Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Educational Innovation and Psychological Insights
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.34277

The Impact of Social Media on Teenagers' Civic Identity and Civic Engagement in the Context of School Bullying

Yiwen Chen

University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
fanfanchen690@gmail.com

Abstract. Social media has become essential to teenagers' lives, profoundly influencing their development. This study explores the role of social media in shaping teenagers' civic identity and civic engagement, especially in school bullying. A questionnaire survey was employed. The results indicate that social media plays a positive role in disseminating information about school bullying and inspiring teenagers to participate in anti-bullying activities. Yet, it also brings negative issues like cyberbullying and misinformation. This research is of great significance as it provides a basis for formulating anti-bullying policies, guiding parental and community involvement, and enhancing teenagers' civic engagement and proper identity formation, contributing to creating a safer school environment and the healthy growth of teenagers.

Keywords: Social Media, Teenager, Civic Identity, Civic Engagement, School Bullying

1. Introduction

Social media has become an indispensable part of contemporary teenagers' lives, influencing various aspects of their daily routines, social interactions, and personal development. The widespread availability of smartphones and internet access has made platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter ubiquitous among adolescents. These platforms serve as tools for communication and arenas for self-expression, identity formation, and socialization.

For many teenagers, social media is the primary means of staying connected with peers, family, and global communities. It offers a real-time space to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, fostering a sense of belonging and social support. The ability to interact with a diverse range of people and ideas also contributes to their social learning and development. Additionally, social media is a significant source of information and news for teenagers. It exposes them to various perspectives and issues, enhancing their awareness and understanding of the world. Teenagers often use social media to discuss social, political, and environmental issues, participating in broader societal discourse.

However, social media's impact is not entirely positive. Issues such as cyberbullying, privacy concerns, and the pressure to conform to idealized images can have detrimental effects on teenagers' mental health and well-being [1]. Despite these challenges, the pervasive nature of social media in teenagers' lives makes it a critical area of study for understanding their behavior, development, and social interactions.

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.34277

2. The role of social media in shaping teenagers' civic identity and civic engagement

Social media plays an important role in shaping teenagers' civic identity and civic engagement, especially in the context of school bullying.

2.1. Positive effects

2.1.1. Effects on awareness and information dissemination

Social media platforms are often the first place teenagers encounter news and discussions about school bullying [2]. This exposure can raise their awareness of the prevalence and severity of bullying, making them more informed citizens. News about bullying incidents can spread rapidly through social media, reaching a broad audience. This dissemination helps bring attention to the issue, prompting discussions and debates among teenagers.

Teenagers frequently engage in online activities to combat bullying. They might participate in campaigns, sign petitions, or join groups dedicated to anti-bullying efforts. This participation helps develop their civic identity, making them active and engaged citizens. The visibility of peers participating in civic actions can motivate others to get involved. Seeing friends or influencers taking a stand against bullying can inspire teenagers to engage more in civic activities. Thus, social media provides a platform for teenagers to discuss and debate bullying issues. These discussions can develop their critical thinking skills and deepen their understanding of civic issues. Exposure to various viewpoints on social media can help teenagers appreciate the complexity of civic issues, promoting a more nuanced civic identity.

2.1.2. Effects on empathy and emotional response

Reading personal stories and watching videos of bullying victims can evoke empathy among teenagers. This emotional response can foster a sense of responsibility and a desire to support peers, strengthening their civic identity. Through social media, teenagers can express solidarity with bullying victims [3].

2.1.3. Effects on role modeling and identity formation

Influential social media figures who speak out against bullying can be role models for teenagers. These role models help shape teenagers' civic identity by demonstrating positive civic behaviors. Social media allows teenagers to explore and express their civic identity. By engaging in discussions and activities, they can experiment with and solidify their values and beliefs [4].

2.2. Negative effects

Cyberbullying is a persistent issue. While social media can combat bullying, it can also be a platform for cyberbullying. This dual role complicates the relationship between social media and civic identity, as negative experiences can undermine teenagers' willingness to engage civically [5]. The spread of misinformation and the formation of echo chambers can distort teenagers' understanding of bullying and civic issues, potentially leading to misguided actions and beliefs.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.34277

3. Methodology

The study employs a questionnaire survey method. The questions in the questionnaire are designed to address issues of school bullying and identity formation among teenagers. Basic information includes age and gender. The second set of questions involves whether the respondent has experienced school bullying, the frequency of bullying, responses to bullying, and the effectiveness of the school's handling of bullying incidents. More profound questions address the psychological thoughts and mental health issues arising from both being bullied and bullying others, as well as the impacts of these experiences.

