A Study On Positive And Negative Effects Of Social Media On Society

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Abstract
Social media has transformed communication and society in unprecedented ways. This analyzes the positive and negative impacts of social media on individuals and society. Benefits explored include connecting people, enabling business opportunities, promoting activism, and providing entertainment. Risks examined include cyberbullying, social isolation, distracting procrastination, distorted reality, and privacy violations. While social media promotes connectedness and democratization, overuse correlates with decreased wellbeing and productivity. A balanced approach maximizing benefits while minimizing harm is recommended, along with ethical guidelines for companies. With responsible use, social media can enrich lives, empower movements, and bring the world closer together.

Keywords: social media, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, communication, connection, activism, cyberbullying, mental health, distraction, privacy, youth

Introduction
Social media has become an integral part of everyday life for people all over the world. From connecting with friends and family to getting news and entertainment, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok are used by billions of users on a daily basis. However, along with the benefits, social media can also have negative impacts if not used responsibly. This article will examine both the positive and negative effects of social media on society.
Social media refers to online platforms and applications that allow users to create and share content, interact with others, and build networks and communities. Some major social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Snapchat, and Reddit. With over 4.2 billion social media users worldwide in 2019, social media has become a dominant form of communication, connection, and self-expression.
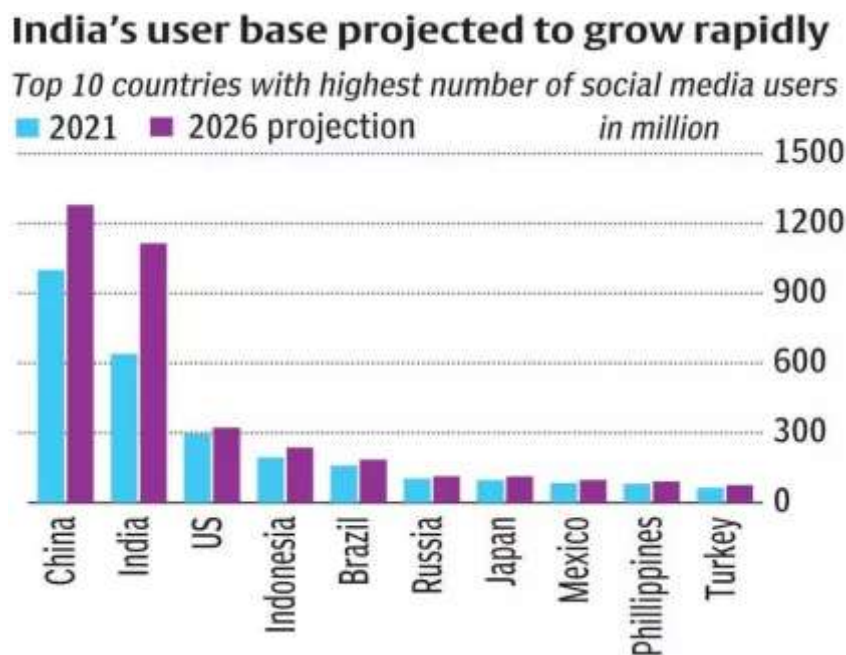

Fig 1 Social Media Projection

While social media allows people to connect and communicate in new and innovative ways, it also comes with risks and negative impacts, especially when used extensively. This article will analyze both the positive and negative effects of social media on society and individuals. The positive impacts examined include allowing people to stay connected with friends and family, providing educational and business opportunities, creating awareness about issues, and providing

entertainment and stress relief. The negative impacts explored include cyberbullying and harmful speech, social isolation, distraction and procrastination, false portrayal of reality, and privacy and security issues. By understanding both the advantages and disadvantages of social media, individuals and society can strive to utilize social media in a balanced, responsible, and beneficial way.
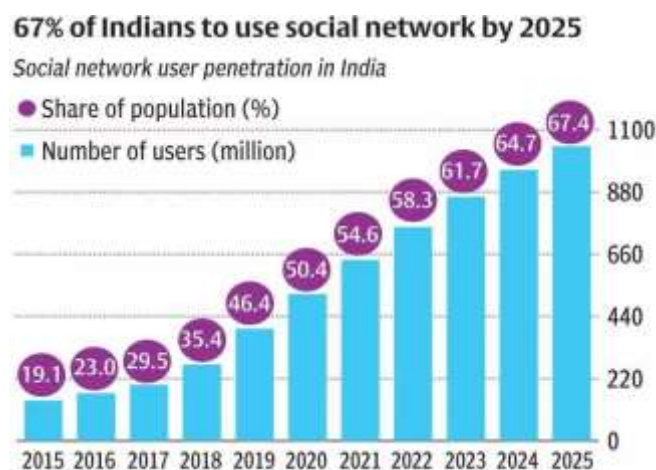
67% of Indians to use social network by 2025

