Research Project Outcome

*What are the impacts of an increasing presence of social and entertaining media on teenagers?*

**Introduction**

Social media, a form of interactive technology can influence and affect an individual's mental state; this influence is most prevalent in teenagers and adolescents.[[1]](#footnote-2) This report identifies the ways in which social media impacts teenagers and adolescents health using a variety of sources. Additionally, surveys were completed by social media users, and secondary research was used, including the final child mind survey report. Namely the key factors to be considered when concerning media consumption are;

* Effect on self-image[[2]](#footnote-3)
* Effects on Behaviour[[3]](#footnote-4)
* Impact on Education[[4]](#footnote-5)
* Effects in interpersonal relations[[5]](#footnote-6)

Before continuing to the effects, this report will distinguish two primary sources of media consumption. Entertainment media and social media. The difference between the two forms of media is that social media was created with the purpose of creating and sharing content or participating in social networking[[6]](#footnote-7) . In contrast, entertaining media was designed to entertain *Figure 1[[7]](#footnote-8): Graph depicting the recent rise of Social Media,* e.g., movies, music and television shows. [[8]](#footnote-9)

**Effects on self-image.**

Since the meteoric rise of social media starting in 2006 with the availability of social websites like Facebook[[9]](#footnote-10) and Twitter[[10]](#footnote-11), people have grown weary of what effects prolonged exposure to these social media sites can have on one's self-confidence[[11]](#footnote-12). There has been evidence of a relationship between a person's prolonged use of media and their self-image[[12]](#footnote-13); this effect applies to all forms of media.[[13]](#footnote-14) Multiple studies have effectively come to the conclusions that a mediated use of social media can help an individual to create social-comparisons[[14]](#footnote-15) and provide opportunities an individual to enact self-evaluation[[15]](#footnote-16) and even self-enhancement[[16]](#footnote-17). Appropriate use of video games can help create a more accepting community[[17]](#footnote-18) where players reported feeling involved[[18]](#footnote-19) and respected[[19]](#footnote-20), which in turn has the possible effect of boosting overall confidence[[20]](#footnote-21). However, alongside the positive results, there have been negatives studies have concluded that the portrayal of most female characters in popular online games as overly-sexualised[[21]](#footnote-22) undermines the confidence[[22]](#footnote-23) of female gamers and harms their self-image[[23]](#footnote-24).

Female gamers, however, don't experience the same positive effects and respect that male players report[[24]](#footnote-25). The treatment of women in games is polar to how men reported treatment while men reported feeling respected[[25]](#footnote-26) and included, women generally reported being harassed[[26]](#footnote-27). Female gamers have reported harassment[[27]](#footnote-28) by the online community when expressing discontent about the sexism in games[[28]](#footnote-29) and demanded a more balanced portrayal[[29]](#footnote-30) of males and females in games; these harassments included anonymous threats of violence[[30]](#footnote-31)

**Impact of Behavior**

There has been constant worry about increased exposure to violent media and the effect that it has on teenagers[[31]](#footnote-32); however, most of these worries are unfounded[[32]](#footnote-33), with only a minor influence being suggested[[33]](#footnote-34). It has been shown that while exposure to violent media, in general, may not cause a change in behaviour alone[[34]](#footnote-35) exposure to violent media alongside other contributing factors such as living in a high-conflict environment increases aggressive behaviour[[35]](#footnote-36) though these effects have been shown to be circumvented easily; with parental mediation[[36]](#footnote-37) proven to reduce significantly any aggression that would be caused by exposure to violent or aggressive media.[[37]](#footnote-38)

Researchers have concluded that social media leads to an increased vulnerability to depression[[38]](#footnote-39) and other mental well-being[[39]](#footnote-40). It was shown that by limiting exposure to social media, participants were shown to be less depressed[[40]](#footnote-41) and less lonely[[41]](#footnote-42), supporting that a decreased social media use is what causes that qualitative shift in general well-being[[42]](#footnote-43). It was even revealed that no matter at what point the participants had started whether it was an hour a day or multiple all participants showed the same trend[[43]](#footnote-44), they had less depression, no matter their initial levels[[44]](#footnote-45).

