

Chapter 27

How Adolescents Use Social Media to Navigate Their Mental Health: Examining Reddit's “/r/teenagers” Community

Mohid Khan

Polygence Research Academy, USA

Ian Scott Stark

Texas Tech University, USA

ABSTRACT

Research on the negative impact of social media on mental health is extensive and well-documented. However, in this process, relatively little attention has been paid to social media communities oriented around mental health. This study aimed to address this gap by using uses and gratifications theory to analyze the posts and comments related to mental health, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem in the “/r/teenagers” community on Reddit. The results revealed that many users in these communities turn to social media to identify with others and seek advice, while a smaller percentage uses social media for entertainment and escapism. An even smaller minority of users leverage social media platforms to educate others. By exploring the motivations and reasons behind social media use in mental health communities, this study provides valuable insights into the potential benefits and drawbacks of social media use in this context, as well as avenues for future research and intervention.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8397-8.ch027

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant increase in screen time, particularly among adolescents. Among twelve and thirteen-year-olds, this number has doubled since the pandemic, with an average of 7.7 hours of non-school-related screen time a day (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). As more educational resources, social interactions, and commercial transactions are moving online, the trend of increased screen time is showing no signs of slowing down. One specific area of screen time that has seen significant growth is social media (Moreno et al., 2009). Social media platforms provide free and accessible ways for users to connect with others around the world. They have transformed the way people communicate and share information (Rosen et al., 2013), but they also raise concerns about their impact on adolescent mental health (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). As the rates of adolescent depression continue to rise, it is essential to explore how young people use social media to navigate their mental health. It is also critical to examine the safety and reliability of mental health communities on social media, as these groups can provide vital support for those who may be struggling (Andreassen et al., 2017). Nonetheless, the humorous use of social media by young people for addressing mental health issues cannot be ignored, and more research is needed to understand this phenomenon (Wang et al., 2020).

Mental health is a crucial aspect of an individual's overall well-being, encompassing emotional, social, and physiological dimensions. Mental health issues can be caused by a range of factors such as genetic predispositions and traumatic experiences, leading to the development of a wide range of disorders, including depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and many others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). While numerous studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between screen time, social media, and adolescent mental health, the findings are still inconclusive (Twenge et al., 2018). Some studies suggest that social media usage can lead to lower self-esteem and increased anxiety levels (Kross et al., 2013), while others propose that screen time can promote cognitive growth and enhance extracurricular involvement (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2017). Although the results are not definitive, it is clear that excessive screen time has the potential to harm adolescent mental health. Therefore, it is crucial to continue exploring the relationship between screen time and mental health, to better understand how to promote positive mental health outcomes for young people.

Limiting screen time among adolescents is a complex issue, and it is important to consider how young people are coping with the mental health issues that arise from screen use. In recent years, economic recession and family breakdown have made it increasingly challenging for adolescents to access professional support for their mental health (Blum et al., 2000; Mojtabai, 2010). As a result, many young people have turned to social media platforms, which offer a sense of community and a place to seek help, regardless of geographic location or financial constraints. These online communities provide an accessible space for young people to share their experiences and connect with others who may be facing similar challenges. However, it is crucial to recognize the limitations of these platforms in providing effective support for mental health issues. While online communities can offer valuable emotional support, they are not a substitute for professional therapy or treatment. Therefore, it is necessary to explore how to best leverage social media and other digital tools to support young people's mental health and ensure that they have access to the resources and care they need.

To that effect, this study involved collecting data from the "/r/teenagers" community on Reddit, where young people discuss a wide range of topics, including mental health. Specifically, the study focused on posts related to four major mental health issues: "mental health," "anxiety," "depression," and "self-esteem." The collected data was transferred to a spreadsheet and categorized according to uses

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/how-adolescents-use-social-media-to-navigate-their-mental-health/325204

Related Content

Psychological Maltreatment and Internet Addiction: Is Psychological Maltreatment a Risk Factor?

Gökmen Arslan (2018). *Psychological, Social, and Cultural Aspects of Internet Addiction* (pp. 90-108).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/psychological-maltreatment-and-internet-addiction/193096

The Seduction of Science: How Paradigms Can Lead One Astray

Ben Trubody (2017). *Seduction in Popular Culture, Psychology, and Philosophy* (pp. 1-33).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-seduction-of-science/162981

Developing Emotion-Libras 2.0: An Instrument to Measure the Emotional Quality of Deaf Persons while Using Technology

Soraia Silva Prietchand Lucia Vilela Leite Filgueiras (2016). *Psychology and Mental Health: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 947-969).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/developing-emotion-libras-20/153433

Question Concerning Evil in the Age of New Television: Dichotomy of Good and Evil in Money Heist

Kemal Deniz (2021). *International Perspectives on Rethinking Evil in Film and Television* (pp. 135-149).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/question-concerning-evil-in-the-age-of-new-television/266953

Vigilantism and Banditry in Southern Katsina Emirate, Northern Nigeria 1987-2015

Imbrahim Sani Kankara (2023). *Research Anthology on Modern Violence and Its Impact on Society* (pp. 1321-1334).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/vigilantism-and-banditry-in-southern-katsina-emirate-northern-nigeria-1987-2015/311330