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Exposure to mental health content on social media and emotional status among adolescents

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Abstract

Background: The rapid development of social media has had a significant impact on the lives of adolescents, particularly in emotional aspects. Early and middle adolescence are age groups in a phase of psychological development that is vulnerable to emotional changes due to exposure to digital content. Exposure to a variety of social media content, both positive and negative, has the potential to impact adolescents' emotional stability.

Purpose: To examine exposure to mental health content on social media and emotional states among adolescents.

Method: A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design. The sample size was 82 participants, consisting of 41 junior high school students (early adolescents) and 41 vocational high school students (middle adolescents). The sampling technique used purposive sampling. The research instrument was a questionnaire to measure the emotional status of participants. Data analysis was conducted using the Dependent T-Test and the Independent T-Test to determine the average difference in emotional status between the two groups.

Results: No significant difference between the emotional status of early and middle adolescents in response to exposure to social media content, either in the pre-test ($p = 0.671$) with a significance value of $p > 0.05$.

Conclusion: This indicates that the level of age development does not significantly influence the emotional responses of adolescents in this study.

Keywords: Early Adolescence; Emotional Status; Exposure To Social Media Content; Middle Adolescence.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media has significantly influenced adolescents' lives, particularly in terms of emotional well-being and mental health (Phalswal, Pujari, Sethi, & Verma, 2023). Adolescents, both in early and middle stages, are considered vulnerable groups because they are undergoing psychological changes and identity formation (Adinda & Indrawati, 2024). The high intensity of social media use, including platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and others, exposes adolescents to various types of content, both positive and negative (Munirah, 2024).

Exposure to such content can trigger a wide range of emotional responses, including happiness, anxiety, stress, and feelings of insecurity resulting

from social comparison (Basjiruddin, Nadilla, Ayubiyakhan, & Suprayogi, 2021). Current data indicate that social media use in Indonesia is very high, especially among adolescents, and this trend has been accompanied by an increase in mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (Simanjuntak, Sitompul, Nadapdap, Raja, & Naibaho, 2024).

The results of the preliminary survey showed that adolescents actively used social media for several hours each day and experienced mood changes after viewing certain types of content (Haryanto, 2025). Early adolescents appeared to be more emotionally affected compared to middle adolescents (Anggraeni, 2024). These findings suggest that there

may be differences in emotional responses based on developmental stages and age groups (Yasin, Anjani, Salsabil, Rahmayanti, & Amalia, 2022).

RESEARCH METHOD

A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design to compare the emotional status of early adolescents and middle adolescents following exposure to social media content. The study was conducted at Junior High School 12 Bandar Lampung and Senior High School Bandar Lampung from December 2025 until completion of the research. The study population consisted of 443 adolescents, with a total sample of 82 participants, including 41 early adolescents (junior high school students) and 41 middle adolescents (vocational high school students). The sampling technique used was purposive sampling based on predetermined inclusion criteria. Data were collected using questionnaires to measure the emotional status of the participants. The collected data were statistically analysed using the Dependent T-Test to assess changes before and after the intervention and the Independent T-Test to compare differences between the two groups.

The instruments used in this study included a questionnaire to assess adolescents' emotional status, which had undergone validity and reliability testing. The instrument was a modified questionnaire adapted to the objectives of the study. Additional tools included informed consent sheets, stationery, and data-processing devices such as computers or laptops equipped with statistical software, including

SPSS, for data analysis. The materials used in this study consisted of primary data obtained directly from participants, namely junior high school students (early adolescents) and vocational high school students (middle adolescents), as well as information regarding the social media content they were exposed to.

The research procedure began with the preparation stage, which included proposal development, obtaining research permits, and selecting samples according to the inclusion criteria using purposive sampling techniques. After obtaining permission, the researcher coordinated with the schools and prepared the research instruments, including questionnaires that had been tested for validity and reliability. The implementation stage began with providing informed consent to participants, followed by administering the pre-test questionnaire to assess the participants' initial emotional status. Subsequently, participants were exposed to or took an intervention in the form of social media content according to the study design. After the intervention, the participants' emotional status was reassessed using the same questionnaire as a post-test. The final stage involved data processing and analysis, including editing, coding, data entry, and statistical analysis using the Dependent T-Test to evaluate changes before and after the intervention, as well as the Independent T-Test to compare differences between early and middle adolescents. The results of the analysis were then compiled into a research report.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Participant (N= 41)

Variable	Junior High School	Senior High School
Gender (n/%)		
Male	19/45.2	21/50.0
Female	22/52.4	20/47.6
Content Type (n/%)		
Entertainment	34/81.0	34/81.0
Education	3/7.1	3/7.1
Inspiration	3/7.1	4/9.5
sadfishing	1/2.4	0/0.0

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Duration (n/%)		
< 30 minutes	3/7.1	6/14.3
1–2 hours	19/45.2	15/35.7
2–3 hours	11/26.2	11/26.2
> 4 hours	8/19.0	9/21.4

Based on the table, the distribution of participants by gender showed that in the junior high school group, most participants were female, accounting for 22 students (52.4%), while male participants accounted for 19 students (45.2%). In the senior high school group, male participants slightly predominated with 21 students (50.0%), while female participants accounted for 20 students (47.6%).

