

Strategies for using Social Networks to Develop Healthy Communication Skills in Adolescents

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Abstract

The article analyzes the role and significance of social networks in shaping adolescents' communication culture. It also examines how modern technologies can have either positive or negative impacts on the socialization and interpersonal relationships of the younger generation. Psychological issues arising from social network use—such as addiction, emotional instability, and social isolation—are explored, along with strategies to prevent these negative consequences. Furthermore, the importance of fostering healthy communication through the development of life skills and the enhancement of digital literacy is substantiated.

Keywords: adolescents, social networks, healthy communication, digital literacy, life skills, psychological safety, online addiction, cyberbullying, emotional stability, interpersonal relationships.

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Introduction. In today's era of globalization, fostering the moral and ethical development of the younger generation and creating conditions for their healthy physical and psychological growth have become pressing everyday concerns. It is well known that scientific and technological progress has permeated all aspects of our daily lives, providing humanity with various conveniences and simplifying many time-consuming tasks. At the same time, these advances have begun to influence our interpersonal relationships, particularly our communication. Social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, and others have become important tools in the process of interpersonal communication and relationships.

These processes especially affect adolescents, who are in the process of forming their identity, adapting to independent life, and are considered sensitive to various social influences. The impact of social networks on adolescents' behavior, communication style, and quality can be both positive and negative. Therefore, it is an important task for psychologists today to conduct thorough scientific research on the negative influence of modern communication technologies—such as social networks, a product of human

intellect—on the growing younger generation. This also includes studying addictive behaviors that may arise, preventing their occurrence, and developing scientific and practical recommendations to foster healthy communication skills.

Literature review. There are several reasons why it is essential to protect adolescents from the negative consequences of excessive use of social networks. According to researchers such as Crone E. A. and Konijn E. A., during this developmental stage, many adolescents' nervous systems are not yet fully developed or remain unstable. Additionally, some adolescents may lack sufficient knowledge about the functions of social networks and the legal and ethical norms governing their use. These factors can contribute to the emergence of various psychological problems related to addiction to social networks among adolescents. (Crone, E. A., & Konijn, E. A., 2018). In our opinion, during adolescence, many young people experience complex psychological challenges such as self-awareness and emotional regulation difficulties, and they are often emotionally unstable. This can lead to the misinterpretation of various content and information on social networks, inappropriate reactions, and negative responses. Naturally, in traditional communication, individuals exchange not only information but also a range of emotions. Emotions such as empathy, joy, anxiety, and anger help people better understand each other and foster interpersonal relationships. However, adolescents whose emotional intelligence is not yet fully developed often interact with known or unknown individuals behind screens, which further limits their ability to understand emotions. This may cause various interpersonal problems, including destructive conflicts, online harassment, and cyberbullying. These issues can potentially lead to psychological problems in the long term, such as social phobias, self-aggression, aggression toward others, or social isolation in some adolescents.

Overall, not all adolescents necessarily fall victim to the negative effects of social networks. This process depends on socio-psychological factors such as emotional regulation, personality traits, attachment, a sense of belonging, and fears of being forgotten. (Beyens, I., Frison, E., & Eggermont, S., 2016). In our opinion, dependence on using social networks as the primary means of interpersonal relationships and communication may be caused by psychological factors such as the need for attachment, belonging, and individual psychological characteristics. For instance, some adolescents who are raised in a healthy social environment and possess time management and self-regulation skills are able to balance both social networks and traditional face-to-face communication and interactions. This balance contributes to the development of healthy social relationships and a psychologically sound environment.

Discussion and Questions. Preventing and addressing the negative consequences of social media addiction among adolescents is a scientific issue that has been studied across various fields. Researchers such as Elizabeth Zimmermann and Samuel Tomczyk have proposed the development of life skills and digital competence as effective strategies. (Zimmermann E., Tomczyk S., 2025). The World Health Organization (WHO) proposed five key life skills in 1999. These include decision-making and problem-solving (a), creative and critical thinking (b), communication skills (c), self-awareness and empathy (d), and coping skills related to emotions and stress (e) (WHO, 1999). Life skills play a crucial role in academic success, maintaining health, and reducing abusive behaviors related to alcohol and psychotropic substances. Additionally, these skills are important for helping adolescents maintain a balance between social media and traditional communication, as well as for preventing addiction to online communication and the deviant behaviors or social isolation that may result from such addiction.

According to the research of Elizabeth Zimmermann and Samuel Tomczyk, digital life skills help children and adolescents use social networks consciously and effectively. (Zimmermann E., Tomczyk S., 2025). These skills not only help manage activity on social networks but also serve to address risks and developmental challenges encountered in traditional life. The fact that social networks have become an integral part of adolescents' lives creates favorable opportunities for preventive measures and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. In particular, social networks, with their interactive features—such as content sharing, quizzes, and social support—can serve as effective tools aimed at positively influencing behavior change. (Moorhead, S. A., Hazlett, D. E., Harrison, L., Carroll, J. K., Irwin, A., & Hoving, C.,

2013).

