Having the conversation: Strategies for effective communication with adolescents about their social media use

Candice Biernesser, PhD, LCSW
STAR Conference
May 6th, 2022

AGENDA

1. Current trends in adolescents’ use of social media
2. Influence of social media use on adolescent suicide risk
3. Strategies for social media monitoring for reducing risk among vulnerable youth
SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND COVID-19

During the pandemic, media use among teens increased at a higher pace than it has over the four years prior to the pandemic.

Common Sense Census, 2022
DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL MEDIA USE ACROSS GROUPS

• Age
  • 8 to 12-year-olds: 38% use social media, 18% use it daily (5% increase since 2019)
  • 13 to 18-year-olds: 84% use social media, 62% use it daily (~stable since 2019)

• Sex, Race/Ethnicity, Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 17. Social media: Enjoyment, frequency, and time spent among teens, by demographics, 2021</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Among 8- to 18-year-olds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enjoyment: Percent who enjoy social media &quot;a lot&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequency: Percent who use social media &quot;every day&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time spent: Average daily time spent using social media ...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Among those who use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Among all</td>
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</table>

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING COVID

• Online hate speech and cyberbullying have risen considerably
  • 34% of Black youth "often" see racist comments
  • 44% of LGBTQ+ youth encounter homophobic/transphobic comments
  • 30% of females encounter sexism and 35% experiencing body shaming

• Misinformation

• Social comparison
POSITIVE USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING COVID

• Connection to friends, especially important during the pandemic
• Identity formation
• Minoritized youth finding shared connection
• Creative expression & sharing
• Learning, staying informed
• Activism/community engagement
• Entertainment, e.g., watch parties

“Social media has made me feel less depressed because I can connect with people. When I feel alone because of the pandemic, I can go onto Instagram or Snapchat and talk with friends and see what they are doing. Then I see that we are all in this together and everyone is having a hard time, not just me.”
—15-year-old boy

MOST USED SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

**FIGURE D.** Top social media sites among tweens, 2021
Percent of all 8- to 12-year-olds who have ever used...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Site</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discord</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE E.** Top social media sites among teens, 2021
Percent of all 13- to 18-year-olds who have ever used...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Site</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snapchat</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discord</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you had to pick one site you didn’t want to live without, which would it be?

- **YouTube**: 32%
- **Snapchat**: 20%
- **Instagram**: 13%
- **TikTok**: 13%
- **Facebook**: 6%
What is it?

- Social image-sharing platform with built-in options for filtering/editing photos & videos

How do teens use it?

- Space to connect with in-person friends or follow accounts that align with interests, celebrities, etc.
- Rinstas – “real” public-facing account, highly curated vs. Finstas – “fake” private account with close friends, reflect true self

What are its features?

- Direct messaging, feed & stories, disappearing messages (viewed once), public or private accounts

What are its age recommendations?

- Intended for users age 13+, no age verification process to download
- Common Sense Media recommends 15+

INSTAGRAM: SECURITY & MONITORING

What can teens do?
- Limit or turn off notifications
- Set account to private
- Add 2-factor authentication
- When needed, unfollow, block, or report (How to report)

What can parents do?
- Supervision – new feature
  - Requires agreement from parent & child
  - Allows parent to view & set time limits on use
  - Allows parent to see who the teen is following & who is following them

https://help.instagram.com
SNAPCHAT

What is it?
- Messaging app for exchange of pictures or videos with filters, lenses, and effects, some that disappear

How do teens use it?
- Most often used to stay connected with friends, make plans, etc.

What are its features?
- Direct messaging - individual & group texting, can set a time limit until image disappears
- Stories – record of the day, disappears after 24 hours
- Discover – offers content created by celebrities, news & entertainment outlet
- Snapstreaks - special emojis & stats appear in response to repeated snaps among 2+ users
- Snapmaps – displays location on a map in real time to friends

What are its age recommendations?
- Intended for users age 13+, no age verification process to download
- Common Sense Media recommends 16+

SNAPCHAT: SECURITY & MONITORING

What can teens do?
- Put snapmaps into “ghost mode” indefinitely
- Let snapstreaks go
- Set account to private
- Send every snap with the idea that someone may take a screenshot
- When needed, block, unfollow, report (How to report)

What can parents do?
- No option for parents to see their child’s activity
- Alternative review privacy settings with teen:
  - “Who Can...” – where to control who can see location & view stories
What is it?
• App that supports watching, creating, and sharing of user-generated videos

How do teens use it?
• Viewing/sharing content created by themselves or others, i.e., celebrities/influencers

