Social Media Use and Social Connectedness in Adolescents: The Positives and the Potential Pitfalls

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As social media use is rising among adolescents, the issue of whether this use leads to positive or negative outcomes warrants greater understanding. This article critically reviews the literature related to this important topic. Specifically, we examine how social media use affects social connectedness in terms of three elements of adolescent development: sense of belonging, psychosocial wellbeing, and identity development and processes. Mixed findings are reported regarding the role that social media plays in fostering social connectedness, which suggests that young people may experience both positive and negative psychological outcomes. As a result, this article argues that online tools create a paradox for social connectedness. On one hand, they elevate the ease in which individuals may form and create online groups and communities, but on the other, they can create a source of alienation and ostracism. This article contributes to ongoing discourse in the area of educational and developmental psychology, and has implications for researchers and practitioners working with adolescents.

■ **Keywords:** inclusive education, educational psychology, school psychology, special education

For adolescents living in developed nations, digital technology has become an integral aspect of their culture, their education, and more broadly, their life. As such, these adolescents are often referred to as 'digital natives' (Teo, 2013). In the last decade, social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, have provided these digital natives with the ability to form and maintain virtual communities online. Evidence for the life-changing capacity of interacting on social networking includes the mobilisation of rallies, boycotts, and protests (Adams, 2011), the establishment and maintenance of romantic relationships (Fox, Warber, & Makstaller, 2013), and the real-time prevention of potential acts of suicide (Milian, 2011).

Adolescents are among the most enthusiastic users of social networking and social media. For example, a recent Pew Internet survey from the United States discovered that 81% of teens with internet access were regularly using Facebook (Madden et al., 2013). A similar trend has also been observed in Australia: statistics published in 2011 state that 88% of 15- to 17-year-olds used social networking sites (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). In addition, data derived from other countries in the developed world also support the notion that a substantial percentage of adolescents with internet access are regularly using online social media (socialbakers.com).

The increased uptake of social media applications has provided more opportunities for young people to connect, communicate, and interact with each other. However, this use raises an important question for educational and developmental psychologists: How does social media affect young people's social connectedness? At this point in time, very few researchers have addressed this question. This article sets out to bring together existing research in this area, in order to shed some light on this important topic. In doing so, the following questions will be addressed: (1) What are the potential positive and negative effects associated with social media use among adolescents? (2) What are the main limitations within the current body of research? and (3) How can future researchers better investigate this relationship?

The Importance of Social Connections During Adolescence

It is well established in theory that a sense of social connection forms the basis for creating strong, long-lasting interpersonal bonds (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). Baumeister and Leary (1995) describe humans as possessing an innate psychological drive to belong to groups and take part in meaningful social interactions. The authors state that 'belongingness can be almost as compelling a need as food and that human culture is significantly conditioned by the pressure to provide belongingness' (p. 498). The importance of meaningful relationships has been incorporated into a variety of theories, such as frameworks on social capital (Putnam, 2000), attachment (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Cohen, 1982, 1985), self-presentation (Fiske, 2004), and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991). For example, authors writing about self-determination theory argue that 'relatedness is the need to establish close bonds and secure attachments with others, and reflects the desire to be emotionally connected to and interpersonally involved in warm, caring relationships' (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004, p. 35). As Reeve et al. (2004) explain, such relatedness enhances motivation and the capacity of adolescents to relate themselves authentically to others, and to internalise the values endorsed by significant others. Thus, social connections are particularly important during adolescent development.

Social connections are a central feature of the normative developmental trajectory of adolescence to adulthood. When adolescents perceive a greater sense of belonging in school they place more value on the academic material they are learning (Gillen-O'Neel & Fuligni, 2013). On the other hand, adolescents who perceive a weaker sense of belonging among their peers are more likely to engage in maladaptive internalising and externalising behaviours (Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007), and experience negative emotions, both concurrently and in the future (Shochet, Smith, Furlong, & Homel, 2011).

Social connections can also systematically contribute to elements of adolescents' psychosocial wellbeing, such as levels of anxiety, loneliness, and depression (Caplan,

2003). For example, boys and girls who undergo early pubertal onset appear to experience greater psychosocial maladjustment (Mensah et al., 2013). This may be due to a lack of assimilation with peers, presumably because — as offered by Lanza, Echols, and Graham (2013) in a study of body mass index (BMI) — youth are uncomfortable knowing that their bodies differ from what is normative for their in-group. Similarly, Fitzpatrick, Dulin, and Piko (2010) reported that youth who experience peer victimisation often exhibit depressive symptomatology — an association that is mediated by loneliness (Baker & Bugay, 2011). On the positive side, Bradley and Inglis (2012) found that adolescents who spend their leisure time performing effortful and social activities experience positive psychosocial outcomes.

