

Social Media and the Psychological Development of School-Age Children: Implications for the SDGs

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Abstract

Objective: This study analyzes the impact of social media on the psychological development of school-age children, focusing on both positive and negative influences. It aligns with SDG Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being and SDG Goal 4: Quality Education. **Theoretical framework:** The research draws on psychological development theories, social learning theory, and ecological systems theory to explore the digital environment's effect on children's mental health and social skills. **Literature Review:** Previous studies show that while social media can improve social connectedness and learning, it also poses risks such as anxiety, sleep disturbances, and low self-esteem. The literature highlights the importance of supervision to mitigate these negative effects. **Methods:** A mixed-methods approach was used, involving quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with 600 school-age children, parents, and teachers. Data assessed the frequency of social media use and its impact on mental health, social relationships, and self-esteem. **Results:** Data analysis revealed a dual effect of social media on children's psychological development. Positively, social media enhanced social connectedness, provided valuable information, and supported the development of social skills. On the negative side, it was associated with increased anxiety, sleep disturbances, and adverse impacts on self-esteem and social behavior. These findings underline the importance of achieving a balance, which contributes to SDG Goal 3 (promoting good mental health) and SDG Goal 4 (ensuring quality education by fostering healthy social and educational environments). **Implications:** The study highlights the need for active supervision and time limits on social media to support children's mental health and well-being, aligning with SDG Goal 3 and SDG Goal 4. **Novelty:** This study provides a comprehensive view of social media's impact on children's psychological development, offering practical recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers to promote a balanced and healthy digital environment, supporting the achievement of SDG Goal 3 and SDG Goal 4.

Keywords: social media, psychological development, school-age children, positive and negative influences, sdgs.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of children's lives in this digital age, bringing a variety of significant influences on their psychological development. In the context of school-age children, the use of digital *platforms* not only offers opportunities to interact and learn but also poses challenges that need to be considered. Therefore, parents and educators need to implement active supervision and encourage a healthy balance in the use of social

media. This issue aligns with several key aspects of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, and Goal 4: Quality Education. The impact of social media on children's mental health and social development is crucial for achieving these global objectives, as fostering healthy, well-rounded individuals is essential for sustainable development [1].

These findings are expected to provide a basis for effective education policies and intervention strategies to support children's psychological well-being in an increasingly strong digital trend. This study aims to explore the impact of social media, both positive and negative, on children's mental health, social relationships, and self-esteem, in line with the SDGs' focus on nurturing healthy and inclusive societies. Using a mixed method involving quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with 600 children, parents, and teachers, this study presents comprehensive data on the frequency and type of social media use. The results of the analysis show that social media can improve social connectedness and support the development of social skills, but it is also at risk of triggering anxiety, sleep disturbances, and low self-esteem [2].

Implications and Novelty. The implications of this study are multi-layered, addressing academic, practical, and policy-oriented dimensions in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the academic level, the findings contribute to a growing body of literature on the dual nature of social media use among school-age children, highlighting both its beneficial and harmful consequences. By showing that moderate use can enhance social connectedness and skill development, while excessive use increases risks such as anxiety, sleep disturbances, and low self-esteem, the study provides empirical evidence that psychological development is deeply shaped by digital environments. This recognition expands theoretical discussions on child psychology and developmental studies by situating social media as a core element of modern childhood experiences [3].

Practically, the results underscore the necessity for parents, teachers, and schools to engage in active supervision and provide structured digital literacy education. These strategies align with SDG Goal 3, which promotes good health and well-being, and Goal 4, which emphasizes quality education. The dual findings of positive and negative outcomes suggest that the key lies not in prohibiting access but in creating balance and guidance. For instance, educational institutions can integrate media literacy programs that train students to critically assess online content and manage screen time, while parents can establish routines that encourage offline socialization alongside healthy digital interactions. These measures can mitigate the risks of psychological strain while maximizing the opportunities for personal growth and learning offered by social platforms. From a policy perspective, the implications are equally significant. Policymakers are urged to consider children's digital engagement as a matter of public health and education policy. Regulations on child-friendly online spaces, campaigns to raise awareness about cyberbullying, and investments in teacher training on digital mentoring are examples of systemic interventions that could safeguard children's psychological well-being. These measures would not only contribute to mental health improvements but also ensure inclusive and equitable educational opportunities, thus directly supporting the targets of SDG Goals 3 and 4 [4].

