The positive impacts of incorporating social media into adolescent social practices

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Abstract.
This article delves into the role of social networks in adolescents’ lives, particularly examining their impact on communication habits and educational needs. It highlights a growing inclination towards online communication, especially among youth, evident during periods of Russia’s full-scale military invasion of Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings reveal that social networks serve not only as platforms for entertainment and social interaction but also as significant resources for education and self-improvement. Specifically, adolescents are actively engaging with educational content in various formats such as videos, audiobooks, textual reviews, and lectures on social media platforms. These findings underscore an increasing interest in leveraging social networks as educational resources, reflecting contemporary trends in education and the evolution of digital technologies. The authors advocate for further exploration of the positive effects of social network usage in adolescent education and development, aiming to enhance both education and the psychosocial well-being of young people in the modern online landscape.

Keywords:
- social networks
- adolescents
- remote learning
- online communication
- adolescent literacy
The internet has become a global hub of information, bringing together people from all walks of life and fostering collaboration and communication. This digital realm offers various avenues for interaction: from personal exchanges to public discussions, and from individual browsing to group activities. Sociological research affirms that interest in the online sphere is on the rise, with more users joining social networks and spending increasingly longer periods engaged online [1].

Today's teens are forming ever-deeper and more enduring ties with social media. This connection has particularly strengthened since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began. The war has heightened the challenges that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, when offline socializing opportunities were scarce and daily life became repetitive. According to a nationwide sociological study, teenagers see social media as a means of distraction from the war. The study also sheds light on teens' content preferences: they turn to Telegram channels for news updates, watch YouTube videos showcasing military equipment and weapons, and use TikTok for both educational and entertainment purposes. When it comes to leisure, teenagers often seek out video game reviews on YouTube, as they have limited time for gaming themselves. TikTok remains a primary source of entertainment content for them [2].

Sociological research reveals a trend in the communication habits of teenagers. One-third of teenage respondents find it easier to express their personalities online compared to offline interactions. Between 16 to 29 percent of surveyed teenagers claim that they feel more comfortable articulating their thoughts in the virtual world than in real life [3].

This phenomenon makes perfect sense, as online communication erases barriers of distance, geography, and social status. Modern teenagers can engage with people from different cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, and ages because every Internet user has the same opportunities to showcase their personality and express themselves [1].

The phenomenon of social media has a two-sided nature, where alongside its positive aspects, there are also existing and potential risks: privacy breaches, dependency on social
networks, spread of misinformation, and cyberbullying.

However, experts stress that social media platforms are neither inherently beneficial nor inherently harmful on their own [4]. It's impossible to definitively determine whether social media primarily has a negative or positive impact on a teenager's personality, as it depends on a variety of subjective and objective factors. [1]. In our view, the real danger isn't social media per se, but rather the lax attitude toward online safety. Trying to keep teenagers away from social media is futile and ineffective. A more practical approach is to teach teenagers how to use social media responsibly while following safety guidelines. This is especially crucial in education, within schools, given the emphasis on implementing media literacy in Ukraine, which underscores the importance of adolescent media literacy [5].

Hence, exploring the positive impacts of social media usage in teenagers' well-being practices becomes a pressing concern today. Understanding this aspect becomes especially vital in the context of young people's mental and emotional growth, as well as their social development. Such analysis will not only help uncover the advantages of social media in their everyday interactions but also aid in developing effective strategies for pedagogical support and youth development.

The research aims to uncover the current positive effects of social media on adolescents during their learning process. The findings could contribute to the creation of effective programs and strategies, fostering improvement in education and the psychosocial well-being of Ukrainian teenagers in the contemporary online landscape.

Using social media as a platform for sharing knowledge is one of the contemporary trends in education [6]. In our study, we surveyed teenagers aged 11 to 18 to understand how they use educational content on social media platforms. We gathered responses from 200 participants. According to our findings, the most popular types of content among teenagers include educational videos, favored by 47.6% of respondents; short textual reviews of literature, chosen by 42.8%; audiobooks and excerpts, interesting to 31%; and lectures or webinars on educational topics, selected by 25.7%. When asked whether
they see educational content on social media as a replacement for traditional schooling, 50.8% said it could sometimes serve as a substitute, while 23% believed it could effectively replace formal education [9].

These results suggest a growing interest among teenagers in using social media for educational purposes. It's clear that they actively engage with various educational materials available on these platforms, such as videos, audiobooks, reviews, and lectures. Social media has become an important resource for teenagers, not only for socializing and entertainment but also for self-improvement and learning new things. This reflects the changing landscape of education, influenced by the widespread use of the internet and digital technologies.

For students in 10th and 11th grade, preparing for the National Multi-Subject Test (NMT) is particularly important, as it's a mandatory step for admission to Ukrainian bachelor's degree programs. Additionally, there's a growing interest in learning English for the purpose of taking this test or for admission to foreign universities.

While there's much discussion about the negative impact of social media on teenagers, the potential benefits of social media content often go unnoticed by researchers. However, some foreign and Ukrainian researchers have long highlighted the positive aspects of these platforms since their inception.

We've uncovered some key positive effects of social media in adolescent well-being practices:

1. Social media serves as a platform for extracurricular activities within the learning process. Over a decade ago, N. Tverezovska noted that integrating educational materials into social networks significantly boosts interest in independent, out-of-class work [7].

2. Social media as a source of psychological comfort. Many teenagers find that during times of fear and anxiety, they are most helped by distractions like music, socializing, using social media, and going for walks. Additionally, sports and computer games are mentioned. [2].

3. Opportunities for cognitive development (the ability to compare various perspectives and formulate one's own opinions). Through exposure to information, adolescents undergo changes in their social and communicative
experiences, leading to transformations in their thinking strategies. For instance, according to I. Kuznetsova, "Having access to different, sometimes opposing viewpoints on topics of interest to adolescents enables them to compare their own perspectives with those of others. The socio-cognitive conflict that arises from this process serves as a catalyst for adolescent cognitive development [8]. Through active engagement with information and in making alternative choices, the individual's subjectivity and proactive life stance become apparent. Thanks to their adaptable thinking, adolescents who actively utilize search systems are able to process information, analyze it, and make decisions more swiftly compared to their peers who do not use computers. Proficiency in navigating through hypertexts and large volumes of information cultivates a readiness to consider divergent viewpoints and contradictory information, fostering personal growth, the development of a nuanced worldview, and tolerance. Learning to use computers aids adolescents in regulating their own activities, drawing parallels with the efficiency and precision of computer programs, thereby enhancing their autonomy and independence.

In essence, we advocate for the perspective of those who, while acknowledging the challenges posed by social networks as communication platforms and sources of information, lean towards transforming them into constructive spaces. When used consciously and competently, social networks have the potential to serve as environments for intellectual, cognitive, and social growth among adolescents.

References

