

Teenage Mood: The Comparative Effects of In-person Communities versus Social Media

Joshua Kao

Palo Alto Senior High School,
50 Embarcadero Road, Palo Alto, California, UNITED STATES

jkao45@yahoo.com

Abstract:

Media consumption among teenagers is at an all-time high. Yet, existing literature supports the idea that excessive and addictive social media usage affects teenagers neurologically by setting dopamine levels below baseline and leads to shorter attention spans and more depressive symptoms¹. Existing literature also supports the importance of in-person social communities, which have been shown to boost long-term attention and general mood². This study adds on to existing literature by investigating the differing effects of social media engagement and in-person socialization with the added comparative effect on the same participant. This study also expands on previous work by adding the specificity of examining how the different communal activity types (e.g., performing arts, social support, athletics) affect the emotional outcome of teens differently. A Quasi-experimental design was utilized with 6 different activity groups of high school students (N= 52). Results supported the positive emotional outcomes of in-person social communities while corroborating the inverse effect of social media use ($p < 0.001$). Participants in the performing arts group experienced the largest emotional outcome gains, providing evidence for benefit when teenagers participate in activities where creative expression is needed. Participants in social support activities experienced significantly boosted mood and decreased stress levels, suggesting that youth participation in community service and social support activity groups benefit both others and themselves. Thus, partaking in communal activities reap positive emotional outcomes for teenagers while passive social media use reaps negative emotional outcomes for teenagers.