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Digital Adolescence: The Current Reality

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Abstract

The study aimed to discuss the influence of digital technology on the lives of adolescents today. The methodology used was a literature review, including books and articles on the topic. The conclusion was that digital adolescence represents a phase marked by intense transformations, in which young people, highly connected to technology, develop new forms of interaction, learning, and expression. While this scenario offers countless positive possibilities, such as creativity and access to information, it also poses risks such as digital dependence, social isolation, and emotional and academic impairments. Therefore, it is essential that families, schools, and society work together to promote the balanced and conscious use of technology through guidance, dialogue, and monitoring, so that adolescents can enjoy the benefits of the digital world without compromising their overall development.

Keywords

Adolescents; Digital Age; Current Affairs.

Introduction

Adolescence is a phase marked by intense physical, emotional, social, and cognitive transformations. During this transition period between childhood and adulthood, young people seek to build their identity, gain autonomy, and strengthen social bonds. With the rapid advancement of digital technologies, this stage has evolved amid new forms of communication and relationships with the world, directly influenced

by the daily use of devices such as smartphones, computers, and social media.

The presence of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICT) in the daily lives of adolescents is increasingly intense and impactful. Social media, online games, messaging apps, and digital learning environments have become central elements in young people's routines, influencing their way of thinking, acting, and interacting. The internet has become not only a channel for entertainment, but also a space for social interaction, expressing emotions, and building personal and social identity.

While the digital environment offers diverse opportunities for development, expression, and learning, it also poses significant challenges. Excessive use of technology can lead to dependence, social isolation, anxiety, sleep disorders, and difficulty concentrating. Furthermore, many adolescents face risks such as cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, and a loss of in-person social skills. These factors require attention from parents, educators, and society as a whole regarding how adolescents interact with the digital world and the impact this relationship has on their well-being.

Given this scenario, this work is justified by the need to understand the effects of digital life on the development of adolescents today. Considering that the virtual environment has become an integral part of youth's reality, it is essential to reflect on its benefits and risks, proposing paths for a more balanced and healthy use of technology.

The work aimed to discuss the digital influence on the lives of adolescents today. The methodology used was a bibliographic review, where books and articles on the topic were used.

Adolescence

Adolescence is a stage of life whose beginning and end are still debated, and it is widely understood as the transition period between childhood and adulthood. Many scholars describe it as a developmental stage marked by intense transformations and ending with the consolidation of psychosocial maturity.

This phase is characterized by profound physical, emotional, social, and cognitive transformations that occur in an interconnected and complex manner, influenced by internal and external factors. In this context, providing adequate support and attention is essential to ensure healthy and balanced development. During this period, young people seek to affirm their identity, strengthen social bonds, and develop essential skills for adulthood. Therefore, the spaces in which they live—including digital environments—need to be structured to support this process [1].

Furthermore, adolescence is marked by identity crises, the search for autonomy, the beginning of sexual life, career choices, and emotional and family conflicts. These elements coexist with hormonal changes and a new perception of the world, which drive young people to take on new social roles, becoming active subjects in the construction of their identity and vision of reality [2].

In this scenario, the rise of social media has had a huge influence on adolescents. The ease of interacting with real and virtual friends, sharing content, and participating in online communities has encouraged the intensive use of these platforms. As a result, there has been a rise in the number of young people showing

signs of digital addiction. This behavior doesn't emerge suddenly, but rather develops progressively, reaching increasingly harmful levels. Excessive use of digital technologies tends to intensify its negative impacts over time [3].

Despite important contributions on the effects of excessive technology use on adolescents' socioemotional development, significant research limitations remain, such as the lack of experimental studies and the predominance of theoretical reviews. Therefore, further empirical research involving representative samples and different age groups is needed to deepen our understanding of how technology affects young people's emotional development.

