

Modern Digital Media and Their Effects on Adolescents

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Abstract – This article analyses modern digital and social media and their effects on adolescent development. The theoretical foundation is grounded in research on digital media, education, psychosocial development, and media literacy. The methodology consists of a theoretical literature review covering the definition of digital resources, their characteristics, and their positive effects, such as social connectivity, creativity, competence development, and emotional support. The conclusion emphasizes the necessity of balanced, responsible media use, the promotion of digital responsibility within the educational process, and the study of the effects of digital pedagogy on adolescents' holistic development.

Keywords – digital media, social media, adolescents, digital responsibility.

1. Introduction

Digitalisation and the use of digital resources are among the key factors in modern society, as they significantly influence almost every aspect of human life. Digital technology has become an integral part of daily life and has fundamentally transformed the ways in which we communicate, acquire information, learn, work, conduct research, and spend our leisure time. The development of information and communication technologies has enabled rapid access to knowledge, greater connectivity among individuals, and new forms of social interaction, while also raising numerous questions regarding the long-term consequences of digital media use for both individuals and society.

Many authors note that digital technology brings a wide range of possibilities, uses, and impacts. Globokar highlights that digital media significantly influence the educational process and require careful consideration of their role in modern schools [1]. Kavčič Čolić emphasizes the importance of a critical approach to digital content [2], while Spitzer warns of potential adverse effects of excessive digital technology use, particularly on the cognitive and emotional development of youth [3]. Therefore, it is essential to approach digital resources and modern media comprehensively and critically, considering both their short-term and long-term effects.

Modern times are marked by rapid advances in digital technology, which also significantly impact education. Changes in teaching practices are linked to the use of digital tools, interactive content, and online environments, allowing more flexible forms of learning. Despite numerous advantages such as faster access to knowledge, increased student motivation, and the possibility of individualising the learning process, risks also emerge. Tancig stresses that the use of digital technology in education has to be deliberate and planned, as this ensures a positive and responsible impact on the learning and development of children and adolescents [4].

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2. Purpose

The purpose of this article is, through a review of relevant scientific and professional literature and a synthesis of existing theoretical knowledge, to present modern digital and social media in terms of their positive effects on adolescents. The article also emphasises the importance of balanced and responsible media use and highlights the role of education in developing digital literacy and digital responsibility.

3. Methodology

The study is based on a theoretical analysis of domestic and international scientific literature on digital media, social networks, education, and the psychosocial development of children and adolescents. Within the article, we:

- defined the fundamental concepts of modern and digital media,
- presented their characteristics and prevalence, and
- examined the positive effects of their use on adolescents.

4. Definition and Characteristic of Modern Media

In contemporary society, there is a broad and diverse range of mass media, including radio, television, newspapers, magazines, and the internet. These media enable the transmission of information to large audiences and play an important role in shaping public opinion, culture, and daily practices. Globalisation and the development of information and communication technology allow people on different continents to follow the same news, listen to the same music, and access the same content [5].

A key feature of modern media is their interconnection. Advanced technology allows traditional media to move into digital environments: newspapers are accessible online, radio stations can be listened to via digital television or mobile apps, and smartphones enable multifunctional use of various media [5]. Media increasingly adapt to user needs and their socio-psychological requirements. Television plays an important role in entertainment, print media in information dissemination, and online and social media primarily in interpersonal communication and social relationship formation [6].

Digital technology is defined as tools that allow information acquisition, mutual communication, and environmental influence.

Digital resources enable access to, storage of, transmission of, and dissemination of information, contributing significantly to knowledge creation [4].

Digital resources include electronic documents, e-books, e-articles, websites, multimedia content, and software accessible through electronic devices.

Digital resources also play a significant role in education. Well-designed digital programs support language, reading, and mathematics learning while encouraging curiosity, creativity, and collaboration [7]. Children and adolescents use digital tools to create stories, drawings, and other content, expressing their ideas, thereby developing communication and creative skills [8]. The Council of Europe recognises technology as a key factor in lifelong learning, as it enables learning through feedback and experience with various digital media [9].

