



The Effects of Social Media on Adolescent Identity Formation

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Introduction:

Technology and social media use among adolescents has increased during recent years. Today, teens have a much bigger online presence than ever have before. In 2006, 55% of teens ages 12-17 used social media, and 48% said they used it daily (Lenhart 2007). Many adolescents now have devices (such as smartphones) that allow them to go online anywhere and at any time. According to the Pew Research Center, 88% of American teens ages 13-17 have access to a mobile phone of some kind and 73% of teens own a smartphone (Lenhart, 2015). Those teens who own a mobile device use the device 91% of the time to go online, and 94% say they go on daily (Lenhart, 2015). Social media has become one of the main forms of communication among adolescents and it now has become a big part of their lives.

Social media refers to any website that allows for social communication and the exchange of ideas (O'Keefe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). These websites include Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube etc. As a result on-line activities might affect how they adolescents develop their identities.

Identity is who a person believes he or she is. There are different types of identity, like career, political, religious, cultural and so on (Santrock, 2014).

Identity formation is the process of how identities develop. Erickson and Marcia are two of the most influential psychologists that have researched identity development.

Theoretical Framework:

Erick Erickson (1968) theorized that adolescents go through a stage in their lives in which they will have to decide who they are and what they want to become. He calls this identity confusion. To experience this, adolescents have to go through a crisis period in which they start making their own choices. They begin exploring and experimenting with different identities that will eventually define who they are as adults.

James Marcia (1966) continued Erickson's work and refined it. Marcia believed that the adolescent stage didn't consist of identity confusion but instead consisted of exploration and commitment to an identity. He defined crisis as a period of exploration when adolescents explore different identities. By commitment he means personal investment in the adolescent's decisions. He then divided these two parts into four identity statuses: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. These are the four statuses that we will look at.

Identity Status:

Identity diffusion: this is when adolescents have not experienced a crisis (explored) and have not made any commitments.

Identity foreclosure: this is when adolescents have made a commitment but have not experienced a crisis.

Identity moratorium: this is when adolescents are experiencing a crisis but have not made a commitment.

Identity achievement: this is when adolescents have experienced a crisis and have made a commitment.

Types of Identity:

Gender: Gender identity refers to how one experiences oneself and relates to others of the same gender (Steensma, 2013). Adolescence is the time when gender intensification occurs (Hill & Lynch, 1983). Studies have shown that there is an increase of gender intensification but it is moderated by gender.

Peer relations: Teens have a strong need to be liked and accepted by their friends and peer groups. Peers are those who are about the same age or maturity level. They are important because they give feedback about the world outside of one's family (Santrock, 2014). Teens will do positive or negative things to be liked by their peers. Dating is also important for adolescents.

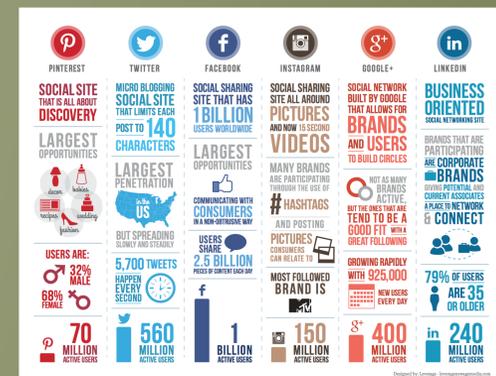
Family relations: Parents serve as monitors to help adolescents with social relations and help adolescents arrange and initiate interactions (Santrock, 2014). Parents also help adolescents find information and guide them to make competent independent decisions.

Culture/ethnicity: Culture is a set of behaviors, patterns, and beliefs of a specific group that are passed on from generation to generation (Santrock, 2014). Ethnicity is based on cultural heritage, nationality, characteristics, race, religion, and language (Santrock, 2014).

Research Question and Rationale:

This project investigates the effects of social media and technology on adolescent identity formation. This is important because technology has become an integral part of an adolescent's life. As technology advances, adolescents will be the first to adopt and use new technologies. It is important we research how these new means of communication are affecting the development of adolescents.

The main research question is simple – What kind of effect is social media having on the identity development of adolescents? This question also has a subset of questions. Is there a particular status when adolescents start using social media? Are they looking at gender specific websites and if so does it increase gender intensification? Are dating relations changing as a result of social media?



This research will provide insight into what teens are doing with social media. It will also help us understand how social media is affecting teen development.

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Creation of color TV 1950s

World wide web/internet invented 1994

First major smartphone created 2007