[4], observe that, nowadays, children enter adolescence earlier and remain in this phase longer before reaching adulthood. This phenomenon reflects psychological, familial, cultural, and social transformations. It is common to find children between eight and 12 years old who already adopt adolescent behaviors. They demonstrate autonomy, reject childish interests, consume products aimed at young people, and interact intensely through cell phones and social media, with ease and argumentative power.

According to [5], adolescence typically lasts about a decade, beginning around age 11 and continuing until age 20, although these limits are not fixed. The authors also highlight that entry into the world of work is increasingly delayed due to the need for more time for training and qualifications required by today's society.

[6], highlight the complexity of defining adolescence, since biological factors intertwine with sociocultural elements of the environment in which adolescents live. It not only deals with the transformations of the body itself, but also with accelerated changes in the modern world, such as scientific and technological advances, new forms of communication and changes in social values. These factors play a fundamental role in the construction of their identity.

These influences determine how young people approach life, shaping their way of thinking, acting, and relating. It is from these experiences that they prepare—or fail—for entering adulthood. [7], emphasize that, just as childhood has well-defined stages, adolescence also goes through distinct phases, both biologically and psychosocially. These include emotional turmoil, accelerated physical growth, and the sense of omnipotence typical of adolescents.

The Rise of Social Media: A Transformation in Communication and Social Interaction

In recent years, we've witnessed a remarkable transformation in the way people communicate, share information, and interact with the world around them, thanks to the rise of social media. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and many others have revolutionized the way interpersonal relationships, the sharing of ideas, and even social dynamics occur. This digital revolution has had a profound impact on every aspect of modern life [8].

The rise of social media marked a moment of democratization in communication. Before its proliferation,

traditional sources of information were controlled by mass media, leaving little room for individual voices. However, social media has fundamentally changed this dynamic, allowing anyone with internet access to share their opinions, stories, and perspectives with the world. This has resulted in a more diverse and pluralistic landscape, where diverse voices have the opportunity to be heard.

These platforms have also revolutionized the way we connect with others. Before social media, social relationships were often limited to local contacts and close friendship circles. Today, it's possible to connect with people from different parts of the world, sharing interests, experiences, and cultures instantly and seamlessly. Physical distance is no longer an insurmountable barrier to building and maintaining meaningful relationships.

However, this rise of social media has also brought with it a number of challenges. One of the most obvious problems is the spread of false information and misinformation. The speed at which information circulates on social media often outpaces the ability to verify it, leading to situations where misleading or unfounded information gains widespread acceptance before it is even questioned. This raises important questions about the reliability and authenticity of information shared online.

Furthermore, the constant flow of information and interactions on social media can affect individuals' mental health. The pressure to stay constantly connected, the constant comparison with others, and the search for online validation can lead to isolation, anxiety, and low self-esteem. It's crucial to find a healthy balance between online presence and real-world attention.

More broadly, social media has also played a central role in social and political movements, allowing the voices of those who previously had no platform to be heard globally. This demonstrates the potential of these platforms to mobilize positive change and raise awareness of important social issues.

The rise of social media has been a game-changer in the way we communicate, interact, and perceive the world. While it has brought a democratization of voice and the possibility of global connections, it also presents significant challenges regarding the accuracy of information and its impact on mental health. As a society, it is essential to embrace the opportunities offered by social media while adopting a critical and balanced approach to its use.

Transformation in communication: the impact of new technologies

Communication is one of the fundamental pillars of society, and among adolescents, it has undergone profound transformations in recent decades. With the growing influence of new technologies, especially digital ones, the way young people connect, share information, and interact with the world has changed significantly.

Driven by the internet and the increasingly early use of smartphones, communication among adolescents has become more dynamic and instantaneous. Today, young people can stay in touch with colleagues, friends, and even strangers around the world with just a few taps on a screen. Geographical barriers have virtually disappeared, and access to real-time information has become part of daily life.

Social media plays a central role in this new scenario. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and others are the main means of interaction among teenagers. They not only facilitate contact but also serve as spaces for personal expression, identity building, and group belonging [8].

