



Social Media Use and Early Adolescent Development: A Literature Review on Social and Academic Outcomes in Junior High School

Erna Febriany*

Universitas Asahan, Kisaran, Sumatera Utara

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Erna Febriany

Email: febrianyerna125@gmail.com

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Abstract: *The use of social media among early adolescents, particularly junior high school students, has increased significantly over the past decade. Early adolescents (ages 12–15) are in a critical phase of psychosocial development, including identity formation, social interaction, and academic adaptation. This study aims to analyze the impact of social media use on the social and academic outcomes of junior high school students based on the latest empirical evidence. The method used is a systematic literature review (SLR) of relevant research articles published between 2019 and 2025. The research process was conducted through several stages in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines, namely the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. The findings indicate that social media has a dual impact. On one hand, social media supports the maintenance of existing friendships, provides social support, aids in identity exploration, and facilitates the sharing of academic information. On the other hand, problematic social media use is associated with an increased risk of cyberbullying, social anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, sleep disturbances, and academic procrastination. Protective factors such as parental support and active supervision have been shown to mitigate these negative effects. This study recommends the need for psychoeducational interventions for students and parents, as well as the integration of digital literacy into the school curriculum.*

Keywords: Social Media, Early Adolescent Development, Academic Outcomes

Introduction

Social Advances in digital technology have made social media an integral part of teenagers' lives Rohmatillah et al., (2024). In Indonesia, according to a report by We Are Social (2024), the number of social media users exceeds 167 million, with the majority falling within the teenage to young adult age range (Farikha, 2025). Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) indicates that 98.20% of internet users are adolescents aged 13–18 years, and the primary reason for internet use is to access social media. The group with the highest frequency of social media use is adolescents, with 93% of adolescents aged 12–17 having accessed the internet and 73% of them having social media accounts. Early adolescents, particularly junior high school (SMP) students aged 12 to 15, are at a very critical stage of development. Adolescence is a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood characterized by dynamic changes, including physical, mental, social, and emotional changes. During this developmental phase, adolescents tend to have

high energy levels and intense emotions, while their self-control is not yet fully developed. Adolescents also often experience feelings of restlessness (anxiety) and fear of loneliness (Hurin et al., 2026). Therefore, adolescence is considered a period of heightened vulnerability to shifts in self-esteem and the onset of depression due to the presence of social media (Liyoni, 2026).

Previous research has identified various negative effects of social media use on adolescents. The majority of studies show a significant correlation between intensive social media use and an increased risk of depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and low self-esteem. The main identified triggers include unhealthy social comparison, cyberbullying, and the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) phenomenon. Additionally, excessive social media use has the potential to reduce the quality of face-to-face communication, increase the risk of social isolation, and contribute to mental health issues. Social media use can also lead adolescents to compare themselves with others they encounter online, which is a significant factor that can affect an individual's self-esteem (Abuzar & Hussain, 2024). Adolescent mental health has become an urgent global issue, including in Indonesia. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that one in seven children aged 10–19 years experiences a mental disorder, accounting for 15% of the global disease burden in this age group (West dkk., 2024). Depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents. According to the Indonesian Health Survey (SKI), the prevalence of mental health problems among adolescents aged 15–24 years reached 130,977 individuals, or 2.8%, with a prevalence of depression of 2.0%.

However, social media also offers benefits that cannot be ignored. Social media provides opportunities to expand social networks, foster creativity, and support informal learning (Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025). On the other hand, social media also supports social support and self-expression for adolescents. Social media can also serve as a platform for individuals to express emotions, interact, and share information with others (Liyoni, 2026). The characteristics of social media apps make them particularly appealing to teenagers during this vulnerable stage of development. Social media not only serves as a communication tool but also functions as a primary space where adolescents explore their identities, build relationships, and even engage in learning processes. However, high usage intensity poses unique challenges, such as a decline in the quality of face-to-face interactions, a tendency to withdraw from the surrounding environment, and the emergence of the FOMO phenomenon. Current trends indicate that social media use can influence changes in adolescents' self-esteem, particularly when they present themselves by posting photos they consider highly appealing on social media (Nilot Pramudita et al., 2025).

