influencers and their role in shaping trends and norms.

9.5.2 Advertising Ethics: Assessing the impact of targeted advertising on youth consumer behavior, including the ethical implications of using data-driven marketing strategies. Research should explore how transparent and ethical advertising practices can reduce negative impacts while still benefiting businesses.

9.6 Technological Interventions

Future research should explore the potential of technological solutions to mitigate the negative effects of social media. This includes:

9.6.1 AI and Machine Learning: Developing algorithms that can detect and limit harmful content, such as cyberbullying and misinformation. These technologies can also promote positive content and provide recommendations for healthy social media use.

9.6.2 Apps and Tools: Creating and evaluating apps and browser extensions that help users manage their social media use, such as by tracking screen time, providing reminders to take breaks, and offering mental health resources.

9.7 Social Media and Academic Performance

Further research should examine the relationship between social media use and academic performance. This includes studying how social media affects study habits, concentration, and overall academic



achievement. Understanding this relationship can help educators develop strategies to integrate social media positively into educational settings, such as using it as a tool for collaborative learning and peer support.

9.8 Cyberbullying and Online Safety

Research into cyberbullying and online safety is critical for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. Future studies should explore:

9.8.1 Prevalence and Impact: Conducting large-scale studies to determine the prevalence of cyberbullying across different age groups and its short- and long-term impacts on mental health and social development.

9.8.2 Prevention Programs: Evaluating the effectiveness of various cyberbullying prevention programs and policies, both at the school level and through social media platforms themselves.

9.8.3 Legal and Policy Frameworks: Investigating the role of legal and policy frameworks in protecting youth from cyberbullying and ensuring safe online environments. This includes examining the effectiveness of current laws and proposing new regulations to address emerging challenges.

10. Conclusion

Social media has become a pivotal factor in the decision-making processes of youth. While it offers numerous benefits, including but not limited to It enhances educational opportunities, provides valuable career guidance, and enables informed consumer behavior. Social media also strengthens social connections, offers exposure to diverse cultures, promotes creativity and self-expression, and encourages civic engagement and activism. These benefits underscore the potential of social media as a powerful tool for personal and professional development, provided that its use is balanced and mindful. It also presents challenges that need to be addressed. Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and cyberbullying are prevalent concerns. Information overload and addiction can impair decision-making and disrupt daily life. Unrealistic expectations and sleep disturbances further highlight the need for balanced and mindful social media use. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from educators, parents, policymakers, and businesses to promote digital literacy, responsible use, and supportive environments that help youth navigate the complexities of social media safely and healthily. This study underscores the importance of fostering digital literacy and providing support to help young individuals navigate the complexities of social media. Future research focusing on longitudinal studies, intervention strategies, platform-specific effects, demographic and cultural differences, the role of influencers and advertising, technological interventions, academic performance, and cyberbullying, can provide deeper insights and more effective solutions.

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