

A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND TEENAGERS IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

One important setting for teenage identity development is social media. However, different definitions of social media activity and different ideas of identity in previous research make it difficult to comprehend how social media and identity creation are related. Research on the relationships between social media use, both in terms of quantity and quality, and many facets of identity development, including identity exploration, commitment, self-concept clarity, and identity distress, is summarized in this study. 32 studies including 750 teenagers with an average age of 16.43 years and an age range of 11 to 20 years were included in the analysis that were found via a search across databases. The results show that more identity exploration is associated with active social media use rather than just the quantity of time spent online. Furthermore, greater self-concept clarity is associated with authenticity in social media interactions rather than idealized self-presentation. Teenagers who compare themselves on social media also show higher degrees of identity exploration and identity discomfort. Overall, it seems that young people's identity formation is more influenced by the type of social media activities they engage in than by the amount of time they spend on these sites.

Keywords: Teenagers, Identity development, Self-concept, Identity distress, Social media

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INTRODUCTION

Teenagers' everyday lives now revolve around social media, with many of them spending a lot of time there both producing and consuming material [1]. There has been a lot of scholarly interest in this active social media use, especially in relation to its effects on identity development [2]. However, the lack of a common concept of social media involvement in research prevents a thorough understanding of the connection between identity formation and social media use. Furthermore, it is challenging to make clear conclusions on

the relationship between social media activity and identity development due to the variety of identity categories examined in research. By reviewing the relationship between social media use and identity development, differentiating between the quantity (such as time spent on social media) and quality (such as comparisons, self-presentation) of social media use, and methodically analyzing their associations with important aspects of identity development, such as commitment, exploration, self-concept clarity, and

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identity distress, this study seeks to synthesize the body of existing research [3, 4].

Teenagers develop their identity through ongoing interactions between commitment and exploration. Commitments, which represent choices regarding one's identity [5], are essential not only for fostering identity certainty but also for cultivating a coherent and stable self-concept. A consistent self that is molded by one's devoted values, beliefs, objectives, and relationships—as well as how these commitments mesh throughout different spheres of life—is referred to as self-concept clarity. Supporting the best possible development of teenagers requires the alignment and stability that come from integrating commitments. For example, a clear self-concept has been linked to increased relationship satisfaction, good self-esteem, and open communication with parents, while commitments have been linked to lower levels of anxiety and depression and improved scholastic achievement. Furthermore, it can cause anxiety and possibly indicate the need for additional identity discovery and revision if one's existing commitments do not accurately reflect who they are [6-8].

Examining present commitments in detail, challenging their legitimacy, and maybe changing or replacing them with new ones are all part of identity development. Examining these commitments is thought to help preserve a stable identity, but reevaluating them might cause identity ambiguity, which can have detrimental effects like anxiety and depression symptoms, poorer academic performance, and low self-esteem. Additionally, teenagers who are unsure of their self-concept may suffer from identity distress, which can range from mild anxiety to severe symptoms across a variety of life domains, such as friendships, moral ideals, and long-term objectives. It should come as no surprise that those who are suffering identity discomfort report lower levels of commitment and higher levels of

exploration. Both internalizing and externalizing issues have also been linked to identity anxiety [9, 10].

Exploration and dedication are part of the identity development process, which should result in a secure self-concept; identity anxiety is a less desirable consequence. Family, peer, and school interactions are the foundation of this process, and these settings have been the subject of a lot of research. However, social media has allowed today's youth to expand their social networks. Users can now connect in a variety of ways, both one-way and multi-directional, and create and consume content while getting feedback thanks to this upgrade. Additionally, users have some control over who can view their accounts and material [11].

When examining the effects of social media on teenagers development, researchers have primarily concentrated on the amount of time young individuals spend on these platforms. This time has been linked to depression [12], lower well-being, and a variety of behavioral and emotional issues. Regarding identity development, excessive social media use has been associated with low self-concept clarity and a disengagement from active identity exploration [13]. Findings in this field, however, are conflicting, and not all research shows a direct link between social media use and identity commitment or exploration. These contradictory findings call into question whether the present knowledge of social media participation is sufficient and the degree to which social media time is related to components of identity formation.