Although much research has been conducted, there are still several significant gaps that need to be addressed. First, most existing literature reviews focus primarily on psychological impacts such as depression and anxiety separately (Hurin et al., 2026; Farikha, 2025), but have not integrated them simultaneously with academic outcomes such as academic achievement or academic procrastination among early adolescents. Second, many studies combine various adolescent age groups (ages 10–22) without conducting specific

subgroup analyses, making specific findings for 12–15-year-old junior high school students unclear (Liyoni, 2026). Third, the majority of research on social media and adolescent mental health is still dominated by Western contexts, whereas Indonesia has distinct cultural and social characteristics, including parenting styles and access to technology. This limits the generalizability of findings to the Indonesian context. Fourth, although some studies mention the role of family and parental supervision as important factors (Nuryanti et al., 2025), there is still a limited number of studies that specifically examine which protective factors are most effective in protecting junior high school students from the negative impacts of social media.

Given these gaps, the research questions posed are: (1) How does social media use affect the social outcomes (mental health, social interaction, and self-esteem) and academic outcomes of junior high school students based on the latest empirical evidence? (2) What protective factors can mitigate the negative effects of social media use on junior high school students? This study aims to analyze the impact of social media use on the social and academic outcomes of junior high school students based on the latest empirical evidence, as well as to identify protective factors that can mitigate its negative effects. The contributions of this study include: (1) a theoretical contribution in the form of a current synthesis regarding the dual impact of social media on early adolescents by simultaneously integrating social and academic aspects; (2) a population-specific contribution focusing on the most vulnerable age group of early adolescents (12–15 years); (3) a contextual contribution for Indonesia, which has cultural characteristics distinct from those of Western countries; and (4) a practical contribution in the form of the identification of key protective factors for interventions targeting schools, families, and policymakers. This review concludes that social media has a dual impact on early adolescents, with positive effects on social support, social network expansion, and the sharing of academic information, but also negative effects including cyberbullying, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and academic procrastination. Parental supervision and digital literacy are key protective factors. Addressing this gap is crucial because middle school students are the age group most vulnerable to problematic social media use, and findings from WEIRD countries may not be directly applicable to the educational context in Indonesia.

Methodology

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to examine various studies on social media use and early adolescent development among junior high school students. The SLR method was chosen because it allows researchers to identify, evaluate, and interpret previous research findings in a systematic, transparent, and reproducible manner, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of the research topic.

The research process was conducted in several stages in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, namely the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages. A PRISMA flow diagram was used to document the number of articles identified, screened, excluded, and ultimately included in the review.

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- A. **Identification Stage:** At this stage, the researcher searched for relevant articles through four national and international journal databases: Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus, and DOAJ. The keywords used included: social media use, early adolescent development, junior high school, academic outcomes, and social outcomes, as well as their Indonesian equivalents: media sosial, siswa SMP, perkembangan remaja, hasil akademik, and hasil sosial. The selected articles are studies published within the last six years (2019–2025) to ensure the information obtained remains up-to-date. During this identification phase, a total of 120 articles were identified from the four databases.
- B. **Screening Stage:** During the screening stage, articles were selected based on the relevance of their titles and abstracts to the research topic. The criteria used in the selection process included: (a) the study population consisted of early adolescents or middle school students (ages 12–15); (b) the research focused on social media use (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube); (c) the research findings cover aspects of social development (mental health, social interaction, self-esteem, cyberbullying, anxiety, depression) and/or academic development (academic achievement, academic procrastination, attention disorders). Articles that did not meet these criteria were excluded from the review process. After the screening stage based on titles and abstracts, 55 articles remained (65 articles were excluded due to irrelevance, duplication across databases, or failure to meet the criteria for population and research focus).
- C. **Eligibility Stage:** The eligibility phase involves a comprehensive review of the article's full text to ensure that the study specifically addresses the impact of social media use on the social and academic lives of junior high school students, as well as protective factors that can mitigate its negative effects. At this stage, inclusion and exclusion criteria are applied more strictly. Inclusion criteria include: (1) publication type in the form of indexed journal articles (nationally accredited by SINTA or internationally reputable such as Scopus/Web of Science); (2) quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research design; (3) participants are early adolescents aged 12–15 years (equivalent to junior high school level) or studies that specifically mention junior high school students; (4) the variables measured include the frequency/duration of social media use and indicators of social development (e.g., social support, cyberbullying, anxiety, depression, self-esteem, self-identity) or academic development (e.g., academic achievement, academic procrastination, attention disorders); (5) full-text access is available; and (6) published in English or Indonesian. Exclusion criteria include: (1) opinion pieces, books, book chapters, or conference proceedings without empirical data; (2) populations other than early adolescents (e.g., adults, children under 10 years old, or college students); (3) studies that do not specifically address social media; (4) studies that do not measure social or academic development aspects; (5) studies not published between 2019 and 2025; and (6) duplicate articles across databases. After reviewing the full texts and applying

the inclusion/exclusion criteria, 25 articles remained that met all eligibility requirements.