However, this hyperconnectivity also poses significant challenges. One of them is the authenticity of relationships. A preference for virtual interactions can reduce face-to-face contact, which is essential for emotional and social development at this stage of life. Furthermore, there's a risk of misinterpretation, as written messages may not convey emotions clearly, which can lead to conflict and misunderstandings.

Another worrying aspect is information overload. Adolescents are often exposed to a continuous stream of notifications, messages, and content, which can cause distraction, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and even mental exhaustion. The pressure to respond quickly and be always available can also harm their well-being and academic performance [9].

Privacy and digital security issues are also relevant. Many adolescents share personal information online without fully understanding the risks involved, which can leave them vulnerable to undue exposure, cyberbullying, and manipulation by algorithms and commercial platforms [10].

Given this reality, it's crucial to encourage adolescents to critically reflect on the use of communication technologies. Despite the numerous advantages of connectivity and freedom of expression, it's essential to develop skills to balance the digital world with authentic human relationships, preserve mental health, and protect privacy.

The evolution of social media and its impact on society

The history of human communication is marked by significant transformations, and one of the most notable is the evolution of social media. From the early days of the internet to the present day, this evolution has redefined the way we interact, share information, and shape society as a whole [11].

Social media had its genesis in the early days of the internet, with platforms like Friendster and MySpace in the 2000s. However, it was the launch of Facebook in 2004 that marked the beginning of a digital revolution that would forever alter the landscape of communication. Over time, new platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and LinkedIn emerged, each offering different forms of interaction and sharing [12].

Social media's impact on society has been profound and diverse. First, it has democratized voice, allowing ordinary individuals to share their opinions, experiences, and perspectives globally. This has created a more inclusive public sphere, where people from diverse backgrounds can connect and contribute to conversations previously monopolized by a few.

Furthermore, social media has revolutionized the way we consume information. News is now disseminated in real time, often before it is even reported by traditional media. This constant flow of information has brought benefits, such as the rapid dissemination of emergency alerts, but also challenges, such as the proliferation of misinformation and fake news.

Social media has also had a profound impact on the political sphere. Social movements, protests, and activist campaigns can now gain global visibility in a matter of hours. This can lead to significant changes in the political agenda and even in public policymaking. However, the misuse of social media to spread misinformation and manipulate opinions has also become a crucial concern [13].

From an economic perspective, social media has given rise to new business models and employment opportunities. Digital influencers have emerged as key figures in advertising and marketing, and companies now have a more direct way to interact with their consumers. This has also brought to the fore issues of transparency, ethics, and data privacy, which are being widely debated globally [14].

However, with all these positive changes and opportunities, significant challenges arise. Overreliance on social media can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Furthermore, the rapid spread of unverified information can undermine the credibility of journalism and undermine trust in information.

Furthermore, adequate regulation is essential to address emerging challenges. Issues such as data privacy, the spread of misinformation, polarization, and toxic behavior must be addressed through policies and laws that ensure social media platforms are accountable and protect individual rights [15].

Technology companies themselves have a crucial role to play. They must take proactive measures to promote transparency in data collection and use, combat the spread of false information through algorithms, and provide effective tools for users to control their online experience.

At an individual level, cultivating a critical awareness of social media use is crucial. This includes setting screen time limits, cultivating real connections outside of the digital environment, carefully verifying information sources, and practicing empathy and respect when interacting with others online [16].

The evolution of social media is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has shaped society in profound and diverse ways. While we celebrate the opportunities these platforms offer to connect, communicate, and create positive change, we cannot ignore the challenges they also present. The path forward involves a balanced approach that promotes innovation and freedom of expression while ensuring the ethics, privacy, and mental health of all individuals participating in this ever-evolving digital ecosystem.

