

Article

The impact of YouTube on social isolation among young people

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Abstract: This research aims to examine the impact of YouTube usage on social isolation among young people, in light of the growing reliance on modern digital platforms by adolescents. The study employed a descriptive approach, using a questionnaire administered to a random sample of 30 secondary school students Abbassia district, Cairo. Findings revealed that YouTube is primarily used for entertainment, replacing traditional television, satisfying curiosity, and, to a lesser extent, for educational purposes. The results indicated that these motives significantly contribute to increased levels of social isolation among adolescents. Participants reported experiencing difficulties in forming friendships and occasionally feeling unaccepted in their social environments. Despite these findings, the study showed no statistically significant differences between males and females in terms of vulnerability to social isolation resulting from YouTube use. The overall results suggest that excessive engagement with YouTube contributes to heightened feelings of isolation, which may lead to broader social, psychological, and health-related issues among youth. The study recommends increasing awareness of the potential dangers of unregulated YouTube consumption. The overall results suggest that excessive engagement with YouTube contributes to heightened feelings of isolation, which may lead to broader social, psychological, and health-related issues among youth.

Keywords: Family, social isolation, social health, social impact, YouTube.

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1. Introduction

The internet has profoundly transformed modern lifestyles, becoming an essential part of everyday life. It has also triggered a major revolution in communication and virtual social relationships, fostering the growth of interpersonal connectivity and opening new avenues for individuals to express their thoughts, fears, and aspirations (Al-Friji, 2021). This expansion has led to the emergence of numerous social media platforms, among which YouTube stands out as one of the most influential. Widely used across demographics—particularly by adolescents—YouTube has gained popularity due to its distinctive features that offer personalised content, often drawing users into isolated digital environments (Bosha, 2019).

Major global institutions have harnessed YouTube's potential to expand their outreach and engage wider audiences. For example, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) has signed multiple agreements to distribute its content on the platform, resulting in increased viewership. YouTube programs often cater to younger audiences, offering a mix of entertainment and educational content in both audio and video formats that can be accessed, downloaded, and revisited at any time (Al-Nimr, 2020). However, this convenience comes with potential risks. It is essential for parents and guardians to monitor children's usage, as some content available on the platform may be inappropriate for their age and could contribute to adverse social effects, including social isolation. Social isolation is defined as a condition in which an individual feels disconnected from others, is detached from their surroundings, and exhibits minimal interest in social engagement or participation. In light of these concerns, this study seeks to examine the impact of YouTube on youth social isolation (Click, 2019).

1.1.Problem

With the advancement of globalization and digital communication tools, social media platforms—particularly YouTube—have emerged as some of the most widely used innovations for interaction and information sharing. While these platforms play an important role in modern life, they are also associated with certain social challenges, most notably social isolation (Khaniq, 2018). YouTube, in particular, has become one of the most extensively accessed platforms worldwide, especially

among adolescents. It offers a wide array of content presented in engaging audiovisual formats, which users can view and replay at their convenience. However, the platform is not without risks. Certain videos and programs can lead to excessive use and even behavioral addiction among youth. When left unregulated, such usage may result in negative consequences, including social isolation and depression (Talib, 2018). In light of these concerns, this study seeks to address the following research question: *What is the impact of YouTube on social isolation among young people?*

1.2.Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine the impact of YouTube usage on social isolation among adolescents. Specifically, it seeks to explore the underlying motives for using YouTube and how its use may influence the social connectivity of young people. The research also aims to determine whether gender plays a role in this relationship.

1.3.Questions and Hypothesis

1. What are the primary motives behind adolescents' use of YouTube?
2. What is the impact of YouTube usage on social isolation among adolescents?

H0: There is no statistically significant effect of YouTube usage on social isolation among adolescents based on gender differences.

2. Literature review

A number of studies have investigated the effects of technology on human behaviour, particularly the influence of YouTube. However, few have specifically addressed the platform's impact on social isolation among Egypt youth.

