

GSA Research Association Student Report

School: Batley Girls' High School

Research Title: The impact of Social Media on the Mental Wellbeing of Teenage Girls

Your Names:

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Section 1: Introduction

In the 21st Century, the awareness of the impact of social media has increased. However, something that has had very little research conducted on is the effect of social media on young teenage girls with regard to body image issues. Experts fear that social media has taken over the lives of teenagers so much that it is affecting their mental health, increasing their anxiety and leading to a society where young people struggle in social situations. Therefore, we decided that the aim of our research was to investigate the positive and negative impacts of social media on the lives of teenage girls and the relationship between social media use and mental wellbeing.

Section 2: Literature Review

The existing information surrounding this topic demonstrated a strong link between social media use and the negative impact on body image, mental health and wellbeing for teenagers. Our research highlighted issues with the feelings of self-comparison and insecurity as well as the negative effects of excessive screen time on the overall wellbeing of teenagers.

- Research conducted by *'Child Mind Institute'* suggests that excessive screen time is linked to anxiety, poor self-esteem, and social isolation.
- The *'Child Mind Institute'* also suggested that the reliance on digital communication reduces emotional connection and nonverbal understanding, hindering social skill development.
- A clear link exists between engaging with appearance-focused content and developing body dissatisfaction, which can lead to eating disorders as evidenced by research conducted by the *National Eating Disorders Organisation (NEDA)*.
- Social media can also expose teens to cyberbullying and other damaging content which are risks that teenagers need to be educated on.
- A 2019 UK survey completed by the *'Child Mind Institute'* found that 40% of teenagers began to worry about their body image after seeing images on social media. As a result, 35% had reduced their diets due to these body concerns.
- According to the *'Eating Recovery Centre'*, Nearly half of teens say that social media worsens their body image. This is because social media portrays unrealistic beauty standards resulting in low self-esteem and negative self-comparisons.

- The '*Eating Recovery Centre*' also suggested that teens attempting to emulate these unrealistic body goals often experience mental health issues, such as: low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety
- Social media can also be positive by supporting recovery by providing educational resources and combating harmful trends and misinformation according to the '*Eating Recovery Centre*'.

Section 3: Methodology

Our research methodology combined both qualitative and quantitative data. We identified the whole Year 8 cohort of 233 students between the ages of 11-12. We also briefed students and asked the Achievement Leaders/Behaviour for Learning leads to identify any potential barriers to our research. Our questionnaire was completed in a controlled environment with Form Tutors/SLT. Our research questionnaire was not compulsory and students had the opportunity to opt out of this research (38/233). It was anonymised as we did not collect email addresses which helped us gain honest answers. 195 students took part.

Qualitative research included:

- Research Groups- Year 7 into 8
- Open Ended Google Form Questionnaire
- Closed Google Form Questionnaire
- Journals
- Feedback /Observation

Quantitative research included:

- Wide sampling of Year 8 cohort at BGHS
- Statistics
- Research - Health and Market Research

Section 4: Data Analysis

A Google questionnaire was sent to the Y8 students who wished to participate in our research project which was then used to create a spreadsheet. We worked in pairs to analyse the results by creating tallies and pie charts which summarised the key trends and patterns in Y8 students' responses. We have included these in Appendix 1.

Through discussion around extreme diets, accessing risky trends or posts about body focus, these are our important findings:

1. 38/195 (19%) said that comparing themselves left them feeling insecure.
2. 35.8% of girls surveyed use social media to compare themselves to others.

Section 5: Evaluation

We feel that the approach we agreed and used to conduct our research was successful due to the large number of students who wanted to participate in our project. This helped us to gain a better understanding of the experiences of teenage girls in our school community. We worked effectively as a team by allocating roles and responsibilities and discussing our findings in our weekly GSA team meetings. We combined both Primary and Secondary data that matched our aims and objectives.

A key challenge we experienced was a lot of the research conducted into this area focused mainly on the impact of social media on the rise of eating disorders. However, we wanted to explore a wider range of negative impacts which affect young girls so that we can help to educate teenage girls to think and feel more positively about themselves.

If we were to complete this research again, we would use more focus groups as students may be more honest in a small, open forum. We would

also use more research based statistical data for the same age group from a wider audience.

Section 6: Interpretation, Discussion & Conclusion

Year 7 and 8 students are at a critical stage in their development and online media, alongside real world experiences can heavily influence their mental health. We believe that social media has a huge influence on young people and it is important to us because we care about happiness and what the world would be like without it.

We also believe that our research suggests that the influence of social media is a bigger problem than we anticipated. The average time spent on mobile phones is 6 hours a day according to *'Exploding Topics'*. This involves communicating with friends and family, playing games and going on social media apps like YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat. However, we feel we are well educated around the risks of social media at Batley Girls'. We feel that some of our data from our findings in school contradicts our wider research.

