

#1 Intro

As technology progresses, the age at which children gain access to mobile devices drops. This can be cause for concern because with access to mobile devices children tend to participate in fast paced social media like TikTok or Instagram. These different outlets for entertainment can harm a child's ability to socialize or empathize with others if left unchecked. Several Studies suggest that without interruption, social media can lead to deterioration of the user's socio-emotional abilities (O'Reilly et al. 2024; Piccerillo et al. 2025). The issue lies in finding the correct time spent on social media, while it can harm a person's face-to-face interactions, social media still enables its users to connect with people whom they might have known prior to using it and/or are trying to keep in contact with them. It is in this way that I believe social media can improve a person's empathy/social-emotional connections, being able to check in on your friends with the click of a button isn't something you can achieve without technology. My project's goal is to define where the negative returns from social media start, and the positives begin. What parts of social media are harmful to the youth's socio-emotional development and what parts tend to assist and improve a person's socialization.

Carson et al. argue that "higher parent-child technology interference was significantly associated with lower response inhibition...and emotional self-regulation...scores." In other words, their study shows how technology, particularly smartphones, can disrupt children's ability to manage their impulses and emotions. John et al. expands this discussion by suggesting that technology is not inherently harmful but can serve both destructive and constructive purposes. While it may encourage unhealthy habits, it can

also support children through educational shows or socio-emotional learning (SEL) apps.

Similarly, O'Reilly et al. focuses on social media use and proposes an "interruptive feature" to counteract "doomscrolling" and reconnect users with the reality that people online are not just part of an algorithm but real individuals.

These perspectives highlight the complexity of technology's role in youth development. Carson et al. emphasize its risks, while John et al. suggest that the key lies in how technology is applied whether for passive entertainment or meaningful learning. O'Reilly et al.'s proposed solution adds another layer, raising the question of whether the responsibility to prevent harm lies with app designers, parents, or children themselves. Examples like the show Bluey demonstrate that technology can, in fact, have overwhelmingly positive effects when designed with intentional lessons in mind. Taken together, these sources raise an important question: is the problem truly technology itself, or the ways in which it is created, consumed, and managed?

In my review of literature, two common focuses have emerged: the range of effects social media has on the youth as well as the effects of technology in general. O'Reilly et al. discuss the continuous use of social media being a clear factor in generating disconnect as its users get sucked in to the instant gratification of it all and stop thinking of people as people and instead entertainment. Beyond social media, Carson et al. did a study on multiple forms of technology and their effects on children during significant developmental stages (Ages 3-5), he found that smartphones were very disruptive and noted a negative correlation between how often technology interrupted interactions and one's ability to suppress impulsive response. In consideration of these findings, I found one more study

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that has research on the beneficial uses of technology on one's socio-emotional learning (SEL). John et al. goes on to examine the effects different media outlets can have on children. Noting that some media did positively influence SEL, granted these were shows and games designed specifically for this set purpose.