In terms of identity formation, the questions include the respondent's sense of identity, self-evaluation, plans, whether their culture and background are respected at school, how peers view them within the school social environment, and the impact of participating in community and school activities on their sense of identity. The final open-ended questions seek solutions and measures, specifically how to correctly recognize one's identity and what actions schools and other fields should take.

The reasons for using a questionnaire survey method include the efficiency and broad reach of data collection. Surveys can quickly gather large amounts of data, making them suitable for large-scale studies. Furthermore, survey data can provide empirical evidence for policy-making, ensuring decisions' scientific basis and effectiveness. Survey results can help identify issues and suggest improvements, offering references for optimizing education, corporate management, and public policies.

Another advantage of surveys is their anonymity and reliability. Surveys typically guarantee the anonymity of participants, making them more willing to honestly answer sensitive questions, thus enhancing the authenticity and reliability of the data. Anonymity also reduces social desirability bias, leading to more objective and truthful responses. Participants do not need to fear that their identity as bullies will be exposed, which might otherwise deter them from answering and participating in discussions.

4. Discussion

Research on the relationship between teenagers and school bullying reveals that understanding the psychological and emotional health aspects has numerous benefits. Studies on school bullying help identify the psychological impacts, such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, that victims may experience. Understanding these impacts is crucial for developing effective mental health interventions and support systems. By studying bullying incidents, we can gain deeper insights into how negative experiences affect teenagers' emotional development, their ability to cope with stress, build healthy relationships, and develop resilience [6].

Academic performance and the school environment are also closely linked to school bullying. Bullying can significantly affect students' academic performance. Research emphasizes how bullying-related stress and absenteeism can lead to lower grades and decreased academic engagement. Understanding the prevalence and impact of bullying helps create a safer and more inclusive school environment. This facilitates the implementation of anti-bullying policies and programs that promote respect and kindness among students. School bullying has profound effects on social and behavioral development as well. Bullying can impair victims' social skills and their ability to interact with peers [7]. Research can provide strategies to help victims improve their social interactions and build supportive peer networks. At the same time, victims of bullying may exhibit

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.34277

behavioral problems such as aggression or withdrawal. Studying these issues helps develop behavioral interventions to address and mitigate these effects.

Severe school bullying impacts teenagers' identity formation. Understanding how identity is formed helps recognize how teenagers develop self-esteem and confidence. A strong, positive identity can lead to higher self-worth and a healthier emotional state. Research on identity formation provides insights into mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and identity confusion. Early identification and support can mitigate these issues and promote better mental health. Identity formation is crucial for developing healthy peer relationships. Understanding this process helps identify how teenagers navigate social dynamics, form friendships, and establish social networks [8]. Research on identity formation can reveal the role of family in supporting or challenging a teenager's sense of self. This understanding can guide parents in fostering a supportive home environment.

Correct identity formation provides teenagers with proper guidance. A well-formed identity can influence academic motivation and the choice of educational paths. Research helps understand how teenagers decide about their studies and future careers based on their sense of identity. Identity formation affects career aspirations and long-term goals. Understanding this process can guide career counseling and support services in helping teenagers align their interests and strengths with their career paths. Identity formation includes the development of civic identity. Research helps understand how teenagers perceive their roles as citizens and their willingness to engage in community and civic activities. Understanding identity formation can explain why some teenagers become actively involved in social causes. This knowledge can be used to encourage positive civic engagement and activism. The cultural background needs to be respected as identity formation is influenced by cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Research in this area helps appreciate the diversity of identity experiences and promotes cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Understanding the impact of ethnic identity on self-perception and behavior can help address issues of discrimination and foster a sense of pride and belonging among minority teenagers.

Long-term school bullying and incorrect identity formation also have negative impacts. The effects of bullying can persist into adulthood, affecting mental health, career success, and relationships. Research on bullying provides valuable data for understanding these long-term impacts and the importance of early intervention. Understanding the effects of bullying also helps break the cycle of violence. Research can inform programs to prevent bullies from continuing their aggressive behavior into adulthood. A strong sense of identity can enhance resilience and coping with stress [9]. Research on identity formation can guide interventions to build coping skills and resilience in teenagers. Understanding how identity formation helps teenagers deal with adverse experiences, such as trauma or bullying, can inform support strategies and therapeutic approaches.

