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Beyond the Screen: Exploring the Multifaceted Impact of Social Media on Young People, Well-Being, Learning, and Digital Life

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an important part of young people's everyday lives, influencing how they communicate, learn, create, develop relationships, and access information. Digital platforms provide opportunities for educational engagement, creative expression, social interaction, community participation, and career development. However, increased social media use has also raised concerns about distraction, problematic use, cyberbullying, social comparison, misinformation, privacy, and interference with academic activities and offline relationships. This study examines the multidimensional impact of social media on young people, with particular attention to mental well-being, academic engagement, communication, interpersonal relationships, creativity, career development, and responsible digital behaviour. The study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research approach based primarily on relevant scholarly literature, while also proposing a framework for a small-scale student survey. The findings from the reviewed literature indicate that the effects of social media are complex and vary according to individual characteristics, purpose of use, content, platform features, intensity of engagement, and social context. Social media can support learning, communication, creativity, and social connection when used purposefully, while unbalanced or problematic use may be associated with difficulties in concentration, well-being, and everyday responsibilities. The study therefore argues that the central issue is not simply the presence of social media but the quality, purpose, and context of its use. Digital literacy, critical evaluation of information, privacy awareness, time management, respectful communication, and a healthy balance between online and offline activities are essential for responsible digital participation among young people.

Keywords: Social Media; Young People; Mental Well-Being; Academic Engagement; Digital Literacy; Social Comparison; Cyberbullying; Misinformation; Responsible Digital Use; Online-Offline Balance

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has transformed the way people communicate, learn, share information, and maintain relationships. Platforms such as social networking sites, video-sharing services, messaging applications, and online communities allow users to create and exchange content almost instantly. For young people, these platforms have become part of everyday social and educational life.

STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
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Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

Young people use social media for many purposes. They communicate with friends and family, follow educational content, participate in online communities, develop creative skills, discover career opportunities, and obtain information about events and current issues. Social media can therefore provide important opportunities for learning and participation beyond the traditional classroom.

However, increased digital engagement has also created concerns. Young users may experience cyberbullying, social comparison, privacy problems, misinformation, unwanted interactions, distraction, and problematic patterns of use. Social media may also compete with time needed for academic work, sleep, physical activity, and direct social interaction.

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2023) emphasizes that social media should not be understood as inherently beneficial or harmful. Outcomes depend on the characteristics of the young person, the content encountered, platform features, and the social context. Similarly, recent psychological research has highlighted that associations between social media use and adolescent mental health are complex and vary considerably across individuals and situations (Orben et al., 2024).

International evidence also demonstrates the importance of the issue. The World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (2024), based on the 2021/2022 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey, reported that 11% of the adolescents included in its study met the criteria for problematic social media use, compared with 7% in 2018. The findings covered adolescents aged 11, 13, and 15 in 44 countries and regions and should therefore not be interpreted as a prevalence estimate for all young people worldwide.

The present study therefore examines social media as a multidimensional phenomenon. Instead of asking whether social media is simply good or bad, the study considers its opportunities, risks, and the conditions under which different outcomes may occur.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Traditional communication has changed considerably because of digital technologies. Social media allows users to be both consumers and producers of information. A young person may read an educational post, create a video, communicate with classmates, participate in a professional group, and share creative work within a single day.

This flexibility creates significant opportunities. Students can access tutorials, educational discussions, language-learning materials, online courses, and professional information. Creative users can publish writing, photography, music, artwork, and videos without depending entirely on traditional media organisations.

At the same time, digital environments contain risks. Young people may encounter unreliable information, aggressive communication, inappropriate content, commercial manipulation, or social pressure. The speed and constant availability of social media can also make it difficult for some users to maintain boundaries between study, leisure, sleep, and online activities.Therefore, social media should be examined through a contextual approach. The amount of time spent online is

STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
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Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

relevant, but it does not explain the whole experience. The purpose of use, type of content, nature of interaction, individual characteristics, and social environment are also important.