This correlation between social media and mental health well-being is due to social comparisons[[45]](#footnote-46), those who use social media regularly socially compare their own lives to others that are put on display on social media[[46]](#footnote-47). Constant "upward social comparisons" can happen hundreds of times a day, leading to the decrements in ones mental-health.[[47]](#footnote-48)

**Impact on Education**

As various opportunities arise, social media has begun being utilised inside a classroom learning environment[[48]](#footnote-49). Teachers have started to used video presentation platforms such as Zoom[[49]](#footnote-50) and Skype[[50]](#footnote-51) to allow instruction to be delivered over great distance enabling students to receive the same level of education even if absent. Collaboration apps such as Microsoft Teams[[51]](#footnote-52) can be utilised to allow students to hand in assignments and receive grades online. However with these positives come along their negatives, social media serves as a distraction[[52]](#footnote-53) for students with teachers reporting that after implementing social media in their classroom assignments were more likely to be submitted late or missing entirely[[53]](#footnote-54). Teachers also commonly reported shortened attention spans[[54]](#footnote-55) in class and lowered quality of work[[55]](#footnote-56) completed in given class time.

Media predominately shows an effect on grades and test scores not only when implemented in the classroom but also how it's used in a students personal life[[56]](#footnote-57), outside of school. PISA (Programme for Internation Student Assessment) surveys from 2000-2012 found that playing videogames for a mediated amount of time helped to facilitate the development of various visual-spatial[[57]](#footnote-58) and problem-solving[[58]](#footnote-59) skills which in turn improves math-related[[59]](#footnote-60) test scores for boys. For girls, the effect on math results was to prove to be generally neutral[[60]](#footnote-61). This gender difference in test improvements was due to the genre of game that was more likely to be played[[61]](#footnote-62), how they interacted while playing the game[[62]](#footnote-63) and how they were treated by those that they were playing with[[63]](#footnote-64), the most influential games being those with large online communities.

**Effect on Interpersonal Relations**

Studies have found that technology can harm social interactions at home[[64]](#footnote-65) and that excessive media usage is leading adolescents to become more socially excluded[[65]](#footnote-66). The effect of a more socially excluded generation and a generation spending less time with family members within the home is that of a negative impact on communication[[66]](#footnote-67) and social interaction skills[[67]](#footnote-68). Excessive use of social media can even lead to social isolation[[68]](#footnote-69). In this condition, social relationships are reflected with a low degree of shared values[[69]](#footnote-70) and a high degree of separation between individuals[[70]](#footnote-71). Prolonged social isolation has been linked to both physical and mental detriments[[71]](#footnote-72) such as mental illness[[72]](#footnote-73), emotional distress[[73]](#footnote-74), development of dementia[[74]](#footnote-75), premature death, poor health behaviours, smoking, physical inactivity, poor sleep and biological effects such as high blood pressure and poorer immune function[[75]](#footnote-76). With the excessive use of social media, users become more comfortable communicating without direct face-to-face contact and communication, which hinders teenagers ability to speak straightforwardly[[76]](#footnote-77) to one another and not merely without digital devices.

Excessive media usage shows many adverse effects; however, a mediated use of social media, in particular, provides many benefits. It's proven to help improve communication[[77]](#footnote-78), sustain existing relationships[[78]](#footnote-79) and create new friendships[[79]](#footnote-80). However, the growing dependence of modern society on social media is worrisome with its capability to impact the community in both a positive[[80]](#footnote-81) and negative way[[81]](#footnote-82).

Online gaming spaces are predominately, socially accomodating environments[[82]](#footnote-83) that can help emotionally sensitive individuals communicate[[83]](#footnote-84) and create friendships[[84]](#footnote-85). Individuals with high emotional sensitivity reported a more significant amount of online friends[[85]](#footnote-86), met offline and not offline than individuals with low emotional sensitivity[[86]](#footnote-87). It indicates that individuals with high emotional sensitivity are using online game spaces different from less emotionally sensitive counterparts and that they are experiencing tangible differences in their friendship networks[[87]](#footnote-88). Mediated social spaces are socially advantageous for emotionally sensitive individuals allowing them to overcome any traditional social difficulties[[88]](#footnote-89), generate new friendships[[89]](#footnote-90), and strengthen old ones[[90]](#footnote-91).

**Conclusion:**

Social media integration into everyday lifestyles has been fraught with worries concerning its effect on behaviour, education and relationships. Most of these worries are based on the impact of obsessive use of media while not concerning the benefits that a mediated method may have. Obsessive use of media catalyses violent behaviour. It can lead to reduced grades and a diminishment of communication and other core interpersonal skills however through a mediated use media can be help develop communication improve problem-solving and spatial awareness and even increase overall mental health well-being. While media alone is no cause for concern, an obsessive or compulsive use can lead to many detrimental effects which can lead to mental illness, emotional distress and poor health behaviours. Media use is beneficial to teenagers with mediated usage but harmful to teenagers who show any compulsive or obsessive behaviour towards it.

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