
Connected but Disconnected: The Impact of Social Media on Students

B. Reddemma

MLiSc Librarian, T John College of Nursing

ABSTRACT

In today's hyperconnected world, social media is no longer a teenage fad but a digital ecosystem where school kids live, learn, and often lose themselves. From Instagram to TikTok, WhatsApp to YouTube Shorts, the average school-aged child spends more time online than in the playground today.

INTRODUCTION

1. Digital Expression and Learning: The Bright Side

Social media platforms are increasingly being used as tools for learning and self-expression.

- **Educational Content:** YouTube channels like Khan Academy and Crash Course provide free tutorials that make complex concepts digestible and engaging. In fact, a 2021 Pew Research Center study found that 58% of teens use YouTube for educational purposes.
- **Creativity and Skill-Building:** Platforms like Instagram and Pinterest inspire school kids to experiment with art, photography, DIY science experiments, and even public speaking. Through social media, a child from a remote village can showcase their painting to a global audience, an opportunity that would have been unthinkable two decades ago.
- **Community and Inclusion:** Children who feel isolated in school find acceptance in online communities. Whether it's a STEM club on Reddit or a mental health support group on Instagram, these digital spaces can foster belonging and reduce loneliness.

What Works:

- Content creators with an educational focus
- Language-learning apps with social elements (e.g., Duolingo)
- Platforms that encourage user-generated tutorials

2. Academic Decline: When Scroll Time Eats Study Time

Despite its upsides, excessive use of social media can hurt academic performance. The average child aged 8–18 spends over 7 hours daily on screens, with a large chunk devoted to social media (Common Sense Media, 2022). That's more time than most kids spend in school or on homework.

- Research indicates that the brain's capacity to focus is weakened by frequent app switching. Children who spend a lot of time on screens have poorer memory and attention spans, according to the
- National Institutes of Health.
- Children are tempted by social media to put off or neglect their homework. Comparatively speaking, notifications and dopamine surges from likes might make algebra seem uninteresting.
- Contrary to popular belief, multitasking between studies and screens doesn't boost productivity. In fact, it decreases retention and understanding of academic material.

Did You Know?

A 2019 study by the University of Chicago found that even the presence of a smartphone on a desk (switched off) reduces available cognitive capacity—affecting memory, focus, and problem-solving.

3. Mental Health Impacts: Anxiety Behind the Filter

One of the most deeply concerning effects of social media is its toll on mental health. School-age children are especially vulnerable due to their still-developing sense of self.

- Comparison Culture: Kids often compare their real lives with the curated, filtered lives of influencers and peers. This leads to anxiety, low self-esteem, and even depression. Instagram was
- identified as the most harmful app for mental health by a 2017 Royal Society for Public Health study in the UK.
- Validation Addiction: Many school kids equate likes and comments with self-worth. When posts don't "perform well," it can damage confidence and lead to obsessive behaviour.
- Cyberbullying: Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying follows children home. According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, over 37% of middle and high school students in the U.S. report being cyberbullied at some point.

Real Impact:

A 2021 JAMA Paediatrics study found that youngsters who use social media for more than three hours a day are more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression.

4. Sleep and Physical Health:

The brain's reset button, sleep, is frequently disrupted by late-night internet browsing. Children's access to notifications, fear of missing out (FOMO), and constant scrolling keep them from getting enough sleep.

1. Blue Light Exposure: The hormone melatonin, which controls sleep cycles, is delayed by the blue light emitted by screens.
2. Reduced Physical Activity: Too much screen time has taken the place of playtime, which has increased childhood obesity and other health issues.

- Consequences of Sleep Deficiency: Students who don't get enough sleep struggle to control their emotions, remember information, and perform well in class.

5. Social Disconnect in a Connected World

While social media connects kids globally, it's also weakening face-to-face communication skills. Children are becoming less confident in reading body language, resolving conflicts, or expressing empathy in real-life scenarios.

- Digital vs. Real Communication: Students report feeling awkward in person, relying on emojis to express feelings they can't verbalize.
- Instant Gratification: Social media teaches kids to expect instant results such as likes, responses, or feedback, which is the opposite of the patience required for long-term goals like studying or learning a new skill.

What Can Parents and Schools Do? A Balanced Approach

Social media is not going away. Banning it altogether is neither practical nor productive. Instead, thoughtful use and digital literacy are required.

Effective Techniques:

- Parental Limits: Promote "phone-free" areas before bed and at dinner. Make sensible use of parental control tools—not for eavesdropping, but for assistance.
- Knowledge of Digital Education: Help students realize manipulative content, question what they see online, and recognize cyberbullying.
- Model Good Behavior: Children learn by example. If adults are always on their phones, kids will be too.
- Encourage Hobbies: Music, art, sports, and reading keep children grounded in the real world.
- Mental Health Support: Ensure access to counsellors in schools who can help students struggling with screen-induced stress or anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Raising Smart Surfers, Not Just Scroll Addicts

Social media is a double-edged sword. While it offers creativity, connection, and access to knowledge, it can also amplify stress, reduce attention, and harm mental health. As caretakers of the next generation, we must help children walk this digital tightrope with balance.

By nurturing critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and screen discipline, we can empower school kids to use social media as a tool—not a trap. The classroom may now extend into the digital world. Still, with the right guidance, every child can be a responsible and resilient digital citizen.

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