One notable study is by Tiger (2020), titled *"The Impact of Using YouTube Sites on Social Isolation Among Teenagers in Saudi Arabia."* This research, which adopted a descriptive methodology, included a sample of 240 female students. The findings indicated a significant effect of YouTube use on social isolation, and the study recommended raising awareness among teenagers about the platform's potential drawbacks.

Tariq (2019) examined the influence of YouTube on the social characteristics of university students, employing a sample of 210 male and female students from the University of Baghdad. The study concluded that YouTube significantly affects individual behavior. Similarly, Al-Zumar

(2019) explored the role of YouTube in enhancing self-adaptation among university students. Using a questionnaire distributed to a sample of 120 students from the University of Benghazi, the findings indicated that YouTube contributes positively to self-adaptation; however, the study also warned of the potential risks associated with excessive use of the platform. In another study, Khaniq (2018) focused on the impact of social media on family communication. A questionnaire was administered to a sample of 200 students, and the results revealed a substantial effect on family dynamics. The study emphasized the need to raise awareness among families regarding the possible negative implications of unregulated use of platforms such as YouTube.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. The Emergence of YouTube

At the beginning of the 21st century, various advanced technological tools began to emerge, including modern social media platforms. Among them was YouTube, which was launched in 2005 by a group of former PayPal employees. The platform initially relied on technologies such as Adobe Flash to stream video content and quickly gained popularity by offering users access to a wide variety of videos. YouTube's viewership experienced a significant surge in 2006, marking its transformation into a global platform that has become an integral part of daily life. Its engaging and diverse content continues to provide users with both entertainment and educational value (Wafiq, 2019; Al-Husseini, 2019; Muhammad, 2019).

Key Features of YouTube

YouTube's widespread appeal can be attributed to several unique features. It is a free, user-friendly platform accessible to a global audience, supporting video uploads in various formats including MP4, WMV, and WAV. The platform's simple interface and powerful search engine make content discovery easy for users (Believe Me, 2019). YouTube also offers adjustable privacy settings, allowing users to tailor content visibility. Its high video quality—including HD and holographic formats—enhances the viewing experience, while its promotional capabilities enable individuals and businesses to reach audiences at no cost (Hussein, 2019).

3.2.The Importance of YouTube

Recognising its potential, organisations and public figures have adopted YouTube as a powerful marketing and communication tool. For example, CBS entered into an agreement with YouTube to share programme highlights, while companies like Warner Music and Sumi MBG collaborated with Google to monetise their content through advertising (Atallah, 2019). Politicians such as Tony Blair, Hillary Clinton, and Barack Obama have also used YouTube to communicate their messages to the public, demonstrating the platform's versatility beyond entertainment (Mohammed, *ibid.*).

YouTube enables users, particularly youth, to access information and repeat content as needed—facilitating skill development and learning outside traditional classrooms. Educational and promotional content can be uploaded freely, with support for various formats and languages. This ease of use, combined with massive storage capacity, allows for the sharing of both live and recorded events (WeChat, *ibid.*).

However, YouTube also presents challenges. Security vulnerabilities have allowed unauthorised parties to hack the platform, sometimes broadcasting content contrary to its intended use, including material that contradicts Islamic values. Additionally, exposure to violent or sexually explicit content has raised ethical concerns (Believe Me, *ibid.*). The platform has also hosted politically sensitive material, leading some governments—such as those of China, Armenia, and Iran—to block access (Atallah, *ibid.*). Furthermore, creators face revenue challenges due to widespread free access, prompting YouTube to revise its content policies and impose restrictions on long-format videos (Hussein, *ibid.*).

One of the most concerning consequences of prolonged YouTube usage is social isolation. Studies suggest that individuals who spend extensive time on digital platforms tend to withdraw from real-life interactions with family and friends. Over time, this can lead to psychological distress and even physical symptoms. Users may experience discomfort in social settings, a decline in self-expression, and increased academic difficulties. As isolation deepens, individuals may avoid social interaction entirely, which can contribute to depression or self-harming behaviours.

