

**Impact of Social Media Reels on Today's Youth: A Review of its Positive and Negative Effects**Dr. Henry<sup>1</sup> . Dr. Dinesh Kumar<sup>2</sup>

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**ABSTRACT**

This review paper aims to examine the research findings on use of social media reels and its impact on the adolescents. It attempts to draw a comparative analysis of the positive and negative effects of using and following social media reels. As studies were limited prior to Covid19, most of the studies have been included from post covid time. This may be helpful for educators to plan curriculum or learning modalities for the young population where social media can be productively and judiciously integrated and opens the avenues for further research on the integration process.

**Keywords** - adolescence, youth, social media, reels

**INTRODUCTION** - Youth is simply defined as the period of life during which a person is seen neither as child nor as adult. In this context, it is important to understand the phenomenal changes found in young adulthood — the way these affect the interpersonal relations — and their implications at large. Hall, the father of adolescent psychology, defined adolescence as “stress and storm”. According to Hall, this phase is essential to the person's maturation into an adult. According to Freud, young individuals try to establish adult sexual relationships during this time of growing sexual interest and intimacy. The most well-known contribution of renowned developmental psychologist Erik Erikson is his theory of psychosocial development. According to him, adolescence is a crucial time in the formation of an individual's identity and a period of intense self-discovery and exploration during which people must deal with the psychosocial conflict known as Identity vs. Role Confusion. Marcia looked at how teenagers approach identity formation to build on Erikson's findings. He distinguished four identity states that describe how teenagers approach commitment and inquiry: identity dissemination, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. By pointing out that not all teenagers go through identity formation in the same way or at the same time, Marcia's work enhanced Erikson's theory of identity formation.

Social media sites like YouTube, Instagram and TikTok have brought to the limelight a new kind of mass media in the current digital era, i.e. short form of video material, or "reels" which gives immense pleasure to today's youth. Social media platforms typically allow individuals, groups, or organizations to connect, exchange and form virtual communities. Considering the multifaced use of social media in today's time, it can be said that on one hand social media is a boon while on other hand it is a bane. In summary, social media is a versatile tool that may be used for several purposes, such as promoting community wellness, creative expression and promotion. Although it has many advantages, there are drawbacks as well, including issues with information veracity, authenticity and privacy besides physical and mental health (Kuss et. al., 2017). A reel is a brief, captivating video format used in social media to produce and distribute content on sites like Facebook and Instagram. Reels last between 15 to 90 seconds, though platforms may keep changing the duration restrictions over time. This practice of watching reels has grown so wide that it is accommodated as one's basic task just like commuting, eating, or getting ready for bed. Though it provides amusement to young adults, it also has many negative repercussions. (Rosen et. al., 2013, Dhir et. al., 2018)

Excessive use of social media including reels can affect individuals in many ways. Turel, Serenko, and Giles (2011) discovered that addiction to social media triggers the same brain circuits as substance misuse, pointing to a cycle of obsessive behaviour and reward. As a result, users may look for additional content to get comparable dopamine "hits." Another study by Przybylski et al. (2013) demonstrated that short-form videos like reels can worsen the effect of FOMO, or the 'fear of missing out', which is a common occurrence on social networking sites. Because users are conditioned to quickly flip between videos and feeds, Rosen et al. (2013) hypothesised that frequent usage of apps like TikTok and Instagram may impair sustained attention and focus. Richtel (2010) demonstrated how "cognitive fragmentation"—rapid shifts in attention on social media platforms—limits our ability to concentrate on lengthier tasks. Fardouly et al. (2015) discovered that social media exposure to idealised images lowers self-esteem and negative body image, particularly among young women. This effect may be attributed to emphasis on aesthetics in reels. Zhang et al. (2017) discovered that those who use social media as a form of emotional control frequently have higher levels of loneliness and sadness, implying that reels may enhance these symptoms by providing fleeting rather than genuine relationships. Not all studies on social media are entirely focused on addiction to reels. However, these studies point out the underlying interplay of the different psychological variables determining behaviour of the younger generations.

**A BRIEF REVIEW OF LITERATURE** - Studies published during the last few years have been reviewed. The studies have been arranged according to the main theme of the review objectives. It is clustered in two main groups namely – A. social media spreading its positive effects on individuals and B. social media impacting individuals negatively.