Social connections also play a role in the cognitive representations adolescents develop regarding who they are, and what their place is in the world (e.g., see Harter, 1999). This is known as identity — a term that is, at times, used interchangeably with self-concept (Schachter & Rich, 2011). Questions of identity are heightened during adolescence (Hill et al., 2013), likely due to the demands of physical maturation, and the need to make real-world decisions about where an individual is headed in life. Indeed, during this transitional period, social connection with peers increases in importance. This may be due to factors such as delayed entrance into adult society and expanded communication networks afforded by social media. During this time, adolescents seek out the advice of peers on issues that impact directly on their developing sense of identity, such as clothes, entertainment, and fads and fashions (McInerney, 2014).

As demonstrated above, research on belonging, psychosocial wellbeing, and identity asserts that social connections are embedded in the way youth develop. Yet in the era of social media, it is necessary to understand the extent to which these experiences are affected by the digitised world. The purpose of this article is to explore the positives and potential pitfalls of social media in relation to social connectedness. The benefits and drawbacks of social media use for young people are addressed by investigating research in three domains of inquiry: sense of belonging, psychosocial wellbeing, and identity development. Such a review is both timely and salient, in light of the vast popularity of online social applications among young people today.

Conducting a Review of the Empirical Literature on Social Media and Adolescents

In order to find research for this review article we searched academic databases including PsycINFO and Web of Science using combinations of the following search terms: *social media, connectedness, belonging, loneliness, psychosocial wellbeing, identity, self concept, adolescence, Twitter,* and *Facebook.* Publications that met the following criteria were marked for inclusion:

(a) The manuscript was a peer-reviewed journal article.

(b) The article was published within the past decade.

(c) The research was empirical (quantitative or qualitative) in nature.

(d) The article examines early adolescents (11–12), adolescents (13–17), or emerging adults (18–19).

(e) The results of the study must uniquely contribute to an understanding of the positives and/or potential pitfalls of social media.

Research in the area of adolescent social media use is still in its infancy. Presently, this research is primarily cross-sectional in nature, and tends to include members of clinical populations, such as students with learning disabilities (e.g., Sharabi & Margalit, 2011a, 2011b) or convenience samples of university students (e.g., Ryan & Xenos, 2011). Although popular media (e.g., newspapers and magazines) have published on the topic of social media, empirical research on the topic lags behind. There are also reviews on the use of social media in teaching and learning (e.g., McInerney, 2014). However, few reviews are available that discuss linkages between social media and social connectedness in young people. For this present review article, only 11 studies were deemed suitable as determined by the inclusion criteria. The sections below present existing literature according to three important outcomes of social connectedness: belonging, psychosocial wellbeing, and identity formation. In each section we will present the evidence as it relates to the negative and positive outcomes of each theme.

A Sense of Belonging

Studies have demonstrated that young people often interact with friends using social networking sites, instant messaging, and mobile phones (Abrams, Weick, Thomas, Colbe, & Franklin, 2011; Davis, 2012). Given that a sense of belonging represents the extent to which one feels that one is a part of one or more social groups (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013), it is sensible that belonging may be fostered through digital mediums. This view is espoused by Davis (2012), who points out that digital mediums facilitate opportunities for young people to interact with others who share similar values, beliefs, and interests. On the other hand, Abrams et al. (2011) have reported that digital mediums have a disabling effect on belonging. To make sense of these differing positions, this article draws from four main studies (Abrams et al., 2011; Davis, 2012; Pharo, Gross, Richardson, & Hayne, 2011; Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013) that investigate the positive and negative effects of social media use and the impact on a young person's sense of belonging.

Positive Influences of Social Media on Sense of Belonging

Davis (2012) used a series of interviews with 32 adolescents to investigate the value young people place on online exchanges with their friends. As mentioned above, the study found that casual exchanges between young people through texting, social networking (i.e., Facebook), and instant messaging helped foster a sense of belonging among participants. The young people in the study reported that social media helped them connect with peers, regardless of their physical location or the time of day. These results suggest that it may be the opportunity to experience connectedness — *staying in touch* — that fulfils adolescents' need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Nurullah, 2009).