The Relationship of Adolescents with Digital Technologies

Digital technologies are increasingly present in people's daily lives, through computers, software, electronic games, cell phones, and other devices. According to [17], these technologies can be understood as technical objects, such as machines and their manufacturing processes, and are introduced in various contexts, including Information and Communication Technology. These tools enable interaction between humans and machines, which has led to significant changes in the way we socialize.

The term Information and Communication Technology refer to electronic and digital devices such as the internet, computers, tablets, and smartphones, as well as more traditional technologies such as television,

newspapers, and mimeograph machines. Some researchers still use the term "New Technologies" to refer specifically to digital technologies or Digital Information and Communication Technologies (TDIC) [19].

These technological changes have been transforming people's daily lives and directly influencing individual cognitive development, as each culture proposes activities that shape the way we think and organize our minds. According to [10], These changes are especially noticeable among young people and students who have constant access to TDIC, known as "digital natives." For this group, technology is expected to be a means of social transformation, promoting new forms of interaction, information sharing, and learning.

So-called digital natives demonstrate greater skill in using TDIC, interacting with others through blogs, social networks, games, and other digital media. Among these digital natives are adolescents, who have gone from being mere passive recipients of information to also becoming content producers. This is largely due to the free time available and the diverse possibilities offered by contemporary technologies [20].

However, because this is a period of intense transformation, healthy family communication is essential, allowing adolescents to share their feelings freely and safely. In this sense, families need to maintain an open and welcoming dialogue with young people, even if the world of digital technologies poses communication challenges. This contact, despite the difficulties, can foster closer family bonds [20].

As can be seen, digital technologies can positively contribute to both young people's social interactions and their learning process. However, many scholars have warned about the excessive use of TDIC, especially by adolescents. According to [21], this phase of life is marked by confrontation with reality, physical transformations, and the discovery of new feelings in interpersonal relationships and the development of social values. It is a time of great need for social integration, the pursuit of individual independence, and the formation of identity.

A survey conducted by [22], found that between 30% and 40% of children and adolescents have been exposed to uncomfortable or embarrassing situations online, but only half of them shared the experience with someone else. The other half preferred to remain silent.

The study of [23], revealed that 68% of children and adolescents access the internet from their living rooms, while 57% use the network directly from their bedrooms. Also, according to the survey, among users aged nine to 17, 77% use Facebook most frequently; 87% use the internet for school research; 68% to watch videos; and 50% to download music or movies.

The impact of technology on adolescents' daily lives is evident, especially when observing the growing use of the internet. However, it is essential to build a relationship that values the balanced use of digital technologies, considering the diverse contexts in which they are present.

Adolescents' vulnerability to technology addiction

Adolescence, in itself, is a phase marked by intense physical, emotional, and social transformations. In the

current context, however, this period has become even more challenging due to the constant presence of digital technologies in young people's lives. Children and adolescents are immersed in a digital environment that, besides representing a powerful socialization tool, can also be considered a risk factor.

Video games, for example, offer a symbolic space where adolescents feel freer to experience fundamental aspects of this stage of life. In this environment, they often feel more comfortable exploring their identity, initiating emotional experiences, and seeking greater autonomy from their parents. The absence of direct face-to-face contact allows for greater disinhibition, since adolescents have control over what they share with others, reducing the anxiety typical of in-person interactions [18].

Many adolescents are naturally drawn to the virtual world, where they feel their emotional and subjective needs are more addressed than in the real world, which often imposes demands and responsibilities. Online, it's possible to create idealized versions of themselves, express feelings, share experiences, and build bonds, even superficial ones. Social networks like Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and even dating apps serve as showcases for emotions and everyday experiences. A 2011 Canadian study revealed that teenagers have, on average, 2,500 virtual friends, although only 10% have met in person [24].

Within this context, authors point out that the virtual world becomes a fertile ground for the creation of alternative identities, especially in spaces like chats and online games. This imaginary construct allows young people to avoid confronting their inner weaknesses, functioning as a strategy for dealing with insecurities and emotional conflicts. The ability to control the digital environment according to their desires becomes a way to compensate for real-life frustrations.