Proper guidance for teenagers and stopping bullying behavior requires a multi-faceted approach. First, policy and program development. Research provides evidence for the development and implementation of effective anti-bullying programs and policies. This ensures that interventions are grounded in scientific understanding and are more likely to succeed. Findings from bullying research can support advocacy efforts for stronger anti-bullying legislation and school policies, ensuring a more robust framework for protecting students. Insights from research on identity formation can inform the development of educational programs that support personal growth and identity exploration in safe and structured environments. Policymakers can use research findings to create policies that support healthy identity development, such as anti-bullying laws, mental health services, and inclusive educational practices. Second, parental and community involvement. Research can guide parents in effectively recognizing signs of bullying and supporting their

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.34277

children. This includes providing resources and strategies for addressing bullying at home and in schools. Increased awareness of bullying's impact can mobilize community efforts to address the issue, fostering a collective approach to creating safer environments for teenagers. Third, enhancing civic engagement and identity. Understanding the impact of bullying can improve empathy and a sense of responsibility among teenagers, promoting positive civic engagement. This understanding can encourage students to participate actively in anti-bullying campaigns and community initiatives. Research on bullying helps teenagers understand the importance of standing up against injustice and fostering a sense of civic identity that values fairness, empathy, and active participation in community affairs. Identity formation involves the development of personal values and moral beliefs. Research helps in understanding how teenagers establish their value systems and ethical frameworks. A well-formed identity can lead to better decision-making skills. Understanding this process can aid in designing programs that help teenagers make informed and moral choices.

5. Conclusion

This research delved into the impact of social media on teenagers' civic identity and civic engagement in the context of school bullying. Social media, a crucial platform for teenagers to obtain information and socialize, offers opportunities to understand school bullying and participate in anti-bullying actions, facilitating the shaping of their civic identity. However, it also poses negative challenges, such as cyberbullying and misinformation.

Based on the research findings, understanding the dual nature of social media is of great significance for teenagers' growth. Policy-making can provide a scientific basis for constructing more comprehensive anti-bullying policies. It helps parents and the community enhance their awareness of school bullying and take effective action. For teenagers, it can strengthen their empathy and sense of responsibility and encourage active civic participation.

In the future, we should fully utilize social media's positive aspects while taking measures to address its negative impacts. Schools and families must strengthen guidance and improve teenagers' media literacy to identify information and actively participate in social affairs correctly. In addition, all sectors of society should work together to create a safe online and school environment, promoting the formation of positive civic identities and values among teenagers in a healthy environment and enabling them to contribute to social development.

References

[1] Dan Olweus. (2013). School bullying: Development and some significant challenges. Annual review of clinical psychology 9 (1), 751-780.
[2] Pamela Orpinas, Arthur M Horne, and Deborah Staniszewski. (2003). School bullying: Changing the problem by changing the school. School Psychology Review 32 (3), 431-444.
[3] Peter K Smith. (1999). The nature of school bullying: A cross-national perspective. Psychology Press.
[4] Stewart Waters, William B Russell, and Matt Hensley. (2020). Cyber bullying, social media, and character education: why it matters for middle school social studies. The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas 93 (4), 195-204.
[5] Elizabeth Burgess Dowdell, Erin Freitas, Alanna Owens, and Meredith MacKenzie Greenle. (2022). School shooters: patterns of adverse childhood experiences, bullying, and social media. Journal of Pediatric Health Care 36 (4), 339-346.
[6] Sumera Batool, Rabia Yousaf, and Feroza Batool. (2017). Bullying in social media: An effect study of cyber bullying on the youth. Pakistan Journal of Criminology 9 (4), 119
[7] Nikolaos Drakatos, Eleni Tsompou, Zoe Karabatzaki, and Anna Maria Driga. (2023). School bullying and the role of social media. TechHub Journal 3, 27-51.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.34277

[8] Zhao Pan, Yaobin Lu, Bin Wang, and Patrick YK Chau. (2017). Who do you think you are? Common and differential effects of social self-identity on social media usage. Journal of Management Information Systems 34 (1), 71-101.
[9] Philip Seargeant, and Caroline Tagg. (2014). The language of social media: Identity and community on the internet. Springer.