Social isolation can manifest in several ways. Initially, individuals may exhibit a preference for solitude and reduced interest in social contact. If unaddressed, this may develop into severe

isolation, where the person perceives others as sources of stress or harm and actively avoids interaction. In extreme cases, this detachment can result in hostility towards social engagement and a complete withdrawal from communal life (Mohammed, *ibid.*).

Once signs of social isolation appear, immediate intervention is necessary. Families play a critical role, as they are closest to the affected individual and can provide early support and awareness. Parents should educate children about the risks of social isolation and help them recognise its signs. Health professionals, educators, and policymakers also have a role to play. In several countries, specialised institutions have been established to combat social isolation, supported by legal frameworks that encourage treatment and restrict harmful digital practices. Some governments now mandate parental involvement in rehabilitation programmes to ensure holistic care and reintegration.

Children need to feel safe both at home and in their external environments. Families play a vital role in fostering this sense of security by providing both material and emotional support. Acts of affirmation such as praise and expressions of warmth are essential in treating introversion, as they help the child feel valued and recognised as an important and accepted individual (Wafik, *ibid.*). It is also important to encourage social engagement through friendship-building and participation in cultural, social, and sports activities to strengthen social bonds and solidarity. Establishing inclusive social values—such as respect for diversity and the minimisation of ethnic or religious inequalities—can further support integration. These goals can be achieved through involvement in multicultural community activities (Sadaki, *ibid.*).

Adolescence represents a transitional period marked by significant physical, emotional, mental, and social changes.

- Mental development involves increasing cognitive differentiation and adaptation to social and cultural environments, ultimately guiding behaviour towards adulthood.
- Emotional development is characterised by intense emotional fluctuations, such as anger, sadness, and frustration.
- Social development reflects a shift from dependence on family to the formation of a more independent identity and social presence (Believe Me, *ibid.*).

During this phase, adolescents experience physical changes—such as growth spurts and sexual maturation—as well as psychological and emotional transformations, including heightened sensitivity and difficulty regulating emotional expression. Socially, adolescents seek peer acceptance, personal identity, and societal recognition (Mohammed, *ibid.*).

3.3.Key Challenges Faced During Adolescence

Adolescents often face a range of challenges due to the complexity of this developmental stage:

- **Health issues:** Studies indicate increased physical and mental health concerns among adolescents, including digestive disorders, acne, insomnia, and stress-related symptoms. Nutritional imbalances have also been reported, with 24% of adolescents underweight and 20% overweight—largely due to psychological stress affecting eating habits (Hussein, *ibid.*; Atallah, *ibid.*).
- **Introversion and social isolation:** During late childhood, children show high levels of social engagement. However, by the end of adolescence, many exhibit withdrawal, choosing solitude over social interaction. This may result from a lack of parental understanding or emotional neglect, and may serve as a temporary coping mechanism for anxiety (Al-Husseini, *ibid.*).
- **Time management and leisure:** Adolescents often struggle to channel their energy into productive activities, leading to tension and frustration. The absence of structured leisure time and outlets for creativity can result in internal conflict. Engagement in hobbies and meaningful activities can alleviate this tension and redirect energy towards positive outcomes (Atallah, *ibid.*).
- **Academic underachievement:** Academic delay is a common concern, often reflected in declining performance and lack of motivation. Factors such as school avoidance, lack of self-confidence, mental distraction, and emotional distress contribute to poor academic outcomes (Hussein, *ibid.*).
- **Internet-related issues:** Excessive use of the internet poses several risks. Adolescents may encounter age-inappropriate content, privacy violations, online hate speech, and misinformation. The accessibility of diverse, unfiltered content increases the likelihood of

overuse and confusion between factual and fictional information, potentially affecting academic integrity and emotional wellbeing (Believe Me, *ibid.*).

4. Methodology

The current study adopted a descriptive research approach, which is suitable for analyzing social phenomena by providing an in-depth and accurate description of the issue under investigation. This approach allows for the collection of rich and detailed data that highlights the study's problem. Page | 107

4.1.Participations

The study participants were 30 male and female secondary school students from private schools in the Abbassia district of Cairo. They were selected randomly after being informed of the purpose of the study and that the information collected would be used for the study. They were then given a questionnaire specifically designed for this study, table 1 shows the participations characters.