Regarding the type of social media content most frequently accessed, the majority of participants in both groups preferred entertainment content, with 34 participants (81.0%) in both junior high school and senior high school groups. Educational content was accessed by 3 participants (7.1%) in each group, while inspirational content was reported by 3 participants (7.1%) in the junior high school group and 4 participants (9.5%) in the senior high school group. Sadfishing content was only reported in the junior high school group by 1 respondent (2.4%). Based on the duration of social media exposure, most junior high school participants spent 1–2 hours on social media, accounting for 19 participants (45.2%), followed by 2–3 hours with 11 participants (26.2%). In the senior high school group, the majority also spent 1–2 hours on social media, consisting of 15 participants (35.7%), followed by more than 4 hours with 9 participants (21.4%). These findings indicate that entertainment content and moderate social media exposure duration were dominant among both adolescent groups.

Table 2. Average Emotional Status of Adolescents

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviasi	SE	Min-Max	Confidence Interval 95%
Junior High School					
Pre Test	49.71	3.523	0.550	43-57	48.63 – 50.76
Post Test	48.41	3.406	0.532	40-55	47.39 – 49.41
Senior High School					
Pre Test	49.71	3.523	0.550	43-57	49.29 – 51.05
Post Test	48.41	3.406	0.532	40-55	47.85 – 49.68

Based on the table, the emotional status scores of junior high school students showed a decrease after exposure to social media content. The mean pre-test score was 49.71 with a standard deviation of 3.523 and a standard error of 0.550, with scores ranging from 43 to 57. The 95% confidence interval for the pre-test scores was 48.63–50.76. After the intervention, the mean post-test score decreased to 48.41 with a standard deviation of 3.406 and a standard error of 0.532, with scores ranging from 40 to 55. The 95% confidence interval for the post-test scores was 47.39–49.41.

Similarly, among senior high school students, the emotional status scores also decreased following exposure to social media content. The mean pre-test score was 49.71 with a standard deviation of 3.523 and a standard error of 0.550, with a score range of 43–57 and a 95% confidence interval of 49.29–51.05. The mean post-test score decreased to 48.41 with a standard deviation of 3.406 and a standard error of 0.532, with scores ranging from 40 to 55 and a 95% confidence interval of 47.85–49.68. These findings indicate a slight decline in emotional status scores after exposure to social media content in both groups.

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Table 3. Normality Test

Variable	Statistik	df	Sig
Pre Test Junior High School	.118	41	.158
Post Test Junior High School	.140	41	.200
Pre Test Senior High School	.116	41	.185
Post Test Senior High School	.168	41	.200

Based on the table, the normality test results showed that all variables had significance values greater than 0.05, indicating that the data were normally distributed. In the junior high school group, the pre-test data had a significance value of 0.158 and the post-test data had a significance value of 0.200. Meanwhile, in the senior high school group, the pre-test data showed a significance value of 0.185 and the post-test data showed a significance value of 0.200. Since all significance values exceeded 0.05, the assumption of normality was fulfilled, and the data were considered appropriate for further parametric statistical analysis using the Dependent T-Test and Independent T-Test.

Table 4. Emotional State and Exposure to Social Media Content Among Adolescents

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	SE	P Value
Junior High School				
Pre Test	49.54	3.695	0.577	0.004
Post Test	47.85	3.934	0.164	
Senior High School				
Pre Test	50.10	3.007	0.470	<.001
Post Test	48.56	3.107	0.485	

Based on the table, the results of the Dependent T-Test in the junior high school group showed a decrease in the mean emotional status score from 49.54 before the intervention to 47.85 after exposure to social media content. The pre-test standard deviation was 3.695 with a standard error of 0.577, while the post-test standard deviation was 3.934 with a standard error of 0.164. The statistical analysis produced a p-value of 0.004, indicating a significant difference between pre-test and post-test emotional status scores among junior high school students.

Similarly, in the senior high school group, the mean emotional status score decreased from 50.10 during the pre-test to 48.56 during the post-test. The pre-test standard deviation was 3.007 with a standard error of 0.470, while the post-test standard deviation was 3.107 with a standard error of 0.485. The statistical analysis showed a p-value of <0.001, indicating a statistically significant difference in emotional status scores before and after exposure to social media content among senior high school students. These findings suggest that exposure to social media content significantly affected the emotional status of both junior high school and senior high school students.