What are its features?
• Videos: “For You” Feed & “Follow” feeds, Duets
• Organized by hashtags, often correspond with challenges, memes, or current events
• Direct messaging – individual & group

What are its age recommendations?
• <13 can’t post videos or comment, content curated for younger audience, 13-15 – accounts are private by default, 16-17 – can livestream & use direct messaging, no age verification
• Common Sense Media recommends 15+

TIKTOK: SECURITY & MONITORING

What can teens do?
- Limit or turn off notifications
- Set account to private
- Unfollow, block people, or report (How to report)

What can parents do?
- Family Pairing
  - Screen time management
  - Restricted mode (blocks mature content)
  - Restrict who can message or turn off messaging completely
  - Talk about how to deal with challenges

https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/safety
**What is it?**
- A place to share interests in subject-specific groups (servers)

**How do teens use it?**
- Connect with friends in private/invite-only servers or connect with online friends/strangers around topics of shared interest (e.g., gaming, music, anime, etc.)

**What are its features?**
- Servers – communities oriented around a certain topic, each with their own set of rules, can be private (requiring an invite) or public, operate by text or voice
- Direct messaging – text and video-based chat features for individuals & groups

**What are its age recommendations?**
- Intended for users age 13+, no age verification process to download
- Common Sense Media recommends 13+

**DISCORD: SECURITY & MONITORING**

What can teens do?
- Only participate in private servers
- Only accept friend requests from in-person friends
- When needed, block, delete, report (How to report)

What can parents do?
- No options for parental controls
- Review privacy settings together
  - Activate “keep me safe” on Safe Direct Messaging
  - Limit direct messaging and friend requests
- Talk to teens about dealing with online predators
RESEARCH UPDATE: SOCIAL MEDIA’S INFLUENCE ON MENTAL HEALTH

FREQUENCY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE NOT A STRONG PREDICTOR OF WELLBEING

Most large-scale studies with youth have found frequency of social media use has little impact on adolescents’ mental health and wellbeing.

*Also see: Odgers & Jenson, 2020

The association between adolescent well-being and digital technology use

Amy Orben & Andrew K. Przybylski


17k Accesses | 345 Citations | 2453 Altmetric | Metrics

Matters Arising to this article was published on 17 April 2020

Abstract

The widespread use of digital technologies by young people has spurred speculation that their regular use negatively impacts psychological well-being. Current empirical evidence supporting this idea is largely based on secondary analyses of large-scale social datasets. Though these datasets provide a valuable resource for highly powered investigations, their many variables and observations are often explored with an analytical flexibility that marks small effects as statistically significant, thereby leading to potential false positives and conflicting results. Here we address these methodological challenges by applying specification curve analysis (SCA) across three large-scale social datasets (total n = 3,553,358) to rigorously examine correlational evidence for the effects of digital technology on adolescents. The association we find between digital technology use and adolescent well-being is negative but small, explaining at most 0.4% of the variation in well-being. Taking the broader context of the data into account suggests that these effects are too small to warrant policy change.
FREQUENCY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE NOT A STRONG PREDICTOR OF WELLBEING

Although usage of social media has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, data suggests it is not associated with increases in depression, anxiety, or suicidal ideation among teens over time.

NATURE OF TEENS’ SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIENCES ARE LIKELY MORE MEANINGFUL TO MENTAL HEALTH THAN USE

Social media experiences may be more influential to youth mental health than amount of social media use.
Investigating Influence of Social Media Experiences on Youth Suicide Risk

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RISK FACTORS</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy/frequent use</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic use</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbullying/ peer victimization</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to self-harm/ suicidal content</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nighttime-specific use</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Negative upward social comparison</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thwarted belongingness/ social isolation</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PROTECTIVE FACTORS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social connectedness</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social engagement</td>
<td>X</td>
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POTENTIAL FOR DIFFERENCES ACROSS GROUPS

- More research needed on demographic & psychological characteristics that could contribute to vulnerability or protection
- High risk youth may have added vulnerabilities as well as added opportunities for support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vulnerabilities</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risky online behaviors (e.g., talking to strangers, disclosing personal information)</td>
<td>High in online health information seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to harmful content (e.g., self-harm)</td>
<td>Likely to seek emotional support on social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet harassment &amp; cyberbullying</td>
<td>Participation in online friendships is prospectively associated with decreases in suicidal ideation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Adolescents who are marginalized in offline social context (e.g., ethnic, racial, gender or sexual minority groups) report companionship, resource sharing, and emotional validation in online settings that is harder to find in-person (Ybarra et al, 2005).