When simply the quantity of time spent on social media platforms is taken into account, the complexity of social media engagement—which varies and has different links with identity development—is ignored.

This diversity encompasses different forms of self-presentation, seeking feedback on one's persona, discussing specific topics or sharing everyday issues, and comparing

abilities and opinions. Research has shown that certain engagement patterns relate to identity development facets; for example, individuals who compare their abilities on social media tend to have lower self-concept clarity and higher identity distress [14, 15]. In contrast, activities such as editing profiles, sharing posts or blogs, and presenting oneself in various ways or as someone else indicate identity exploration. To date, no systematic review has focused specifically on how different forms of social media engagement relate to teenagers identity development. Previous reviews have suggested that social media facilitates identity exploration and diverse self-presentation among teenagers. Social media research has both quantitative and qualitative components, each of which is connected to a distinct facet of identity formation. However, prior research has not comprehensively addressed this distinction. A synthesis of previous research is required to close this knowledge gap and improve our comprehension of the interactions between identity formation and social media, two factors that are crucial to teenagers development. This systematic review distinguishes between the amount of time spent on social media and the caliber of activities that teenagers participate in, concentrating on original qualitative and quantitative research on the subject. Along with associated ideas like self-concept and identity anxiety, it also looks at identity development, including commitment and exploration.

METHOD

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis's amended reporting criteria were adhered to in this review. The names of particular platforms were picked because of their widespread appeal. In order to make sure that pertinent older studies were not overlooked, platforms that were once widely used, such as social media, were also included. The search encompassed article titles, abstracts, and keywords [16-18]. Teenagers with ages ranging from 11-

20 years of age range made up the participants.

The study evaluated identity discomfort, self-concept clarity, and exploration and commitment as social media correlates. The study was unique and might be classified as qualitative or quantitative. A peer-reviewed publication published the study. It was published in English. The survey looked at the use of computers, tablets, and mobile phones as well as general internet use. The study evaluated learning, addiction, purchasing, and online gambling. Instead of focusing on elements of identity development including dedication and exploration, self-concept clarity, and identity distress, the emphasis was on social identities (such as sexual, religious, ethnic, gender, civic, national, or professional identities).

Both qualitative and quantitative research assessment tools were used to evaluate the quality of qualifying studies. Study design, population, sample size, independent and dependent variables, and follow-up rates were all included in our evaluation. Since cohort studies were not included in our systematic review, other categories were eliminated, giving quantitative studies a maximum score of six, which denotes the highest quality.

RESULTS

To ensure reliability, the second author independently screened 20% of randomly selected titles and abstracts, achieving an 84% agreement with the first author's selections. In cases of disagreement, the authors discussed the studies until a consensus was reached. Additionally, one study was identified through a reference in another included study and was included for full-text screening. Ultimately, data were extracted from $k = 32$ out of $k = 145$ studies.

Quality Assessment

Since the majority of quantitative studies were cross-sectional, none of them were given a score for follow-up rates when evaluating their quality. None of the existing longitudinal studies were able to

reach the maximum score of six since their loss to follow-up rate was higher than 20%. The other studies did not receive any points in this category since just one study provided justification for their sample size. Every study developed a research topic and offered sample data. By overemphasizing the relevance of social media in identity formation, three research classified identity development as a component of social media usage, which may have skewed the results. [19-21]. Identity formation was not precisely defined in one study, and social media use was not conceptualized explicitly in other investigations. The research' overall quality was deemed adequate in spite of these drawbacks.

Due to a number of factors, including as poor data analysis, ambiguous reporting of the suitability of the research design, and insufficient investigation of the researcher-participant relationship, none of the qualitative studies were given an eight. One study did not describe its recruitment strategy, but all of the others did explain their qualitative research methodology and recruitment tactics [22].