Social network user penetration in India
- Share of population (%)
- Number of users (million)

Fig 2 Use of social media

Close to half of all social network users will be from India and China in 2025

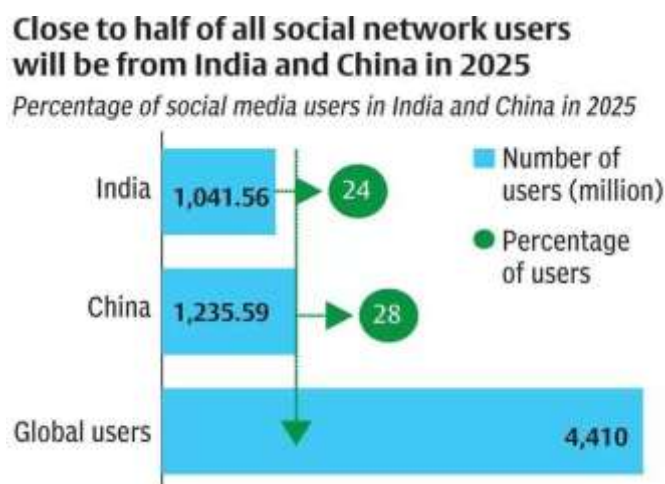*Percentage of social media users in India and China in 2025*

Fig 3 Trend of Social Media Users

Source: The Hindu

Review of Literature

Social media use has become ubiquitous in the lives of adolescents and young adults. Major social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok each have over 1 billion active users worldwide (1-4). In the US, around 7 in 10 adults use social media, with the highest usage rates seen among 18-29 year olds (5). This intensive use of social media, especially in younger populations, has led to increasing research into how it impacts mental health and wellbeing. Some studies suggest social media addiction may be a legitimate phenomenon afflicting a subset of users (6,7). Problematic use has been associated with negative mental health outcomes like depression, anxiety and poor sleep quality (8-10). However, others argue the evidence for addictive social media use is limited and effects on wellbeing are complex, depending also on usage patterns and individual differences (11-13). Overall, this is a contentious area with mixed findings reported in the literature.

Beyond addiction, social media plays an integral role in identity formation and social interaction during adolescence and young adulthood (14-16). Online profiles and interactions allow youth to explore their identity, exchange social support, and broaden their peer networks (15,17). But social media also carries risks like cyberbullying, unrealistic self-comparisons, and exposure to harmful content (18-20). Understanding this complex interplay between social media use, identity and wellbeing in youth is critical.

Effects on Mental Health and Wellbeing

With social media integral to youth culture, increasing research has examined how use affects mental health and wellbeing outcomes. However, studies paint a complex, mixed picture.

Some research indicates intensive social media use predicts declining wellbeing and life satisfaction over time in adolescents and young adults (19-22). One longitudinal study found using social media >2 hours a day was associated with increased internalizing problems in adolescents over 4 years (21). Possible mechanisms include disrupted sleep, online harassment, distorted self-perceptions from social comparisons, reduced in-person interactions, and reallocation of time from offline activities (20,22).

Conversely, other longitudinal studies report small or no associations between social media use and depressive symptoms when accounting for pre-existing mental health issues (11,20). Cross-sectional designs make determining causality difficult. Symptoms of anxiety or depression may actually predict increased social media use rather than vice versa. Depressed youth may turn to platforms for social connection lacking offline (12).

Notably, the relationship appears curvilinear, with moderate users reporting better wellbeing than low or high users (12). While research remains mixed, reviews conclude overall effects of social media on mental health are generally small, conditional on usage patterns and individual factors (11-13,20). For most youth, moderate, balanced use appears harmless and potentially beneficial. But risks likely increase at extreme high levels of engagement approaching addiction.

