

Navigating the Modern Landscape: Understanding the Impact of Technology and Social Media on Child Psychology

Dr. Shrruti Sahrawat

Associate Professor (Department of Psychology), Indraprastha College, University of Delhi

Abstract: *The rapid advancement of technology and the widespread use of social media have reshaped the landscape of childhood in the modern era. This article explores the multifaceted impact of technology and social media on children's development, behaviour, and well-being. Through a comprehensive review of current research and insights, this paper shall examine how children interact with digital devices, navigate online spaces, and engage with social media platforms and discuss both the opportunities and challenges presented by digital technology, including its potential to support learning, creativity, and social connection, as well as its risks for physical health, mental health, and socio-emotional development. By considering the influences of parental guidance, educational integration, peer dynamics, regulatory measures, and cultural factors, we underscore the importance of promoting a balanced approach to technology use that prioritises children's holistic well-being. Ultimately, this article advocates for collaborative efforts among parents, educators, policymakers, and tech companies to create safe, supportive, and empowering digital environments that nurture children's growth, resilience, and flourishing in the digital age.*

Keywords: Child Psychology, Technology, Depression, Social Media, Addiction, Well-being

1. Introduction

In today's fast-paced world, the landscape of childhood is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by the pervasive influence of technology and the omnipresence of social media. Children are growing up in an era characterised by digital connectivity, instant communication, and unprecedented access to information. From smartphones and tablets to social networking platforms and online gaming, digital technology has become integral to children's daily lives, shaping how they learn, play, and interact with the world around them.

This transformation brings both promise and peril. On one hand, technology offers unparalleled opportunities for learning, creativity, and social connection, empowering children to explore new horizons and engage with diverse perspectives. On the other hand, concerns have been raised about the potential risks and consequences associated with excessive screen time, cyberbullying, and the commodification of childhood in digital spaces. A study conducted in Tehran, reveals that some adolescents and young people who exhibit addictive internet use experience issues such as avoiding social responsibilities, social isolation, a lack of social support, and reduced performance in education and work.¹

As we navigate this complex terrain, it is essential to understand the multifaceted impact of technology and social media on children's development, behaviour, and well-being. This article seeks to explore the intersection of child

psychology and the digital age, examining the ways in which children interact with technology, the challenges they face in digital environments.

By delving into the nuances of children's digital experiences and considering the influences of parental guidance, educational practices, peer dynamics, regulatory measures, and cultural factors, it is pertinent to shed light on the opportunities and challenges of raising children in the digital age. Ultimately, this paper aims to foster a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between technology and child development and advocate for policies and practices prioritising children's holistic well-being in the digital era.

Supporting or Undermining Well-being

The impact of technology and social media on children's well-being is multifaceted, with both positive and negative implications. On one hand, digital technology can enhance learning, creativity, and social connections, providing valuable resources and opportunities for personal growth. "A study in Chennai, involved a sample of 90 students from 12 different schools and 3 city colleges. Among them, 79 students were identified as owning phones. Notably, 88.1% of these children possessed smartphones."²

Online communities and support networks can offer validation, solidarity, and a sense of belonging, particularly for children who may feel marginalised or isolated in their offline environments. Social media addiction can lead individuals to experience anxiety when they cease using social media and disconnect from themselves.³

¹ Said, M., & Karam, H.G. (2011). Investigating the Phenomenon of the Internet Addictive Usage Among Adolescents and Youth (15-25 Years of Age) in The City of Tehran. *IAU International Journal of Social Sciences*, 1 75-81.

