

# Social Media: Friend or Foe?

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Social media has played an influential role in the lives of many youth, especially in terms of their mental health. While social media is often portrayed through a negative lens, many forget that social media can have its advantages for mental health. By fostering connections across the world through storytelling and engagement, youth may seek benefits in using social media to improve their own mental health and wellness. In Canada, many youth remain active on different social media platforms including TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, while in Vietnam, Zalo, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram platforms are more commonly used by youth. Despite some differences, both Canada and Vietnam share common themes in the impact of social media on mental health for youth.

There are a few consequences of social media on youth mental health that are commonly discussed in Canada and Vietnam. Some of these include increases in anxiety, depression and lower self-esteem. These can be often caused by the “perfect image” many feel pressured to showcase on social media platforms or the pressure to succeed by using social media as a method to monetize. This may lead to feelings of inadequacy and loneliness. Other consequences include cyberbullying and excessive social media use, which can further perpetuate mental health issues and lead to changes to a youth’s sleep, school, work and relationships.

Fortunately, there are many advantages of social media for youth and their mental health in terms of connection and community, particularly for minority or stigmatized youth. Social media provides youth with a platform to connect with other youth across the world, which is significant for those in rural areas or with disabilities. This can provide

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support for those who feel isolated within their own communities. Through these connections and support, social media can allow for a safe and welcoming community for underserved groups where their voices are heard. Social media can also provide youth with an opportunity to participate in support groups or awareness campaigns about issues that are relevant to them. In both Canada and Vietnam, social media has played a role in destigmatizing mental health issues by providing space for open conversations and challenging existing perceptions. Lastly, many youth use social media as a means of entertainment and a method to escape from their daily lives, allowing for relaxation and disconnection, which can be beneficial.

Despite the few disadvantages to social media, it is important to draw on the strengths of social media to improve youth mental health, as it is seamlessly intertwined into our society and culture. As social media continues to play an enormous role in the lives of youth, it's important to encourage the positive use of social media to promote impacting change in terms of mental health.