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive, mixed-method approach that integrates both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews across a substantial sample of 600 children, parents, and teachers. Unlike previous studies that often emphasize either risks or benefits in isolation, this research presents a balanced, multidimensional analysis of the psychological impacts of social media. Furthermore, by embedding the discussion within the framework of the SDGs, the study situates childhood psychological development as a global sustainability issue rather than a local or isolated concern. This innovative framing highlights that fostering healthier digital habits among children is not merely a private responsibility but a collective endeavor essential to sustainable social progress. Ultimately, the study provides fresh insights and actionable recommendations, offering novelty by bridging psychological

theory, empirical findings, and sustainable development policy, thereby charting a holistic pathway for ensuring the well-being of children in the digital era [5].

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the relationship between social media use and children's mental health. The results showed that moderate use may increase a sense of connectedness, but excessive use correlates with anxiety and depression. This study emphasizes the importance of limits in the use of social media to protect mental health [6], [7], [8]. In this study, the authors found that social media can increase adolescents' self-esteem through positive social interactions. However, they also noted that exposure to negative content can have a detrimental impact on self-esteem, indicating a duality in the experience of using social media [9], [10], [11]. Frison & Eggermont, This study analyzes the impact of social media use on children's mental health. The findings show that children who frequently compare themselves to their peers on social media experience increased anxiety and dissatisfaction with themselves, especially among adolescent girls. Best et al This study explores the effects of social media on children's social skills [12].

They found that interaction through social media can improve communication skills, but it can also reduce face-to-face interaction, which is essential for healthy social development. Woods & Scott, In this study, the authors investigated the relationship between social media use and sleep disorders among adolescents. The results showed that high use of social media before bed was associated with sleep disturbances, which could have an impact on mental health and academic performance [13]. Lenhart et al. This study focuses on the impact of social media on children's social relationships. It found that while social media improves connectivity, there is also an increased risk of cyberbullying, which can affect children's self-esteem and psychological well-being. Keles, McCrae, & Grealish. This study identified a link between social media and feelings of loneliness among children [14].

The results showed that although social media can be a tool for interaction, many children report greater feelings of loneliness due to superficial interaction and a lack of real relationships [15]. The existing literature shows that the use of social media has a complex impact on children's psychological development [16]. These findings are relevant to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, and Goal 4: Quality Education, as they highlight the importance of fostering mental well-being and healthy social interactions. This research will continue to explore the balance between benefits and risks, as well as provide recommendations for parents and educators in accompanying children in the digital age [17].

Table 1. Literature Review

Researchers	Research Topics	Results and Findings
Mawangir	Social Media Use and Children's Mental Health	Moderate use of social media increases a sense of connectedness. However, excessive use is correlated with anxiety and depression. This study emphasizes the importance of limits in the use of social media to protect mental health.
Noor Et Al.	The Influence of social media on Adolescent Self-Esteem	Positive social interaction on social media can increase teens' self-esteem. However, exposure to negative content can lower self-esteem, suggesting a duality in the experience of using social media.
Muvid Et Al.	Positive and negative impacts of social media	Social media can increase self-esteem through positive interactions. Exposure to negative content can have a bad impact on self-esteem.