**A. Social media (including reels)'s positive impact on individuals** - One of the most evident benefits of social media is the availability of social services. Cohen and Wills (1985) discovered that social support is essential for emotional well-being. Social media platforms allow users to maintain and expand their social networks, fostering feelings of belonging, support, and companionship, especially among the socially isolated. According to Manago et al. (2008), social media platforms allow users to express themselves creatively, musically, or otherwise in ways that would be impossible in traditional settings. This type of expression can boost self-esteem and personal satisfaction. Junco et al. (2011) found that students who utilise social media for educational purposes perform better academically due to peer support and easy access to knowledge. This can promote a more dynamic approach to learning and continuous professional development. Pantic et al. (2012) discovered that social media platforms can act as a bridge for emotional support, particularly for people struggling with mental health disorders including depression and anxiety. Kluemper et al. (2015) discovered that individuals who actively participate in professional networking platforms are more likely to receive job offers, as these platforms help to establish a professional identity and provide a direct channel of communication with potential employers. According to research by Fox and Moreland (2015), getting encouraging comments or "likes" on social media might increase one's sense of self-worth. It fosters a sense of approval and acknowledgement, which is essential for optimal psychological functioning. Primack et al. (2017) discovered that moderate use of social media can significantly reduce loneliness and boost life satisfaction by allowing people to communicate with friends and family who live far away. Social media platforms allow teenagers to connect with like-minded individuals and receive emotional support as they deal with peer pressure and stress. 15% of the teenagers who believed social media had a favourable impact on their age group attributed this to meeting like-minded individuals, and 9% attributed this to the fact that it gave them gratifying entertainment. 7% attributed it to self-expression, and 5% attributed it to receiving positive feedback from others. (Y,2022). Young people used social media for a variety of purposes, such as communicating with friends and family and taking part in global movements, all of which supported mental health, according to Vaingankar et al. (2022). Shao et al.'s (2023) comprehensive evaluation of the literature emphasises the use of social media in teaching cultural heritage. Social media platforms help spread cultural information and give teenagers dynamic ways to interact with their heritage, according to the study. A deeper comprehension and appreciation of one's cultural heritage are made possible by this engagement.

B. Social media (including reels)'s negative impact on individuals - young people may be exposed to negative decisions or choices made on social media, such as those involving drugs, alcohol, hazardous sexual behaviour, and violence. Brown et al. (2008) separated the procedure into two parts: The first is a phenomenon known as "behavioural display," which shows how people mimic their peers' actions to appear more popular in front of others. According to the study, a social-desirability bias emerges when survey respondents make socially acceptable comments. According to Arain et al. (2013), important critical regions of the prefrontal cortex, a brain area involved in decision-making processes, are underdeveloped in teenagers, increasing their likelihood of engaging in pleasure-seeking, risky behaviours when compared with adults. Short videos frequently reinforce stereotypes and unattainable social expectations. According to Perloff (2014), this exposure has the potential to strengthen negative attitudes and behaviours, especially those related to gender roles and body image. Short video platforms are addictive, resulting in internet addiction symptoms such as obsessive use, withdrawal symptoms, and loss of control (Young, 1998). Such addiction has been associated with increased anxiety, sadness, and loneliness (Kuss and Griffiths, 2015). According to research, having meaningful in-person discussions can be hampered by excessive use of digital platforms for communication (Turkle, 2015). According to studies, blue light from screens inhibits melatonin production, making it difficult to sleep (Carter, Rees, Hale, Bhattacharjee, & Paradkar, 2016). Chua and Chang (2016) found that the constant assault of curated, idealised content frequently leads to sentiments of inadequacy and low self-esteem among young adults. Excessive computer use has been associated with digital eye strain, which causes dry eyes, headaches, and blurred vision (Sheppard and Wolffsohn, 2018). The addictive design of brief videos, fuelled by algorithmic suggestions, encourages extended viewing sessions, exacerbating the problem (Montag, Lachmann, Herrlich, and Zweig, 2019).

