

Social Media Affect Adolescence's Discrimination among Marginalized Peers

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Abstract. The unlimited usage of social media of teenagers is a pervasive problem across the world. Many researchers have found the explicable correlation between social networks and discrimination. However, the effect of social media on marginalized teenagers such as LGBTQ and disabled population is yet under-discussed. Adolescents are at a critical stage of physical and psychological growth and maturity, as well as sexual orientation. The LGBTQ+ community experiences a lot of stigmatization and discrimination, which affects their normal lives. Similarly, people with disabilities are also lagging behind in their development due to inadequate education and support. Hence, the present study aims to provide a holistic review of how social media affects adolescence's discrimination among their LGBTQ and disabled peers. The conditions and plight of marginalized communities were first presented. Results implicate that social media could benefit marginalized group by offering a collaborative and united group in some extent. However, there are excessive amounts of long-lasting negative comments towards this population. The true mechanism and causation require further researches.

Keywords: Social media, Discrimination, Marginalized peers.

1. First Section

1.1. A Subsection Sample

Adolescence denotes a phase marked by notable and swift biological, societal, and psychological transformations. The developmental epoch of adolescence is distinguished by the exploration of identity, a burgeoning independence from guardians coupled with a heightened reliance on companions, escalated tendencies toward seeking novel sensations and undertaking risks, as well as the commencement of romantic and sexual affiliations. On the other hand, according to a nationally representative survey in 2019, adolescents in USA use an average of 7 hours and 22 minutes—excluding the time spent using screens for academics. Moreover, it has been documented that the percentage of adolescents responding affirmatively to the inquiry regarding their daily usage of social media has risen from 45% in the year 2015 to 63% in the year 2019 [1]. Social media (SM) has become a significant element of teenagers' lives, affording them a space to establish connections with peers, articulate their individuality, and disseminate their personal experiences.

However, social media could also be a source of discrimination for LGBTQ and disabled teenagers. A number of studies have found that LGBTQ teenager has a higher chance experiencing cyberbullying on social media compared to their heterosexual peers. For example, a research shows that 41% of LGBTQ teenagers had been the victim of cyberbullying, compared to 26% of heterosexual teenagers [2]. Victims of cyberbullying may suffer long-lasting psychological effects, which may lead to changes in their behavior, self-efficacy, and self-esteem [3]. Considering the current amount of non-heterosexual population, this malicious trend is detrimental to the development of society. On the other hand, the disabled teenagers may be targeted with overwhelming comment due to their disability. Nonetheless, despite the risk of encountering discrimination, the platform of SM can also play a role as a beneficial tool for the marginal population. Social media provides them an opportunity to communicate with others who share analogous identities and personalities while also foster their growth. Moreover, the platform facilitates the expansion of their social networks, a pivotal factor in the cultivation, sustenance, or even restoration of relationships. Furthermore, it contributes to the enhancement of teenagers' learning aptitude. It might additionally contribute to the

enhancement of psychological well-being and overall happiness among LGBTQ young groups via mechanisms such as peer interaction and identity management [4]. Hence, in this literature review, the severity and applicable solutions of the pervasive discrimination among young-aged LGBTQ and disabled population would be analyzed by examining relevant researches. Throughout the research, the main database includes Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, Researchgate, and Elicit- a latest research website. Keywords of this literature review include LGBTQ, teenagers, disabled population, discrimination, social media, etc.

2. Target Groups

2.1. Puberty

In this section, the characteristics of the subject of study, teenagers, would be demonstrated with more detail.

Puberty, a significant stage marking the transition from childhood to adulthood, typically starts during the formative years of adolescence. This phase entails a complex integration of physical, psychological, and emotional modifications, with each individual's encounter imbued with distinctiveness.

Puberty can often be characterized with perplexity, underscoring the importance of comprehending the impending changes and their underlying rationales. This stage of human development encompasses a myriad of bodily and cognitive shifts, resulting from fluctuations in the hormonal levels. The advent of puberty typically emerges between the ages of 8 and 14, with females starts earlier than their male counterparts. It is a time when they are developing their identities, exploring their sexuality, and forming relationships. The adolescents are more sensitive hence they are easily influenced by others comment and judges. As puberty unfolds, numerous adolescents starts the progress of self-discovery concerning their sexual orientation, seeking to discern whether they are homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, or aligned with alternative identities.