M. R. Waston & W. Waston, Rois	The Influence of social media on Children's Mental Health	Exposure to negative content on social media can reduce self-esteem, while positive interactions can increase self-esteem.
Frison & Eggermont	The Influence of social media on Anxiety and Dissatisfaction	Children who often compare themselves to friends on social media experience increased anxiety and dissatisfaction, especially adolescent girls.
Best Et Al.	Effects of social media on Children's Social Skills	Interaction through social media can improve communication skills, but it also reduces face-to-face interaction, which is essential for healthy social development.
Woods & Scott	Social Media Use and Sleep Disorders in Adolescents	High use of social media before bed is related to sleep disorders, which have an impact on mental health and academic performance.
Lenhart Et Al.	The Impact of social media on Children's Social Relationships	Social media improves connectivity but also increases the risk of cyberbullying, which negatively impacts children's self-esteem and psychological well-being.
Keles, McCrae, & Grealish	Social Media Relationships and Children's Feelings of Loneliness	Although social media provides a means of interaction, many children feel lonelier due to superficial interaction and a lack of real relationships.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed-method approach, which combines *quantitative* surveys and *qualitative* interviews to get a *comprehensive picture* of the impact of social media on the psychological development of school-age children [18]. Here is a breakdown of the methodology used:

Research Design: This study adopted a *cross-sectional* design to explore the relationship between social media use and children's mental health. This design allows the collection of data from various respondents at any given time. This design allows the collection of data from various respondents at any given time. The study also aligns with SDG Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, by emphasizing the need to understand factors that affect children's mental well-being and help create supportive environments [19].

Population and Sample: The population in this study is school-age children (6-12 years old) who use social media. The sample taken amounted to 600 children, along with their parents and teachers. Sample selection was conducted randomly from several primary schools in urban and rural areas to ensure diversity in social and economic backgrounds. This sampling approach contributes to the SDG of promoting inclusive and equitable quality education by considering diverse socio-economic backgrounds [20].



Figure 1. Illustration Of Children Playing with Gadgets

Source: <https://pin.it/4BLDLYjm4>

Questionnaire Research Instruments: *The questionnaire* consists of several sections that include: Frequency and type of social media use (duration, *platform* used). Mental health aspects (anxiety, depression, sleep disorders) are measured using standard scales such as the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). Social skills and self-esteem are measured using *the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*. These instruments aim to evaluate mental health and emotional well-being, contributing to the SDGs' goal of improving health and well-being for children.

Qualitative Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 parents and 30 teachers to explore their views on the impact of social media on children, as well as the strategies implemented to accompany them. This qualitative approach aligns with SDG Goal 4: Quality Education, as it focuses on understanding how educators and parents can best support children's development in the digital age [21].

Quantitative data collection: Data is collected through questionnaires distributed online and face-to-face at schools. Qualitative data were obtained through interviews conducted in a location convenient for respondents, recorded, and transcribed with their permission [22].

Table 2. Research Methods

Research Approach	Using a mixed method, which is a combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media on the psychological development of school-age children [18].
Research Design	The design of cross-sectional research to collect data at a given time allows for the exploration of the relationship between social media use and children's mental health [19].
Population and sample	Population: School-age children (6-12 years) who use social media. Sample: 600 children, randomly selected from primary schools in urban and rural areas to ensure socio-economic diversity. Additional interviews with 30 parents and 30 teachers [20].
Research Instruments	Quantitative questionnaires: Includes: Frequency and type of social media use (duration, platform), Mental health aspects (anxiety, depression, sleep disorders) with the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), Social skills and self-esteem with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.
	Qualitative interviews: Semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers to delve into their views on the impact of social media on children and mentoring strategies [21].
Data Collection	Quantitative data: collected through online and face-to-face questionnaires in schools.

	Qualitative data: collected through recorded and unstructured interviews in a location convenient for respondents, with their consent [22].
Data Analysis	Quantitative: Using descriptive and inferential statistics with SPSS software. Regression analysis to find the relationship between social media use and mental health [23]. Qualitative: Thematic analysis to identify and interpret the main themes in the interview [24].
Research Ethics	Consent from parents or guardians of children before data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents are maintained [25].
Objectives and Expected Results	It provides in-depth insights into the impact of social media on children's psychological development and recommends strategies for parents, educators, and policymakers to support children's well-being in the digital age [26].

