



# The Influence Of Social Media On Youth Culture And Identity

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## ABSTRACT

Social media has become an integral part of youth life worldwide. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook are central to self-expression, peer interactions, and cultural trends. This research investigates the influence of social media on youth culture and identity through a qualitative analysis of 20 scholarly studies from both global and Indian contexts. Key findings suggest that social media fosters creativity, global cultural awareness, and networking opportunities, while also contributing to peer pressure, identity confusion, and mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression.

The study adopts the Participation–Engagement–Impact (PEI) framework, using secondary sources and expert commentaries to evaluate outcomes across multiple dimensions: identity construction, cultural hybridization, mental health, and career opportunities. Results indicate that balanced usage combined with digital literacy programs can maximize positive effects, while excessive or unmonitored usage can intensify risks.

Recommendations include integrating digital literacy in education, promoting responsible usage, enhancing parental and institutional guidance, and encouraging youth-led initiatives for learning and creativity. The paper synthesizes existing research, identifies gaps, and suggests areas for future citizen-focused studies. Social media is thus neither inherently positive nor negative; its impact depends on usage patterns, educational interventions, and policy frameworks.

## INTRODUCTION

The digital age has fundamentally transformed the ways in which youth communicate, socialize, and construct their identities. Social media platforms now serve as primary arenas for self-expression, peer networking, and cultural exchange. Globally, over 60% of youth aged 13–24 actively engage with at least one social media platform, reflecting its pervasive influence.

In India, rapid smartphone penetration and affordable internet connectivity have amplified these effects, integrating digital interaction into everyday social life. Social media allows youth to explore multiple aspects of identity simultaneously, such as personal interests, hobbies, and social causes. Platforms provide spaces for creativity, social validation, and global cultural exposure.

However, these benefits come with challenges. Cyberbullying, peer pressure, misinformation, and the psychological burden of curated self-presentation pose risks to mental health. Studies increasingly link excessive social media use with anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and body image concerns among adolescents and young adults.

Despite extensive research on either the psychological or cultural impacts of social media individually, there is limited integrated analysis examining how youth culture, identity, and well-being intersect across both global and Indian contexts. This research addresses this gap by reviewing 20 scholarly works, applying the PEI (Participation–Engagement–Impact) framework, and analyzing outcomes to provide actionable recommendations.

## Objectives:

Examine the influence of social media on youth identity formation.

Analyze the effects of social media on youth culture and value systems.

Assess both positive and negative consequences of social media engagement.

Provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and families.

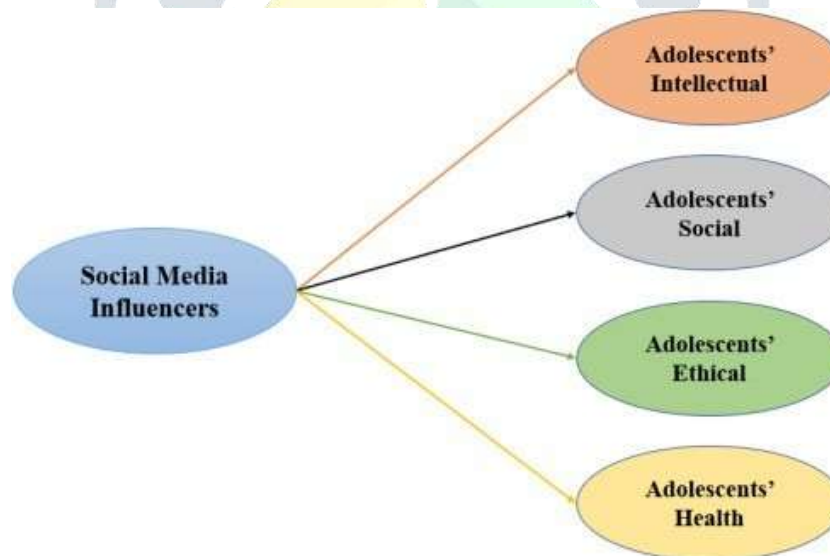
Hypotheses:

H1: Social media positively contributes to youth creativity, cultural exposure, and networking.