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Table 5. Comparison of Emotional State Among Adolescents

SE Post Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	SE	P Value
Junior High School	47.49	2.314	0.361	0.457
Senior High School	47.85	2.116	0.330	

Based on the table, the results of the Independent T-Test on post-test emotional status scores showed that the mean score of junior high school students was 47.49 with a standard deviation of 2.314 and a standard error of 0.361. Meanwhile, senior high school students had a mean score of 47.85 with a standard deviation of 2.116 and a standard error of 0.330. The statistical analysis produced a p-value of 0.457, which was greater than 0.05. This result indicates that there was no statistically significant difference in post-test emotional status scores between junior high school and senior high school students after exposure to social media content.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that the majority of adolescents, both in the early and middle adolescent groups, primarily consumed entertainment content on social media (Salsabila & Rahmasari, 2024). This finding reflects adolescents' need for social validation and emotional relief from academic pressures (Anggraini, 2020). However, continuous exposure to entertainment content, particularly content related to lifestyle comparison or sadfishing, may increase the risk of emotional instability, as adolescents tend to engage in upward social comparison by comparing themselves to unrealistic standards presented in digital media (Abd Ellatif Elsayed, 2025).

Statistical analysis using the paired sample t-test demonstrated a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.001$) in emotional status before and after exposure to social media content. These findings indicate that digital stimuli, including visual information and interpersonal interactions on social media, significantly influence adolescents' emotional dynamics (Rahmawaty, Silalahi, & Mansyah, 2022). From a neurobiological perspective, this may be associated with the development of the adolescent limbic system, which is highly responsive to

emotional stimuli, while the prefrontal cortex responsible for impulse control has not yet fully matured (Balga & Khairullah, 2025).

Furthermore, the independent sample t-test revealed no significant difference in emotional status between early adolescents and middle adolescents ($p = 0.671$ for the pre-test and $p = 0.457$ for the post-test). Although middle adolescents tend to have greater cognitive maturity, both groups remain within the same psychosocial developmental stage, namely identity versus role confusion (Hidayat, Rifki, & Rachman, 2025). Consequently, both age groups demonstrate similar vulnerability to social pressure and a strong need for peer recognition within the digital environment (Santoso, Noviekayati, & Rina, 2022).

In addition, the duration of social media exposure may also contribute to changes in adolescents' emotional status. The findings showed that most participants spent between one and two hours per day on social media, while some reported usage exceeding four hours daily (Ayub, 2022). Prolonged exposure to social media can increase emotional sensitivity, reduce concentration, and negatively affect psychological well-being (Karunia, Ashri, & Irwansyah, 2021). Adolescents who spend more time online are more likely to encounter emotionally provocative content, cyberbullying, unrealistic beauty standards, and negative comments, all of which may influence their emotional stability and self-esteem (Puspitaningrum, Diaz, & Saleh, 2023).

Another important aspect is the role of social media algorithms, which continuously provide personalized content based on users' viewing patterns and interactions (Cahyani & Muntazah, 2025). Adolescents are therefore repeatedly exposed to similar emotional stimuli, whether positive or negative, which can intensify emotional reactions over time. Content that promotes idealized lifestyles, popularity, or emotional storytelling may create pressure for adolescents to seek validation through

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likes, comments, and peer approval. This condition may increase feelings of anxiety, fear of missing out (FoMO), and emotional dependency on social media engagement (Hasibuan, 2024).

Despite the negative impacts identified, social media may also provide certain benefits for adolescents when used appropriately (Dinata, 2025). Educational and inspirational content can support self-development, broaden knowledge, and encourage positive social interaction. Social media can also function as a platform for emotional expression and social support among peers (Freska, 2022). Therefore, improving digital literacy and emotional regulation skills is essential to help adolescents use social media in a healthier and more balanced manner. Parents, teachers, and schools also play an important role in guiding adolescents to critically evaluate digital content and maintain healthy online behaviour to reduce potential negative effects on mental and emotional health (Friska, Arni, & Riyadi, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Exposure to social media content significantly affected the emotional status of both early and middle adolescents. Most participants predominantly consumed entertainment content and spent considerable time accessing social media platforms each day. The findings revealed a significant difference in emotional status before and after exposure to social media content, indicating that digital content and online interactions can influence adolescents' emotional well-being. However, no significant difference was found between early and middle adolescents, suggesting that both groups share similar emotional vulnerability due to their ongoing psychosocial development and need for social recognition. These results highlight the importance of promoting healthy social media use, strengthening emotional regulation skills, and increasing digital literacy among adolescents to minimize the negative psychological impacts of social media exposure.

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