² Venkatraghavan, M. (2015). A Study on the Usage of Mobile Phones for Cyber Bullying Among Tweens & Teens of Chennai, India. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*,

19-30. Retrieved June 15, 2017 <https://www.ojcm.net/download/a-study-on-the-usage-of-mobile-phones-for-cyber-bullying-among-tweens-amp-teens-of-chennai-india-5671.pdf>

³ Schou Andreassen, C., Billieux, J., Griffiths, M. D., Kuss, D. J., Demetrovics, Z., Mazzoni, E., & Pallesen, S. (2016). The Relationship Between Addictive Use of Social Media and Video Games and Symptoms of Psychiatric Disorders: A Large-Scale

However, there is also growing evidence to suggest that excessive screen time and immersion in virtual worlds can have detrimental effects on children's physical health, mental health, and socio - emotional development. Sedentary behaviours associated with prolonged screen time contribute to obesity, sleep disturbances, and musculoskeletal problems. Moreover, the constant stimulation and distractions of digital devices can impair attention, concentration, and impulse control, impacting academic performance and cognitive functioning. A study observed that participants experienced greater positive well - being as their social media usage decreased.⁴

In a study of 13, 871 children aged 9–12, weak linear links were found between the highest daily usage had a relative risk of 2.0 or higher for lower well - being. Offline social networks were a stronger predictor of well - being than online ones for the 2, 528 children (18.2%) with a Facebook profile. This suggests that heavy digital media use harms young children's well - being, while moderate use has minimal effects.⁵

In terms of social and emotional well - being, the curated nature of social media can foster unrealistic expectations, social comparisons, and feelings of inadequacy. The pressure to conform to idealized standards of beauty, success, and popularity can fuel anxiety, low self - esteem, and body image issues, particularly among adolescents. Adolescents at risk of excessive social media usage were predominantly female and reported the highest levels of internet and social media engagement.⁶

Cyberbullying and online harassment further exacerbate stress and emotional distress, undermining children's sense of safety and security in digital spaces. Victims of cyberbullying may experience anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation. As per the NCRB report 2022, "A total of 65, 893 cybercrime cases were registered, indicating a 24.4% increase in registrations compared to the 52, 974 cases reported in 2021".⁷ The detrimental impacts of cyberbullying, a type of cybercrime, on mental well - being, have been well -

documented.⁸ In the Delhi - (NCR) study, 630 teens were surveyed. Results showed that 9.2% reported cyberbullying; half stayed silent. Furthermore, Teens aged 13 - 18 spending over three hours online daily had a 22.4% risk of cyberbullying.⁹

Social media (e. g., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc) usage ranks as one of the most favoured leisure activities among adolescents presently.¹⁰ Social media platforms have become prominent arenas where children socialise, communicate, and express themselves. From sharing photos and videos to participating in online communities and messaging friends, social media offers avenues for connection and self - expression. However, it also introduces new challenges and pressures, including concerns about online safety, cyberbullying, and the impact of curated images and content on self - esteem and body image.

In a study, low self - esteem influences the development of social media addiction, as individuals with low self - esteem tend to avoid direct interaction and utilize social media as a platform for social engagement.¹¹ Studies have also indicated that internet addiction adversely impacts academic achievement, leading students to experience feelings of loneliness, shame, fatigue, and sleep deprivation.¹²

Adolescents grappling with social media addiction encounter difficulties in establishing relationships and engaging in social interactions.¹³ Other Research suggests that adolescents mainly use instant messaging, cell phones, and social networking sites to maintain existing relationships, including friendships and romantic connections, and to explore potential new connections in their offline lives.¹⁴ Another study conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal, revealed forty - six percent of adolescents showed signs of potential social media addiction, while 68.2 percent exhibited symptoms of probable depression. Among the depressed

Cross-Sectional Study. *Journal of the Society of Psychologists in Addictive Behaviors*, 30(2), 252–262. <https://doi.org/10.1037/adb0000160>

⁴ Upadhayay, V. (2018). 'Social Media Usage and Psychological Wellbeing among Indian Youth'. *International Journal of Stress Prevention and Wellbeing*, 2, 4, 1-12. DOI: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6776-8220>

⁵ Bruggeman, H., Van Hiel, A., Van Hal, G., & Van Dongen, S. (2019). Does the Use of Digital Media Affect Psychological Well-Being? An Empirical Test Among Children Aged 9 to 12. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 101, 104-113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.07.015>