We want to be able to offer research that influences young girls' choices and makes them feel more confident in themselves. Excessive use of social media increases the risks of poor mental health, and unrealistic body expectations. To address these problems more education is needed for teenage girls particularly around digital awareness, online safety and healthy use of digital technology.

Section 7: References

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Section 8: Appendices

Appendix 1

Qualitative Data: Open Questions Included on Google Form

What does the phrase 'damaging behaviour' mean to you?

- Bad behaviour 51/214 = 23.83%
- Being violent 33/214 = 15.42%
- Behaviour that has a negative impact on others 28/214 = 13.08%

Does social media influence how you think/feel about the way you look?

- Yes = 22%
- No = 63%
- Sometimes = 12%

What kind of messages do you think social media sends about how young teenage girls should look or act?

- Teenage girls need to have a 'perfect life' 13/195= 7%
- Teenage girls need to be 'pretty' and 'popular' 65/195=33%
- Teenage girls shouldn't have any spots 9/195=5%
- Teenage girls should act mature 14/195=7%
- Teenage girls should be 'slim' 28/195= 14%
- To be yourself 9/195= 5%

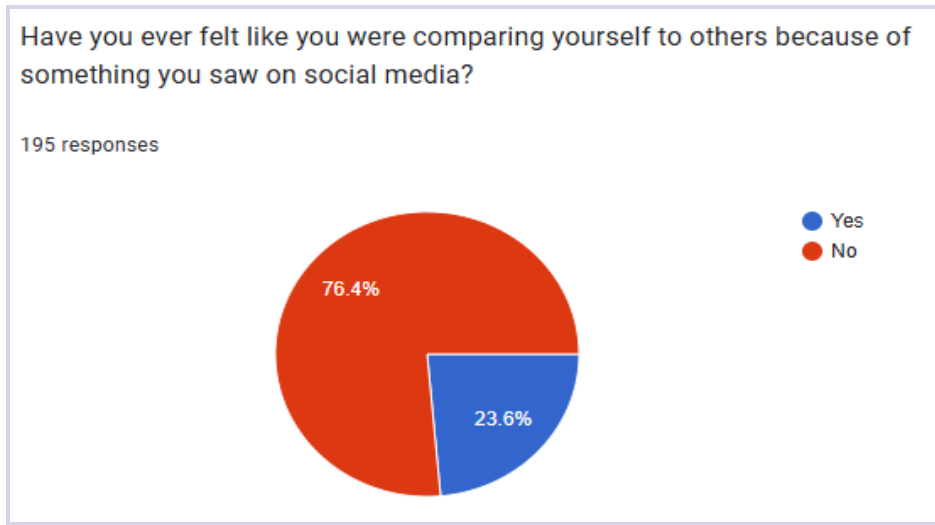
What do you think/feel is positive about social media? Why?

- Information and homework $56/205 = 27.32\%$
- To talk and chat to friends and family $41/205 = 20\%$
- For entertainment $26/205 = 12.68\%$

What do you think are some negative ways of using social media?

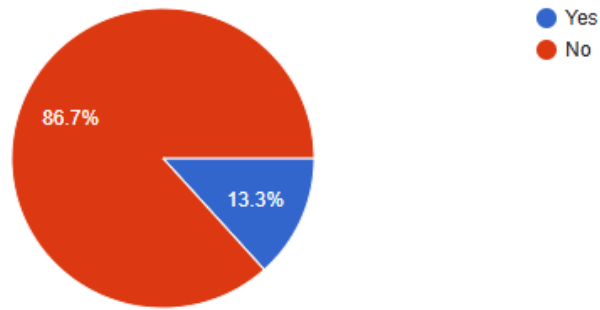
- Cyberbullying $68/209 = 32.54\%$
- Rude and negative language/posts $35/209 = 16.75\%$
- Makes teenage girls feel insecure $29/209 = 13.88\%$

Quantitative Data: Closed Questions Included on Google Form



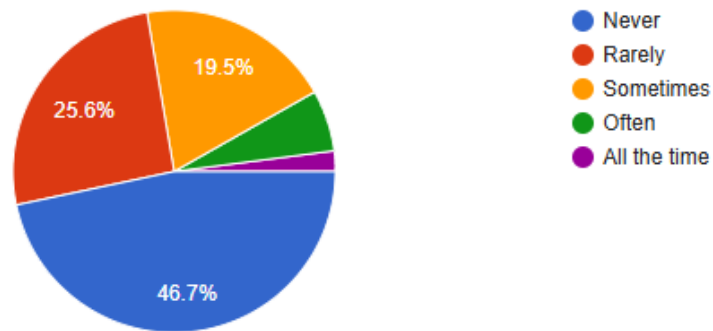
Have you ever seen something on social media that made you feel unsure or uncomfortable?

195 responses



How often do you see posts on social media that make you compare your body to others?

195 responses



After spending time on social media, how often do you feel pressure to look a certain way?

195 responses