- D. **Inclusion Stage:** Articles that met the eligibility criteria were then included in the analysis. The final number of articles included in this systematic review was 25. These 25 articles served as the primary sources for the presentation of results and discussion. Ten of these articles were used as the primary sources in the results table because they were most relevant to the research questions and comprehensively covered the social, academic, and identity aspects of early adolescents, while the remaining 15 articles were used to support the discussion and conclusions. All of them are listed in the reference list.
- E. **Analysis Methods:** As part of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology, the articles that met the inclusion criteria (25 articles) were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen because it aligns with the qualitative and exploratory nature of the study, which aims to identify patterns of positive and negative impacts, as well as protective factors, associated with social media use among early adolescents. The steps of thematic analysis conducted within this SLR framework consist of six stages. First, data familiarization, which involves reading the full text of each article repeatedly to gain a deep understanding of the key findings from each included study. Second, initial coding, which involves coding text sections relevant to the impacts of social media use (positive and negative impacts) and protective factors, such as labeling them cyberbullying, depression, parental support, or improved academic performance. Third, identifying themes, which involves grouping codes with similar meanings into potential themes; for example, the codes anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and FOMO are grouped under the theme negative impacts on mental health. Fourth, reviewing themes, which involves reviewing and finalizing themes by ensuring that each theme has sufficient data and is clearly distinct from other themes. Fifth, defining and naming themes, which involves operationally defining each theme and then assigning a representative name. The final themes resulting from this analysis include: positive social impacts, positive academic impacts, positive identity impacts, negative social impacts, negative mental health impacts, negative academic impacts, negative identity impacts, and protective factors. Sixth, producing the report, which involves compiling an analysis report presented in a descriptive qualitative format through narrative and tables (Table 1 and Table 2 in the Results and Discussion section). Thus, the SLR method provides a systematic framework for the search, selection, and evaluation of articles, while thematic analysis is used to extract, group, and synthesize findings from the selected articles.
- F. **Data Availability Statement:** All data used in this systematic review were drawn from 25 previously published articles listed in the references. No new primary data were collected. The search protocol and inclusion criteria are described in full in the methodology section to ensure reproducibility.

G. Restrictions: There are no restrictions regarding the availability of the materials or information used in this study.

Result and Discussion

This study conducted a systematic literature review of 25 articles published between 2019 and 2025 on social media use and early adolescent development among high school students. Bozzola dkk., (2022) found that depression was the most frequently reported issue related to social media use. Wibisino & Mulyani., (2019) identified a very strong relationship between social media and student academic achievement. Saputra & Islam., (2025) emphasized that uncontrolled social media use has significant negative impacts on adolescents' mental health, sleep patterns, social interactions, and academic achievement.

Based on the results of a thematic analysis of articles that met the inclusion criteria, it was found that social media use among early adolescents has a dual impact that is, both positive and negative effects as well as a number of protective factors that can minimize negative risks. (Saputra & Islam, 2025) found that social media has a dual impact on adolescents' mental health. Concluded that social media has a significant influence on adolescent behavior. These findings are grouped into eight main themes presented in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. Positive Effects of Social Media Use on Middle School Students

Tema	Temuan Utama	Indikasi Sintesis
Positive Social Impact	Maintaining friendships, social support (from peers and parents), acquiring social capital, a sense of belonging, expanding social networks, and the comfort of online communication for adolescents with social anxiety	Social media serves as a social glue that strengthens existing social bonds while opening up new networking opportunities
Positive Academic Impact	Sharing academic information, use for academic purposes, facilitating learning	Social media serves as an informal learning support system outside of school
The Positive Impact of Identity	Exploration of identity, clarity of self-concept	Social media provides a safe space for teenagers to actively and authentically explore their identity