Table 1. Major Areas of Social Media Impact on Young People

Area	Possible Opportunities	Possible Challenges
Education	Tutorials, study groups, learning resources	Distraction, off-task use
Communication	Instant communication and collaboration	Misunderstanding, excessive messaging
Mental well-being	Social support and community	Social comparison, problematic use
Relationships	Maintaining distant relationships	Reduced face-to-face interaction
Creativity	Writing, art, music, video production	Copyright and privacy concerns
Career	Professional networks and opportunities	Misleading advertisements or information
Information	Exposure to diverse perspectives	Misinformation and unreliable sources
Personal development	Skill development and self-expression	Pressure and negative online experiences

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims:

1. To examine the influence of social media on the everyday lives of young people.
2. To explore the relationship between social media use and mental and emotional well-being.
3. To examine the relationship between social media use and academic engagement.
4. To analyse the role of social media in communication and interpersonal relationships.
5. To identify educational and creative opportunities provided by digital platforms.
6. To examine challenges associated with problematic or unbalanced social media use.
7. To explore young people's exposure to misinformation, privacy risks, and cyberbullying.
8. To examine the importance of digital literacy in responsible social media use.
9. To identify practical strategies for maintaining a healthy online-offline balance.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: How does social media influence the mental and emotional well-being of young people?
RQ2: What relationship exists between social media use and students' academic engagement?
RQ3: How does social media contribute to communication and social interaction?
RQ4: What challenges are associated with excessive or problematic social media use?
RQ5: How does social media influence creativity and career awareness among young people?

STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
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RQ6: How can digital literacy promote responsible social media behaviour?
RQ7: How does online interaction interact with young people's offline relationships?

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and exploratory research design. The primary purpose is to synthesise existing research concerning social media and young people. The literature is considered across several areas, including mental well-being, academic engagement, communication, relationships, creativity, career development, privacy, cyberbullying, misinformation, and digital literacy. A small-scale student survey may be added to provide information about social media practices within a particular student population. Since actual survey data were not supplied for the present manuscript, no numerical survey findings are presented as completed results.

5.2 Study Population

If primary data are collected, the participants should be college or university students within the selected study population. The final manuscript should clearly state the number of participants, age range, institution, sampling method, and period of data collection.
A suitable statement would be:
“The primary survey involved [actual number] undergraduate students aged [actual age range] from [institution], selected through [sampling method] during [survey period].”

5.3 Data Collection

A structured questionnaire can examine:

- frequency of social media use;
- main purpose of use;
- educational use;
- entertainment;
- communication;
- career-related use;
- effects on concentration;
- exposure to unreliable information;
- privacy awareness;
- online social interaction;
- cyberbullying experiences; and
- responsible-use practices.

5.4 Data Analysis

Survey responses can be analysed using frequencies and percentages. Results may be presented through tables, bar charts, and pie charts. Qualitative responses can be analysed thematically to identify common patterns. Where statistical analysis is used, researchers should report the actual

STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
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Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

sample size, statistical procedures, and relevant measures rather than presenting illustrative values as research findings.

6. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study follows a contextual model of social media use:

SOCIAL MEDIA USE
↓
PURPOSE AND PATTERN OF USE
↓
CONTENT + PLATFORM FEATURES + SOCIAL CONTEXT
↓
ONLINE EXPERIENCES
↓
POSSIBLE OUTCOMES
↓
Education | Communication | Creativity | Relationships | Mental Well-Being | Academic Engagement | Career Development
↓
DIGITAL LITERACY AND RESPONSIBLE ENGAGEMENT

This framework recognises that the same platform can produce different experiences for different users. For example, educational use may support learning, whereas continuous off-task use may interfere with concentration. Similarly, online communities may provide social support to one person while another user may experience comparison or harassment. Therefore, social media effects should be understood through the interaction between the user, the content, the platform, and the surrounding social environment.

7. SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL WELL-BEING

Mental well-being is an important part of young people's development. Adolescence and early adulthood involve changes in identity, relationships, self-perception, and emotional development. Social media has become part of this developmental environment. Online platforms can provide social connection and access to communities. Young people may communicate with friends, share experiences, find people with similar interests, and obtain emotional or informational support. For individuals who have limited access to particular communities offline, online spaces may sometimes provide additional opportunities for connection. However, social media can also create negative experiences. Social comparison is one important concern. Users are often exposed to carefully selected images and stories showing particular aspects of other people's lives. Repeated exposure to idealised representations may influence how users evaluate their own appearance, achievements, relationships, or lifestyle. The APA (2023) notes that some social media experiences can support psychological well-being, while other patterns may be associated with harm. Importantly, the evidence does not establish that every negative mental-health outcome experienced by a young person is caused by social media.

STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
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Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

Orben et al. (2024) similarly emphasise that research findings on social media and adolescent mental health are mixed and that greater attention should be given to mechanisms, developmental stages, individual differences, and social context.

Table 2. Social Media and Mental Well-Being

Potentially Helpful Experiences	Potentially Difficult Experiences
Social connection	Social comparison
Peer support	Cyberbullying
Access to communities	Pressure to maintain an online image
Self-expression	Negative comments
Information about well-being	Problematic use
Shared interests	Interference with daily routines

The evidence therefore supports a balanced interpretation. Social media can be part of a healthy social environment, but problematic patterns and harmful experiences require attention.

8. POSITIVE OPPORTUNITIES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

8.1 Communication and Social Connection

Social media makes communication fast and accessible. Students can create groups for academic activities, communicate with friends, share information, and maintain contact with family members living in different locations. Messaging, voice calls, video calls, comments, and collaborative platforms provide different forms of communication. These tools can be particularly useful when physical meetings are difficult.

8.2 Educational Opportunities

Social media can complement formal education. Students can access tutorials, educational videos, online lectures, language-learning resources, academic communities, and skill-development materials. However, educational value depends on the reliability of the source and the student's purpose. Not all information available online is accurate. Students therefore need the ability to evaluate sources rather than accepting every post as factual.

8.3 Creativity and Self-Expression

Digital platforms provide young people with opportunities to create and distribute original material. Writing, photography, music, graphic design, filmmaking, public speaking, and digital storytelling can all be developed through online platforms. Social media can therefore move young people from being passive consumers of information to active creators.

8.4 Career Development

Social media can expose students to professional networks, internships, workshops, competitions, online courses, certifications, volunteering opportunities, and employment information. For students studying humanities and English Literature, digital platforms may also support the

STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
(ISSN: 3139-3373)
Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

development of writing, editing, communication, presentation, research, and content-creation skills.

8.5 Community Building and Information Access

Online communities can connect people who share academic, cultural, professional, or creative interests. Social media can also expose users to different cultures and perspectives.

However, exposure to diverse information does not automatically result in accurate knowledge. Users need critical thinking and source-evaluation skills.

9. SOCIAL MEDIA AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

Social media has a dual relationship with education. Its educational value depends heavily on how students use it. Students can use digital platforms to participate in study groups, follow educational channels, access tutorials, discuss academic topics, and discover learning resources. These activities may complement classroom learning. However, social media can also interrupt academic attention. Notifications, entertainment content, short-form videos, and frequent checking may encourage students to move away from academic tasks.

Liu et al. (2017), in a meta-analysis involving adolescents and young adults, found a significant relationship between social networking site use and academic performance, while also noting variation according to the type of academic outcome examined. More recent research has continued to examine the relationship between off-task smartphone and social media use and academic achievement.

Pyhalto et al. (2025), in a systematic literature review, reported that problematic or off-task use was generally associated with poorer academic achievement, while also highlighting the complexity of the relationship.

Therefore, the relevant question is not simply how many hours students spend online. Researchers should also consider whether the use is academic or recreational, whether it occurs during study time, and whether it interferes with concentration.