Quantitative Data Analysis: Data is analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of statistical software such as SPSS. Regression analysis was used to identify the relationship between social media use variables and mental health [23]. **Qualitative Data:** Interview data is analyzed using thematic analysis methods, where emerging themes are identified and interpreted to provide deeper insights into respondents' experiences and perceptions [24]. This study adheres to ethical principles by obtaining consent from parents or guardians of children before data collection. All respondents are guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity of the data they provide [25].

Through this methodology, it is hoped that research can produce in-depth insights into the impact of social media on children's psychological development, as well as provide useful recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers. These findings will contribute to achieving SDGs, particularly in creating supportive educational environments and promoting mental health for children [26].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of a Quantitative Data Survey from 600 School-Age Respondents

Frequency of Social Media Use: About 75% of children use social media for more than two hours per day, with the most widely used platforms being Instagram and TikTok. This high level of engagement highlights a potential challenge for achieving SDG Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, particularly in the context of children's mental health. Excessive use of digital platforms may contribute to anxiety and sleep disturbances, affecting overall well-being.

Mental Health: An analysis using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) showed that 40% of respondents experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety. In addition, 30% reported experiencing sleep disturbances. These findings are significant in the context of SDG Goal 3, as mental health challenges in children can hinder their development and well-being. Addressing these issues through effective interventions could contribute to achieving better mental health outcomes for school-age children [27].

Self-Esteem: The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale reveals that 35% of children have low scores on self-esteem, especially among those who are more active on social media. This finding is linked to SDG Goal 3, as self-esteem is a critical component of children's mental health. The potential negative impact of social media on self-esteem underscores the importance of creating supportive and healthy online environments to ensure children develop a positive sense of self.

Social Skills: Although 60% of children feel more connected with their friends online, they also report difficulties in face-to-face interactions. This finding highlights a potential

challenge for SDG Goal 4: Quality Education, as the development of social skills is vital for children's success in educational and social settings. Encouraging a balanced approach to social media use may help children improve both their online and offline communication skills.

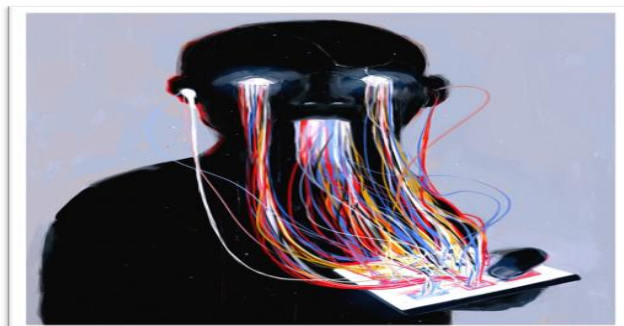


Figure 2. Illustration of the advantages of digital media

Source: <https://pin.it/1MwCBMA26>

Qualitative Data Interviews with 30 Parents and 30 Teachers Resulted in Several Key Themes

Parental View: Most parents acknowledge the benefits of social media for connection, but many are also concerned about negative influences, such as anxiety and self-satisfaction in children. These concerns are particularly relevant to SDG Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, as they highlight the need for supporting children's mental health and emotional well-being in the digital age. **Supervision Strategies:** Parents and teachers mention the importance of active supervision and limiting the time spent on social media to maintain children's mental health. This aligns with SDG Goal 3, which calls for promoting mental health and well-being among children, particularly through protective strategies and interventions that minimize harm from excessive screen time [28].

Teacher Experience: Teachers report that many children lack confidence in direct interactions, attributing this to high social media use. This finding underscores a challenge for SDG Goal 4: Quality Education, as the development of interpersonal skills and confidence is essential for children's success in both educational and social contexts. Encouraging healthy social media use can help foster a balanced skill set in children [29].