2.2. LGBTQ population

LGBTQ+ youth are often subjected to social stigma regarding their sexual orientation or identity, which can manifest in various forms such as discrimination, harassment, rejection from family or society, or even violence. These experiences can have detrimental effects on their health. For example, LGBTQ+ youth have a higher risk of experiencing overwhelming mental health, violence, and HIV compared to their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts. Related survey reveals that nearly 70% of LGBTQ+ youth show sadness. During the pandemic, LGBTQ+ students were four times more likely to attempt suicide than others [5].

Nonetheless, recent research has shifted its focus towards resiliency and protective factors that promote the happiness of LGBTQ+ young groups. For example, LGBTQ+ who have access to affirming spaces that acknowledge and validate their sexual orientation and gender identity show reduced rates of suicide attempts and encounter more supportive surroundings. Enhancing the well-being of LGBTQ+ youth requires various aspects, including tackling stigma, discrimination, and violence targeting LGBTQ+ individuals. Leveraging the strengths of LGBTQ+ youth and cultivating support systems such as familial acceptance and secure, validating settings in schools and other contexts also contribute positively to their outcomes [6].

2.3. Disabled population

For disabled teenagers, puberty can be an even more challenging time. They may face discrimination and bullying from their peers, both in person and online. They may also have difficulty accessing the same resources and opportunities as their non-disabled peers. This can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression.

The global count of children with disabilities is nearly 240 million, as outlined in a recent UNICEF report. Children with disabilities confront notable disadvantages when compared to their non-disabled

peers across multiple facets of child well-being. Specifically, in contrast to children without disabilities, those with disabilities exhibit: a 24% reduced likelihood of receiving early stimulation and responsive care; a 42% diminished likelihood of acquiring foundational reading and numeracy skills; a 25% elevated likelihood of being undernourished and a 34% heightened likelihood of experiencing stunted growth; a 53% increased likelihood of displaying symptoms of acute respiratory infection; a 49% higher likelihood of never having attended school; a 47% greater likelihood of being excluded from primary school, a 33% elevated likelihood of being out of lower-secondary school, and a 27% amplified likelihood of being absent from upper secondary school; a 51% heightened likelihood of experiencing unhappiness; a 41% increased likelihood of feeling subjected to discrimination; and a 32% heightened likelihood of enduring severe corporal punishment[7]. Based on the thorough dataset, it is clear that disabled teenagers faced countless inconvenience in their lifetime.

3. Impact of social media

3.1. Impact of social media on LGBTQ Teenagers

Social media platforms is a double-edged sword for LGBTQ+ youth, encompassing both favorable and detrimental aspects. On one hand, these platforms offer a refuge where LGBTQ+ youth can engage with like-minded peers, encouraging an environment of affirmation and support devoid of judgment. Analysis of participants' social media accessibility, Facebook activity frequency, usage as a connection and exploration tool, commitment levels, and comfort perceptions indicates that social media has evolved into a sanctuary for multiply marginalized LGBTQ+ youth to explore aspects of their sexuality and gender [8]. Conversely, a darker facet emerges as LGBTQ+ youth frequently find themselves targets of online bullying that specifically attacks gender identity. Despite the potential for these platforms to facilitate the formation of online communities, they can paradoxically induce feelings of alienation [9]. Recent datas from the Anti-Defamation League expose a stark reality: LGBTQ+ individuals are considerably more susceptible to online harassment in comparison to their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts, with figures reaching 66% versus 38%. Within this subset, 53% attribute the harassment they experience to their sexual orientation [10].

Furthermore, Facebook serves as a platform for heterosexual individuals to propagate vitriolic contents directed at the LGBTQ+ community. A disconcerting observation underscores the intrusion of heterosexual individuals into digital spaces created by the LGBTQ+ population, thereby elevating the risk of online violence and compromising the realms of privacy and security [11]. To be specific, instances of discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community on social media are distressingly common. Offensive comments on posts related to LGBTQ+ issues, targeted harassment towards prominent LGBTQ+ figures, and the creation of derogatory memes and hashtags are some examples of discriminatory behavior. Such conduct not only perpetuates negative stereotypes but also contributes to an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among LGBTQ+ individuals online.

The concept of confirmation bias also contributes to the creation of a discriminative atmosphere. This make individuals only pay attention to information that consist with their pre-existing beliefs. For example, users who hold discriminatory views towards the LGBTQ+ community may encounter content that reinforces their biases, making them less receptive to diverse perspectives and perpetuating discrimination.