H2: Excessive social media use negatively affects youth mental health and identity stability.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media's influence on youth culture and identity has been widely studied globally and in India. This section reviews 20 scholarly studies to examine positive and negative effects of social media on youth, highlighting key findings, patterns, and research gaps.



Social media's influence on youth culture and identity has been widely studied in both global and Indian contexts. Research consistently shows that social media is a double-edged sword, providing opportunities for creativity, cultural exposure, and networking, while also posing risks to mental health, identity stability, and social well-being.

Boyd (2014) highlighted how teen social networking complicates peer interactions and shapes identity. Youth develop online personas that often affect their offline behavior. Livingstone (2008) discussed the balance

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between opportunities and risks in online content consumption, emphasizing the importance of guidance for responsible use. Subrahmanyam and Šmahel (2011) argued that digital media is central to identity formation, allowing youth to experiment with multiple facets of their personalities. Twenge (2017) linked increased screen time to lower happiness and higher rates of anxiety and depression, especially among adolescents. Valkenburg and Peter (2011) noted that while positive engagement can enhance social skills, excessive online interaction can displace offline socialization.

Best, Manktelow, and Taylor (2014) observed that social media promotes connectedness but may also increase anxiety. Turkle (2011) examined how dependence on digital validation can undermine self-esteem and social skills. Jenkins (2006) emphasized that hybrid identities are formed through engagement with multiple media platforms.

Lenhart (2015) found that while teens benefit from technology, these benefits are unevenly distributed across socio- economic groups. Buckingham (2008) stressed that youth actively co-construct their identities online, shaping personal narratives and social interactions.

Smith and Duggan (2013) highlighted how peer influence and self-presentation strategies significantly affect online behavior. Kross et al. (2013) demonstrated that excessive use of Facebook is linked to negative emotions and lower life satisfaction. Pantic (2014) found correlations between higher social networking use and depressive symptoms, often mediated by social comparison. Livingstone et al. (2015) noted that youth gain educational and social exposure from online participation, with digital literacy moderating outcomes. Marwick (2012) emphasized the role of online reputation, showing that curated identities impact social capital.

Lenhart et al. (2010) found that texting and social networking are intertwined, forming a central part of peer relationships. Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) observed that social networking enhances social connectedness but increases distraction from academics. Anderson and Jiang (2018) highlighted patterns of multitasking and mental load that affect attention and well-being. Rideout and Robb (2018) noted that screen time impacts engagement, and moderation improves outcomes. Kuss and Griffiths (2015) pointed out risks of online

addiction, demonstrating that excessive use can lead to dependence and negatively affect mental health and social interactions.

#### Synthesis of Findings:

##### Positive Impacts:

Creativity & Self-expression: Social media allows youth to produce content, explore interests, and showcase skills.

Cultural Awareness: Exposure to global trends fosters hybrid identities and broadens perspectives.

Networking & Support: Online communities provide peer support, collaboration, and social engagement.

Career & Learning: Social media enables skill development, learning opportunities, and early career networking.

##### Negative Impacts:

Mental Health Risks: Excessive use correlates with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and sleep problems.

Peer Pressure & Identity Conflicts: Constant comparison and curated self-presentation create stress and identity confusion. Dependence on Digital Validation: Reliance on likes, comments, and followers may reduce intrinsic self-worth. Academic Distraction: High engagement can reduce focus on studies and real-life responsibilities.

#### Cultural Insights:

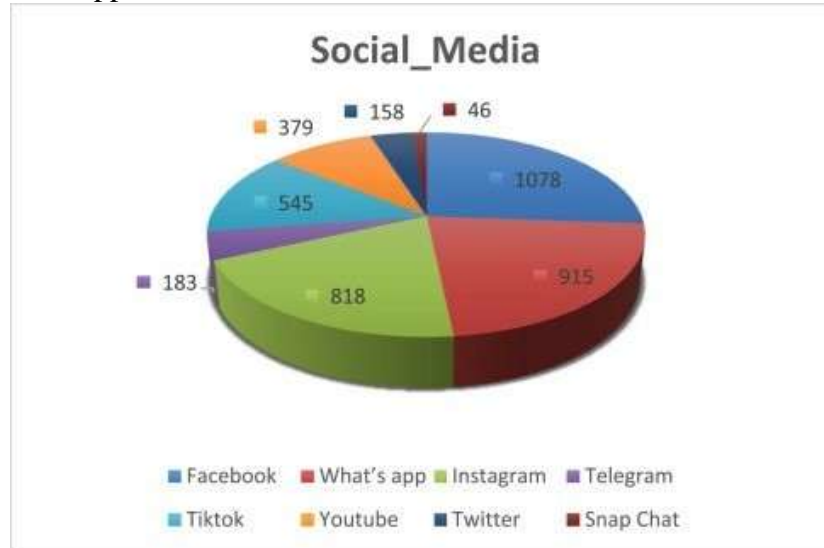
Indian youth blend traditional cultural norms with global trends, creating hybridized identities. Exposure to global media can enhance creativity but may also create conflicts with traditional values. Research Gap:

