Transcript

**Project Title**

Hello. My name is Tara Casserly, and I’m currently studying for a Master's in Computer Science at the University of Essex.

The title of this research proposal is ‘Screen Time and Self-Esteem: A Deep Dive into Social Media's Impact on Adolescents.’

This research sets out to explore the intricate ties between social media usage and self-esteem among adolescents.

Adolescence is defined as the transition from childhood to adulthood (Sawyer et al., 2018, cited in Frontiers in Psychology, 2021) and is a developmental period during which brain regions undergo significant changes influenced by biological and environmental factors (Burnett et al., 2011; Larsen and Luna, 2018, both cited in Frontiers in Psychology, 2021).

In an era where digital screens are an integral part of our lives, it's crucial to understand the impact of this relationship.

By using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, This research aims to critically analyse the relationship between screen time and self-esteem among adolescents, focusing on the role of social media, providing depth through personal stories about their experiences.

**Significance/Contribution to the Discipline/Research Problem**

Given the nature of digital devices and the presence of social media in teenagers' lives, understanding this relationship is crucial.

Insights from the Pew Research Center highlight the profound engagement teenagers have with social media and the internet, which underpins the significance of this study:

* A notable proportion of teenagers (54%) find it difficult to envisage life without social media, a sentiment particularly pronounced among girls and older teens. (Pew Research Center, 2022)
* Internet usage has surged, with nearly half of teens reporting "almost constant" usage, a significant rise from 24% in 2014-15. (Pew Research Center, 2022)
* The frequency of visitation to platforms like YouTube and TikTok, with about one in five teens engaged "almost constantly," accentuates the central role these platforms play in teenagers' daily routines and, by extension, their social lives and self-perception. (Pew Research Center, 2023)
* Twenge & Campbell highlight a correlation between increased screen time, particularly on social media, and lower self-esteem among adolescents. This relationship underlines the psychological effects of prolonged digital engagement, emphasising the need for our investigation into these dynamics. (Twenge & Campbell, 2018).
* Valkenburg & Peter discuss how social media platforms central to teenagers' digital experiences differentially affect psychological states compared to non-social digital activities. Their findings suggest that the nature of interaction and content on these platforms may uniquely influence self-perception and mental health. (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009).
* Sherman et al. delve into the emotional motivations behind social media use, noting how the pursuit of social validation and peer comparison can shape self-esteem. Their work points to the complex interplay of internal and external factors in the digital self-image construction process among teenagers. (Sherman et al., 2016).

This research proposal seeks to build upon these foundational insights, aiming to dissect the intricate ways through which screen time and social media use impact adolescent self-esteem. By understanding these dynamics, we can better inform policy, educational curriculum, and parental guidelines, ultimately creating healthier digital environments for our youth.

**Research Question**

My research question is: How does screen time, specifically through social media usage, impact the self-esteem of teenagers?

This question guides the exploration into whether social media acts as a mirror, reflecting and possibly distorting the self-image of adolescents.

In this research, 'social media' encompasses platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube, known for their visual content and high user interaction. Each platform uniquely engages teenagers, potentially influencing their self-esteem through mechanisms like appearance-focused sharing (via Snapchat), influencer culture (on YouTube), and the dual aspects of creative expression and social validation (on TikTok).

TikTok which is similar to Instagram in its visual and performative nature can lead to comparisons with others, affecting self-esteem. Users often see curated content from influencers and peers that may present an idealised view of life, beauty, and success.

While TikTok provides a platform for creative expression, the quest for likes, comments, and followers can turn it into a source of social validation. This dynamic can significantly impact teenagers' self-perception and worth, especially when their content or persona does not receive the anticipated recognition.

**Aims and Objectives**

To address the research question, I have set several objectives:

1. First, I’ll determine the average amount of time teenagers spend on social media.
2. Next, I aim to assess how self-esteem varies with different levels of social media engagement.
3. I'll identify specific experiences within social media that significantly affect teenagers' self-esteem.
4. And finally, I intend to propose evidence-based strategies to mitigate any negative impacts discovered, aiming to promote positive online experiences.

**Key literature related to the project**

Tim Walker's 2021 piece on the impact of screen time on students, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlights concerns among educators about the increase in screen time and its potential negative effects on students' mental health. This article, published by the NEA, investigates how excessive screen time is perceived by educators to affect students, including its role in intensifying body image issues among teenage girls, as per findings from an internal Instagram survey. It also explores the broader implications of digital media consumption on child development and the need for responsible technology use in education. Walker (2021).