Table 3. Educational Uses and Academic Challenges

Educational Uses	**Academic Challenges**
Online tutorials	Notifications
Study groups	Entertainment during study
Educational videos	Multitasking
Language learning	Loss of concentration
Academic discussion	Procrastination
Course information	Continuous checking
Skill development	Reduced study time

STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
(ISSN: 3139-3373)
Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

10. SOCIAL MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Digital platforms have expanded the ways in which young people communicate. Text messages, images, voice messages, video calls, comments, and collaborative spaces allow communication to occur across geographical boundaries. Social media can help maintain relationships between people who cannot meet regularly. Family members and friends can exchange photographs, messages, and videos and participate in shared online activities.

However, online communication does not contain all the features of face-to-face communication. In-person interaction provides facial expressions, body language, physical presence, immediate feedback, and other social cues. Written communication may sometimes create misunderstandings because tone and emotional intention are difficult to communicate through text. Excessive online engagement may also reduce time available for face-to-face interaction. The appropriate goal is therefore not to replace offline communication with online communication but to maintain a constructive balance between the two.

Online connection → Messages → Groups → Video calls → Communities

Balanced participation → Face-to-face conversation → Shared activities → Emotional interaction

11. CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL MEDIA USE

11.1 Distraction and Problematic Use

Frequent notifications and highly engaging content can interrupt academic work and other responsibilities. Some users may also find it difficult to stop using social media even when they recognise that it is interfering with daily activities. The APA (2023) identifies behaviours such as using social media for longer than intended, difficulty reducing use, and interference with important activities as indicators that problematic use may be occurring.

11.2 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying can include repeated harassment, humiliating comments, threats, unwanted messages, exclusion, or the circulation of harmful material. Because digital content can spread rapidly and remain accessible, negative experiences may become difficult to escape.

Young people need to understand how to report harmful behaviour, protect their accounts, preserve evidence when necessary, and seek support from trusted adults or appropriate institutions.

11.3 Social Comparison

Social comparison can occur when users evaluate themselves against people they encounter online. Appearance, lifestyle, academic achievement, relationships, and financial success are common areas of comparison. Online content may not represent the complete reality of another person's life. Awareness of this selective presentation is therefore important.

11.4 Privacy and Security

Young people may share personal information without fully considering its long-term consequences. Photographs, location information, contact details, educational information, and personal opinions can contribute to a permanent digital record. Privacy awareness should include strong passwords, appropriate privacy settings, careful sharing of personal information, and awareness of suspicious links and requests.

STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
(ISSN: 3139-3373)
Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

11.5 Misinformation

Social media allows information to circulate rapidly. False or misleading information may therefore reach large audiences before it is corrected. Young people should be encouraged to identify the original source, check publication dates, compare information across reliable sources, read beyond headlines, and distinguish facts from opinions and interpretations.

12. SOCIAL MEDIA, CREATIVITY AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

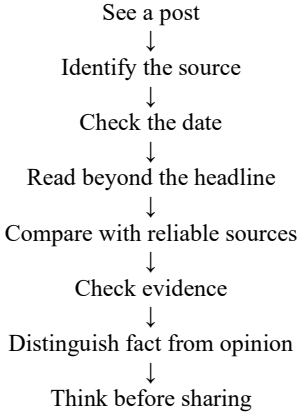
Digital platforms have created new opportunities for young people to demonstrate creative abilities. A student can publish poems, stories, artwork, photographs, music, videos, presentations, and educational content. This creator-oriented environment can support confidence and skill development. It can also help young people build portfolios that demonstrate their abilities. However, responsible digital creativity requires awareness of copyright, plagiarism, attribution, consent, and privacy. Content creators should respect the intellectual property of others and obtain permission before using identifiable personal material. Social media also has a growing role in career development. Students can follow organisations, professionals, educational institutions, and industry communities. They may discover internships, workshops, competitions, volunteering opportunities, online courses, and professional events. Nevertheless, online opportunities should be evaluated carefully. Students should verify the identity of organisations, check official sources, and avoid providing sensitive personal information to unverified accounts.