Additionally, the internet's ability to connect individuals across vast distances paradoxically contributes to a sense of disconnection and isolation among LGBTQ teens. Instead of forming meaningful in-person connections, they may rely on online interactions as substitutes for genuine relationships. The result is a deficit in true emotional support and camaraderie, which is vital for navigating the challenges unique to LGBTQ experiences. To be specific, in-person relationships hold a unique power in providing emotional support and fostering a sense of camaraderie that cannot be fully replicated through screens. The nuances of body language, tone of voice, and physical presence are all integral components of human interaction that allow for a deeper understanding of emotions

and the conveyance of empathy. In their absence, the online interactions that LGBTQ+ teens increasingly rely upon may lack the authenticity and depth required to fully address their emotional needs.

The challenges unique to LGBTQ+ experiences underscore the importance of true emotional support and understanding. The journey of self-discovery, navigating societal expectations, and addressing potential discrimination demand a level of empathy and connection that is most effectively nurtured through in-person interactions. The absence of these connections may lead to a deficit in the emotional scaffolding that helps LGBTQ+ youth build resilience and cope with the adversities they encounter.

3.2. Impact of social media on Disabled Teenagers

Social media has pivotal effects also on disabled teenagers. On one hand, social media fosters coherence and encourages collaboration between people with similar traits. For instance, research has demonstrated that the Internet can empower intellectually disabled adolescents by enhancing their ability to express themselves, cultivate social relationships, and present themselves primarily as individuals rather than being defined by their disabilities [12]. Moreover, Barlott et al ascertained that social media tend to enhance the social connectedness of intellectually underdeveloped people following a comprehensive examination of their online interactions [13].

However, even though researches have claimed that social media is beneficial for disabled people to participate in normal social activities, social media has detrimental influences on disabled people. Similar to the case of LGBTQ, social media can unwittingly perpetuate ableist attitudes and harmful stereotypes about disability. Offensive and malicious content might hurt disabled individuals circulate widely, creating a hostile environment for disabled users. Additionally, the lack of comprehensive accessibility features prevents disabled individuals from experiencing social media platforms on an equal basis with their non-disabled counterparts. This limitation restricts their ability to engage in social interactions, consume media, and share their perspectives, leading to a sense of isolation and exclusion. In a comprehensive study with 20,000 students, the amount of time disabled teenagers spent on SM exhibited no detectable difference in comparison to students without disabilities. In contrast, noteworthy distinctions were observed in the occurrence of cyberbullying. Students with disabilities exhibited a heightened likelihood of: being solely victims of cyberbullying by a factor of 1.8; acting as sole perpetrators by a factor of 1.7; and participating as both victims and perpetrators, with a likelihood 1.5 times greater [14].

4. Possible solutions

Despite the negative influences on the discussed marginalized groups, none of the researches proposed to restrict these adolescents usage of social media. They all point out the urgency to create contents and platforms that promote connectedness and caring.

For companies, a more rounded policy should be administered in order to protect the right of marginalized group. At least, the policy should be transparent and anti-discrimination. Additionally, better detection algorithms towards cyberbullying should be invented. Tech companies ought to hire more content moderators and trained them properly so that they could recognize malicious cultural and linguistic contexts as precise as possible when enforcing policies around violative content.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the influence of social media on the discrimination experienced by marginalized adolescents, particularly those belonging to the LGBTQ+ and disabled populations, is a complex and multi-faceted issue. The rapid proliferation of social media platforms among teenagers has provided both opportunities and challenges. While social media can offer spaces for marginalized groups to connect, share experiences, and find support, it can also perpetuate discrimination and harassment.

Despite the potential for finding like-minded peers and fostering a sense of community, the prevalence of offensive content exacerbates the mental health challenges faced by LGBTQ+ youth. The lack of comprehensive regulation and algorithmic bias contribute to the persistence of such negative behaviors. Similarly, disabled adolescents encounter a range of difficulties in online spaces, from a lack of accessibility features to the spread of ableism and harmful stereotypes. While social media can foster connections among disabled individuals, it also exposes them to discriminatory comments and derogatory content. The underrepresentation of disabled voices and experiences in media and advertising further compounds the issue.

Solutions of these challenges should prioritize transparent and anti-discriminatory policies within social media platforms. Improving content moderation and completing detection algorithms for cyberbullying can attribute to a more collaborative environment. Recognizing the potential benefits and risks inherent in social media usage is crucial in crafting a more equitable and supportive online environment for all adolescents, irrespective of their identity or abilities. Further research is essential to better understand the intricate dynamics at play and to develop effective strategies to counteract discrimination on social media platforms.

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