Online racial discrimination is common among youth of color. In a daily diary study, Black adolescents averaged over 5 racial discrimination experiences per day. Discrimination occurred more commonly online than in offline settings (English et al, 2020).
POTENTIAL FOR DIFFERENCES ACROSS GROUPS

• Analysis of large longitudinal datasets from UK (17,409 youth, ages 10-21) observed distinct developmental windows of sensitivity to social media in adolescence when higher use predicted decreases in life satisfaction one year later.

• Windows occur for:
  • Males at ages 14-15 and 19
  • Females at ages 11-13 and 19

SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING FOR VULNERABLE YOUTH
STUDY EXAMINING YOUTH & PARENTS LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING

Participants and Setting

- Youth, ages 13-20 (N=31) and their parents (N=30) were recruited from clinical treatment settings for depression in Pittsburgh area
  - Youth: ages 13-20 (mean=16 years), 78% female, 87% White and 13% Black
  - Parents: ages 37-55 (mean=46 years), 83% female, 91% White, 9% Black

Data Collection

- Aimed to explore perspectives of adolescents with depression and their parents regarding use and monitoring of social media
- Individual qualitative interviews (parents and adolescents were separate)

Data Analysis

- All data were recorded and transcribed
- Individual parent interviews were analyzed using content analysis
- Parent-child matched pairs (N=21) were analyzed using dyadic analysis

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Themes related to monitoring were conceptualized using constructs from Stattin and Kerr’s work which hypothesizes three primary sources of parental knowledge:

1. Adolescents’ voluntary disclosure of information with their parents
2. Parents’ solicitation of information from their child
3. Parents’ use of control (e.g., setting rules or limitations)

Kerr & Stattin, 2000 & 2010

DYAD-LEVEL RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
<th>Parent’s Perspective</th>
<th>Adolescent's Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social media as a form of expression</td>
<td>Disagreed</td>
<td>Inconsequential, interferes with other activities “But why do you have to tell everybody? Like why? I don't get it.”</td>
<td>A forum for honest expression of emotions “Because it’s your Twitter, so you can just say how you feel.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about depression on social media</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
<td>It’s better to talk offline, to parents. “If they feel that way, he should come to his mother or father....”</td>
<td>It’s not a good idea. What will others think? “I don’t want everybody to know my business.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with strangers online</td>
<td>Disagreed</td>
<td>Worried about safety &amp; privacy “How dangerous it is, some of these people are older…”</td>
<td>Talking to strangers is normative “You want to have so many friends on there you just add whoever.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental monitoring</td>
<td>Disagreed</td>
<td>Tried to protect their child and maintain their relationship “She’s 16, so I’m sure she doesn’t appreciate, you know, me watching everything she does. But she understands.”</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction with monitoring when excluded from the decision-making “It kind of makes me irritated. I’m 16, almost 17, and I feel like I should be old enough that she doesn’t have to follow everything I do.”</td>
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STUDY 2: INDIVIDUAL PARENT INTERVIEW RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCES OF PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adolescent’s Voluntary Disclosure</strong></td>
<td>Adolescents at times opened up organically about social media experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open conversations were seen as the best way to contribute to adolescent disclosure</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parental Solicitation</strong></td>
<td>Offers viewpoint on child’s emotional state that can open opportunities for dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directly solicited about social media use when concerned</td>
<td>Disclosure may be selective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirectly solicited without the child’s knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental Control</strong></td>
<td>Selective need for protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control was typically enacted through restriction of social media sites either as a means of discipline or to protect from perceived harm</td>
<td>Limited parental knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential for parent-child conflict</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adolescent secrecy</td>
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TAKEAWAYS

This research suggests need to:

- understand the specific context of adolescents’ social media use and parents’ perceptions toward monitoring
- aid families in finding a middle ground between parents’ need to protect and adolescents’ need for autonomy
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE & MONITORING

2018 (ongoing)  2019  2021

Common element across recommendations: open conversation

FOSTER OPEN DISCUSSION IN SAFE, AFFIRMING SPACES AND RECOGNIZING DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXT

• Active, supportive discussion > restriction at reducing incidence of media-related risks (Chen & Shi, 2018)

• Curate a safe & affirming space where teens feel comfortable opening up
  • LGBTQ youth who report having at least one accepting adult were 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt in the past year.
  • Helpful Resource: Trevor Project: How to be an ally

• Discussions should be developmentally appropriate
  • younger adolescents may need guidance on appropriate media use
  • older adolescents may need someone to calmly listen, validate, and offer support
GUIDANCE FOR TEENS ABOUT SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- Check your mood before going on social media
- Don’t compromise your identity, especially on public sites
- Build a positive online reputation
- Avoid telling others where you are at all times
- Prioritize friends who supportive and unfriend/block/unfollow friends who can be toxic
- Develop a relationship with a parent/trusted adult to talk with about online experiences

GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS ABOUT HAVING OPEN CONVERSATIONS WITH TEENS

- Talk to adolescents about the places they feel supported and safe online and times when social media can increase stress
- Ask young people how the people they follow or interact with online the most make them feel
- Reserve judgements about screen time
- Pay close attention if an adolescent is already struggling offline
- Be prepared for younger adolescents to enter social media earlier than planned
- Consider ramifications of phone removal
GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOL & MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

- Responsibility to build an awareness of social media trends and uses
- Recognize positive and negative aspects of social media use
- Aid families in appropriate monitoring of social media based on child’s developmental stage & mental health vulnerability

School professionals
- Offer education & support on strategies for safe & healthy social media use and effective monitoring strategies

Mental health professionals
- Address social media during assessment and safety planning and help families find a middle ground with monitoring

Helpful Resource: AAS Tipsheet

WHAT ABOUT PARENTAL CONTROLS?

- Younger adolescents or those who are developmentally less mature often benefit from parental monitoring. See options here.

- What to keep in mind:
  - Be open about parental controls, if used, and discuss why and how they will be used. Adolescents feeling their privacy was invaded is associated with secrecy and deficits in family functioning.
  - Be supportive. Supportive parenting facilitates adolescents voluntarily discussing challenges with parents, whereas unsupportive parenting + control strategies are associated with increased depressive symptoms.
  - Be aware that any parental control option is not full proof.
RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING VULNERABLE YOUTH

#chatsafe

Young Person’s Guide for Communicating Safely Online About Suicide
RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING VULNERABLE YOUTH

Trevor Project
Protect Your Space and Well-being on Instagram

Center for Countering Digital Hate
A Practical Guide for Dealing with Hate Speech

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

Interactive lessons and activities for all students! 🔴
Digital Citizenship Curriculum

Use digital citizenship lesson plans to address timely topics and prepare students to take ownership of their digital lives. Browse lessons by grade and topic below, or see an overview of the curriculum.

Filter by grade

- Media Balance & Well-Being
- Privacy & Security
- Digital Footprint & Identity
- Relationships & Communication
- Cyberbullying, Digital Drama & Hate Speech
- News & Media Literacy

https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship/curriculum
RESOURCES FOR RESPONDING TO CYBERBULLYING

- For Pennsylvania:
  - Pennsylvania Bullying Prevention Consultation Line
  - Safe 2 Say
- Other resources: Stomp Out Bullying
RESOURCES FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

• National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call 800-273-8255
• Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741-741
• Trevor Project: Call 866-488-7386 or Text START to 678-678
• Trans Lifeline: Call 877-565-8860
• Re: Solve Crisis Network: 1-888-796-8226

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR CYBERBULLYING

• Cyberbullying Research Center: (Resources for teens/youth, parents and educators) www.cyberbullying.org
• StopBullying.gov: (Tips and resources for teens, parents and educators) www.stopbullying.gov/cyberbullying
• PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center: (Resources and support for parents of children with disabilities, as well as, information regarding bullying and cyberbullying) www.pacer.org/bullying/info/cyberbullying/
• Anti-Defamation League: (Resources, education and support to combat anti-Semitism, bigotry, discrimination and injustice, includes resources for bullying and cyberbullying) www.adl.org
RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

• Common Sense Media: https://www.commonsensemedia.org
• Connect Safely: https://www.connectsafely.org
• Kids and Tech – resources from the American Academy of Pediatrics
  https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Tips-for-Parents-Digital-Age.aspx
• AT&T Secure Family: (App that tracks location, limits screen time and filters web and app use) https://www.att.com/security/secure-family-app/
• OnGuardOnline: (FTC’s free online tips and resources for parents and educators) www.consumer.ftc.gov

RESOURCES FOR TEENS

• A Thin Line – developed to empower teens to identify, respond to, and stop the spread of digital abuse http://www.athinline.org/
• That’s Not Cool – provides tools to help teens navigate digital communication in relationships https://thatsnotcool.com/
RESOURCES FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH

• The Trevor Project: (Crisis intervention and suicide prevention resources for LGBTQ young people) www.thetrevorproject.org

• GLSEN: (Resources for teachers and allies to create safe learning environments for LGBTQ students) Homepage | GLSEN

• LGBT National Help Center: (Hotlines, peer support, and moderated youth chat) https://www.glbthotline.org/