13. INFORMATION, OPINION FORMATION AND DIGITAL LITERACY

Social media exposes young people to a large amount of information. This can encourage curiosity and awareness of different cultures, ideas, and social issues. It may also allow users to explore subjects beyond the formal curriculum. At the same time, algorithms and personal interaction patterns can influence what users repeatedly encounter. When people mostly interact with similar sources or communities, they may receive a narrower range of perspectives. Digital literacy is therefore essential. Young people should be able to distinguish:

FACT → OPINION → INTERPRETATION → MISINFORMATION

A practical information-evaluation process can include:



STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
(ISSN: 3139-3373)
Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

Table 4. Digital Literacy Skills for Young People

Skill	Purpose
Source evaluation	Determine whether information is trustworthy
Fact-checking	Identify inaccurate claims
Privacy awareness	Protect personal information
Critical reading	Avoid accepting headlines without context
Media awareness	Understand how content is selected and presented
Ethical communication	Reduce harmful online behaviour
Copyright awareness	Respect others' creative work
Time management	Maintain healthy digital boundaries

14. RESPONSIBLE DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Responsible social media use requires more than limiting screen time. Young people need a combination of critical thinking, self-regulation, privacy awareness, and respectful communication.

14.1 Time Awareness

Students should consider whether social media interferes with study, sleep, exercise, hobbies, or other responsibilities.

14.2 Privacy Protection

Personal information should be shared carefully. Privacy settings should be reviewed regularly, and users should consider the long-term consequences of posting information.

14.3 Information Verification

Information should be checked before it is accepted or shared. Reliable sources should be compared when a claim is important or controversial.

14.4 Respectful Communication

Users should avoid harassment, humiliation, threats, discriminatory language, and unnecessary personal attacks.

14.5 Offline Balance

Digital engagement should coexist with face-to-face relationships, physical activity, academic work, hobbies, and rest.

14.6 Purposeful Use

Young people can benefit from using social media for clearly defined purposes such as learning, communication, creativity, professional development, and community participation.

15. SMALL-SCALE STUDENT SURVEY FRAMEWORK

A primary survey can strengthen the study by providing evidence from a specific student population. The following questionnaire can be used:

1. Which social media platform do you use most frequently?

STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
(ISSN: 3139-3373)
Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

2. What is your main purpose for using social media?
3. How frequently do you use social media for educational purposes?
4. Does social media interrupt your study time?
5. Do you follow educational or career-related accounts?
6. Do you think social media improves communication?
7. Have you encountered information online that you considered unreliable?
8. Do you think excessive social media use affects concentration?
9. Do you regularly take breaks from social media?
10. What would help students use social media more responsibly?

Table 5. Suggested Survey Variables and Measurement

Variable	Example Measurement
Frequency of use	Less than 1 hour / 1–3 hours / 3–5 hours / More than 5 hours
Main purpose	Education / Communication / Entertainment / Career / Other
Educational use	Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often
Study interruption	Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often
Information reliability	Rarely questioned / Sometimes checked / Usually verified
Privacy awareness	Low / Moderate / High
Communication benefit	Disagree / Neutral / Agree
Concentration impact	Low / Moderate / High
Break-taking	Never / Sometimes / Regularly
Responsible-use support	Multiple-choice or open response

16. DISCUSSION

The literature reviewed in this study demonstrates that social media has both opportunities and challenges for young people. Its effects cannot be understood by considering only the amount of time spent online. First, social media provides important opportunities for communication and social connection. Young people can maintain relationships across geographical distances and participate in communities based on shared interests. Second, digital platforms can support education. Students can access tutorials, educational videos, discussions, and professional information. However, educational benefits may be reduced when social media is primarily used for distraction during academic activities. Third, the relationship between social media and mental well-being is complex. Some online experiences may support connection and self-expression, while others may involve comparison, cyberbullying, pressure, or problematic use. Contemporary research therefore supports a contextual approach rather than a simple positive-negative interpretation (APA, 2023; Orben et al., 2024).