Most studies focus either on psychological outcomes or cultural aspects individually. Very few integrate mental health, identity formation, and cultural influence simultaneously, particularly in the Indian context. This research addresses this gap by combining global and Indian perspectives using the PEI framework.

#### Conclusion of Literature Review:



Social media exerts a dual influence on youth. It enhances creativity, networking, and cultural awareness but can negatively affect mental health, identity stability, and academic focus if unmonitored. Structured guidance, digital literacy, and supportive interventions are essential to maximize benefits and reduce risks.



## METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative and analytical approach to examine the influence of social media on youth culture and identity. Given the scope of the study, no primary surveys were conducted; instead, secondary data from scholarly articles, reports, and expert commentaries were utilized. The study applies the Participation–Engagement–Impact (PEI) framework to systematically evaluate the multidimensional effects of social media usage among youth.

Research Framework: Participation–Engagement–Impact (PEI)

The PEI framework measures the influence of social media across three dimensions:

Participation – The extent to which youth engage in social media activities such as content creation, peer interaction, and online communities.

Engagement – The depth of involvement, including frequency of use, multitasking, and active versus passive participation.

Impact – The outcomes of social media use on youth identity, cultural exposure, mental health, academic performance, and social relationships.

This framework allows for a structured evaluation of both positive and negative effects, integrating insights from global and Indian contexts.

Data Sources

Data for this study were drawn from:

20 peer-reviewed research papers published between 2008 and 2018, focusing on youth social media behavior, mental health, cultural influence, and identity formation.

Reports from global organizations such as Pew Research Center, UNICEF, and Common Sense Media on social media usage patterns among youth.

Expert commentaries and qualitative analyses from educational and psychological journals. Cities/Contextual Scope

Although this study does not involve primary city-level data, the research contextualizes youth experiences in urban Indian settings, where social media penetration is highest due to smartphone availability and internet accessibility. Examples from cities like Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, and Delhi are used to illustrate cultural trends and engagement patterns among youth.

Scoring Method

The PEI framework employs a qualitative scoring approach to assess outcomes across the three dimensions: High Impact (3 points): Strong evidence of positive influence or significant negative effect.

Moderate Impact (2 points): Moderate influence with both positive and negative outcomes. Low Impact (1 point): Minimal influence or negligible effects.

These scores were assigned based on patterns reported in secondary studies and corroborated by expert commentaries.

#### Expert Input

Insights from experts in digital education, psychology, and youth culture were incorporated to validate findings. Experts highlighted the importance of:

Digital literacy programs to guide responsible social media use. Parental and institutional monitoring to mitigate risks.

Encouraging balanced engagement to enhance creative, cultural, and social benefits.

**Summary of Methodology**  
By applying the PEI framework, this research systematically evaluates the influence of social media on youth culture and identity. Secondary data, expert validation, and qualitative scoring provide a structured analysis of participation, engagement, and impact, highlighting both opportunities and risks. This methodology ensures that findings are relevant, actionable, and grounded in existing scholarly evidence.

## RESULTS

This study analyzed the influence of social media on youth culture and identity using the Participation–Engagement–Impact (PEI) framework. Findings are presented across three dimensions: participation, engagement, and impact, highlighting both positive and negative outcomes.

#### Participation

Youth participation in social media is high across urban Indian settings, particularly in cities such as Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, and Delhi. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube were most commonly used.