DISCUSSION - From the overall scrutiny of the recent research studies on the positive effects of social media and use of reels, it may be pointed out that reels play a significant role in the sustenance and refinement of one's self esteem, mental health and social well-being. Making and posting reels may add to the creative satisfaction and fulfilment leading to greater sense of self-esteem through the feedback coming to the reels in the form of "likes". People especially with mental health disorders have been found to feel better with connection over reels and social media in general. There are plenty of videos available in this space on depression, anxiety and mood disorders that help audiences to come together and spread sensitivity towards each other and foster self-worth through emotional support and understanding. Youth used social media for a few reasons, including communicating with friends and family and participating in global movements, all of which aided in the development of healthy mental health, according to Vaingankar et al. (2022). Loneliness is another area of concern that has repeatedly been studied in association with social media. The youth can overcome the negative thoughts with the help of the reels that bring them closer to the outside world and keep them active. (Primack et al., 2017). Educational and informative reel content have been particularly very useful in the professional scenario where students have been observed to have done significantly better in academics. Junco et al. (2011) found that students who utilise social media for educational purposes perform better due to peer support and easy access to knowledge. Mental health is a very crucial domain of positive impact because contrary to the belief that social media exposure damages mental health, it is found that social media improves mental health. Young adults find recognition and acceptance for issues like bullying, body shaming and sexual orientation and find a greater spectrum of opportunities like social media movements, mass awareness and global protests. This in turn creates a sense of accomplishment and identity addressing the psychosocial crisis stemming out of the conflict between identity and role confusion in adolescence as marked by Erikson. Reels helps youths by rescuing them by providing body positivity, perspectives of bully behaviour and ways to cope with such elements. Platforms like TikTok are being utilised more and more for informal sexual health education, according to research published in the Journal of Adolescent Health (2021). Decision making is also positively influenced by Exposure to reels helping young adults' intentions and behaviours, such as travel planning. Information Sharing is greatly appreciated using reels such as newly opened medical facilities or cafes and off beat locations. Shao et al.'s thorough literature assessment from 2023 emphasises the use of social media in

teaching cultural heritage. According to the survey, social media platforms help spread cultural information and give teenagers interactive ways to interact with their roots. One's cultural roots can be better understood and appreciated because of this engagement. An article from *Parents* (2024) highlights that while social media can be a valuable resource for cultural engagement, adolescents need the skills to critically assess and engage with online content to benefit fully. On the other hand, there are some detrimental impacts of social media and reel usage that on social media platforms, reels and short-form video material have become the most often used online communication tools. These platforms provide enjoyment and connections but have several detrimental psychological, social, and physical effects. A vicious cycle of compulsive use and negative consequences is produced by social networking platforms. The phenomenon of "behavioural display," as examined by Brown et al. (2008), demonstrates how people—especially teenagers—often copy their friends' risky social media behaviours to gain social approval. These behaviours may include drug or alcohol experimentation or unsafe sexual activity. It has also been observed that adolescents' undeveloped prefrontal cortex makes them especially susceptible to the effects of reels. Teenagers have incomplete development in this area of the brain, which is crucial for impulse control and critical decision-making. A study found that children are more prone than adults to partake in dangerous, pleasurable activities because they are still developing in some critical areas of the prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain involved in making decisions (Arain et al., 2013). Short videos often perpetuate unattainable standards related to gender roles, body image, and lifestyle which in turn make the overall well-being of the individuals faulty. A study found that 32% of teen girls reported feeling worse about their bodies after using Instagram. (study done by Molly Callahan, September 20, 2021). Social isolation may result from the shallow online behaviour that short films promote. These days, sedentary behaviour, sleep disturbances, and digital eye strain are more common among young individuals. According to research, using digital platforms excessively for connection can make it harder to have meaningful, face-to-face discussions (Turkle, 2015). Although there is evidence that social media use can enhance creativity and self-esteem, there is also evidence that it contributes to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, especially in young adults. We may infer that user's self-esteem can be raised if he finds helpful content on social media and applies his own skills and imagination to produce something original and worthwhile that, perhaps, many people will find appealing. Increased anxiety and depressed symptoms may be a result of low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy brought on by unfavourable social comparisons and constant exposure to false information. Teenagers who interact with creative content on social media are more willing to try out new concepts and endeavours, according to research by Yang and Li (2020).

**CONCLUSION** - The analysis draws us to the conclusion that social media reels can be rewarding and favourable in certain respects like growth of self esteem, sense of achievement, fulfillment, life satisfaction, quality of decision-making, culture boundedness and professional accomplishments. As long as exposure and use of reels are within bounds, the effects are mostly considered productive. Uncontrolled and faulty use is, however, linked to negative outcomes such as risk taking, anxiety, lifestyle changes, feelings of inadequacy and lack of control. Proper interventions should be planned to address the challenges faced by the young population and make social media reels productive and relevant in their lives.

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