The results of this study show that social media has a dual impact on children's psychological development [30]. The findings regarding the high frequency of social media use are in line with previous research suggesting that excessive use can contribute to mental health problems, such as anxiety and sleep disorders. Parents' and teachers' concerns about the negative effects of social media are also confirmed by qualitative data [31]. Many parents indicated that they felt the need to impose limits on their children's use of social media, reflecting the importance of active supervision in mitigating negative impacts [32].

Although there are several advantages, such as improved social connectedness, the results suggest that lower face-to-face interaction has the potential to harm children's social skills [33]. This is in line with the findings of Best et al, who note that while social media can improve communication skills, the reduction in direct interaction can have an impact on healthy social development. Further, the data show that children who experience anxiety are more likely to spend more time on social media, creating a cycle in which social media use can worsen their mental health conditions. This highlights the need for more strategic interventions from parents and educators to help children manage their time and how they use social media [34].

Overall, this study emphasizes the need for a balance in social media use and more active supervision from parents and educators. By understanding both sides of the impact of social

media, we can better support the psychological well-being of children in this digital age. These findings are expected to serve as a basis for more effective education policies and intervention strategies that benefit children, parents, and educators, contributing to the realization of SDG Goal 3 (mental health) and SDG Goal 4 (quality education) [35], [36].



Figure 3. Illustration of a child who is addicted to playing with gadgets

Source: <https://pin.it/7pJuDJULB>

Deep Analysis

The digital era has significantly transformed the social, cognitive, and emotional landscapes of children, particularly those in school-age groups who are increasingly exposed to social media platforms. The study presented in the document provides a comprehensive investigation of how social media shapes psychological development, capturing both positive and negative influences and situating them within the broader framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Goal 4 (Quality Education). The findings provide nuanced insights into the dual role of social media, which can function as a supportive tool for connection and learning, but also as a source of psychological strain when usage becomes excessive [37], [38].

One of the central findings is the duality of impact, which highlights the complexity of children's digital engagement. On the one hand, social media enhances social connectedness, facilitates access to information, and provides opportunities for developing communication skills. The ability to connect with peers, share ideas, and build networks offers children new forms of social capital, which in turn supports self-confidence and a sense of belonging. These benefits reflect the potential of social media to contribute positively to children's educational environments and mental well-being, aligning with SDG Goal 4 by enhancing quality education through digital literacy and collaborative learning [37], [38].

On the other hand, the study reveals serious challenges, particularly regarding mental health. Excessive use of social media is closely associated with heightened anxiety, disrupted sleep patterns, and declining self-esteem. Quantitative data show that 40% of children experience moderate to high levels of anxiety, while 30% report sleep disturbances. These outcomes point to the psychological costs of unregulated screen time and the often-toxic dynamics of online interactions, including cyberbullying and constant comparison with peers. The adverse effects are particularly concerning because they not only impact children's current well-being but may also shape long-term patterns of self-perception, coping strategies, and social interaction. These risks emphasize the urgency of SDG Goal 3, which calls for measures to ensure good health and well-being for all, including children in increasingly digital societies [39].

The role of parents and teachers emerges as a crucial moderating factor in this landscape. Qualitative findings from interviews with parents and educators underscore the importance of supervision, digital guidance, and setting healthy limits on screen

time. Parents recognize the potential benefits of digital tools but remain deeply concerned about their children's vulnerability to online harms. Teachers, meanwhile, observe a decline in students' confidence in face-to-face interactions, attributing it to high levels of digital engagement. This indicates that while social media may support virtual interaction, it risks eroding essential offline social skills. The insights highlight a gap between online competence and offline interpersonal development, suggesting that educational strategies must strike a balance between the two. This is particularly relevant to SDG Goal 4, which emphasizes not only access to education but also the cultivation of holistic skills necessary for lifelong learning and healthy citizenship [39].