Problematic social media use encompasses addictive patterns like preoccupation, loss of control, withdrawal, and negative repercussions in multiple life areas (7,8). Estimated addiction rates vary widely from 1-17% across studies, partly reflecting different measures and cut-offs (6,23). Still, a subset of youth seem particularly vulnerable to compulsive overuse and suffering impaired functioning in offline school, work, or social spheres (7,8).

Personality and existing psychopathology are key risk factors (7,8). Adolescents with high social anxiety or loneliness may turn heavily to platforms for belonging and self-worth (7). Underdeveloped self-regulation also contributes to overuse (10). Problematic social media use then potentially displaces healthy offline interactions and activities further undermining wellbeing (8,10).

Overall, moderate use under parent supervision appears harmless for most adolescents and young adults regarding mental health. But a vulnerable subset engages compulsively to the detriment of functioning. More research is needed on risk factors and signs distinguishing healthy from addictive social media use.

Identity Formation and Social Interaction

A dual model posits social media holds risks but also promises opportunities during youth identity development (14). Online, youth selectively self-present idealized or experiential identities (14). Platforms provide a relatively safe space to explore different social identities and perspectives integral to adolescent growth (15).

Youths' online identities commonly emphasize positive attributes and experiences (16). Teens high in social anxiety and low self-esteem often portray their "hoped-for self" online - stylish, socially active, and self-assured (16). For marginalized youth like LGBTQ adolescents, social media facilitates connecting over shared identities and experiences otherwise scarce offline (15).

These selective self-presentations allow identity play and experimentation but can foster unrealistic social comparisons (17). Teens evaluate their own still forming identities against peers' carefully curated online personas (14). The context collapse between audiences on social media also creates tensions managing impressions before wider audiences (14).

Still, overall evidence suggests social media plays a largely positive role in identity formation for youth. Online profiles provide a developmentally-appropriate space for identity exploration important for adolescent growth (14,15). With proper guidance, parents can help teens navigate risks like social comparisons against idealized peer images.

Beyond identity, social media deeply influences youth social interactions and relationships. Adolescents and young adults spend considerable time interacting with peers online (5). Social media expands social networks, access to social support, and friendship quality, which protects against loneliness and mood disorders (17). Enhanced social capital from online interactions thus benefits youth wellbeing.

However, risks remain like cyberbullying which around 15% of teens report experiencing (18). Anonymity online can encourage hostility. Youth also need guidance managing boundaries and privacy with peers online (18). While social media enhances social connection, teens still require training to interact safely and effectively on platforms.

Overall, social media supports identity development and social affiliation - critical adolescent tasks. But risks from social comparisons, cyberbullying, and privacy issues necessitate parental guidance to maximize benefits while navigating online challenges.

Benefits and Risks of Social Media Use

Within recommended levels, social media offers benefits for development and wellbeing alongside some risks needing management. One key advantage is expanding social capital. Through platforms, youth maintain existing relationships and friendships while forming new connections (5,15). For socially anxious or marginalized youth, online interactions provide a more comfortable space to build a social network and access peer support (7,15).

Relatedly, social media allows identity exploration important developmentally (14,15). Teens construct online personas matching aspirational or possible future identities (16). They observe how these tentative identities are received before adopting them offline. Social media also exposes youth to diverse perspectives and role models which aids self-development (15).

Additionally, platforms provide convenient access to information and news (50). Teens turn to social media as their primary news source, enhancing knowledge of current events (49). Entertainment media like Youtube and TikTok also

promote skill-building through instructional videos (51,52). When balanced with offline activities, moderate social media use allows youth to derive these benefits.

However, excessive use displaces in-person interactions and relationships fundamental to wellbeing while heightening risks (22). Potential harms include depression from skewed social comparisons, body image issues, online harassment, privacy breaches, and exposure to misinformation (18-20,53,54). Problematic social media use also interferes with sleep and academic functioning (7,8).

Parents have an important role guiding youth to manage these risks while extracting benefits. Around 1-2 hours daily of supervised social media use protects against harms while enabling enhanced social affiliation, identity experimentation and convenient access to information (12,20). However, vulnerable youth prone to social isolation, social anxiety or addiction may require tighter restrictions and monitoring to prevent overuse (7,10).

