

# The Impact of the Internet on Adolescents' Mental Health

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**Abstract:** Studies have found that the age of adolescent first exposure to the Internet is getting younger and younger, and the bad information on the Internet may have a negative impact on their mental health. Communication of Network community in online social media may cause extreme emotions among teenagers, especially under online anonymity, teenagers may show extreme emotions different from those in reality, which may lead to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. According to the research, the author pointed out that Internet addiction is positively associated with depression in adolescents, and Internet addicts may disperse their depressive emotions through the Internet, but this behavior may aggravate the degree of depression. Moreover, the negative emotional atmosphere and social comparison on the Internet may lead to low self-esteem and anxiety among adolescents. Excessive use of Internet technology for recreational activities may adversely affect the educational development of adolescents, leading to decreased academic performance and depression tendencies. This paper explores in depth the effects of the Internet on adolescent mental health, especially the effects of Internet addiction, online social networking, cyberbullying and online use on sleep. And how to guide teenagers to use the Internet correctly and protect their mental health has become an urgent social problem to be solved.

**Keywords:** The Internet; Adolescents; Online Community; Mental Health; Depression; Anxiety.

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## 1. Introduction

In the current era of the rapid development of information technology and the high popularization of the Internet, we can observe that young people, especially teenagers, their use the Internet has become increasingly frequent, and this phenomenon is constantly happening in every corner of the society. According to the youth blue book the Chinese minors Internet use report (2023), according to data, we can see that teenagers first contact with the network age is the declining trend, among them, as high as 78% of teenagers in the age of 10 and below began to contact with the Internet, and they the first net the main age in between 6 to 10 years old. This phenomenon undoubtedly makes it easier for them to access a variety of information, including both positive and negative or negative information. These adverse information may adversely affect adolescents' mental health, interfering with their values formation and cognitive development processes.

In addition, we should not ignore the impact of social communication in online social media on teenagers. Nowadays, wechat, TikTok, QQ and other social software have become an important tool for teenagers' daily social entertainment. In these virtual communities, teenagers may be influenced by various views and emotions, and may even be directed to think in extreme or negative directions. Because they are not fully mature and lack sufficient judgment and emotional regulation, they are more likely to develop extreme emotions when they are exposed to information in online communities. Especially under the protection of the Internet anonymous " mechanism, some teenagers may show extreme emotions completely different on the Internet from the reality. If such extreme emotions are not effectively guided and regulated, it may further lead to mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression. In this case, if not timely intervention and guidance, they may lead to extreme behavior in real life. Therefore, how to guide teenagers to use the

Internet correctly and protect their mental health has become an urgent social problem to be solved.

In view of the current situation and context, this article will conduct an in-depth and comprehensive discussion of the interaction and influence between the Internet, online community and adolescent mental health, as well as the underlying mechanisms behind it. The author hopes that through this research, we can understand and reveal how these factors affect the mental health of teenagers, and on this basis, a series of propose and develop effective strategies and measures to protect the mental health of teenagers and maintain their spiritual well-being. At the same time, based on their own experience, the author also hopes that these studies can provide useful guidance for teenagers, help them better cope with various challenges in the network environment, and promote their healthy growth and all-round development.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Internet Addiction Causes Anxiety Leading to Depression in Adolescents

The adolescent depression of the meta analysis and Internet addiction for sample set of linear regression model analysis concluded that adolescent depression is positively associated with Internet addiction, in the period of stress and challenge teenagers to distract depression through Internet addiction, but may aggravate the degree of depression, form a vicious circle.[1]

Multiple studies have demonstrated pairwise significant positive associations between Internet addiction, non-adaptive cognitive strategies, and depression."Neurodiseases and mental health" on February 20,2022 volume 222 (with cross-sectional survey design, in December 2015 to January 2016 in Shanghai 5 ordinary public junior middle school of 2751 students questionnaire survey) concluded that Internet

addiction can borrow anxiety aggravate adolescent depression, make teenagers more prone to anxiety, and anxiety will increase the risk of mental diseases such as depression.[2]

Hou Juan, Zhu Yingge, Fang Xiaoyi mobile phone addiction and depression: social anxiety and negative mood information attention to the multiple mediation effect in summary: network addicts due to long-term accumulation of negative emotions, gradually produced attention to bad mood information bias, the bias further intensified their negative emotions, make them pay more attention to the negative information, thus forming a vicious circle. In this cycle, Internet addicts experience increasing social anxiety and increasing sensitivity to negative emotional information, eventually leading to depression.[3]

