



Exploring the Role of Social Media Use in Anxiety Among Teenagers

Sat Yuki*

Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan

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Adolescence is widely recognized as a developmental period marked by increased emotional sensitivity and a higher risk of developing mental health concerns particularly anxiety disorders. In parallel with this vulnerable stage of life, the rapid expansion and widespread adoption of social media platforms have introduced new forms of social interaction that may influence emotional well-being. The potential mental health implications of adolescent's online behavior have become a subject of growing interest among researchers, educators and mental health professionals. This study aimed to explore the associations between specific patterns of social media use and symptoms of generalized anxiety in high-school students, shedding light on how both the amount and nature of online engagement may relate to adolescent's psychological health. The study surveyed a total of 450 high-school students, aged approximately 14 to 18 using a structured self-report questionnaire. Participants provided information about the average number of hours they spent on social media each day the types of activities they typically engaged in while online categorized as either passive (such as scrolling through feeds or viewing others' content without interaction) or active (such as posting updates, commenting or messaging) and the extent to which they engaged in social comparison during their online experiences. Generalized anxiety symptoms were assessed using a validated anxiety scale that captures feelings of excessive worry, restlessness, difficulty concentrating and physical tension.

The analysis of the data revealed several key findings. Most notably students who spent more time engaging in passive forms of social media use reported significantly higher levels of anxiety symptoms. This suggests that simply consuming content without interaction such as browsing through images, videos or posts without direct communication may contribute to increased internal distress. In contrast, active engagement such as posting content or interacting with peers online, did not demonstrate a strong or consistent correlation with anxiety levels. This distinction between passive and active use highlights that the impact of social media on mental health is not solely dependent

on time spent online but is also shaped by the nature and intention of online activities. Another important aspect of the study centered on the role of social comparison. Students who indicated that they frequently compared themselves to others while using social media evaluating their appearance, popularity, achievements or lifestyle against the curated content of their peers were more likely to report elevated anxiety symptoms. This finding supports previous psychological research suggesting that comparison-based behaviors particularly in the context of idealized portrayals on social platforms, can negatively affect self-esteem and increase psychological distress. The tendency to measure one's worth against others' online personas may amplify feelings of inadequacy and worry especially in adolescents who are already navigating identity development and peer evaluation.

Although these findings offer meaningful insights into how social media engagement is associated with adolescent anxiety the cross-sectional nature of the study means that causality cannot be established. It remains unclear whether passive consumption and comparison behaviors contribute to the development of anxiety symptoms or if individuals experiencing higher anxiety are more drawn to these forms of social media use as a way of coping or seeking distraction. This limitation points to the need for longitudinal studies that can track these variables over time and determine the directionality of the relationship. Nevertheless, the results carry important implications for clinical practice and youth mental health interventions. When working with adolescents who present with symptoms of anxiety mental health professionals may find it beneficial to include a detailed assessment of social media habits in their evaluations. Specifically, questions around the quality of engagement such as how frequently an individual scroll without interacting or engages in upward social comparisons could provide valuable context for understanding emotional triggers and maintaining factors. Therapeutic strategies might then incorporate elements of digital literacy cognitive restructuring related to social comparison and the development of healthier more intentional online habits.

Furthermore, these findings suggest that educational programs aimed at promoting mental wellness in schools could benefit

Correspondence to: Sato Yuki, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan, E-mail: yuki.sato@kyoto-u.ac.jp

Received: 01-Jul-2025, Manuscript No. JOP-25-30173; **Editor assigned:** 03-Jul-2025, PreQC No. JOP-25-30173; **Reviewed:** 17-Jul-2025, QC No. JOP-25-30173; **Revised:** 23-Jul-2025, Manuscript No JOP-25-30173; **Published:** 31-Jul-2025, DOI: 10.35248/2378-5756.25.28.754

Citation: Yuki S (2025). Exploring the Role of Social Media Use in Anxiety Among Teenagers. 28:754.

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from incorporating discussions about mindful social media use. Teaching adolescents to critically reflect on how they engage with digital content and encouraging more active and meaningful online interactions may help buffer the potential negative effects of excessive passive consumption. Additionally, fostering resilience and self-esteem offline may reduce reliance on online validation and lessen the impact of comparison-based behaviors. In summary, this study contributes to the growing body of research examining the intersection between adolescent mental health and digital behavior. It highlights that not all

social media use is equal in its psychological impact passive scrolling and habitual social comparison are particularly associated with heightened anxiety among high-school students. While more research is needed to establish causation and identify protective factors these findings support the idea that both the amount and the quality of social media engagement matter. Mental health professionals, educators and caregivers should remain attentive to these patterns helping adolescents cultivate a healthier relationship with the digital spaces that increasingly shape their social world.