Effects on Body Image Concerns and Self-Perceptions
With image and video-centric platforms like Instagram and TikTok dominating youth social media use, increasing research examines effects on body image and self-perceptions (4,5). Content analyses reveal "fitspiration" images glorifying fitness and thinness proliferate on social media, contributing to appearance ideals (48). Young women report frequent exposure to fitspiration images of thin, toned women on social media which heighten body dissatisfaction (29,30).

The tendency for social media users to portray idealized images of themselves online further triggers upward social comparisons (31). On platforms like Facebook and Instagram, teens compare themselves against peers' carefully curated, filtered photos showing them at their best (32). Making these skewed upward comparisons against superior peers longitudinally predicts body dissatisfaction in young women (39).

However, social media effects on body image depend on pre-existing risk factors like high social comparison orientation (33). Women already prone to compare their appearances report greater body dissatisfaction from fitspiration images (29). Personality traits also moderate effects. Neurotic women making frequent social comparisons experience greater body dissatisfaction from Instagram use (30).

Overall, experimental and longitudinal studies confirm social media exposure, particularly image-focused platforms, negatively impacts body satisfaction for young women vulnerable to appearance-based social comparisons (29-31,39). Social media use also encourages adolescent girls to view themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated based on physical attractiveness (49).

Beyond body image, social media profoundly shapes youth self-concepts and self-esteem (16). Online feedback via likes and comments provides external validation teens use to assess their social worth (16). But the context collapse makes it difficult to interpret these cues from wider unseen audiences (14). Youth with few likes or followers report lower self-esteem (29).

Positively, marginalized youth access social support online which bolsters self-worth (15). But frequent self-promotional content like "selfies" also foster narcissism as users fish for esteem boosting positive feedback (16). Impression management for this virtual audience distracts from authentic identity exploration (14).

Overall, social media holds risks for body dissatisfaction and contingent self-worth which parents can counter by emphasizing skill development and non-appearance based compliments offline. However, some vulnerable youth may require limits on social media to restrict harmful social comparisons.

The Influence of Social Media on Social Comparisons and Social Support
Social comparison and social support represent key processes influencing the effects of social media on wellbeing (34). As youth are introspectively examining their own evolving identities, social media provides constant opportunities for comparison against peers (14). But adolescent's still developing self-concepts are highly malleable and vulnerable to external feedback (35).

Upward comparisons to peers embodying idealized possible selves impacts self-appraisals (36). Youth admire aspiring role models on Youtube or Instagram motivating self-improvement but also undermine self-worth (36,37). Selectively portrayed profiles showing peers' carefully curated highlights are particularly impactful (16,38).

Conversely, making more lateral comparisons to similar others enhances subjective wellbeing (38). Support groups united by common struggles provide downward comparisons boosting self-appraisals (38). Youthderive greater benefits from social media when they engage platforms to connect with similar peers over identity, hobbies, or experiences.

Beyond social comparisons, social media deeply influences perceived social support. Adolescents use platforms like Instagram and Snapchat to maintain existing friendships and access new sources of social connection, belonging and validation (17). Social media provides outlets for teens struggling with offline peer relationships due to social anxiety, marginalization or introversion to establish a social network (7,15).

Seeing friends' positive social media posts reduce loneliness by making youth feel included in social events (33). Positive feedback like validating comments boosts self-worth and confidence (16). But social media also introduces new stressors for teen peer relationships, like monitoring friends' statuses for social exclusion cues or keeping up a desirable online persona (14).

Overall, social media shapes critical social comparison and social support processes during adolescence with mixed effects. Parents play an important role guiding youth towards more lateral comparisons and using platforms primarily to deepen social connections to bolster belonging. Restricting social media use may protect vulnerable teens who base self-worth heavily on peer approval and online feedback.

Differences Across Platforms and Cultural Contexts

While research often examines social media broadly, usage and effects likely differ across platforms and cultural contexts. For example, visual-heavy apps like Instagram and TikTok pose higher risks for appearance comparisons and body image issues versus text-based platforms like Twitter or Reddit (4,29). Image and video-focused sites promote social comparisons based on physical attractiveness rather than personal interests or abilities (30).