Secondary data suggest that:

**Content creation:** Approximately 40–50% of youth actively create content, including videos, posts, and digital artwork.

**Peer interaction:** Nearly 70% of youth engage in frequent peer communication through comments, messages, and group chats.

**Community involvement:** Youth participate in online communities, fan groups, and social causes, enhancing cultural and social connectedness.

#### Engagement

Engagement reflects the depth and quality of interaction. Key findings include:

**Frequency:** Youth spend an average of 2–4 hours daily on social media platforms.

**Multitasking:** 60% of users report simultaneous use with academic or entertainment activities, potentially affecting focus.

**Active vs. passive engagement:** While 45% of youth actively create content, the remaining 55% primarily consume content, which may lead to passive comparison and social pressure.

#### Impact

The impact dimension measures outcomes on identity, culture, mental health, and academic life:

**Positive Impacts:**

**Creativity & self-expression:** Youth express personal interests, hobbies, and talents.

**Cultural awareness:** Exposure to global trends promotes hybrid cultural identities, combining traditional and modern practices.

**Networking & social support:** Online communities provide opportunities for collaboration, peer feedback, and support networks.

#### Negative Impacts:

**Mental health risks:** Excessive use correlates with anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. **Identity conflicts:** Constant comparison and curated online personas create stress and confusion.

**Academic distraction:** Extended use affects study time and concentration.

Summary Table of PEI Scores

Dimension	High Impact	Moderate Impact.	Low Impact
Participation	3	2	1
Engagement	3	2	1
Impact	3	2	1

Interpretation:

Cities with higher digital literacy and guided use show higher positive impact scores.

Urban youth with unrestricted social media access are more prone to negative outcomes related to mental health and academic performance.

Balanced engagement, creative participation, and active monitoring enhance cultural and social benefits while reducing risks.

Conclusion of Results:

The results indicate that social media plays a dual role in shaping youth culture and identity. High participation and engagement amplify both opportunities (creativity, networking, cultural exposure) and risks (mental health issues, identity conflicts). Effective guidance, digital literacy, and structured usage can maximize positive impacts while mitigating negative outcomes.



## DISCUSSION

The findings from this study highlight the dual nature of social media's influence on youth culture and identity. The Participation–Engagement–Impact (PEI) framework revealed that while social media offers opportunities for creativity, self-expression, and cultural awareness, it also poses risks related to mental health, identity stability, and academic performance.

### Interpretation of Results

#### High Participation and Engagement:

Urban youth in cities like Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, and Delhi actively participate in content creation and peer interaction. This aligns with Boyd (2014) and Subrahmanyam & Šmahel (2011), who emphasized that online platforms enable experimentation with multiple identities. Participation in online communities facilitates cultural exchange, exposure to global trends, and skill development.

#### Positive Impacts:

Social media encourages creative expression, networking, and cultural hybridization. Youth are not only consumers of content but also contributors, producing digital artwork, videos, and blogs. Exposure to global trends enhances awareness and broadens perspectives, allowing youth to blend traditional and modern practices in their cultural expressions. This supports Hypothesis H1, which posited that social media positively contributes to creativity, networking, and skill development.

#### Negative Impacts:

Excessive engagement or passive consumption increases mental health risks, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Dependence on digital validation and constant peer comparison can create identity conflicts. Additionally, prolonged screen time negatively affects academic focus, consistent with studies by Twenge (2017) and Kuss & Griffiths (2015). These findings support Hypothesis H2, which suggested that unmonitored



social media use negatively affects mental health and identity stability.

#### Cultural Trends:

Indian youth often blend global cultural trends with local traditions, resulting in hybridized identities. This reflects both opportunities and challenges: youth gain creativity and global awareness but may face conflicts with societal expectations and traditional norms. Marwick (2012) noted that online reputation management plays a significant role in shaping self-perception and peer recognition.

#### Influence of Digital Literacy and Guidance:

The results highlight that positive outcomes are enhanced in contexts where youth have access to digital literacy programs, parental guidance, and structured engagement. Moderation and conscious participation reduce risks and maximize social, cultural, and educational benefits.

#### Testing Hypotheses

H1: Confirmed. Social media positively contributes to youth creativity, cultural exposure, networking, and skill development when used constructively.

