

## **ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON ADOLESCENTS' LEVELS OF EMPATHY IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

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### **Abstract**

Social media has become an integral part of adolescents' daily lives in the digital age. Whilst offering various benefits, the use of social media also raises questions regarding its impact on social and emotional development, particularly levels of empathy. This study aims to analyse the influence of social media use on adolescents' empathy levels by examining various aspects, including social interaction, the influence of content, and gender differences. Through data collection via surveys and case studies, this research demonstrates that social media use can have both positive and negative effects on adolescents' empathy levels, depending on how and in what context it is used. The findings of this study are expected to provide insights for parents, educators, and policymakers in understanding the social dynamics of adolescents in the digital age.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Empathy, Adolescents, Digital Age, Social Psychology

### **Introduction**

In today's digital age, the use of social media has become an integral part of daily life, particularly amongst teenagers. According to data released by We Are Social and Hootsuite (2023), more than 4.5 billion people worldwide use social media, with teenage users being one of the most active groups. Social media offers a platform for interacting, sharing information, and building relationships, but it also raises questions about its impact on social and emotional development, particularly levels of empathy among teenagers.

Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and feel what others are experiencing, is a vital social skill in building healthy relationships. Research conducted by Konrath, O'Brien, and Hsing (2011) indicates that levels of empathy among teenagers have declined over the past decade, a trend potentially influenced by various factors, including the use of social media. With the rise in virtual interactions, there are concerns that teenagers may be losing the ability to empathise directly, which could contribute to social issues such as bullying and isolation.

A study by Twenge et al. (2018) found that excessive use of social media can lead to increased anxiety and depression among adolescents, which in turn can affect their ability to empathise. This suggests that whilst social media can be a tool for enhancing connectivity, there are significant risks associated with its impact on mental health and social skills. It is therefore important to conduct an in-depth analysis of the influence of social media use on adolescents' levels of empathy in order to identify steps that can be taken to promote healthier and more empathetic interactions in the digital world.

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## **Research Methodology**

This study employs a quantitative approach using a survey design to analyse the influence of social media use on adolescents' empathy levels. The target population consists of adolescents aged 13 to 18 who are active social media users. The sample was drawn from various secondary schools in Jakarta and the surrounding area, comprising a total of 300 respondents selected at random. The questionnaire used consisted of two main sections: the first measured the frequency and types of social media use, whilst the second measured empathy levels using a validated Empathy Quotient (EQ) scale.

The data collected will be analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive analysis will provide an overview of the respondents' demographic characteristics and their social media usage patterns. Meanwhile, inferential analysis will be used to test the proposed hypothesis, namely whether there is a significant relationship between social media usage and levels of empathy among adolescents. Pearson's correlation and linear regression tests will be applied to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between these variables.

This study also takes into account control variables such as gender, age, and educational background, which may influence the results. In this way, it is hoped that this study will provide a more comprehensive insight into the dynamics between social media use and empathy among adolescents. Furthermore, the results of this study are expected to provide recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers in creating an environment that supports the development of empathy in the digital age.

## **Research Findings and Discussion**

Social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of teenagers worldwide. According to a report by We Are Social and Hootsuite (2021), more than 4.2 billion people worldwide use social media, with around 90% of teenagers in Indonesia being active on these platforms. The use of social media not only influences how teenagers interact with one another but also impacts their emotional and social development, including their levels of empathy. In this context, it is important to analyse the influence of social media on teenagers' levels of empathy, given that empathy is an essential social skill in building healthy relationships and understanding others' feelings.

Several studies suggest that social media use can have both positive and negative effects on empathy. A study by Seabrook, Kern, and Rickard (2016) found that teenagers who are active on social media tend to feel more connected to their friends, which can enhance their sense of empathy. However, on the other hand, research by Twenge et al. (2018) suggests that increased time spent on social media may be associated with a decline in empathy levels, which may be caused by a reduction in face-to-face interaction. Therefore, this analysis will explore both sides of this phenomenon to provide a more comprehensive picture of the influence of social media on adolescent empathy.

### **A. The Positive Impact of Social Media on Adolescents' Levels of Empathy**

The use of social media can enhance adolescents' levels of empathy in various ways. Firstly, social media provides a platform for sharing personal experiences and stories. According to research by Konrath et al. (2011), sharing personal experiences can improve

understanding and sensitivity towards the feelings of others. For example, social campaigns on social media such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter have successfully drawn teenagers' attention to social and justice issues, as well as encouraging them to be more empathetic towards the experiences of others who are different from them.