Within Davis's (2012) results, it was apparent that the social networking elements of adolescent socialisation were particularly important in affording opportunities for young people to broaden their friendship groups. This finding has been supported by other researchers, who have found that online communication significantly and positively affects perceptions of social integration and bonding (Ko & Kuo, 2009).

Davis also suggested that social media might support a sense of belonging by allowing young people to seek validation from peers regarding their thoughts and experiences.

Other studies that have investigated the link between social networking sites and a sense of belonging have reported mixed results, specifically with respect to gender (i.e., Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013). Quinn and Oldmeadow administered an adapted measure of belonging (Anderson-Butcher & Conroy, 2002) to 443 young people, and found that a sense of belonging was associated with social networking sites for boys, but not for girls. Early adolescent boys (12–13 years) using social networking sites reported a higher sense of belonging to their friendship group than those of the same age who did not use social networking sites. The authors posit that online environments may be utilised by boys as a rehearsal space for caring relationships, which underpin a sense of belonging. Nevertheless, further research is needed to clarify these gender differences and their possible causes.

Whereas technologies that facilitate social connection have been found to support a sense of belonging and social interaction, the same technologies have also been found to undermine these qualities. That is, the rise of social media applications and the increased use of these sites, particularly by young people, may make adolescents more vulnerable to experiences such as ostracism, which negatively affects their sense of belonging (Pharo et al., 2011).

Negative Influences of Social Media on Sense of Belonging

Investigations into the absence of belonging describe this phenomenon in a variety of ways, such as social isolation, ostracism, and social disconnection (Williams, 2007). Ostracism, defined as being ignored or excluded, has been found to directly threaten the psychological need to belong (Williams & Nida, 2011). A derivative of the term, *cyberostracism*, has been coined to describe the sense of exclusion that can sometimes occur in online social environments (D'Amato et al., 2012). This concept is based on the belief that being excluded, rejected, or ignored in these environments can be just as hurtful as the equivalent in offline encounters (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2007; Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004). Like ostracism, cyberostracism has also been found to threaten a sense of belonging (Abrams et al., 2011).

Abrams et al. (2011) used a cross-age sample of 166 participants to compare the effects of cyberostracism across three age groups: 8- to 9-year-olds, 13- to 14-year-olds, and adults. Each age group participated in a game of Cyberball, an online, multiplayer, socially interactive ball tossing game where instructions were introduced verbally and visually to ensure participants understood the instructions. The participants experienced trials that either fostered social inclusion or exclusion through the game. Following the trials, the researchers assessed participants in terms of four primary psychological needs: esteem, belonging, meaning, and control. Interestingly, the need to belong was threatened most for participants whose first experience of the game was exclusion (ostracism). The study also found that belonging was strongly affected by cyberostracism in the 13- to 14-year-old range when compared with the younger or older group. This suggests that adolescents may be more strongly affected by cyberostracism, and may place more priority on inclusion by their peers than children or adults do — a potential implication that corroborates the work of Pharo et al. (2011). Cyberball is but one instantiation of how feelings of cyberostracism may be induced. Being denied access to exclusive Facebook groups, de-friended or blocked from viewing others' profiles, or denied access to following others on Twitter may also

induce similar feelings. However, such speculations should be examined empirically in future work.

Psychosocial Wellbeing

Loneliness is said to occur when an individual feels that their expectations of interpersonal relationships are incongruent with their lived experiences (Olenik-Shemesh, Heiman, & Eden, 2012). Margalit (2010) explains that adolescents can often feel caught between the need to feel a sense of social connectedness with their peers, and a yearning to create their own sense of identity and individuality. All too often, this delicate balance can become disrupted, causing the experience of loneliness. In childhood and adolescence, loneliness can jeopardise healthy development, and lead to reductions in psychosocial wellbeing (Margalit, 2010).

As already stated, the popularity of online social media among adolescents has led some scholars to question whether these technologies promote or reduce connectedness (Laghi et al., 2013). For example, Margalit (2010) asks: 'Do [social media] enhance social connectedness, provide training in social relatedness, or contribute to growing alienation and social exclusion?' (p. 171). Paradoxically, recent literature suggests that both sides of the argument may be valid, but that these results may differ due to individual differences.