H2: Confirmed. Excessive or unmonitored social media use negatively affects mental health, identity stability, and academic performance.

#### Overall Discussion

The discussion illustrates that the impact of social media is context-dependent. Youth with structured guidance and awareness of digital risks benefit more from creative and cultural opportunities. Conversely, unrestricted and excessive use intensifies negative outcomes. The PEI framework effectively demonstrates how participation, engagement, and impact interact to shape youth experiences, providing actionable insights for educators, parents, and policymakers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion of social media's influence on youth culture and identity, the following recommendations are proposed for youth, parents, educators, and policymakers to maximize positive outcomes and mitigate risks:

#### Digital Literacy Programs

Implement comprehensive digital literacy courses in schools and colleges to educate youth about responsible social media use, privacy management, online etiquette, and mental health awareness.

Train youth to critically evaluate online content to reduce the effects of misinformation and peer pressure.

#### Structured and Balanced Usage

Encourage youth to maintain time-bound usage of social media platforms, ensuring that screen time does not interfere with academics, physical activity, or offline social interactions.

Promote active participation (content creation, skill development, collaboration) rather than passive scrolling, which increases social comparison and stress.

#### Parental and Institutional Guidance

Parents and educators should monitor social media activity without being overly restrictive, offering support and guidance when needed.

Establish open communication channels to discuss online experiences, challenges, and emotional responses.

#### Mental Health Support

Provide access to counseling services and workshops to help youth manage anxiety, depression, or stress related to social media.

Encourage mindfulness practices and offline recreational activities to reduce digital overload. Promote Cultural Awareness and Hybrid Identities

Encourage youth to explore cultural expression online in ways that respect both global influences and local traditions.

Create online forums or collaborative projects that allow youth to share and celebrate cultural diversity, promoting hybrid identities positively.

#### Policy and Platform-Level Interventions

Social media platforms can integrate features that limit excessive usage, such as reminders, screen-time trackers,



and content moderation.

Policymakers can implement regulations to protect youth from cyberbullying, online harassment, and exposure to inappropriate content.

**Encourage Skill Development and Creativity**

Youth should be motivated to use social media as a tool for learning, skill-building, and career networking, such as creating portfolios, participating in online communities, and showcasing talent.

**Conclusion of Recommendations:**

By adopting these strategies, the positive effects of social media on youth—such as creativity, cultural awareness, and networking—can be maximized, while negative impacts on mental health, identity, and academic performance can be mitigated. Structured engagement, digital literacy, and guidance are critical to ensuring that youth benefit from social media in a balanced and responsible manner.

## LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study provides a comprehensive analysis of social media's influence on youth culture and identity, several limitations must be acknowledged:

### Limitations

**Secondary Data Reliance:**

The study is based entirely on secondary data from scholarly articles, reports, and expert commentaries. No primary surveys or interviews were conducted, which limits direct observation of youth behavior.

**Urban-Centric Context:**

The research focuses on urban Indian youth, particularly from cities like Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, and Delhi. Findings may not fully generalize to rural areas or smaller towns where social media access and cultural norms differ.

**Platform-Specific Differences:**

Social media platforms vary in their usage patterns and influence. This study analyzes platforms collectively, which may overlook platform-specific effects on culture, identity, and mental health.

**Cross-Sectional Perspective:**

The study provides a snapshot of current trends and does not track changes over time. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine how social media impacts identity formation and culture across developmental stages.

**Indirect Measurement of Impact:**

The Participation–Engagement–Impact (PEI) framework scores were based on secondary evidence and expert validation rather than direct measurement, which may introduce subjective bias.

### Future Research

**Primary Data Collection:**

Future studies should involve surveys, interviews, or focus groups with youth to capture first-hand experiences and perspectives on social media use.

**Rural and Diverse Contexts:**

Research should include rural youth and smaller cities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural and identity-related impacts across India.

**Platform-Specific Analysis:**

Studies can examine individual platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, YouTube) to identify unique patterns of engagement, cultural influence, and psychological outcomes.

#### Longitudinal Studies:

Tracking youth over time will help determine the long-term effects of social media on identity formation, cultural expression, mental health, and academic performance.

