

# Social Media: Shaping the Lives of Young People

## Introduction

Barely two decades ago, the idea of sharing a photo with thousands of people instantly, or joining a conversation with strangers across continents in real time, seemed impossible. Today, it is not only possible but part of everyday life for millions of young people around the world. Social media has transformed from a novelty into a necessity—a powerful digital ecosystem that shapes how the youth communicate, learn, entertain themselves, and even define their identities. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and X (formerly Twitter) are no longer just tools for keeping in touch; they are forces that influence culture, aspirations, and opportunities. But how exactly is social media shaping the lives of young people? To understand its role, we must explore both its transformative benefits, its inevitable challenges, and its undeniable impact on modern youth culture.

## 1. The Positive Impacts of Social Media

One of the greatest strengths of social media lies in its ability to connect people across boundaries. In an increasingly globalized world, young people can communicate with peers thousands of miles away as easily as they talk to their next-door neighbours. This interconnectedness has opened doors for collaboration, cultural exchange, and friendships that transcend national borders.

For many youths, social media is also a vast learning resource. Platforms like YouTube host tutorials on virtually every topic imaginable—from advanced mathematics and language learning to cooking and coding. Instagram pages and Facebook groups dedicated to specific subjects create vibrant learning communities, while LinkedIn provides young professionals with opportunities to showcase skills, connect with employers, and discover internships. These opportunities were far more limited before the digital revolution.

In addition, social media has become a launchpad for entrepreneurship. Many young people have started small businesses by marketing products or services through Instagram shops, TikTok videos, or Facebook marketplaces. With minimal resources, a determined youth can reach thousands of potential customers, turning a side hustle into a sustainable career. In this way, social media has become not just a space for social connection, but also a driver of economic empowerment.

## 2. The Negative Impacts of Social Media

Yet, as with any powerful tool, social media's influence is not without its downsides. One of the most pressing issues is addiction. The endless stream of videos, updates, and notifications can easily consume hours each day, leaving less time for academic work, hobbies, or face-to-face relationships. Studies have shown that excessive social media use can contribute to decreased productivity and difficulty concentrating.

Another serious concern is cyberbullying. The anonymity of the internet can sometimes bring out the worst in people, and many young users have found themselves targets of harassment, ridicule, or hate speech. Such experiences can have a lasting impact on mental health, leading to stress, anxiety, and depression.

Perhaps less obvious but equally damaging is the culture of comparison fostered by social media. Young people are constantly exposed to curated images of others' lives — perfect vacations, flawless selfies, and glamorous lifestyles. These images often hide reality, yet they create unrealistic standards for beauty, success, and happiness. For some, this leads to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and even unhealthy behaviours in an attempt to “keep up.”

### 3. Influence on Youth Culture

Beyond individual experiences, social media has deeply influenced youth culture as a whole. Viral trends, challenges, and memes can spread globally within hours, shaping music preferences, fashion choices, and even the language young people use. A dance routine created by a teenager in one country can be performed by millions worldwide within a week.

Social media has also given rise to a new form of digital activism. Young people now have the ability to raise awareness about social issues, mobilize support, and even influence policy. Movements for climate change action, gender equality, and mental health awareness have gained momentum thanks to hashtags and online campaigns. This empowerment allows youths to participate in conversations that were once dominated by older generations, giving them a platform to be heard and taken seriously.

Moreover, social media has changed how news spreads. Many young people first hear about breaking events not from television or newspapers, but from platforms like Twitter or Instagram. While this rapid sharing of information has benefits, it also raises questions about accuracy and misinformation — another challenge that modern youths must learn to navigate.

### Conclusion

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Social media has woven itself into the fabric of young people's lives, offering unprecedented opportunities for connection, learning, creativity, and advocacy. Yet, it also presents challenges that require conscious and responsible use. It is neither wholly good nor entirely harmful — its impact depends on the choices made by its users.

For today's youth, mastering social media means more than simply knowing how to post a photo or share a video. It means understanding when to log off, how to verify information, and how to engage positively in digital spaces. The young people who can strike a healthy balance between their online presence and their real-world responsibilities will not only thrive personally but will also shape the future of this powerful tool.

As technology continues to advance, one truth remains clear: social media is here to stay. The question is not whether it will continue to shape the lives of young people but whether the next generation will shape it for the better.

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