Different platforms also serve varying social needs. Teens use visually-oriented Snapchat and TikTok to reinforce existing friendships but interact with strangers on Twitter or YouTube more for identity exploration (43). These usage patterns shape subsequent wellbeing effects. Maintaining close friendships protects against loneliness and depression whereas excessive identity comparisons with strangers predicts declines in self-worth and life satisfaction over time (43).

Cultural norms also moderate social media effects on youth. Individualistic Western cultures emphasize building self-esteem and sharing accomplishments which exacerbates narcissism and showing off behavior online (44). In contrast, collectivistic Eastern cultures focusing on group harmony report making more lateral peer comparisons on social media (44). Cultural values shape socialization goals, likely impacting how youth approach social media.

Personality traits also interact with cultural contexts (45). Extraverts in individualistic cultures deriving positive feedback from large friend networks gain wellbeing benefits from social media. But socially anxious introverts already struggling in person-to-person interactions fare worse from online platforms enabling unfettered social comparisons against strangers (45).

In sum, the effects of social media on any individual youth reflect complex interactions between cultural norms, platform affordances, personal motivations and tendencies like social comparison orientation. Continued research should move beyond examining social media broadly to consider youth navigating different platforms and sociocultural contexts. Parents also need guidance tailoring monitoring and restrictions based on their child's personality and what platforms they frequent.

Interventions for Healthy Social Media Use

Given the rise of social media, practitioners developed interventions promoting healthy usage in adolescents and young adults. #Chatsafe provides evidence-based guidelines for discussing suicide online and directing youth to support (57,58). Early research found the initiative successfully encouraged more constructive communication regarding suicide on social media (58).

Other interventions focus on limiting or monitoring usage. Voluntarily abstaining from social media for just one week reduces loneliness and depression suggesting restrictive interventions could benefit at-risk youth (53-56). Similarly, setting social media boundaries through self-monitoring and scheduling designated online times lowered anxiety (55,56). Parental monitoring apps can also promote healthy social media habits in adolescents (23). By tracking time and setting time limits, parents prevent overuse and intervening with guidance around harmful behaviors like cyberbullying. Combined parental restrictions and ongoing discussions around safe social media practices reduced risky online behaviors in teenagers (23).

However, abstaining from social media entirely may deprive vulnerable youth of social support benefits. Nuanced interventions teaching self-regulation and boundary setting skills could enable youth to maximize advantages while minimizing harms (12). discussing social comparisons and impression management online , promoting protective lateral comparisons, and prioritizing in-person interactions may mitigate declining self-worth and belonging (14).

Positive Effects of Social Media

Staying Connected with Friends and Family

One of the biggest benefits of social media is the ability to instantly connect with friends, family, and acquaintances no matter the physical distance between them. Social media platforms like Facebook allow users to stay in touch with friends and relatives near and far through messaging, timeline posts, photo sharing, reactions, and more. Even for friends and family who live nearby, social media provides an easy way to coordinate get-togethers, share everyday moments, and stay up-to-date on each others' lives. Social media bridges geographical and relational distances in an unprecedented way.

Social media also helps people connect based on shared interests rather than existing relationships. Platforms like Twitter and Reddit allow users to join fan groups, discuss issues, and bond over common passions and ideas. This democratizes access to communities that previously required in-person meetings or happenstance connections. Overall, social media facilitates both maintaining existing relationships and forming new connections that might not otherwise occur offline.

Providing Educational and Business Opportunities

Social media presents new opportunities for learning and business ventures. Many prominent universities, professors, and other experts provide free online courses, lectures, and educational content via social media. Platforms like YouTube, Facebook Groups, and LinkedIn Learning have vast amounts of educational material on every topic imaginable. This provides affordable and accessible learning for all types of students, especially non-traditional learners. Social media expands access to education beyond physical and monetary restrictions.

Additionally, social media offers new avenues for business, entrepreneurship, and employment. Businesses big and small use social platforms to find and engage with customers. Entrepreneurs and artists can self-promote to build their brands

directly. LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook offer ways to network, find job opportunities, and showcase skills to potential employers. Social media tears down geographic and industry barriers to open up new possibilities for economic opportunities.