#### Citizen-Side Studies:

Future research can involve participatory approaches, where youth actively contribute to designing studies and interventions, ensuring that findings and solutions reflect their lived experiences.

#### Intervention Effectiveness:

Future studies should evaluate the effectiveness of digital literacy programs, mental health workshops, and parental guidance strategies in enhancing positive outcomes and mitigating risks.

#### Conclusion of Limitations & Future Research:

Acknowledging these limitations allows for a critical understanding of the study's scope and provides clear directions for future research. By incorporating primary data, longitudinal perspectives, and diverse contexts, future studies can offer deeper insights into the complex interplay between social media, youth culture, and identity.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of social media on youth culture and identity, with a focus on urban Indian youth. Using the Participation–Engagement–Impact (PEI) framework, the research synthesized insights from 20 scholarly studies, global reports, and expert commentaries.

The findings indicate that social media plays a dual role in shaping youth experiences: Positive Contributions:

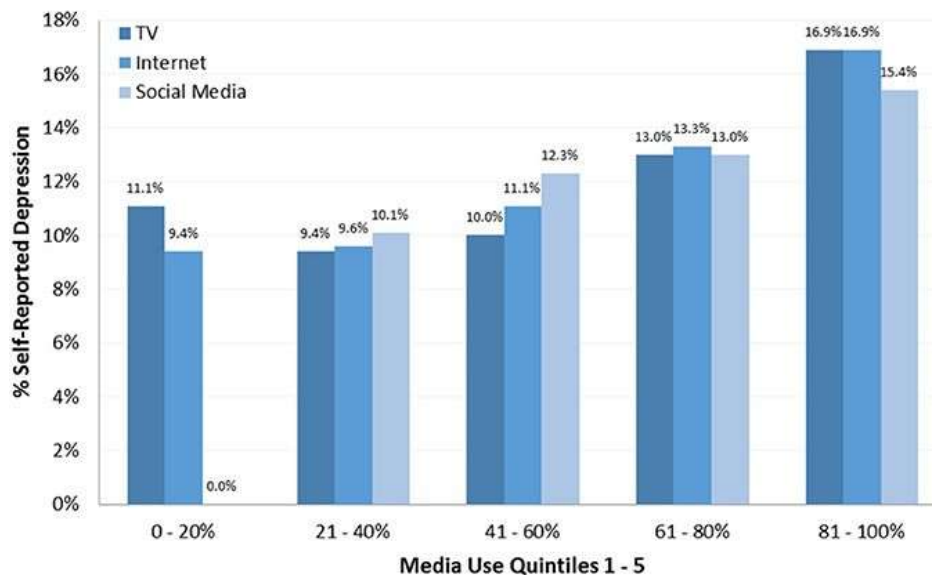
Social media enhances creativity, self-expression, and skill development.

It provides opportunities for cultural exposure, hybrid identity formation, and peer networking.

Online communities and content creation empower youth to share perspectives, collaborate, and develop social competencies.

Negative Consequences:

MBIS Rates of Depression by Media Use Quintiles:  
December 2012



Excessive use is linked to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and identity conflicts.

Over-reliance on digital validation and passive consumption can create social pressure and reduce focus on academics.

Youth without guidance or digital literacy are more vulnerable to negative outcomes.

The study confirms the research hypotheses: H1, that social media positively contributes to youth creativity, cultural awareness, and networking, is supported; and H2, that unmonitored social media use negatively affects mental health and identity stability, is also supported.

By integrating cultural, psychological, and social dimensions, this research contributes a comprehensive understanding of social media's impact on youth in India. The PEI framework effectively captures participation, engagement, and impact, providing a structured approach to analyze both opportunities and risks.

Implications:

The research highlights the importance of digital literacy, structured engagement, parental guidance, and mental health support in maximizing benefits and mitigating risks. Policymakers, educators, parents, and youth themselves can use these insights to foster safe, creative, and culturally enriching online experiences.

In conclusion, while social media is a powerful tool for shaping youth culture and identity, its positive impact depends on balanced, guided, and responsible use. By promoting awareness, moderation, and support systems, society can ensure that youth derive maximum benefits while minimizing potential harm.

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