Secondly, social media enables teenagers to connect with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Research by Nesi and Prinstein (2015) indicates that interacting with people from different backgrounds can increase tolerance and empathy. For instance, platforms such as Instagram and TikTok frequently feature content from various cultures, which can help teenagers understand others' perspectives and feel empathy for their experiences.

Thirdly, social media can also serve as a means of supporting friends who are going through a difficult time. A study by Frison and Eggermont (2016) showed that teenagers who use social media to provide emotional support to their friends tend to have higher levels of empathy. For example, when a friend shares a difficult experience on social media, other teenagers can offer support and understanding, which in turn can strengthen their empathy skills.

Fourthly, social media can facilitate participation in social and charitable activities. Many non-governmental organisations and communities use social media to raise funds and increase awareness of social issues. According to a report by GlobalWebIndex (2020), around 54% of social media users in Indonesia are involved in social activities via these platforms. Involvement in these activities can increase teenagers' empathy towards those less fortunate.

Finally, social media can also serve as a tool for education on empathy. Many accounts on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook share educational content on the importance of empathy and how to develop it. With easy access to this information, teenagers can learn about empathy and apply it in their daily lives.

#### B. The Negative Impact of Social Media on Adolescents' Levels of Empathy

Although social media has the potential to enhance empathy, there are also negative effects that need to be considered. One of the main issues is the phenomenon of 'dehumanisation' that frequently occurs on social media platforms. Research by Haslam (2006) shows that when people interact via a screen, they tend to view others as objects rather than human beings with feelings. This can reduce empathy levels, as adolescents may not feel emotionally connected to the people they encounter online.

Furthermore, social media often creates a competitive environment, where adolescents feel pressured to present a perfect self-image. According to research by Pantic (2014), the pressure to perform well on social media can lead teenagers to become more self-centred and less sensitive to the feelings of others. For example, teenagers who are overly focused on the number of 'likes' and 'followers' may neglect the emotional needs of their friends, which can reduce empathy in their social relationships.

Furthermore, excessive use of social media can reduce face-to-face interaction. Research by Primack et al. (2017) shows that adolescents who spend more time on social media tend to have weaker social relationships and lower levels of empathy. In this context, direct interaction with friends and family is crucial for developing empathy skills,

and a lack of such interaction can have a negative impact on adolescents' emotional development.

Social media can also serve as a platform for spreading misinformation or fake news, which can influence how adolescents understand social issues. A study by Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) found that fake news spreads faster than true news on social media. When adolescents are exposed to misinformation, they may develop distorted views of others and reduce their ability to feel empathy for others' experiences.

Finally, cyberbullying is a serious issue that frequently occurs on social media. According to a report by the Pew Research Center (2019), around 59% of teenagers in the US have experienced cyberbullying. The impact of cyberbullying can be highly detrimental, not only for the victim but also for the perpetrator, who may lose the ability to feel empathy towards others as a result of their negative behaviour. This suggests that social media can be a damaging environment for the development of empathy in teenagers.

## **Conclusion**

In this analysis, the influence of social media use on teenagers' levels of empathy in the digital age has been discussed. On the one hand, social media can enhance empathy through the sharing of experiences, interaction with people from diverse backgrounds, emotional support, engagement in social activities, and education on empathy. However, on the other hand, social media can also reduce empathy levels through dehumanisation, pressure to appear perfect, a lack of face-to-face interaction, the spread of misinformation, and the phenomenon of cyberbullying.

These two aspects demonstrate that social media is a tool with significant potential to shape adolescents' social behaviour. It is therefore important for parents, educators and policymakers to understand these dynamics and create an environment that supports the development of empathy among adolescents. With the right approach, social media can be an effective means of fostering empathy and building healthier relationships among the younger generation.

To foster empathy among adolescents, it is important for parents, educators, and policymakers to understand how adolescents use social media. Educational programmes that teach empathy skills and the healthy use of social media can help adolescents develop these abilities. Furthermore, creating an environment where adolescents feel safe to share experiences and support one another on social media can encourage the development of greater empathy.

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