

Article

## The effect of YouTube on social isolation among young people

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license.

**Abstract:** This research aims to examine the effect 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. Based on these conclusions, the study recommends increasing awareness of the potential dangers of unregulated YouTube consumption. It also calls for the implementation of targeted programmes and activities aimed at promoting healthy digital habits among adolescents. Furthermore, the study encourages the conduct of future experimental and mixed-method research to explore the phenomenon more deeply and support evidence-based interventions within the local community.

**Keywords:** *Family, social isolation, social heath, social impact, YouTube.*

## 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 (Alfrei, 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).

Recognising its influence, major organisations have capitalised on YouTube's potential. For instance, CBC signed agreements to broadcast its programmes via YouTube, including news and entertainment content. Likewise, Google partnered with the platform to distribute curated video content in exchange for advertising rights, making certain videos downloadable for up to one month. This surge in popularity positioned YouTube as a key tool for promotional campaigns, particularly those targeting adolescents (Alnimr, 2020).

Adolescence marks a critical developmental stage that bridges late childhood and early adulthood. It is characterised by cognitive, emotional, physical, and social transitions. Due to these unique characteristics, adolescents are more susceptible to the influences of online content, including the risk of experiencing social isolation (Tarek, 2019).

Social isolation refers to a condition in which individuals deliberately detach themselves from their surroundings, showing little interest in social participation or interpersonal interaction (). This study aims to provide a theoretical framework linking the core variables—YouTube usage, adolescence, and social isolation—and to explore the extent to which YouTube contributes to social disconnection among adolescents. The research further seeks to raise awareness of this phenomenon and propose strategies to reduce excessive YouTube use and its negative implications for social relationships.

## Problem

Contemporary society is increasingly shaped by innovations in information and communication technology (ICT), which present both opportunities and challenges. While ICT facilitates efficient social interaction and has become embedded in daily life, it also carries negative consequences. Among

the most impactful of these is YouTube, whose unique features have made it widely popular and deeply influential (Khaneeq, 2018).

YouTube has become a dominant platform, especially among adolescents and young adults, who are drawn to its diverse content that caters to their interests and desires. However, excessive engagement with such platforms has been linked to mental health issues, including depression, psychological detachment, and social isolation .

Adolescents are among the most vulnerable groups in this regard, as the widespread use of platforms like YouTube can hinder their ability to interact with others and adapt socially. This often results in feelings of isolation, interpersonal conflict, and disconnection from their environment—a state commonly referred to as social isolation . Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the impact of YouTube usage on social isolation among adolescents.

### **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.

### **Questions**

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

### **Hypothesis**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no statistically significant effect of YouTube usage on social isolation among adolescents based on gender differences.

### **Literature review**

Youtube is now being used as a primary digital space in the lives of young people, both as a source of education and entertainment, as well as to make meaning and socialize by interacting with the creators of the content and the people in the digital worlds. Shoufan and Mohamed (2022) have brought up in an exhaustive scoping review that YouTube is not only an educational resource, but it is a social platform with specific features, including comments, recommendation algorithms, and subscriber communities, which can potentially affect the behaviours and attitudes of students. They also observed that the patterns of use and their implications on behaviour need systematic study.

Regarding the daily interaction, the term social presence on YouTube has become one of the possible mechanisms related to the minimization or enhancement of social isolation. Shin et al. (2023) revealed that exposure to YouTube content has the potential to produce the feeling of social presence and increase the intentions to interact through liking, commenting, and sharing. This indicates that the site can partially fill the social needs that could not be achieved through direct interaction through mediation. Nonetheless, overdependence on this type of digital interaction can also replace the face-to-face relationships and, thus, add to the social withdrawal in some instances. Mentally, a systematic review by Balcombe and De Leo (2023) offered a subtle treatment of the psychological effect of YouTube. Although informational support and perceived connectedness can be availed by the platform, unhealthy consumption patterns and exposure to specific forms of content could have adverse effects on well-being. These results show the sensitivity of the connection between YouTube use and possible social isolation as well as imply that specific data should be measured directly instead of making general assumptions.

Still more recent experimental findings by Schroder et al. (2025) validated the idea that YouTube-based video interventions will lead to a measurable cognitive and behavioural changes. Their study, even though they did not directly measure the effect of social isolation, supports the notion that YouTube may have real psychosocial effects based on the type and extent of exposure.