## 2.2. The Internet and the Depression Patient Community

He Miao and Fengxue took the depression mutual aid community in Xiaohongbook as the research object, and conducted online observation for six months from March to September 2023, tracking five depression communication communities. Finally, they found that in the depression online community, the negative emotional atmosphere is easy to cause other members to have negative empathy. There is a lack of professional guidance and communication here, and negative information and emotions cannot be controlled in time, often becoming a place where emotional polarization and violent emotions may appear, which is also the source of creating emotional cocoon and expanding emotional whirlpool.[4]

## 2.3. Networks and Mental Health

### 2.3.1. Network and Sleep

According to the study, the level of depression was positively correlated with the degree of network use and sleep problems ( $r = 0.48$ ,  $r = 0.68$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), and sleep problems were positively correlated to the degree of network use ( $r = 0.35$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). The adolescents with higher depression have more serious sleep problems, negative mood, low efficiency, interpersonal problems are all important factors affecting sleep, while there is a higher correlation between sleep disorders and network overuse.[5]

### 2.3.2. Low Self-esteem and Anxiety Caused by Social Comparison

In an online environment, teenagers tend to compare their own living conditions with the so-called "perfect" life carefully presented by others. For example, when witnessing wonderful travel images posted by their peers on social media, excellent academic achievements, or a variety of social activities, it may lead teenagers to think that their lives are not exciting, resulting in a sense of inferiority and anxiety. There is evidence that Facebook use may lead to adverse social comparisons and jealousy, in turn to depressed mood, but these findings are mostly limited by relevant data, and experiments have not fully demonstrated the complete causal chain of Facebook use that triggers depressed mood through negative comparison or jealousy.[6]

### 2.3.3. Network and Learning

The use of web-learning interaction technologies (such as the Internet and video games) can promote children's educational opportunities and achievements. However, overuse of technology, especially for recreation, may

adversely impact on educational development in children. examined the relationship between the use of entertainment-related interactive technologies and school engagement and performance using two waves of surveys collected from a nationally representative sample of Chinese middle school students ( $N = 9,949$ , 48% girls, mean age = 13.5 years). The results showed that nearly 40% of children used interactive technology for recreational / non-schoolwork-related activities on school days and 62% used interactive technology for recreational / non-schoolwork-related activities on weekends. Multilevel mixed model shows that the excessive use of technology for entertainment / non-academic related activities (i. e., 1 + hours a day, 4 + hours a day) and a year after all results significantly negative correlation, including Chinese, math, English, and cognitive test scores is lower, the education desire is lower, the possibility of truancy is higher, classroom inattention, and school boredom.[7] Many studies have also suggested that students with poor academic performance have greater academic stress and have a significant association with depression tendency[8][9][10]

## 3. Discussion and Analysis

The author believes that the Internet has a certain negative impact on the mental health of teenagers. First of all, the excessive reliance on social network teenagers on the network accustomed to brief words, expression to express themselves, and in reality in the face of complex interpersonal situation, will be overwhelmed, and may make teenagers to real social fear or escape psychology, become withdrawn, indifference, depression, it is difficult to establish and maintain good interpersonal relationship. Secondly, teenagers are in the plastic stage of values, outlook on life and world outlook, lack the ability to distinguish, and have complex information on the Internet, among which some spread of bad values, which distorts the three views of teenagers and is incompatible with the mainstream society, and eventually leads to a series of negative emotions and personalities among teenagers. In addition, teenagers' sense of self-discipline is weak, and excessive addiction to the Internet will take up a lot of learning time and energy, which has a great impact on their physical and psychological aspects. The information on the Internet is rich and fragmented, and various short videos and instant messages constantly attract the attention of teenagers. This makes it difficult for them to focus on something, resulting in shorter attention duration and affecting activities that require focus.