Searches of literature relating to psychosocial wellbeing and social media use among adolescents yielded a total of two studies in this area (Bonetti, Campbell, & Gilmore, 2010; Sharabi & Margalit, 2011a). As with the literature relating to sense of belonging, these studies also highlight the association between social media use and positive and negative outcomes for adolescents. However, as will be explained below, these outcomes may differ according to the characteristics of the sample under investigation.

Positive Influences of Social Media on Psychosocial Wellbeing

A recent study conducted by Bonetti, Campbell, and Gilmore (2010) indicates that online communication may encourage lonely and socially anxious adolescents to engage in self-disclosure with their peers, which enhances their feelings of social connection. Using a convenience sample of 626 Australian students aged between 10 and 16 years, the researchers collected data relating to loneliness, social anxiety, and online communication. The results revealed that lonely students were considerably more likely than non-lonely students to use online chat to discuss personal topics of communication, such as secrets, emotions, or problems they may be experiencing. A similar finding was also recently reported in a study of shy adolescents who used online communication (Laghi et al., 2013).

Bonetti et al. (2010) also found that lonely students were more likely than non-lonely students to admit that they communicated online in order to meet new people and feel that they belonged to a group. Furthermore, lonely students also acknowledged that they felt less shy and more comfortable when they were chatting online, as compared to when they communicated face to face.

The above results highlight the potential positive outcomes that online communication can have for lonely adolescents. In particular, it seems that positive effects may be most apparent in adolescents who are unsuccessful or uncomfortable in face-to-face social situations. This finding supports the social compensation hypothesis (Laghi et al., 2013), which states that the reduction in social cues afforded by the

internet allows socially anxious people to feel more comfortable when self-disclosing with others (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). This tendency can be explained by the fact that online communication reduces anxiety-inducing stimuli, such as the need to make eye contact or respond instantaneously. Given this effect, online social media may allow socially anxious adolescents to form stronger relationships with their peers, which in turn could decrease their experiences of loneliness and enhance their wellbeing.

Research also suggests that adolescents with learning disabilities are at greater risk of becoming lonely than adolescents without such disabilities (Koster, Nakken, Pijl, & van Houten, 2009; Sharabi & Margalit, 2011b). In recognition of this, Sharabi and Margalit (2011a) conducted a study to examine whether online communication and virtual friendships play a mediating role in the experience of loneliness in students with learning disabilities. The sample recruited for the study comprised 716 Israeli students (375 boys and 341 girls) aged from 16 to 18 years. Of these students, 334 had learning disabilities. The results indicated that using the internet to communicate with existing friends did predict less intense loneliness. This finding suggests that conversation with existing friends in an online setting may reduce the likelihood of loneliness in adolescents with learning disabilities. This makes sense, as online social media provide a useful means of extending offline relationships into an online setting.

Negative Influences of Social Media on Psychosocial Wellbeing

The study conducted by Sharabi and Margalit (2011a) also discovered a potential negative effect of online communication among adolescents with learning disabilities. This effect — increased loneliness — was most evident when students primarily used the internet to converse with people who they had met online. Interestingly, this result is contrary to the findings reported above relating to internet communication among adolescents with social anxiety (Bonetti et al., 2010; Laghi et al., 2013). This deviation may reflect a distinction between students with social anxiety and students with learning disabilities in regard to their preference for online communication. For example, socially anxious adolescents may be acutely aware that their loneliness is a direct result of their reduced social skills in offline situations. However, as explained by the social comparison hypothesis (Laghi et al., 2013), socially anxious adolescents can use the internet to feel socially empowered, and reduce the anxiety that would usually stop them from making new connections.

On the other hand, there is no evidence in the studies reviewed to suggest that adolescents with learning disabilities obtain a similar sense of social empowerment through online communication. Instead, prior work suggests the possibility that adolescents with learning disabilities may be primarily interacting with online friends as a function of establishing fewer meaningful social connections in face-to-face social situations (Sharabi & Margalit, 2011a). In light of these results, it is possible that the impact of social media use on psychosocial wellbeing may be influenced by the characteristics of the adolescent or their motivations for social media use. However, more in-depth research is needed to confirm this assumption. Next, we consider how the impact of social media affects identity development.