In modern digital society, the close connection between life skills and digital competencies highlights the urgency of mastering both. Young people face numerous challenges, such as peer pressure and the need for self-expression, not only in traditional environments but also in digital spaces. Therefore, an integrative approach—meaning interconnected and harmonized—is required for the development of life skills. This approach involves analyzing the common psycho-social issues emerging in digital environments and deeply understanding their impact on human experience and behavior.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA, May 2023), the following recommendations have been developed to prevent or mitigate the negative effects of social media use on adolescents:

Firstly, it is essential to guide young people to purposefully use social media functions that promote social support, virtual collaboration, and emotional closeness. This, in turn, serves as a crucial factor in fostering healthy social relationships and strengthening communication culture. Research shows that purposeful and meaningful forms of online social interaction can positively influence the psychological development of young people. This is especially important during periods of social isolation, psychological stress, or when there is a need to connect with peers experiencing similar developmental stages or health-related issues. Moreover, for youths facing social exclusion offline or going through difficult life circumstances, such online interactions play a vital role in providing emotional stability and sources of social support. (Charmaraman L, Lynch AD, Richer AM, Zhai E., 2022).

Secondly, from a psychological perspective, the design of social media platforms—including their interfaces and systems that regulate user rights—must be tailored to align with the cognitive, emotional, and social developmental stages of young people. Platforms created for adults may not suit children's developmental levels and can negatively affect their abilities to process information, understand safety, and make independent decisions. Therefore, a specially adapted approach that considers the psychological needs and protections of young users is necessary. Certain features present on social media—such as the “like” button, automatically recommended content, the absence of time limits, or infinite scrolling—along with various alerts and notifications, especially those about changes in privacy policies, should be appropriately designed to correspond with adolescents' social and cognitive developmental stages. (Introduction to the Age appropriate design code., 2022, October 17). This means that adolescents do not yet possess fully developed critical thinking, time management, or risk assessment skills. As a result, digital features like those mentioned above can negatively affect their emotional stability, self-confidence, need for social approval, and impulsive behavior. Therefore, social media platforms should be designed to be safe, age-appropriate, and psychologically protective for teenagers. Such an approach helps foster a healthy digital communication culture among them.

Thirdly, when adolescents use social media, it is essential that they first undergo specialized education or training in digital literacy, taking into account their psychological state and developmental characteristics. These trainings help young people understand the risks in digital environments, manage their emotions, and develop psychological skills for healthy communication. Consequently, adolescents gain the ability to use social media in a balanced, safe, and meaningful way, which strengthens their mental health and social development.

Conclusion and Recommendations. Through such trainings, it is essential to aim at developing the following skills and competencies in adolescents:

1. The ability to critically evaluate the accuracy and breadth of information shared on social media;
2. Understanding the methods used to spread false and misleading information and ensuring protection against information attacks;
3. Identifying signs of problematic or harmful social media use, fostering self-awareness, and establishing healthy boundaries;

4. Developing skills to build and maintain healthy, trustworthy, and emotionally stable relationships in the online environment;
5. Enhancing communication skills to resolve conflicts on social media constructively;
6. Avoiding excessive comparison with others online and regulating self-assessment by recognizing image and content manipulation;
7. Learning to discuss mental health topics safely and responsibly in online settings.

These skills help adolescents enhance their social media experiences and manage them consciously. They play a crucial role in maintaining emotional stability, coping with stress and social pressure, and fostering mutual respect and a safe communication environment. At the same time, these competencies support young people's personal development, enabling them to become independent and responsible users in the digital world (Balt E, Mérelle S, Robinson J, et al., 2023).

In conclusion, social media creates new spaces for adolescents to expand friendships and increase opportunities for self-expression. However, excessive and poorly managed use can increase risks such as cyberbullying, addiction, and emotional instability. To promote healthy communication skills, it is necessary to strengthen adolescents' digital literacy, critical thinking, and emotional regulation skills, design platforms that are age-appropriate and safe, and enhance the supportive roles of parents and educators. This approach can balance online and offline communication, supporting the mental and social well-being of youth.

Based on the conclusions drawn from the theoretical research above, we propose the following recommendations:

- 1) Integration of digital literacy and life skills into school curricula by teachers and psychologists;
- 2) Introducing safe usage rules to children jointly with parents rather than mere supervision of their online activities;
- 3) Social media companies implementing time limits, age-appropriate content filters, and effective self-regulation signals for young users;
- 4) Researchers conducting deeper studies on the relationship between adolescents' online communication and mental health and developing evidence-based practical recommendations.

Thus, developing healthy communication skills by promoting purposeful, moderate, and psychologically informed social media use strategies and applying them in practice remains a pressing task today.

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