Table 2. Negative Effects of Social Media Use on Middle School Students

Tema	Temuan Utama	Indikasi Sintesis
Social Negative Impacts	Cyberbullying, online anonymity, social comparison, depression, anxiety	Social media can act as a risk multiplier for mental health issues among adolescents
Negative Impact on Mental Health	Social media addiction, dopamine pathway activation, sleep disorders, FOMO	The addictive design of social media platforms triggers a compulsive cycle that disrupts psychological balance
Negative Academic Impact	Decline in academic performance, attention deficits, academic procrastination, excessive use	The duration and intensity of use are negatively correlated with academic achievement

The Negative Effects of Identity	Identity pressure, confusion	identity	An inauthentic self-presentation can hinder the development of a stable identity
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Discussion

Based on the systematic review presented in Tables 1 and 2, the use of social media among middle school students demonstrates a dual impact, namely positive and negative effects.

Positive Impact

Thematic analysis of the positive findings from various articles suggests that social media is not merely a threat to adolescent development, but also a potential social and academic resource when used wisely (Halawa, 2026).

First, in the social sphere, social media has been shown to function as a social glue. Amalia et al., (2024) found that using social media to maintain friendships has a positive effect on relationship quality. This finding aligns with West et al., (2024), who reported that social media facilitates the acquisition of bonding social capital (strong ties with close friends) and bridging social capital (networks with new groups). Masri-zada et al. (2025) added that for adolescents with social anxiety, online communication actually feels more comfortable than face-to-face interaction (Nuryanti dkk., 2025). A critical interpretation is that social media does not replace social relationships but functions as an alternative channel that allows socially anxious adolescents to still build connections. However, excessive reliance on this online channel should be approached with caution as it may hinder the development of face-to-face social skills (Al-Fikri, 2025).

Second, in the academic realm, social media shows potential as a tool for informal learning. (Abuzar & Hussain, 2024) statistically demonstrated that sharing academic information via social media improves academic performance with a β value of 0.184 and $p < 0.001$. Sivakumar, (2020) reported that 80% of students use social media for academic purposes and experience improved performance. Aminudin et al., (2024) reinforce this with findings that social media supports academic competence through knowledge sharing among students. A synthesis of these three findings indicates that social media has transformed from merely an entertainment platform into an informal peer-learning ecosystem. Consequently, schools can leverage this phenomenon by structurally integrating social media into collaborative learning strategies.

Third, regarding identity, Avci dkk., (2025) found that active participation—rather than simply the duration of time spent—is associated with identity exploration. Furthermore, authenticity in self-presentation on social media correlates with self-concept clarity. A key takeaway here is that the quality of engagement is far more decisive than the quantity of time spent. Adolescents who use social media reflectively and authentically tend to gain identity benefits, while those who merely engage in passive consumption or present a false self are at risk of experiencing identity confusion (Gordon & Ohannessian, 2024).

Negative Impact

Thematic analysis of the identified negative impacts suggests that social media can act as a risk multiplier for adolescent development issues, particularly when used inappropriately or without supervision.

First, in the social sphere, cyberbullying emerges as the most serious risk. Senekal et al., (2023) report that victims of cyberbullying have lower self-esteem and are at risk of developing long-term depression. Masri-zada et al., (2025) add that online anonymity facilitates an increase in cyberbullying behaviors associated with self-harm. Agyapong-Opoku et al., (2025) quantitatively found that 82.6% of studies linked social media use to depression, and 78.3% to anxiety. A critical synthesis of these findings reveals a chain of mechanisms: anonymity → emboldening for cyberbullying → victims experiencing negative social comparison → depression and anxiety. This is not merely a correlation but an indication of a vicious cycle that needs to be broken through intervention.

Second, regarding mental health, Masri-zada dkk., (2025) reported that 24.4% of adolescents met the criteria for social media addiction, triggered by the activation of the mesolimbic dopamine pathway from social media notifications. Khalaf et al., (2023) found that social media use before bedtime was associated with poor sleep quality. A mechanistic interpretation of these findings is that social media platforms are intentionally designed to exploit the brain's reward system dopamine-driven feedback loops, similar to the mechanisms of addiction in gambling. Early adolescents, whose impulse control is not yet fully developed, are highly vulnerable to this addictive design (Bozzola et al., 2022).