Identity Development

Scholars have proposed that individuals are prone to seek out information and experiences that affirm their pre-existing social identities — a phenomenon known as social

identity gratification (Barker, 2012; Harwood, 1999). For youth, there are opportunities and costs associated with the use of social media for this purpose, particularly in terms of their ability to establish and maintain positive self-images, and to express their sexuality. The ease by which information is shared can play a protective role in helping adolescents understand what it means to be *me*. At the same time, the public orientation of social networking sites and the exposure of private information within them — the hyper-vigilance of personal profiles, the increased risk of exposure to rumours and gossip (e.g., having a lewd photograph shared without consent) — all contribute to a semi-permanent record of actions and attitudes, and may have negative cascading effects that have yet to be fully understood.

The research in this section discusses five studies — primarily correlational in nature — that highlight the opportunities and challenges that social media poses for adolescents' identity development; that is, the importance adolescents come to place on certain traits or characteristics that define who they are. These studies draw from diverse samples and use diverse methodologies; however, together they serve as an initial window into how social media offers: (1) opportunities for self-branding (Gajaria, Yeung, Goodale, & Charach, 2011) and maintaining current or desired conceptualisations of the self (Barker, 2012); (2) challenges for personal expression and sexual identities (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008; Tortajada, Araüna, & Martínez, 2013); and (3) mixed findings regarding adolescents' ability to establish a more stable sense of self (Davis, 2013).

Positive Influences of Social Media on Identity Development

Barker (2012) asked 734 college freshmen no older than 19 years of age to report the extent to which they viewed their status as adolescents and emerging adults as a central aspect of their self-definition. Social identity gratification was significantly associated with frequency of social networking site use. Specifically, those who perceived that their purpose for using social networking sites was to expose themselves to positive messages about individuals in their generation/age group (i.e., age-specific social identity gratification communication) reported a significantly higher frequency of social networking site usage. One implication of this finding is that as youth view social media as a vehicle for satisfying their social identity needs, their increased usage of outlets such as Facebook and Twitter may feed their efforts to develop healthy and positive self-images.

Social media can also serve as a platform for constructing, maintaining, and accentuating identities. Gajaria et al. (2011) identified 25 ADHD Facebook support groups with at least 100 members, which were led by either a current high school or university student. A content analysis of posts by group members revealed that students used these Facebook groups to define what it means for someone to have ADHD. Group members tended to portray individuals with ADHD in a flattering light. Of the posts that substantiated this finding, one stated: 'ADHD is a great Personality enhancer! I think we are all blessed in that field!' (p. 17). Messages regarding group identity construction also took the form of rejecting unflattering descriptors, such as *trouble-making* or *inattentive*. As this example suggests, social media may be used as a mechanism for self-branding among individuals who must ward off stigma imposed on them from those who do not share their same life experiences.

Whereas certain aspects of identity can be considered to be as collective or group-based (e.g., identification with other members of a special interest group on Facebook),

other aspects of identity are seen as more personal to the individual and relatively stable across situations (e.g., contentiousness, extraversion, neuroticism). Davis (2013) surveyed 2,017 students, ages 11 to 19, across seven high schools in Bermuda. Among other predictions, the author hypothesised that students who communicated online with their friends would express greater self-concept clarity — that is, the perception that one has a clear, well-defined sense of self that is consistent across several situations. The results supported this prediction. Moreover, the effect of online communication with friends on self-concept clarity was mediated by friendship quality (conceptualised as trust and reciprocity). Those who communicated online with their friends perceived their friendships to be of higher quality. In turn, higher friendship quality was linked with greater self-concept clarity. These findings suggest that online communication with those already in one's circle of friends may contribute to the development of a more well-defined sense of self that remains relatively stable across different social domains.

Negative Influences of Social Media on Identity Development

Social media sites also serve as platforms for accentuating gender and sexual identity. This can be problematic for young people, given that adolescents can view dating as a recreational endeavour involving 'companionship, first experiences of romantic love, and sexual experimentation' (Arnett, 2000, p. 473). Moreover, the developing prefrontal cortex of the teenage brain is still mastering tasks such as impulse control, emotional regulation and the assessment of consequences and risks (see Steinberg, 2008). It is therefore not surprising that young people commonly share their sexual desires, lewd photographs, and provocative videos in online communities such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.