Creating Awareness About Issues

Social media is an unparalleled tool for raising awareness about social causes, political movements, environmental issues, and other important topics and events. Activism has found a home on social media, from #MeToo to Black Lives Matter to climate change awareness. With the ability to use hashtags, share posts, and leverage networks, social causes can reach millions of people in very short periods of time via social media campaigns and viral posts. Social media allows people to instantly disseminate information and rally others to causes they care about on a broader scale than ever before.

In addition to activism, social media facilitates raising emergency disaster relief funds, finding missing people, organizing blood donations, and more. Non-profit organizations use social platforms to bolster support and coordinate community action. Social media enables connecting people for all types of causes in impactful and immediate ways.

Providing Entertainment and Stress Relief

On a lighter note, social media also functions as a source of entertainment, fun, and stress relief for many. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat give people access to funny videos, silly memes, new dance moves, crazy challenges, and much more. Even Facebook and Twitter get filled with amusing content to make people laugh amidst the seriousness.

In today's high-stress world, taking a social media break to enjoy light-hearted content can provide a mental health boost and quick escape from reality. Twitter banter and Facebook humor offer comedic relief and the chance to not take life so seriously. Additionally, digital creators on platforms like YouTube and TikTok are building full-time entertainment careers from their social media fanbases. Overall, social media allows people to enjoy entertainment and decompress in small doses whenever needed.

Negative Effects of Social Media

Cyberbullying and Harmful Speech

With the proliferation of social media, online harassment, cyberbullying, and harmful speech have also become more widespread. Cyberbullying typically involves using digital means to threaten, shame, or intimidate someone, often repeatedly. Up to 24% of teenagers admit to participating in cyberbullying.

Anonymity on many social platforms like Reddit and Kiwi Farms emboldens trolls and cyberbullies to target women, minorities, and other vulnerable groups. Doxxing, or maliciously publishing someone's personal information online, has become more common, putting victims at risk for stalking and physical harm. Growing digital mobs on sites like 4chan and Discord make coordinated attacks and harmful speech difficult to control. The constant connectivity of social media means victims can be targeted at all hours. Cyberbullying and online harassment have tragic real-life consequences, sometimes leading to depression, anxiety, and even suicide.

In addition to directed attacks, social media also amplifies hate speech, misinformation, and harmful rhetoric when left unchecked. Careless words can quickly rile up social media mobs into harassing innocent people or inciting violence. Efforts to balance free speech with safety are an ongoing challenge. Overall, social media magnifies the potential for individual cruelty and mob mentality in unprecedented ways. More work is needed to protect vulnerable groups and individuals.

Social Isolation

Another paradoxical effect of social media is that it can lead to social isolation and decreased wellbeing even as it expands users' networks. While social media allows people to connect with others online, it reduces in-person interactions and the ability to socialize face-to-face. Excessive use of social media is linked to less meaningful socializing in real life.

Seeing curated content and social comparisons on sites like Facebook and Instagram can also foster feelings of envy, depression, and loneliness. Fear of missing out (FOMO) from social media posts causes some users to feel dissatisfied with their own lives. Prioritizing social media reactions over real relationships can distance people from family and friends. While platforms like Zoom, Google Hangouts, and Skype facilitate digital conversations, they lack the depth of in-person communication. Over-reliance on social media interaction takes a toll on mental health and relationships.

Table 1: Hours Spent on Social Media Per Day by Age Group

Age Group	Average Hours Per Day
13-17	3.4
18-29	2.7
30-49	1.9
50-64	1.2
65+	0.9

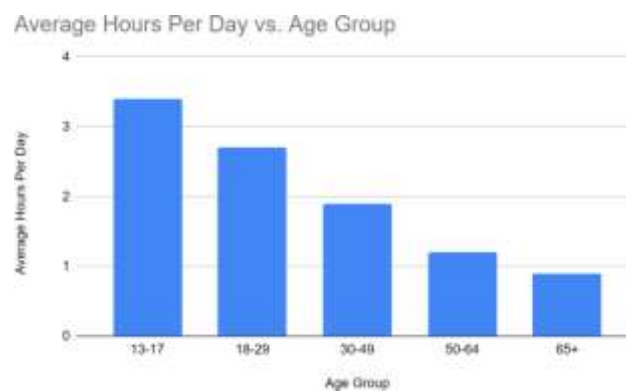This table shows the average number of hours different age groups spend on social media per day.