Table 1. Distribution of the Study Sample According to Personal Variables

Variable	Level	Sample Size Percentage	
Gender	Male	19	63.3%
	Female	11	36.7%
	Total	30	100%
Age	14–16 years	13	43.0%
	17–18 years	17	57.0%
	Total	30	100%
Family Size	Fewer than 4 members	3	10.0%
	5–8 members	17	56.7%
	9–12 members	6	20.0%
	More than 12 members	4	13.3%
	Total	30	100%

Table 1 and indicate that 63.3% of the study sample were male, while 36.7% were female. In terms of age distribution, the highest proportion (57%) belonged to the 17–18 age group, whereas the 14–16 age group accounted for 43% of the respondents. Regarding family size, the majority of participants (57%) came from families with 5 to 8 members. The lowest proportion (10%) represented those from families with fewer than 4 members.

4.2.Tool

To achieve the objectives of the current study, relevant previous research and studies were reviewed to assist in the development of the research instrument. The tool consisted of two main parts:

- Part One included demographic information about the study participants, specifically gender, age, and family size.
- **Part Two** comprised the questionnaire items, which were divided into two thematic dimensions, totalling ten items.

The **first dimension** focused on the *motives behind adolescents' use of YouTube* and included five items:

1. Entertainment and leisure
2. Learning and education
3. Curiosity fulfilment
4. As an alternative to television
5. Following news and current events.

The **second dimension** addressed *the impact of YouTube use on social isolation among adolescents*, also consisting of five items:

1. Feeling unaccepted and lacking social interaction
2. Feeling that one's actions are meaningless
3. Absence of friendships
4. Difficulty in making friends

5. Preference for solitude and withdrawal from family.

To ensure the face validity of the instrument, the initial draft was reviewed by Dr Rakan, who provided expert feedback on the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire items in relation to the study objectives. After incorporating the suggested revisions, the instrument was finalised.

To assess the reliability of the tool, the internal consistency method was employed using Cronbach's Alpha, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Internal Consistency Reliability Coefficient

Instrument Internal Consistency

Questionnaire 0.83

Table 2 presents the internal consistency coefficient, which was found to be appropriate and acceptable for the purposes of this study (Mu‘ammar, 2012). The responses to the questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale. Participants received a score of 5 for "Strongly Agree," 4 for "Agree," 3 for "Neutral," 2 for "Disagree," and 1 for "Strongly Disagree".

After assigning numerical values to respondents' answers on a scale from 5 to 1, the range was calculated by subtracting the lowest value (1) from the highest value (5). To facilitate the interpretation of results, the following classification shown in Table 3 was used.

Table 3. Categories of Arithmetic Means for Interpreting the Study Sample's Responses

Arithmetic Mean Range Level of Response

1.00 – 2.33	Low
2.34 – 3.67	Moderate
3.68 – 5.00	High

5. Results

5.1. Findings Related to the First Question: What Are the Motives Behind Teenagers' Use of YouTube?

To address the first research question, the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the study sample's responses were calculated for the questionnaire items related to adolescents' motives for using YouTube.

Table 4. Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of the Study Sample's Responses to Items Measuring Motives for YouTube Use Among Adolescents

No.	Item	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
1	Entertainment and leisure	4.05	0.44	High
4	Alternative to television	3.70	0.93	High
3	Curiosity fulfilment	3.69	1.07	High
2	Learning and education	3.43	1.50	Moderate
5	Following news and current events	3.08	1.87	Moderate
	Overall Average	3.68	0.51	High

We can see from Table 4 that the arithmetic mean for all items related to teens' motivations for using YouTube ranged between 3.08 and 4.05. "Entertainment and amusement" came in first, with an arithmetic mean of 4.05, while "satisfying curiosity" came in last, with an arithmetic mean of 3.69.

5.2. Findings Related to the Second Question: What Is the Impact of YouTube Use on Social Isolation Among Adolescents?

To address the second research question, the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the participants' responses were calculated for the questionnaire items assessing the impact of YouTube use on social isolation among adolescents.