Digital resources are content available in electronic form, including electronic documents, books, scientific articles, and other multimedia materials. Their importance is growing in both educational and research contexts, as they provide quick and easy access to resources that would otherwise be harder to obtain [10]. Digitalisation fosters greater connectivity and collaboration among all participants in the educational process and enables more open and flexible learning [11]. Advantages of digital resources include increased access to information, the possibility of individualised learning content, and simultaneous use by multiple users [1].

Social media began developing in the second half of the 20th century, but achieved widespread use with greater internet accessibility and the development of online platforms. Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as web applications based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content [12]. Their key features are participation, openness, dialogue, community, and connectivity [13]. Social media enables the formation of virtual communities in which users share interests, experiences, and information. Young people primarily use them for communication, leisure, gaming, and content sharing [14]. In doing so, the internet and social media have fundamentally changed communication routines, allowing instantaneous information transmission to large audiences worldwide [5].

5. Positive Effects of Modern Media on Adolescents

Modern media, mainly digital and social media, play a significant role in adolescents' daily lives and have a substantial impact on their social, emotional, cognitive, and identity development. While professional literature often highlights the risks and negative consequences of excessive or inappropriate use of digital media, numerous studies also confirm their important positive effects, particularly when used thoughtfully, in moderation, and in ways that support adolescents' developmental needs. Some of the positive effects are outlined below.

- **Social Connectivity and Sense of Belonging**

One of the most important positive effects of modern media is the strengthening of social connectivity. Social media allows adolescents to establish and maintain social relationships regardless of spatial or temporal constraints. Young people use these platforms to communicate with peers, share experiences, exchange interests, and form communities based on shared values or life circumstances [6], [14]. Research indicates that online interactions can complement real-world relationships and, in some cases, even enhance their quality, especially for adolescents who have fewer opportunities for social engagement in their immediate environment [15]. Social media thus provides an important space for developing a sense of belonging, which is crucial during adolescence.

- **Identity Expression and Role Experimentation**

Adolescence is a developmental stage characterised by intensive identity formation. Digital media provide adolescents with a relatively safe space to experiment with different aspects of their personality, express opinions, interests, and emotions, and try out social roles [16]. Since online communication often reduces direct social pressure, young people can express themselves more freely and discuss topics that might be difficult to address in face-to-face interactions. Kaplan and Haenlein emphasize that social media offer a high degree of social presence and interactivity, enhancing feelings of inclusion and social influence [12]. Adolescents can use modern media to build their digital identity, which plays an important role in developing self-esteem and confidence.

- **Emotional Support and Mental Health**

Another important positive aspect of modern media is its role in providing emotional support. Studies show that adolescents often use social media as a space to seek understanding, acceptance, and support in coping with personal challenges [17], [18].

Reading about others' experiences and sharing their own stories can reduce feelings of loneliness and improve psychological well-being. Ziv and Kiasi found that Facebook use is positively associated with psychological well-being, particularly among adolescents with lower levels of mental stability [19]. In this context, social media can serve as virtual support communities, providing individuals with a sense of belonging and social support.

- **Access to Information and Health Literacy**

Modern media provide adolescents with fast, anonymous access to information, including health and well-being topics. Guinta and John note that adolescents frequently seek online information about health issues, mental health, sexuality, and stress management [20]. Access to reliable sources can contribute to greater health literacy and better self-care. Mobile technologies and applications further enable health monitoring, better understanding of illnesses, and communication with healthcare professionals [21]. Chassiakos et al. highlight that modern media can encourage healthier behaviours, such as quitting smoking, balanced nutrition, and mental health care when used to support expert recommendations [22].