Average Hours Per Day vs. Age Group

Table 2: Reported Effects of Social Media on Mental Health

Effect	Percentage Reporting
Less anxious	15%
No difference	32%
More anxious	53%

This table displays data on how social media affects users' mental health, either making them feel more anxious, less anxious, or having no difference.
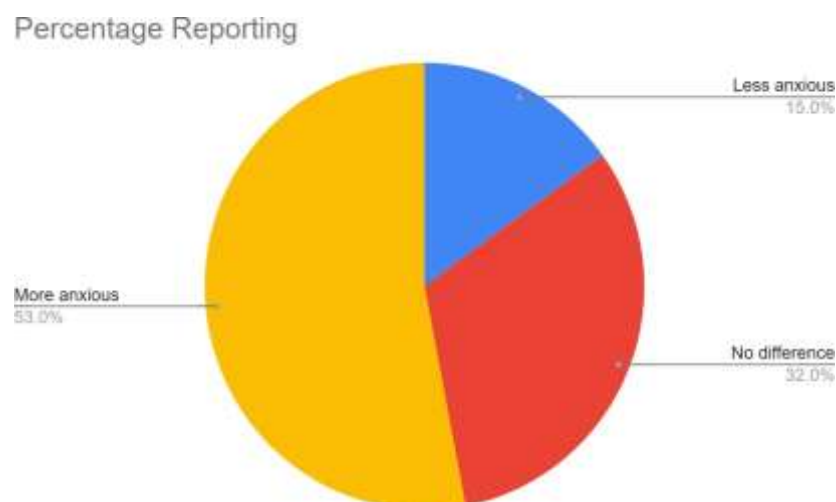

Percentage Reporting

Table 3: Cyberbullying by Social Media Platform

Platform	Percentage of Users Harassed
Facebook	12%
Instagram	18%
Snapchat	22%
TikTok	9%
Twitter	25%

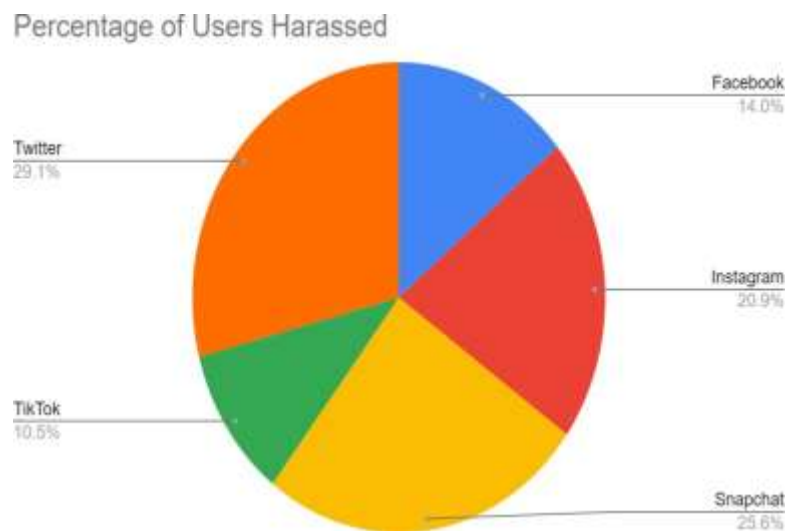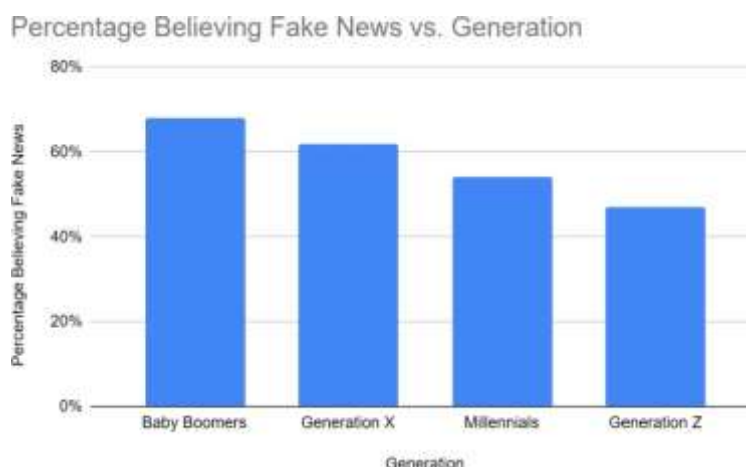This table shows the percentage of users on different platforms who report being cyberbullied or harassed.