Table 5. Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of the Study Sample's Responses to Items Measuring the Impact of YouTube Use on Social Isolation Among Adolescents

Table 5. Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of the Study Sample's Responses to Items Measuring the Impact of YouTube Use on Social Isolation Among Adolescents

No. Item	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
1 I find it difficult to make friends.	4.42	0.86	High
2 Others do not accept me and do not interact with me.	3.63	1.16	Moderate
3 I prefer to sit alone away from my family.	3.59	1.25	Moderate
4 I don't have any friends.	3.52	1.13	Moderate
5 I feel that what I do has no value.	3.22	1.14	Moderate
Overall Average	3.68	0.94	High

It is evident from Table 5 that the overall arithmetic mean of the study sample's responses concerning the impact of YouTube use on social isolation among adolescents was 3.68, indicating a high level. The mean scores for individual items ranged between 3.22 and 4.42. Only one item received a high rating—Item (1): *"I find it difficult to make friends"*, with a mean of 4.42. The remaining items were rated at a moderate level, with mean scores ranging from 3.22 to 3.63. The highest among them was Item (2): *"Others do not accept me and do not interact with me"*, with a mean of 3.63, while the lowest was Item (5): *"I feel that what I do has no value"*, with a mean of 3.22.

5.3. Hypothesis Result: There is no statistically significant effect of YouTube use on social isolation among adolescents based on gender differences.

Table 6. t-Test Results According to the Gender Variable

Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	Significance Level (p)
Male	2.6831	0.58579		
Female	2.7600	0.47659	1.260	0.175

Table 4.21 shows that there are no statistically significant differences at the significance level of 0.05 in the responses of the study sample regarding the impact of YouTube use on social isolation among adolescents, based on gender. The significance level of the F -value was 0.175, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

6. Discussion

6.1. Discussion of the First Research Question: What Are the Motives Behind Teenagers' Use of YouTube?

The findings revealed that the arithmetic means for the motives behind adolescents' use of YouTube ranged between 3.08 and 4.05. The results presented in the previous section reveal that the majority of study participants use YouTube primarily for entertainment purposes, a trend likely attributable to the availability of leisure time among individuals. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Al-Nimr (2020) and Tariq (2019), who similarly observed a dominant entertainment-driven use of the platform.

6.2. Discussion of the Second Research Question: What Is the Impact of YouTube Use on Social Isolation Among Adolescents?

The results also indicated, based on the participants' responses, that excessive use of YouTube may contribute to social isolation, as it hinders individuals' ability to engage effectively with others and form meaningful social relationships. These findings are consistent with the studies conducted by Tariq (2019), Khaniq (2018), and Wafi (2018).

6.3. Hypothesis Result: There is no statistically significant effect of YouTube use on social isolation among adolescents based on gender.

The findings support the hypothesis, indicating no significant differences at the 0.05 level in the responses of male and female participants. The F -value significance was 0.175, exceeding the 0.05 threshold, thus confirming the acceptance of the null hypothesis.

This result suggests that both male and female adolescents experience similar levels of social isolation as a consequence of excessive YouTube use. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted by Al-Nimr (2020), Tarek (2019), Al-Zumur (2019), Khaneeq (2018), and Wafi (2018).

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the study clearly indicate that YouTube—like many other tools of globalisation and modern technology—plays a significant role in contributing to feelings of social isolation among individuals, particularly adolescents. This, in turn, may lead to a broader range of social and psychosomatic challenges that can negatively affect the wellbeing of young people. Page | 113

As with similar studies, this research faced certain limitations. One such challenge was the reliance on a social survey questionnaire for data collection. Although effective for gathering quantitative data, this method may lack the depth of insight that qualitative interviews could provide. A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative techniques, may yield more comprehensive and accurate results in future studies.

Given the growing prevalence of social isolation linked to YouTube use within local communities, it is strongly recommended that more experimental and longitudinal research be conducted on this topic in the Egypt and other similar contexts. Such studies could provide a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon and support the development of effective interventions and awareness programmes targeting adolescents.

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