In the Arab context, a study in Jordan focused on YouTube culture among university students through structural equation modelling (SEM) showed that it is highly integrated into the life of students (Habes et al., 2022). Though the present research was mainly based on the academic performance, it highlights the social centrality of this platform among the Arab youth, thus, making it necessary to further research its social implications, such as isolation.

### **Research Gap**

Regardless of the increasing interest in education, social presence, and mental health in the context of YouTube, there is still a dearth of evidence specifically investigating social isolation as a key dependent variable in the youth, especially the Arab world. In this regard, the current research aims to fill this gap by addressing the research question of how patterns of YouTube use and social isolation are related to each other among young people, providing context-specific data to the growing body on digital media and social well-being.

## Theoretical Framework

### The Emergence of YouTube

YouTube was launched in 2005 by a group of former PayPal employees and rapidly evolved into one of the most prominent video-sharing platforms on the internet. Utilising Flash technology, it initially hosted a wide variety of content, including films, television clips, music videos, and user-generated material. Its popularity soared following Google's acquisition in 2006, solidifying its status as one of the most visited websites globally (Mohammed, 2019). Since then, YouTube has become a central platform for entertainment and knowledge, with millions of videos uploaded daily and viewed by users worldwide (Wafiq, 2019). This growth highlights the power of technology and creativity in reshaping how information is consumed and shared, firmly establishing YouTube as a defining digital platform of the modern era (Hussein, 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 (Alhousseini, 2019).

### 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.*).

### **YouTube and Social Isolation**

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.

### **Forms of Social Isolation**

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.*).

### **Mechanisms for Reducing Social Isolation**

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.

## The Role of the Family and Social Support

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: A Critical Developmental Stage

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.*).

## 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.*).

**Table 1**

*Distribution of the Study Sample According to Personal Variables*

Variable	Level	Sample Size	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	19	63.3%
	Female	11	36.7%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Age</b>	14–16 years	13	43.0%
	17–18 years	17	57.0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Family Size</b>	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%

Variable	Level	Sample Size Percentage	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

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.

### 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*

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Internal Consistency</b>
<b>Questionnaire</b>	<b>0.83</b>

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*

<b>Arithmetic Mean</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Level of Response</b>
1.00 – 2.33		Low
2.34 – 3.67		Moderate
3.68 – 5.00		High

**Results**

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
<b>Overall Average</b>	3.68	0.51	High

It is evident from Table 4 that the arithmetic means of the study sample's responses regarding the motives for adolescents' use of YouTube ranged between 3.08 and 4.05. The table shows that three items received high ratings, the highest being Item (1): "*Entertainment and leisure*", with a mean score of 4.05, indicating a high level of agreement. The lowest among the high-scoring items was Item (3): "*Curiosity fulfilment*", with a mean of 3.69.

Meanwhile, two items received moderate ratings, with mean scores ranging from 3.08 to 3.43. The highest of these was Item (2): "*Learning and education*", with a mean of 3.43, while the lowest was Item (5): "*Following news and current events*", with a mean of 3.08.

**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*

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
<b>Overall Average</b>	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.

**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.

## Discussion

### **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. Three items received a high rating, with the highest being "*entertainment and leisure*" (Item 1), and the lowest among the high-rated items being "*curiosity fulfilment*" (Item 3). Two items received moderate ratings, ranging from 3.08 to 3.43. The highest of these was "*learning and education*" (Item 2), and the lowest was "*following news and events*" (Item 5).

This result can be attributed to the variety of motives that drive adolescents to use YouTube—chief among them being entertainment, leisure, and satisfying curiosity. These findings are consistent with those of Al-Nimr (2020), Tarek (2019), and Al-Zumur (2019).

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

The results showed that the overall arithmetic mean for the impact of YouTube use on social isolation was 3.68, indicating a high level. One item received a high score—"I find it difficult to make friends" (Item 4). The remaining items received moderate scores, with the highest being "*others do not accept me and do not interact with me*" (Item 1), and the lowest being "*I feel that what I do has no value*" (Item 2).

These results reflect the notable psychological and social effects YouTube can have on adolescents, particularly in promoting social withdrawal. The item "*I find it difficult to make friends*" ranked highest among the indicators of social isolation, underlining a key impact of excessive YouTube use. These findings align with those of Al-Nimr (2020), Tarek (2019), Khaneeq (2018), and Wafi (2018).

**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).

### **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.

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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