⁶ Bánya, F., Zsila, Á., Király, O., Maraz, A., Elekes, Z., Griffiths, M. D., Andreassen, C. S., & Demetrovics, Z. (2017). Problematic Social Media Use: Results from a Large-Scale Nationally Representative Adolescent Sample. *PLOS ONE*, 12(1), e0169839. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0169839>

⁷ National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) 2022 Vol: 1 <https://ncrb.gov.in/uploads/nationalcrimerecordsbureau/custom/1701607577CrimeinIndia2022Book1.pdf>

⁸ Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2014). *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin.

⁹ IndiaSpend. 1 In 10 Indian Adolescents Faces Cyberbullying, Half Don't Report: Study

<https://www.indiaspend.com/1-in-10-indian-adolescents-faces-cyberbullying-half-dont-report-study/>

¹⁰ Lenhart A, Purcell K, Smith A, Zickuhr K. Social Media & Mobile Internet Use among Teens and Young Adults. Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project; 2010.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286376855_Social_Media_Mobile_Internet_Use_Among_Teens_and_Young_Adults

¹¹ Casale, S., & Banchi, V. (2020). Narcissism and Problematic Social Media Use: A Systematic Literature Review. *Addictive behaviors reports*, 11, 100252. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.abrep.2020.100252>

¹² Kubey, R. (2001). Internet Use and Collegiate Academic Performance Decrements: Early Findings. *Journal of Communication*.

¹³ Oberst, U., Wegmann, E., Stodt, B., Brand, M., & Chamarro, A. (2017). Negative Consequences from Heavy Social Networking in Adolescents: The Mediating Role of Fear of Missing Out. *Journal of Adolescence*, 55, 51–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.12.008>

¹⁴ Cliff Lampe, Nicole Ellison, and Charles Steinfield, "A Face(book) in the Crowd: Social Searching vs. Social Browsing," Proceedings of the 2006 20th Anniversary Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work, New York: ACM Press, 2006, pp. 167–70

adolescents, 64.4 percent displayed indications of potential social media addiction.¹⁵

The Mental Health Nexus: Amidst these developments, concerns have been raised about the impact of technology and social media on children's mental health and well-being. In Hong Kong, 719 Chinese adolescents participated in this school-based cross-sectional study investigating the inter-relationships between insomnia, internet addiction, and depression. Among students with internet addiction (17.2%), 15.7% were also identified as insomniacs.¹⁶

Excessive screen time, cyberbullying, comparison with idealized online personas, and the pressure to be constantly connected can take a toll on children's self-esteem, social skills, and emotional resilience. Moreover, the blurring of boundaries between online and offline worlds can exacerbate feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Elevated levels of internet usage are linked to clinical depression.¹⁷ According to a longitudinal study conducted among Chinese high school students in 2010, individuals with moderate to severe risk of Internet addiction are 2.5 times more prone to developing depressive symptoms compared to those without Internet addiction.¹⁸

The use of electronic devices, particularly before bedtime, can disrupt sleep patterns in children. The blue light emitted by screens can interfere with the production of melatonin, making it harder for children to fall asleep and negatively impacting the quality of their rest. The study investigated internet addiction in adolescents and explored the relationship between problematic internet use and symptoms of sleep disturbance.¹⁹

Children may imitate behaviours portrayed in advertisements, media, and movies, sometimes learning negative habits or attitudes from these sources. Many studies have shown a robust correlation between exposure to specific mass media messages and adolescent smoking. For instance, in year one, out of a total of 33,676 non-smoking students, 3973 (11.8%) were categorized as susceptible to smoking. Among these susceptible non-smokers, 153 (3.8%) initiated smoking in Year two.²⁰ On 31 May 2005, MoHFW announced the Prohibition on advertisement of cigarettes and other tobacco

products²¹ but in 2009, the Delhi High Court lifted the ban on smoking in films and television.²²

2. Conclusion

The intertwining of technology and social media with the lives of children presents both promises and challenges. While these digital tools offer unprecedented opportunities for learning, creativity, and social connection, they also bring forth concerns regarding their potential impact on children's well-being and development.

