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## THE DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCE OF THE INTERNET ON THE PERSONALITY FORMATION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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## РАЗРУШИТЕЛЬНОЕ ВЛИЯНИЕ ИНТЕРНЕТА НА ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ЛИЧНОСТИ ДЕТЕЙ И ПОДРОСТКОВ

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*Abstract.* This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the negative psychological, social, and cognitive impacts of the internet, social media, and influencers on the personality development of children and adolescents. While innovative technologies expand the lives of young people, issues such as internet addiction, identity confusion, and deficiencies in social communication present serious challenges to adolescent psychology. The article examines the causes and mechanisms of these problems through statistical and empirical research and offers practical recommendations for addressing and mitigating their effects.

*Аннотация.* Исследуется негативное психологическое, социальное и когнитивное влияние интернета, социальных сетей и инфлюенсеров на формирование личности детей и подростков. Несмотря на то, что инновационные технологии расширяют жизненное пространство молодежи, такие проблемы, как интернет-зависимость, нарушения самоидентификации, дефицит живого общения и другие риски, создают серьёзные вызовы для психологии подростков. В статье анализируются причины и механизмы этих явлений, опираясь на статистические и эмпирические исследования, а также предлагаются практические рекомендации по минимизации их последствий.

*Keywords:* internet, social media, influencers, adolescent psychology, personality development, internet addiction, self-esteem, social interaction, media literacy.

*Ключевые слова:* интернет, социальные сети, инфлюенсеры, психология подростков, формирование личности, интернет-зависимость, самооценка, социальное общение, медиаграмотность.

The Internet is one of the most significant technological breakthroughs of the 21st century. It has accelerated access to information, simplified communication, and strengthened the global flow of data. At the same time, it has introduced a constant stream of information that significantly influences the worldview and psychological development of younger generations. Children and adolescents represent a particularly sensitive demographic, as their cognitive, social, and emotional skills are still actively forming. For them, the internet serves as a tool for learning, entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression.

However, despite its numerous advantages, the internet also poses serious psychological and developmental risks. These include dependency on digital media, disruption of self-identity, difficulties in real-life communication, and a blurring of the boundary between virtual and real life. Children and adolescents are especially vulnerable to these influences due to the ongoing formation of their personality and psychological resilience.

This article aims to explore and scientifically examine the negative impact of the internet and social media on the personality development of children and adolescents. It seeks to identify key mechanisms underlying these effects and provide practical recommendations for prevention. The discussion focuses on issues such as internet addiction, impaired self-perception, communication challenges, and the psychological consequences of excessive immersion in virtual environments.

Therefore, a comprehensive examination of the impact of the internet and social media on the psycho-emotional development of adolescents, along with preventative measures against associated risks, has become a relevant scientific and practical issue today.

The influence of the internet on human psychology has emerged as one of the core subjects of numerous interdisciplinary studies in recent years, particularly in the fields of psychology, pedagogy, and sociology. The rapid advancement of communication technologies and the widespread use of social media have fundamentally transformed people's daily lives — especially those of adolescents.

It is also essential to consider the internet's influence on national identity and language. Scholar Zh. T. Kadenova highlights the impact of the internet on native languages as follows: "With each passing day, the world becomes increasingly complex. The entire planet is interconnected by internet networks, and any information can be disseminated via informational websites and social networks. People around the world primarily communicate in a few dominant languages (English, Chinese, German, French, Russian), while other languages face the threat of extinction. In the age of globalization, people are becoming more alike, and national customs, traditions, and cultures are gradually being forgotten" [1].

Adolescents actively use social media platforms to access information, establish social connections, and define their place in society. While these digital resources offer opportunities for learning, creativity, and social self-affirmation, they also pose significant psychological risks in certain cases.

In particular, adolescents' self-esteem is often shaped by stereotypical models presented through social media. As a result, young people may face challenges such as constant comparison with others, the creation of idealized virtual identities, and the pressure to conform to these unrealistic standards. Such dynamics can negatively impact key psychological processes, including self-acceptance, personal integrity, and emotional stability.