Fourth, academic engagement may be influenced by off-task digital behaviour. Evidence from reviews suggests that problematic or distracting use is associated with poorer academic outcomes

STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
(ISSN: 3139-3373)
Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

in many studies, although the direction and strength of relationships differ. Fifth, social media can support creativity and career development. Young people can create content, develop digital skills, discover professional opportunities, and build networks. Finally, digital literacy is central to responsible participation. A young person who can evaluate information, protect privacy, manage attention, and communicate respectfully is better prepared to navigate the opportunities and risks of digital environments. The overall evidence therefore supports a balanced approach: social media should be understood as a tool whose consequences depend on patterns of use, content, individual circumstances, platform design, and social context.

17. RECOMMENDATIONS

For Students

- Develop awareness of personal social media habits.
- Establish boundaries when social media interferes with academic work.
- Verify important information before sharing it.
- Protect passwords and personal information.
- Maintain meaningful offline relationships.
- Take regular breaks from continuous digital engagement.
- Use social media purposefully for learning, creativity, and career development.

For Educational Institutions

- Introduce digital-literacy programmes.
- Teach students how to identify misinformation.
- Provide education about privacy and cybersecurity.
- Discuss cyberbullying and respectful online communication.
- Encourage healthy technology habits.
- Teach students how to evaluate online educational and professional opportunities.

For Families and Communities

- Encourage open conversations about online experiences.
- Support healthy boundaries rather than relying only on prohibition.
- Encourage physical activities and offline relationships.
- Help young people respond constructively to cyberbullying and harmful content.
- Promote critical thinking about online information.

For Future Researchers

Future studies should examine differences according to age, gender, socioeconomic background, cultural context, platform type, content exposure, and patterns of use. Longitudinal studies may be especially useful for examining temporal relationships and distinguishing correlation from causation.

18. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations.

STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
(ISSN: 3139-3373)
Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

First, social media platforms change rapidly. New technologies, platform features, algorithms, and patterns of use can affect the relevance of existing research. Second, findings from one student population cannot automatically be generalised to all young people. Third, many studies depend partly on self-reported measures. Participants may not accurately remember or report their social media behaviour. Fourth, an association between social media use and an outcome does not automatically demonstrate causation. For example, social media use and mental-health difficulties may influence each other, or both may be affected by other social and personal factors. Fifth, if the proposed small-scale survey is conducted using convenience sampling, the findings may not represent the wider student population.

Finally, this paper is primarily based on existing literature and does not claim to provide original statistical findings without completed primary data.

19. CONCLUSION

Social media has become an important part of young people's everyday lives. It provides opportunities for communication, education, creativity, social connection, information access, and career exploration. At the same time, problematic or unbalanced use may be associated with distraction, academic difficulties, cyberbullying, social comparison, misinformation, privacy concerns, and interference with offline activities. The available evidence does not support a simple conclusion that social media is either entirely beneficial or entirely harmful. Its effects depend on who is using it, why it is being used, what content is encountered, how platforms are designed, how intensely they are used, and the social circumstances surrounding the user. The central issue is therefore not simply the presence of social media but the quality and context of digital engagement. Purposeful use can support learning, creativity, communication, and professional development, while unbalanced or problematic use may interfere with important areas of young people's lives.

Digital literacy should consequently become an important part of contemporary education. Young people need to learn not only how to access digital information but also how to evaluate sources, identify misinformation, protect personal information, communicate respectfully, manage attention, and maintain meaningful offline relationships. A healthy digital life does not require complete rejection of social media. Instead, it requires informed and responsible participation. Young people should be encouraged to become active and critical digital citizens who use social media with purpose while maintaining balance between online and offline life.

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STANZALEAF INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES (SLIJMS)
(ISSN: 3139-3373)
Volume 3 Issue 2 September 2026 - Available at https://slijms.com

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