As highlighted in this article, excessive screen time, cyberbullying, comparison with idealized online personas, and the pressure to be constantly connected can negatively affect children's physical health, mental health, and socio-emotional well-being. From disrupted sleep patterns to feelings of inadequacy fuelled by curated social media content, children are navigating a complex digital landscape that demands careful attention and proactive intervention.

To address these challenges, it is crucial for parents, educators, policymakers, and tech companies to collaborate in promoting a balanced approach to technology use that prioritizes children's holistic well-being. This entails fostering digital literacy, cultivating healthy screen habits, and providing guidance on navigating online spaces safely and responsibly. Moreover, prioritizing offline experiences, meaningful relationships, and mental health support remains essential in fostering resilience and thriving in the digital age.

By recognizing the nuanced interplay between technology and child development and implementing evidence-based strategies to support children's well-being, we can create safe, supportive, and empowering digital environments that nurture their growth, resilience, and flourishing in the digital age. Through collective efforts and a commitment to prioritizing children's well-being, we can shape a future where technology serves as a catalyst for positive growth and empowerment for all children.

¹⁵ Paudel, Ashok & Chhetri, Muni & Baidya, Prinisha. (2023). Association Between Social Media and Psychological Effects Among Adolescents: School-Based Cross-Sectional Study in Kathmandu City of Nepal. *Journal of Chitwan Medical College*. 13(2). 63-69. DOI: 10.54530/jcmc.1271

¹⁶ Cheung, L. M., & Wong, W. S. (2011). The Effects of Insomnia and Internet Addiction on Depression in Hong Kong Chinese Adolescents: An Exploratory Cross-Sectional Analysis. *Journal of Sleep Research*, 20(2), 311–317. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2869.2010.00883.x>

¹⁷ Young, K.S. (1998). Internet Addiction: The Emergence of a New Clinical Disorder, *Cyber Psychology and Behavior*, 1(3). 237-244. <https://www.netaddiction.com/articles/newdisorder.pdf>

¹⁸ Lam LT, Peng Z. Effect of Pathological Use of the Internet on Adolescent Mental Health: A Prospective Study. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 2010;164(10):901–906. doi: 10.1001/archpediatrics.2010.159

¹⁹ Fatih Canan., Osman Yildirim., Gjergji Sinani., Onder Ozturk., Tuba Yildirim Ustunel., Ahmet Ataoglu. (2013). Internet Addiction and Sleep Disturbance Symptoms Among Turkish High School

Students, *Journal of Sleep Research*, 11(3). 203-214. <https://www.springermedizin.de/internet-addiction-and-sleep-disturbance-symptoms-among-turkish-25652812>

²⁰ Kamath, V. G., Kulkarni, M. M., Kamath, A., Lewis, S., Bogdanovica, I., Bains, M., Cranwell, J., Fogarty, A., Arora, M., Bahl, D., Nazar, G. P., Naik, A. K., Ballal, K., Bhagawath, R., & Britton, J. (2024). Prospective Study of Exposure to Smoking Imagery in Films and Changes in Susceptibility to Smoking in a Cohort of School Students in Southern India. *Tobacco Induced Diseases*, 22, 10.18332/tid/178442. <https://doi.org/10.18332/tid/178442>

²¹ Ministry of health and Family Welfare Government of India. New Delhi The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) (Amendment) Rules, 2005. G.S.R. 345(E). Government of India, 2005. Available: <https://assets.tobaccocontrollaws.org/uploads/legislation/India/India-a-G.S.R.-345E.pdf>

²² <https://www.newindianexpress.com/lifestyle/health/2009/Jan/24/bollywood-exults-as-smoking-ban-in-movies-lifted-20520.html>

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