Furthermore, biological factors also contribute to this intense relationship between adolescents and the digital universe. [25], emphasize that the adolescent brain is still maturing, especially in the areas responsible for controlling impulsivity and decision-making. This explains why young people tend to act more impulsively and are more prone to behaviors such as compulsive internet use.

Literature also shows that, for many adolescents, the internet serves as a kind of emotional "escape." When feeling stressed or facing difficult situations, the virtual environment emerges as a way to relieve tension and temporarily escape their problems. Because this escape is associated with pleasurable sensations, many young people end up resorting to this behavior with increasing frequency, which can lead to dependence [26].

Social interactions, crucial at this stage of life, are also impacted. The search for peer acceptance is intense during adolescence, and social skills are crucial for building self-esteem and well-being. Some authors point out that young people who struggle with in-person relationships tend to prefer online interactions, as anonymity and the ability to control their own image offer a comfort zone against social anxiety. However, there are also warnings that excessive internet use can limit the development of important emotional skills, impairing the ability to adapt and relate to the real world [24].

Unlike adults, adolescents tend to show little or no resistance to new things, being naturally open to exploring the unknown. This characteristic makes them more vulnerable to the multiple possibilities

offered by the internet. Many experts point out that, in this virtual environment, young people feel a strong sense of autonomy, as if they have complete control over their choices and their own lives [16].

The current generation of teenagers is so integrated into the digital world that parents often struggle to keep up and control their children's use of technology. [21], highlight that, for the first time in history, children and adolescents are taking the lead in a profound transformation in the way we communicate. Some authors see this age group's mastery of digital tools as an extension of youthful creativity, even interpreting it as indicative of adaptive intelligence—an ability to perform multiple tasks simultaneously in a dynamic digital environment.

However, this technological dominance is not without consequences. A study conducted by [27], identified that family conflicts and ineffective parenting practices are among the factors contributing to the development of internet addiction (DI). The home environment often becomes the scene of disputes related to excessive internet use. [28], also found a relationship between dissatisfaction in family relationships, poor academic performance and compulsive internet use by adolescents.

According to the Brazilian Society of Pediatrics (SBP), there is consistent scientific evidence that excessive use of digital technologies negatively impacts the health and behavior of children and adolescents. The most common effects include anxiety, socialization difficulties, sleep and eating disorders, increased aggressive behavior, and even impaired academic performance [29]. These consequences affect not only the individual health of young people but also significantly impact their family life and educational environment.

Conclusion

Given the multiple transformations brought about by digital technologies, adolescence has become an even more complex and challenging phase. Adolescents' relationship with digital devices and the internet reveals a generation that is deeply connected, creative, and skilled in using technological tools. However, this same relationship, when lived without limits or guidance, can have serious consequences for young people's emotional, social, and cognitive development. The constant presence of TDIC in everyday life influences not only how adolescents learn and communicate, but also how they construct their identity and manage their emotions.

The vulnerability of this stage of life demands special attention from parents, educators, and society as a whole. Immersion in the digital world can be positive, as long as it is accompanied by a welcoming family environment, conscious educational practices, and school environments that encourage critical and responsible use of technology. Open dialogue and close monitoring are fundamental strategies for preventing misuse and the associated negative effects, such as digital addiction, social isolation, and psychological disorders. At the same time, it is necessary to recognize the transformative potential of technologies, which can promote learning, personal expression, and social interaction among adolescents.

Therefore, the reality of digital adolescence requires balance. It's necessary to value the benefits the virtual world can offer, without ignoring the risks it poses. It's up to families, schools, and public agencies to create guidance, prevention, and intervention strategies that help adolescents make healthy use of

technology. With proper mediation and ongoing support, it is possible to transform digital adolescence into a phase of full growth, critical awareness, and the building of meaningful bonds, both online and offline.

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