

ANALYSIS OF SELF-ESTEEM OF YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE INTERNET AND
SOCIAL NETWORKS

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Abstract. This article investigates the relationship between the self-esteem of young people and their experiences on the Internet, particularly within social networks. The rapid growth of digital communication has transformed the way adolescents and young adults construct identity, build social relationships, and evaluate themselves. While online platforms provide opportunities for self-expression, connection, and support, they also expose young users to risks such as comparison, cyberbullying, and dependence on external validation. This psychological analysis highlights the dual impact of social networks on self-esteem, exploring both positive and negative mechanisms.

Keywords: Self-esteem, youth, Internet, social networks, psychological analysis, identity formation, online communication, cyberpsychology.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has become a central arena of socialization for young people, shaping not only how they communicate but also how they perceive themselves. Among digital platforms, social networks such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter (X) play a particularly powerful role in identity construction. These platforms provide spaces for self-presentation, social comparison, and feedback through likes, comments, and shares. Consequently, the psychological well-being and self-esteem of young people are increasingly influenced by online interactions. Self-esteem, defined as the individual's overall evaluation of their worth, is a crucial factor in mental health, social relationships, and personal development. Understanding the dynamics of self-esteem in the context of social networks is therefore vital for both psychological research and educational practice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Self-esteem among young people is strongly shaped by the mechanisms of social comparison that are amplified in online environments. Social networks often present idealized versions of reality, where users showcase achievements, physical attractiveness, and social popularity. Adolescents and young adults, whose identities are still developing, may compare themselves unfavorably to these curated images. Such upward social comparisons can lead to feelings of inadequacy, envy, and decreased self-worth. Studies have consistently shown that frequent exposure to idealized images on social media is linked to lower self-esteem, especially among young women who internalize unrealistic beauty standards.

At the same time, social networks provide opportunities for positive reinforcement. When young people receive supportive comments, likes, or shares, they experience validation that may enhance their self-esteem. For some, especially those who lack supportive offline environments, online platforms become essential sources of belonging and recognition. Virtual communities around shared interests, hobbies, or causes can foster identity affirmation and resilience. Thus, the

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psychological impact of social networks is not inherently negative but depends on the quality of interactions and the individual's coping strategies [1].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Another important factor is the phenomenon of online identity construction. Young people often experiment with different aspects of their personality on the Internet, from posting creative content to adopting new roles in virtual communities. This exploration can promote self-discovery and flexible identity development, thereby strengthening self-esteem. However, it can also lead to dependency on external validation, where a young person's self-worth becomes tied to the amount of attention or approval received online. This reliance makes self-esteem fragile, as fluctuations in online feedback directly influence emotional stability [2].

Cyberbullying represents one of the most harmful risks for self-esteem in digital contexts. Insults, exclusion, or harassment on social networks can deeply damage the self-concept of adolescents. Unlike traditional bullying, online aggression is persistent, far-reaching, and often anonymous, which intensifies its psychological consequences. Victims of cyberbullying frequently report lower self-esteem, higher anxiety, depression, and in severe cases, suicidal ideation. Preventive measures, such as awareness campaigns, parental mediation, and stronger platform policies, are crucial to protect young users from such detrimental experiences.

From a psychological perspective, self-esteem on social networks is mediated by individual differences such as personality traits, resilience, and emotional regulation skills. For instance, extroverted individuals may thrive in digital environments, finding affirmation through frequent interactions, while introverted or socially anxious youth may experience difficulties navigating online exposure. Similarly, young people with high resilience and strong offline support systems are better equipped to resist negative effects of online comparison, whereas those with pre-existing vulnerabilities are more likely to suffer declines in self-esteem [3].

The role of digital literacy and psychological education must also be emphasized. Young people who are aware of the constructed and selective nature of online content are less likely to internalize unrealistic standards. Teaching critical thinking, media literacy, and emotional regulation in schools can help students engage with social networks more consciously. Furthermore, encouraging offline activities such as sports, arts, and volunteering can diversify sources of self-esteem, reducing dependency on online validation.

Finally, the broader socio-cultural context influences how self-esteem interacts with social networks. In collectivist cultures, where belonging and community approval are emphasized, social media validation may carry greater weight, while in individualist cultures, self-expression and uniqueness may be more valued. Understanding these cultural dynamics enriches psychological analysis and informs culturally sensitive interventions [4].

CONCLUSION

The Internet and social networks play a dual role in shaping the self-esteem of young people. On the one hand, they provide spaces for expression, connection, and recognition that can strengthen confidence and identity. On the other, they foster unhealthy comparisons, dependency on external validation, and risks such as cyberbullying, which can undermine self-esteem and psychological well-being. The impact depends on individual, social, and cultural factors, as well as on the way young people engage with digital environments.

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