Here are examples of the negative impact on teenagers' mental health:

### 3.1. Depression Communities Aggravate Negative Emotions

The depressed community excludnon-depressed groups, and group friends will collectively attack people who are suspected to pretend to be depressed, and may also hurt patients who are truly depressed. The online community of depressed patients has both positive and negative aspects, because most of the interactive subjects have emotional disorders, and the original intention of community bonding has become extreme, falling into the double cocoon of information and emotion, which makes the community members more depressed. Emotional contagion can lead to the emotions of community members becoming the same, and

the expression of negative emotions may cause trouble to others, and make depressed patients feel more powerless. Emotional vortex refers to the fact that individuals are trapped in strong or complex emotions in the online community with middle school students as the main part of the lack of professional managers or psychological counseling experts. For example, in an online community of depression, when a member confides about extremely negative emotions, other members are vulnerable to infection and have similar negative feelings, which is negative empathy. For another example, if the community is always filled with such negative emotions, and no one guides it, it may form polarized emotions and make the whole community atmosphere become violent.

### 3.2. The Psychological Trauma of Cyberbullying

Cyber-bullying is a serious problem. KuaiSong, Feng-Juan Zhou, Geng-Feng Niu, Cui-Ying Fan, Zong-Kui Zhou”The Association between Cyberbullying Victimization and Depression among Children: A Moderated Mediation Model” Behavioral In Sciences study, The authors used a convenience sampling method, Data data from a primary school at an affiliated Central China Normal University in Hubei, Covering grades three through six, 344 (mean age 9.90 years, 43.90% were among girls). Research showed that 31.1% of children reported experiencing at least one cyberbullying victimization, with sixth graders suffering more severe cyberbullying than in other grades; boys reported greater depressive symptoms in lower grades than in girls and girls in higher grades. Cyberbullying victimization was positively associated with depression and negatively associated with self-perceived social ability and optimism; self-perceived social ability was positively associated with optimism and negatively associated with depression; optimism and negatively associated with depression. Cyberbullying victimization affects children's beliefs about their own social abilities, causing them to generate negative self-evaluation, reduce self-perceived social abilities, and subsequently increase the risk of depression, consistent with the ability model of depression.[11]

### 3.3. Negative Comparisons in Online Social Networking Lead to Depression

In online social networking, negative comparison becomes an important factor leading to depression. For example, there is a girl who was just in the second year of junior high school, immersed in social networks. She frequently observed the "perfect life" carefully displayed by others, and became anxious about her appearance and figure. After twice fainting at school on a diet, the teacher told her to call her parents to school to talk, a series of events that made her feel betrayed and devastated. After confronting the school and her parents, she fell into deep depression and even developed anorexia. Social media is full of seemingly perfect images and life clips, and it is easy for teenagers to compare their lives with them, which tend to focus on material things, looks and body shape. When they find that they fail to meet the ideal standards presented on social media, they fall into a mood of self-denial and dissatisfaction, which may cause depression.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper explores in depth the effects of the Internet on adolescent mental health, especially the effects of Internet

addiction, online social networking, cyberbullying and online use on sleep. Studies have found that adolescents have an increasingly younger age at first Internet exposure, and poor information on the Internet may adversely affect their mental health. Community communication in online social media may cause extreme emotions among teenagers, especially under online anonymity, teenagers may show extreme emotions different from those in reality, which may lead to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Internet addiction is positively associated with adolescent depression. Internet addicts may disperse their depressed emotions through the Internet, but this behavior may aggravate the degree of depression. Moreover, the negative emotional atmosphere and social comparison on the Internet may lead to low self-esteem and anxiety among adolescents. Excessive use of Internet technology for recreational activities may adversely affect the educational development of adolescents, leading to decreased academic performance and depression tendencies.

At the same time, cyberbullying is a serious problem, and cyberbullying victimization is positively associated with depression. Negative comparison in online social networking becomes an important factor in causing depression. For example, it is easy for teenagers to compare their lives to them when browsing social media, which tend to focus on material things, looks and body shape. When they find that they fail to meet the ideal standards presented on social media, they fall into a mood of self-denial and dissatisfaction, which may cause depression.

This study concluded that the Internet easily leads to Internet addiction problems in teenagers, and overuse can seriously affect the sleep quality of teenagers, which in turn affects their physical development and mental health. Teenagers may have bad emotions due to online stress, negative evaluation, or the gap between the virtual world and reality, which can lead to psychological and physical health problems. Internet use may also lead to personality development disorders in adolescents. The anonymity of the Internet makes teenagers easy to lose self-restraint in the virtual world, resulting in confusion of self-identity. At the same time, social bullying on the Internet also brings indelible psychological trauma to teenagers. Therefore, how to guide teenagers to use the Internet correctly and protect their mental health has become an urgent social problem to be solved.

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