

Research Proposal

Impacts of Social Media on the Socio-Emotional Development of Youth

Professor Joel Bergholtz

Department of English, University of Central Florida

My topic is about how social media shapes the socio-emotional development of younger generations. This is important to me because social media has become exponentially more present in the lives of our youth. Growing up, I was strictly against the use of social media until around junior year of high school, when I finally caved in and downloaded Snapchat and TikTok. I have noticed distinct differences between my personal experience and that of my siblings. Specifically, my youngest sister, who is currently 12 years old, experienced a noticeable change in personality when she got her first smartphone at the start of middle school and immediately began using social media. As an older brother, I'm worried about the effects social media can have on her mental health, because from my current understanding, based on different news sources and articles, there seems to be an increasingly negative association between the socio-emotional development of youth and the use of social media. It warrants the attention of others because my youngest sister is just one of millions of kids who experience their first interactions with social media every year. This deserves attention because these kids are the next generation, and the way they develop now will affect not just their own mental health but also the kind of world we're all going to live in.

For my primary research, I'll be using posts from communities on Reddit, which are classified as "subreddits," specifically r/SeriousConversation, r/EmotionalIntelligence, and r/ProductivityCafe. I have already gathered multiple posts ready to be coded for my data analysis. In all of the subreddits I've listed, users are not restricted to text-based submissions, but posts that stray from this format are few and far between. Each post on Reddit has three different forms of interaction: up/down votes, which are a simple way to show support or dislike for a post with the press of a button; comments, which allow users to interact with the post by expressing opinions or answering a question the OP (original poster) asked; and awards. Awards are rarely used in the subreddits I've listed, and they are

generally aesthetic unless a user gains enough interaction to join the Contributor Program, where they can cash out these awards for monetary compensation. Aside from that, the rules of each subreddit are pretty similar: no hate speech or political debate—basically, just discuss what the subreddit was made to discuss. If you don't follow that simple rule, the moderators will likely remove your post.

My secondary research is made up of three studies and two article analysis papers. I currently find that these articles will be sufficient to support my research, as the studies I've included provide me with different ways of understanding the use of social media, or online media in general. The only type of article I currently lack is one that investigates how different social media platforms can affect people's socio-emotional development differently. Factors such as screen time, personal interactions, speed of interaction, and reliance can play a big role in how social media impacts one's socio-emotional development. From gaining this understanding, I'll be able to look for things like what I've referenced and connect them to either positive or negative development. It's also interesting to note that Reddit in its own right is a form of social media and, from my understanding, helps generations of people connect and interact with others of similar nature in an easy and respectful manner. So, considering how different styles of social media can affect development will be key in my research.

To further explore and answer my proposed research question, I'll begin by reading through different discussion posts with high user interaction and analyzing the comments. Then, after deciding which comments relate most to my paper, I'll attempt to code them to allow for easy recall and incorporation into my writing. Lastly, I'll make sure the resources I've listed in my annotated bibliography can support or challenge different arguments I might discuss throughout my paper.

The goal of my research paper is to discuss the effects different forms of social media can have on the socio-emotional development of our youth. This is mainly due to my

concerns over my little sister and how her preadolescent development may be affected by fast-paced media like TikTok, YouTube Shorts, or Instagram Reels. Granted, I doubt I'll have much effect, seeing as I'm a thousand miles away from my family in NJ, but I still care for them, and I know that being aware of and understanding possible side effects can be just as important as actually preventing them.