Furthermore the systematic review by Silva Santos and colleagues from 2023 provides a comprehensive analysis of the associations between screen time and mental health among adolescents. This review, adhering to the PRISMA guidelines, incorporated data from 50 studies, highlighting a nuanced perspective on how various forms of screen usage—spanning social media, smartphones, television, and computer use—differentially impact teen mental well-being. The findings underscore a significant link between increased screen time and diminished mental health, with nuances in the type and context of screen use playing critical roles. Notably, the research pointed out that smartphone usage and social media engagement are particularly detrimental, with a pronounced negative effect on girls, elevating their risk for depression. The review also illuminated the complexity of these relationships, suggesting that while some types of screen engagement, like gaming and TV watching, have mixed outcomes, the overarching trend indicates a troubling association with mental health challenges among youths. (Santos et al. 2023)

This work lays essential groundwork for further research, especially in understanding the intricate mechanisms underpinning these associations and how they might be mitigated or managed. For educators, policymakers, and parents, the review serves as a call to action to address the challenges posed by digital media consumption, advocating for strategies that promote healthier screen habits among adolescents.

But where it gets crucial the existing research pointed out a big gap in our knowledge. Despite all this data, we're still not totally clear on why these effects are happening or how exactly screen content or the way teens interact with devices plays into it.

The existing literature has set the stage. It shows there's a need for more focused research into the 'why' and 'how' of screen time's impact on mental health. And that's exactly where this research proposal aims to contribute. By digging deeper into the unanswered questions, I’m hoping to add a new layer of understanding to this complex issue.

**Methodology**

For my research I'm adopting a mixed-method approach to explore the varied effects of social media usage.

integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This dual approach allows me to not only quantify the relationship between social media usage and self-esteem but also to understand the personal experiences behind the numbers.

By merging quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, my aim is to both measure and interpret the multifaceted influences of social media on self-esteem among adolescents.

The methodology will incorporate both structured and open-ended questions, ensuring a thorough exploration of the topic.

Given the sensitivity of the subject and the focus on minors, Ethical considerations are paramount, particularly ensuring the anonymity and informed consent of participants, given the focus on a younger demographic.

My first step will be to design and distribute a survey incorporating validated measures for self-esteem, such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) is a widely used self-report instrument for evaluating individual self-esteem. Developed by sociologist Morris Rosenberg in 1965, it's considered a groundbreaking tool in psychological research for assessing self-worth or self-regard. The scale consists of 10 items that measure positive and negative feelings about the self. The items are answered on a four-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. (Rosenberg, M. (1965))

The statements are designed to gauge an individual's overall evaluation of their own worthiness as a human being.

* "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself."
* "At times I think I am no good at all."
* "I feel that I have a number of good qualities."
* "I am able to do things as well as most other people."

The scale is balanced with items that are phrased positively and negatively. Responses to negatively worded items are reversed when scoring the scale, and the scores are summed, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem.

This will be coupled with detailed questions aimed at quantifying screen time and specifically social media usage. This survey is designed to capture a wide range of data, allowing for analysis that accounts for the diverse experiences of teenagers with social media. It will include demographic questions to facilitate a nuanced understanding of the potential differential impacts of social media use on self-esteem across various groups.

To complement the breadth of the survey data and to get deeper into the why and how of screen times impact on mental health, I plan to conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a selection of participants who have completed the survey. This stage is crucial for gathering rich, qualitative insights into the personal experiences of teenagers regarding social media use and its effect on their self-esteem. These interviews will allow me to explore beyond the surface, understanding not just the extent of social media's impact, but also the how and why behind these effects.

By integrating the quantitative data with the qualitative narratives, I aim to provide a nuanced view of the complex dynamics at play.

This mixed-methods approach will enable me to not only identify patterns and correlations but also to understand the stories and experience behind those numbers.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical integrity is paramount in research involving minors. I will ensure confidentiality and data security, obtain informed consent (with parental consent for participants under 18).

**Artefacts**

To translate my findings into actionable resources, I plan to create two artefacts:

1. A **Social Media Well-being Toolkit**. A digital toolkit comprised of resources, tips, and activities designed to promote healthy social media use and improve self-esteem among teenagers. This could be integrated into existing social media platforms or stand as an independent mobile app.
2. A **Screen Time Monitoring App** designed to help users manage their digital habits proactively. These tools aim to empower teenagers and their families with knowledge and means to foster a balanced online-offline life."

**Timeline and Conclusion**

Over the next seven months, this research will follow a structured journey from project initiation to submission. The initial months will focus on literature review and methodology design, followed by participant recruitment and data collection. I’ll then delve into data analysis, culminating in the drafting and revision of the findings.

Before I conclude, I'd like to emphasise the importance of this research in understanding and mitigating the potential challenges posed by social media to teenagers' self-esteem. By exploring this relationship, we can contribute to creating a safer, more supportive digital environment for our youth. Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to any questions or discussions.

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