- **Learning, Creativity, and Competence Development**

Digital media also play an important role in learning and competence development. Digital resources provide access to a vast array of information, interactive content, and adaptable learning environments, increasing motivation to learn and encouraging adolescents to take an active role in the learning process [1], [23]. Research shows that digital media promote creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking [24], [1]. Young people use digital tools to create their own content, develop communication skills, and learn to collaborate in virtual teams. Such experiences contribute to the development of social and digital competencies, which are essential for functioning in modern society [25], [26], [1].

- **Development of Social Competence**

When used appropriately, modern media can also contribute to the development of social competencies. Social competence includes the ability to regulate emotions, understand others, cooperate, and resolve conflicts [27]. Digital environments provide adolescents with numerous opportunities for social interaction, where they can practice communication skills, empathy, and prosocial behaviour. Katz and McClellan emphasise that socially skilled individuals can coordinate their actions with others, a capacity that can also be developed through structured digital interactions, particularly when these complement real-world relationships [28].

6. Education for Digital Responsibility

Digital technology has become an inseparable part of the daily lives of children and adolescents. Modern digital and social media influence social, cognitive, and emotional aspects of individual development and pose new challenges for educators, teachers, and parents. In today's educational environment, it is no longer meaningful to ignore or exclude digital media; instead, we have to develop competencies that enable responsible and critical use of technology [1].

Education is a process aimed at shaping a whole personality, a personality capable of making responsible decisions in various social contexts. Modern digital technology places the educational process in a new framework, as media are not merely tools but become part of the adolescent's life space [1]. Digital responsibility refers to an individual's ability to use digital resources critically, ethically, and in a balanced manner, to understand the consequences of their digital actions, and to be aware of both the positive and negative impacts of media [20], [22]. Selwyn emphasises that digital literacy is not only about technical skills but also involves the ability to critically evaluate and understand the effects of digital media on individuals and society. This includes understanding how data are created, how information can be manipulated, who controls digital platforms, and how technology affects social relationships [25], [26].

Schools play a key role in fostering digital responsibility, as adolescents encounter digital tools and services at an early age. Prohibiting the use of digital media in schools is neither sustainable nor meaningful, as it would isolate students from the world in which they will live and work [1].

Key Components of Education for Digital Responsibility:

- **Critical Thinking and Media Literacy:** Digital literacy means the ability to understand and evaluate digital content. Young people have to be trained to recognise not only legitimate and reliable information but also manipulative content, fake news, and biased sources. According to Selwyn, digital literacy also includes understanding algorithms and how social media shapes the information presented [25].

- **Ethics of Digital Interaction:** Digital responsibility also encompasses the ethical aspects of technology use respecting other users, protecting intellectual property rights, respecting privacy, and rejecting hate speech. Students have to understand that their actions in the digital space have real-world consequences for others [20], [14].
- **Self-Regulation of Digital Use:** Excessive use of digital media can lead to reduced face-to-face social interactions, decreased concentration, and even mental health challenges [21]. Therefore, it is essential to teach adolescents self-regulation, the ability to manage their time and use technology in ways that balance the digital and real worlds.
- **Safety and Privacy Protection:** Education for digital responsibility also includes understanding digital safety. Young people have to be familiar with the basics of data protection, recognise online threats, and safeguard their identities online. This includes understanding concepts such as digital footprint, passwords, two-factor authentication, and responsible handling of personal information [22].

7. Conclusion

Modern digital and social media are an integral part of adolescents' lives and significantly influence their social, emotional, cognitive, and identity development. At the same time, they present challenges that can be addressed through responsible, ethical, and thoughtful use.

The educational process has to promote digital responsibility, including critical thinking, ethical digital interactions, self-regulation of media use, and protection of safety and privacy. Digital resources and social media should be used as tools for effective learning, creativity, collaboration, and the development of social competencies, while also fostering a sense of belonging and supporting mental health.

Future research should focus on the long-term effects of digital media use, the effectiveness of digital pedagogy, and strategies of educational institutions to foster critical and responsible media use. When properly integrated, the digital space represents an opportunity for the holistic development of adolescents and preparation for active participation in modern digital society.

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