Using a snowball sampling technique in a mixed methods investigation of 400 adolescents' gender and sexual online self-presentations, Tortajada et al. (2013) found that over 40% of males and females posted pictures in which they were half-clothed, wearing see-through garments, or wearing clothing items that were tight-fitting. In conducting same-sex focus groups with students about their use of Myspace, Manago et al. (2008) highlighted the tension that exists between expressing one's sexual identity and circumventing accusations of promiscuity. Relatedly, Davis (2013) found that when students reported being more likely to report using online communication for the purposes of exploring different aspects of their identity, they also were less likely to have a sense of self-concept clarity, due to low friendship quality. Whereas the expression of sexuality — one form of online identity exploration — can be welcomed and celebrated on social networking sites, the open format of these sites leaves adolescents vulnerable to hurtful comments. In addition, there is the possibility that these photos will draw the attention of unintended audiences (e.g., parents and other adult figures) for whom the individual wishes to reveal a different *self*.

The diversity in the studies presented in this section represent various ways in which social media is related to identity development. We see several areas in which identity researchers may conduct replication and extension studies for the purposes of generalisability. For example, whereas it is tempting, and perhaps intuitive, to deduce that social media may provide members of many stigmatised groups the same identity benefits as ADHD youth (Gajaria et al., 2011), this possibility must be examined empirically before such conclusions can be made. There are also important aspects

of identity that were not explicitly discussed, including racial/ethnic identity and academic identity. The ways in which social media contributes to healthy identity development in these areas should also be explored.

Limitations and Future Research

This article has provided an overview of linkages between social media and social connectedness for adolescents, but additional issues and questions remain. For example, cross-sectional studies do not allow us to fully understand the long-term effects of social media usage on adolescent development. Is there a saturation point at which social media loses impact for adolescents as they transition to adulthood, a period during which they might replace online socialising with more intensive offline group and individual socialising? Or, are the effects of social media exponential for some individuals, with increasing dependence on online social interactions playing a more significant role than offline as they transition to adulthood? These questions can only be answered by well-designed longitudinal studies.

Our review of the literature also indicated that the role of intensity of use has not been extensively examined thus far. There may be an extent to which engaging in social media breeds diminishing returns. Such studies could support further understanding of the impact of these issues, which are important for understanding the impact of technology on aspects of human development. More practically, however, addressing such areas could lead to helpful societal recommendations about the boundary conditions required to ensure that social media is useful for establishing a sense of connectedness.

While we have not extensively accounted for the reciprocal effects of social connectedness and social media, future research exploring the possibility that social connectedness alters the way individuals interface with social media could fulfil an apparent gap in the literature. A lack of social connectedness is linked with negative emotional reactions (Martin & Dowson, 2009), and such emotions impact the way individuals process information about themselves (Trope, Ferguson, & Raghunathan, 2001). Thus, it is presumable that what individuals take away from their experiences in social media outlets is based in part on their level of social connectedness. Notwithstanding the theoretical nature of such a postulation, the possibility of this relationship is important to consider when interpreting future findings regarding the nature of social connectedness and social media.

Future comparative studies may also be important to help determine the extent to which commonalities and distinctions across cultural groups qualifies the statements we are able to make about the role of social media on social connectedness. It is plausible, for example, that cultural groups that are more inter-dependent and collectivist (such as Indigenous Australians and Asian-Australian adolescents) use social media in a different way to mainstream Caucasian adolescents, who are most often the subject of investigation (see, e.g., McInerney, 2014, p. 407). Cultural norms (e.g., collectivism) may shape one's interpretation of the urges they feel (e.g., assimilation to one's ingroup), the activities they engage in online, and the sense they make of this online social experience altogether. Devoid of examining the role of cultural processes, it is impossible to fully understand for whom, and under what conditions, certain aspects of social media influence social connectedness.

Conclusions

As a vast majority of adolescents are using social media to engage in social activities, the present review sought to determine the effects of social media use in these three key areas. The findings presented in this article suggest that a paradox may exist: social media can enhance belonging, psychosocial wellbeing, and identity development, while at the same time exposing young people to potential negative outcomes. Given the prevalence of social media in the daily lives of adolescents, a greater understanding of its impact on social interactions is necessary. Such findings would have practical implications for the development of strategies and interventions for teachers, parents, and educational psychologists hoping to better manage cyberbullying, cyberostracism, and the expression of sexual identity. In addition, adolescents could be taught how to enhance their personal experiences with social media use, by increasing belongingness and psychosocial wellbeing, as well as affirming their social identities.

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