Third, in terms of academics, Sivakuma., (2020) reported that students who spend 5–6 hours per day on social media demonstrate lower academic achievement. Agustinus Abraham., (2026) explained that consuming short-form content (TikTok, Reels) reduces attention span. Sakhieva et al., (2024) found that over 70% of students spend ≥ 2 hours per day on social media, and 66.1% check social media more than four times a day. Ruga et al., (2024) added that moderate addiction leads to disruptions in learning. A synthesis of these findings indicates a dose-response relationship: the higher the duration and frequency of use, the greater the negative impact on attention, procrastination, and ultimately academic performance. The identified critical threshold is approximately 2–3 hours per day; above this threshold, the risk of academic decline increases significantly (Sitorus & Nurulla, 2025).

Fourth, regarding identity, Hidayatullah & Winarti., (2021) found that social comparison on social media leads to identity pressure, while fictional self-presentation leads to identity confusion. An interpretation of these findings is that social media creates an identity laboratory with two sides to the coin: on one hand, it provides a space for exploration; on the other, it triggers pressure to present an idealized version of oneself that is often unrealistic. Adolescents who fail to distinguish between their true selves and their online personas risk experiencing identity fragmentation (Nur, 2025).

Protective Factors: Mitigating Negative Effects

The main finding of this synthesis is that the negative effects of social media are not deterministic. Several protective factors consistently emerge across various studies as effective buffers.

First, parental support and active supervision. Nilot Pramudita dkk., (2025) found that parental support provides protection against the negative effects of cyberbullying. The interpretation of this finding is that parental supervision does not mean spying, but rather fostering open communication about adolescents' online experiences. Parents who actively discuss online risks and set reasonable screen time limits help children develop a balanced approach to social media use (Ratumakin & Tsuroyya, 2023).

Second, peer support. Senekal et al., (2023) also reported that high levels of peer support serve as a protective factor against post-victimization depressive symptoms. A synthesis of these findings suggests that horizontal support from peers is just as important as vertical support from parents in building adolescents' digital resilience. When adolescents have a supportive network of friends, they are better able to cope with the negative pressures of social media (Wibisino & Mulyani, 2019).

Third, digital literacy and self-regulation. Based on a synthesis of various articles, digital literacy—which includes the ability to think critically about content, understand algorithmic mechanisms, and independently manage screen time is the most sustainable protective factor. Adolescents with strong digital literacy tend to be more selective in consuming content and better able to distinguish between beneficial and harmful information.

Overall Synthesis and Implications

Overall, the findings summarized above confirm that social media use among early adolescents is a double-edged sword. Positive and negative impacts do not occur randomly but are determined by three key moderating factors: (1) usage patterns (active vs. passive, authentic vs. fictional, duration vs. quality); (2) social context (parental and peer support); and (3) individual characteristics (levels of social anxiety, impulse control, and digital literacy).

The theoretical implication of this synthesis is that a digital well-being model for early adolescents cannot focus solely on reducing screen time but must simultaneously consider the quality of engagement and the social context. An approach that merely limits duration without considering what adolescents are doing on social media and with whom they are interacting is unlikely to be effective.

In practical terms, schools and families need to work together to implement digital literacy programs and provide active supervision so that the benefits of social media can be maximized while minimizing its risks. Digital literacy programs must go beyond simply teaching how to use social media; they must also include critical thinking skills, time management, and emotional regulation. Additionally, collaboration between parents, teachers, and social media platforms is essential to create a safer digital environment for teenagers.

Conclusion

Based on the results of a thematic analysis and synthesis of 25 articles, it was concluded that the use of social media among junior high school students has dual effects.

Positive effects include maintaining friendships, social support, acquiring social capital, a sense of belonging, improved academic performance, and facilitating identity exploration. Negative impacts include cyberbullying, depression, anxiety, addiction, sleep disturbances, attention disorders, decreased performance, as well as identity-related stress and confusion. Effective protective factors include parental support, active supervision, open communication, peer support, digital literacy, and family-facilitated media usage plans. Therefore, schools and families need to collaborate to implement digital literacy programs and provide active supervision so that the benefits of social media can be maximized while minimizing the risks.

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