Social Media Use and Commitment

The studies explored the relationship between time spent on social media and identity commitment, yielding mixed results. One study found no significant association between social media use and commitment [23]. However, according to a different study, teenagers who used social media excessively or regularly were more likely to break their promises.

The research also looked at how identity commitments are affected by comparisons on social media. Teenagers who compared their thoughts were more sure in their identities, according to one study, while those who compared their abilities felt more comfortable about themselves [24]. The inconsistencies may be explained by the age variations between the two studies; the first studied younger teenagers, while the second studied older teenagers. This suggests that whereas older teenagers might stress their knowledge, younger teenagers

might emphasize their abilities. However, no firm conclusion on the connection between identity commitment and comparisons of opinions and talents on social media can be made because of the cross-sectional character of the research and the small number of studies.

Social Media Use and Exploration

The research looked at the connection between social media use and identity exploration, but the results were conflicting, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions. While one study found no connection between identity exploration and social media use, another revealed that people who used social media excessively were more likely to feel unclear about who they were.

The research examined the relationship between identity exploration and various self-presentation techniques. The results showed that teenagers who tried alternative looks, roles, and self-reflection through role-playing and self-questioning were more likely to actively explore their identities [25, 26]. Furthermore, four research indicated that identity exploration was more common among teenagers who made blog entries, shared postings, or modified their profiles. In conclusion, it seems that social media engagement is important for identity exploration.

The research looked at the connection between identity discovery and comparing perspectives and talents. Teenagers who compared their beliefs were more willing to examine and question those opinions, according to one study, while those who compared their abilities were more likely to critically evaluate and reevaluate those abilities. In conclusion, identity confusion may be associated with comparing skills and viewpoints, which might encourage additional research and the development of new commitments. However, due to the cross-sectional nature of the research and the limited number of studies, drawing broad conclusions about this relationship remains challenging.

Social Media Use and Self-Concept Clarity

Results from the studies that looked at the connection between social media usage and the clarity of one's self-concept were not entirely consistent. No significant association was found in two experiments. On the other hand, two other studies indicated that teenagers who used social media excessively had an ambiguous self-concept, while two more studies indicated that teenagers who used social media extensively had a clear self-concept. It is difficult to get firm conclusions regarding the connection between social media use and the clarity of one's self-concept because of these contradictory findings [27, 28].

A brief longitudinal study investigated the relationship between self-concept clarity and social media comparison. Both longitudinal and cross-sectional relationships demonstrated that people who participated in ability comparisons felt unsure about who they were. In particular, about five months following the original evaluation, a negative link was discovered between self-concept clarity and opinion comparison. This suggests that both comparison types are linked to ambiguous self-concepts, with opinion comparisons possibly coming after ability comparisons. However, it is challenging to draw wide conclusions regarding this link because of the small number of investigations.

Social Media Use and Identity Distress

The research looked into the connection between identity anxiety and social media use. According to one study, those who used social media frequently reported feeling distressed about their identities. On the other hand, a different study did not find any correlation between identity anxiety and excessive social media use, either longitudinally or cross-sectionally. According to a cross-sectional association shown in a short-term longitudinal study, those who compared their abilities were more likely to suffer from identity anxiety. Because of these conflicting results, it is difficult to draw a definitive connection

between social media use and identity discomfort. Nonetheless, one possible contributing aspect to identity anxiety could be ability comparison.

DISCUSSION

Numerous research on the relationship between social media and teenagers development, especially identity formation, have been prompted by the fact that social media has become an essential part of teenagers' life. The various ways that social media use and various facets of identity development are conceptualized and evaluated make it difficult to have a thorough grasp of how social media interacts with identity development. With a particular focus on the amount and quality of social media use and its effects on aspects of identity development such as commitment, exploration, self-concept clarity, and identity distress, this literature review seeks to ascertain whether there are systematic relationships between social media engagement and identity development.