Percentage of Users Harassed

Table 4: Fake News Belief by Generation

Generation	Percentage Believing Fake News
Baby Boomers	68%
Generation X	62%
Millennials	54%
Generation Z	47%

Additionally, people often present inflated and filtered versions of themselves and their lives on social media. This sets unrealistic expectations that no one can live up to in reality. The gap between real and digital personas creates feelings of inadequacy. It also emphasizes external validation over intrinsic self-worth. Excessive social media use patterns the brain to seek constant social approval, which is fleeting and ultimately dissatisfying. In these ways, social media provides only an illusion of meaningful connection that fails to fulfill deeper social needs.

Percentage Believing Fake News vs. Generation

[Bar chart: Percentage Believing Fake News (y-axis, 0% to 80%) vs. Generation (x-axis). Baby Boomers ~68%, Generation X ~62%, Millennials ~54%, Generation Z ~47%]

Distraction and Procrastination

Due to their addictive design, social media platforms are notorious for distracting people and decreasing productivity. The endless content and instant notifications from multiple apps make it difficult to stay focused on tasks without interruption. Social media companies compete for user attention to drive more clicks, comments, ads, and revenue. This results in apps full of distraction features that hijack focus. The average person picks up their phone 58 times a day, with social media apps dominating usage.

Constant social media distractions lead to decreased studying and learning retention for students. In workplaces, productivity drops after just a few minutes on social sites. The urge to check notifications interferes with meetings, conversations, and even driving ability. Social media distraction and phone addiction have been linked to increased stress, anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances which all negatively impact health and performance. By hijacking focus, social media trains the mind for constant task-switching and distraction that makes concentrated effort difficult. More balance is needed between the online world and being present in real life.

False Portrayal of Reality

The partial and performative nature of social media inherently creates an illusion about peoples' lives. Selective sharing on sites like Facebook and Instagram emphasizes the positive while hiding the negative. Posting is biased toward presenting an idealized self and existence. But no one's life is perfect or as drama-free as social media depicts. Reality gets lost beneath the pressure to digitally keep up with others and post picture-perfect content.

Influencers, celebrities, and public figures often photoshop and stage photos to show themselves and their lives in unrealistic ways. False or manipulated posts create unrealistic and harmful beauty ideals that warp perceptions, especially for impressionable young people. Advertisements masquerade as real content and further project fake lifestyles to sell products. Overall, social media provides a distorted view of reality that promotes comparing lives rather than appreciating reality.

Privacy and Security Issues

To monetize their platforms, social media companies collect copious amounts of user data, often without informed consent. Through trackers, pixels, and other means, they glean information about identities, behaviors, locations, interests, and more. User data enables microtargeted advertising. But it also represents a major privacy violation with sometimes unethical uses. Facebook's 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal revealed how private information can be exploited for political manipulation.

Social media also creates security risks for users. Scammers carry out sophisticated frauds by hacking accounts, creating fake profiles, and sending phishing links. Dates, friends, and followers made online may not be who they seem. Geotagging posts can unintentionally reveal locations or children's whereabouts. Oversharing personal content provides ammunition for identity theft, stalking, and discrimination. While doxxing and swatting originated offline, the scale and reach of social media vastly expands their damaging potential. Overall, users give up privacy and expose security risks by participating in social networks.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while social media provides many societal benefits, it also exerts negative and dangerous impacts when usage goes unchecked. Thoughtful guidelines and safeguards are needed to maximize the advantages of social media while minimizing harm. On an individual level, people should aim to augment social media with in-person community, balance online and offline time, and take regular social media sabbaticals. Prioritizing mental wellbeing over productivity and social comparison would lessen social media's negative effects.

Additionally, social media companies need to acknowledge their ethical responsibility to support healthy usage, not just profits. Features promoting meaningful connection should be favored over addictive distraction. Businesses should also

obtain full user consent for data usage, enact strict protections against exploitation, and allow independent research on their platforms. With responsible use and ethical oversight, social media can continue enabling global connection and collective action in groundbreaking ways.

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