Another key contribution of this study lies in its methodological design, which combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. The inclusion of perspectives from children, parents, and teachers enriches the analysis by presenting a holistic view of the issue. This mixed-method approach captures both measurable psychological outcomes and contextualized lived experiences, allowing for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. For instance, while statistical data link heavy social media use to anxiety and low self-esteem, parents' narratives reveal concerns about the erosion of traditional values and the difficulty of monitoring children in the digital space. Similarly, teachers' testimonies illustrate how digital habits affect classroom dynamics and peer relationships, issues that quantitative surveys alone might overlook [40].

The broader implications of these findings extend to policy and practice. Policymakers are urged to recognize the psychological implications of digital engagement as a matter of public health and education. Initiatives such as regulating child-friendly online environments, integrating digital literacy into school curricula, and training teachers in digital mentoring are necessary steps. Furthermore, awareness campaigns targeting parents can equip families with strategies for healthy digital supervision. Such interventions would not only protect children from negative outcomes but also harness the benefits of social media for learning, creativity, and social inclusion. This dual strategy reflects the study's core argument: the problem is not social media itself, but the absence of balanced, informed, and context-sensitive usage [40].

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive framing of social media's impact on psychological development within the SDG agenda. By linking individual mental health outcomes to global sustainability goals, the study elevates the issue from a private or family concern to a collective societal challenge. This perspective acknowledges that fostering healthy digital habits in children is integral to building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable communities. It also offers practical recommendations that bridge the gap between theory, empirical findings, and policy action. In conclusion, the study illustrates that social media functions as a double-edged sword in the lives of school-age children. While it fosters social connectedness and educational opportunities, it also introduces risks that can compromise mental health and self-esteem. The findings emphasize the need for active supervision, balanced use, and systemic interventions from educators, parents, and policymakers. By adopting these measures, societies can maximize the benefits of digital technology while safeguarding the psychological well-being of children. Ultimately, this study contributes significantly to ongoing debates about the digitalization of childhood, offering both theoretical depth and practical pathways that align with the pursuit of sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that social media use among school-age children has a complex and multifaceted impact on their psychological development. Of the 600 respondents involved, it was seen that 75% of children used social media for more than two hours per day, which contributed to high levels of anxiety (40%) and sleep disturbances (30%). In addition, 35% of children experienced a decrease in self-esteem, especially among active users of social media. Although 60% of children feel more connected with their friends online, they face difficulties in face-to-face interactions. These findings align with SDG Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being, highlighting the importance of addressing mental health challenges such as anxiety and low self-esteem in children. Through interviews with parents and teachers, it was revealed that many are aware of the benefits of social media but are also worried about its negative impact. This emphasizes the importance of active supervision and limiting the time spent on social media to maintain children's mental health. These strategies contribute to SDG Goal 3, supporting mental health initiatives and promoting well-being among children in the digital age. The data shows that children who experience anxiety are more likely to spend more time on social media, creating a cycle that has the potential to worsen their mental health condition. This cycle illustrates the need for preventive measures and interventions, which align with the goals of SDG 4: Quality Education, as creating a supportive educational environment is essential for healthy development. Overall, this study emphasizes the need for a balance in the use of social media and support from parents and educators. With a better understanding of the positive and negative impacts of social media, we can develop more effective education policies and intervention strategies to support children's psychological well-being in the digital age. These findings contribute to the achievement of SDGs, particularly Goal 3 and Goal 4, by promoting healthier lifestyles and educational environments for children.

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Author Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, design, data collection, and analysis of this study. Drafting, reviewing, and finalizing the manuscript were carried out collaboratively, ensuring academic rigor and clarity. Each author played an integral role in aligning the research focus with the SDGs framework, guaranteeing balanced scholarly perspectives and practical recommendations throughout the paper.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors affirm that they have no financial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research outcomes. The study was conducted independently, with full academic integrity, and all interpretations are the sole responsibility of the authors. No external pressures or competing interests affected the presented findings.

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