According to our data, the type of activity one engages in while on social media is more important than the quantity of time spent there. This aligns with findings that appearance comparisons on social media are linked to body dissatisfaction [29], and that specific types of engagement—such as comparisons and active or passive use—are associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress [30]. The quantity of time spent on social media appears to be less important than the actual actions. For example, watching chemistry films on websites like YouTube can help a young person who is interested in science develop their sense of self. At the same time, this passive involvement can function as an active identity discovery and reinforcement process. As a result, measuring screen time alone is insufficient to capture the complexity of social media use. We can learn more about the connections between social media and different facets of identity formation by analyzing user behavior on these platforms.

According to our research, teens frequently use self-presentation techniques on social media. These strategies include altering appearances to showcase an ideal self, impersonating others, and creating fictitious profiles, all of which play a role in identity exploration. However, adopting different identities in social media contexts may hinder the development of self-concept clarity. Specifically, teenagers who portray a fictitious version of themselves that diverges from their authentic selves often experience lower self-concept clarity [31]. In contrast, stronger commitments are indicated by a clearer self-concept in those who show who they really are. Although we are unable to make firm judgments regarding the direction of these effects, it is plausible that people who have a more distinct sense of who they are feel more comfortable sharing their true selves on social media. It would be helpful to investigate why teenagers use social media in order to obtain a better understanding of their self-presentation techniques and how they relate to identity formation. There are many different reasons why people engage in false self-presentation. For instance, teenagers may make false profiles to get around age limits, to bully others without being identified, or just for fun. Therefore, displaying an honest self on social media shows a deep commitment to one's identity, whereas changing one's presentation may go beyond simple identity discovery [31-33].

There is a lack of research on the connection between social media comparisons of beliefs and abilities and identity formation; our review includes only a small number of studies that raise the possibility of age effects. Comparing their talents caused younger teenagers to reassess their identity commitments, either strengthening or creating new ones. On the other hand, when comparing their opinions, older teenagers underwent comparable re-evaluations. This suggests that whilst older teenagers frequently describe themselves through their ideas on social media,

younger teenagers are more inclined to define themselves by their ability. However, because these investigations are cross-sectional, it is unable to observe changes over time and establish clear temporal inferences.

Checking social media accounts frequently is not always a sign of compulsive behavior. The definition of "excessive" social media use might change depending on the situation. Instead of just measuring the amount of time spent online, future studies should concentrate on the particular activities that teenagers conduct on these sites. A more nuanced understanding of what defines appropriate, excessive, or harmful social media use will result from an understanding of the nature and context of these activities [34].

Mainstream social media sites like Facebook and Instagram, which were widely used from the late 2000s to the early 2020s, have been the focus of most recent studies. The popularity and usage of each platform are changing more quickly than in the past, though, and young people are significantly shifting towards newer platforms. These newer platforms offer different opportunities for engagement. For instance, TikTok users participate in video challenges, a type of interaction not commonly found on older platforms. YouTube offers a wealth of educational information that strengthens youth identities in learning environments. While Snapchat is well-known for its assortment of filters that allow users to display an idealized version of themselves [35-38]. Even if these platforms have certain things in common, each offers different chances for interaction. In order to monitor trends among teenagers and comprehend how new forms of connection affect their identity formation, it is imperative that social media research be updated on a regular basis.

CONCLUSION

By combining the available data on the influence of social media use on teenage identity development, this systematic study sought to further the field of identity

development research. The results show that identity development among teenagers is more closely linked to the activities they undertake on social media than to the quantity of time they spend there. Furthermore, whereas fake self-presentation is associated with identity exploration, real self-presentation is more common among teenagers who have a clearer self-concept. Unfortunately, because most research are cross-sectional, it is difficult to determine whether identity development is influenced by social media use, whether social media use influences identity development, or whether these relationships are reciprocal. Therefore, to capture the temporal dynamics of this association, carefully planned longitudinal investigations are required. Lastly, gauging social media usage alone restricts our

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comprehension of the relationship between identity formation and social media use. For a more thorough understanding of this link, future studies should concentrate on the interactions, activities, and content that teenagers interact with on social media.

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