Social media influencers—individuals with large-scale audiences across digital platforms—often serve as role models, image-setters, and ideals for youth. The content shared by these influencers creates what is known as a parasocial relationship with their audience—an illusion of a quasi-real interaction between the user and the influencer [2].

This relationship exerts emotional influence and motivates users to align themselves with the influencer's values and worldview. Psychological literacy refers to an individual's ability to understand and manage their own mental state, emotions, and stress factors. In contemporary research, this concept is considered a key factor in preventing mental health disorders, fostering self-awareness, and promoting help-seeking behavior [3].

Mental health-related content available on the internet—such as posts or videos about emotional well-being—can play a vital role in increasing young people's psychological literacy. However, when such content is presented or interpreted out of context, it may reinforce psychological stereotypes and misconceptions, potentially causing more harm than good [4].

Internet addiction is becoming an increasingly prevalent issue, especially among adolescents, as virtual interactions start to replace real-life social connections. This shift negatively affects their social and cognitive development. Moreover, one of the most alarming trends observed globally — and increasingly in Kyrgyz society — is the erosion of face-to-face family communication. Not only children and teenagers, but also parents are becoming dependent on digital media. Rather than engaging in meaningful conversations with their children, many parents now spend considerable time on social media platforms [5].

As a result, core family values and child-parent interactions are being neglected, while gaining “likes” and followers online is prioritized. Unfortunately, this shift has led to various negative behavioral outcomes, which are becoming more frequent and normalized in society. The Emergence of Internet Addiction and Its Psychological Consequences Among Adolescents. The development of internet addiction among adolescents is influenced by a variety of factors. At the core lies the adolescent’s personal identity formation—a critical developmental process involving the understanding of one’s self and values. Social media, particularly the portrayal of “ideal” lives by influencers through filtered images and the pursuit of likes, can significantly disrupt young people's ability to form a stable and authentic self-image. This often leads to: social Comparison: Adolescents may feel inferior when comparing themselves to seemingly perfect online personas; depression: A decline in self-esteem and confidence; loss of Emotional Balance: Difficulty in interpreting and regulating personal emotions; these effects underline the strong role social media influencers play in shaping youth behavior, as adolescents tend to form quick emotional attachments to these figures.

Additionally, internet-based communication is replacing real-life social interaction among youth, leading to. Deterioration of face-to-face communication: In-person conversations are increasingly replaced by chats and emojis. Decline in communicative skills: Verbal expression becomes less clear, and emotional conveyance is weakened. Increase in misunderstandings: Adolescents struggle to navigate real-world social situations due to underdeveloped interpersonal skills.

Children often experience difficulties in interpreting emotional signals in real-life interactions, which negatively affects the development of their social skills. Negative or insufficient real-world communication experiences can result in reduced empathy, misinterpretation of emotions, and weakened interpersonal competence.

Several features of online platforms contribute to this effect: an abundance of positive stimuli (likes, comments, reactions); instant actions and immediate feedback; access to personal information; gamified elements (such as games, rankings, and badges).

Children and adolescents tend to perceive these digital stimuli as forms of emotional reward, which may lead to psychological dependence. Moreover, the content algorithms used by social media and video platforms are designed to cater to the user’s interests, thereby reinforcing engagement and increasing the risk of digital addiction. A number of empirical studies have shown that excessive engagement with the internet can lead to various negative psychological effects in adolescents, including: anxiety and restlessness — often linked to constant social comparison, symptoms of depression — resulting from the discrepancy between idealized virtual representations and real life, sleep disturbances — due to prolonged screen time, especially before bedtime, low self-esteem — caused by unmet expectations and unachieved goals in real life.

On social media platforms, users typically present only the most desirable moments of their lives. Adolescents, being in the process of identity formation, often accept these representations as realistic standards, which can lead to: emotional distress from comparing themselves to others, internalization of unrealistic ideals, detachment from attainable, real-world goals, dissociation — a psychological state of disconnect from reality [6-8].

Overvaluing online presence can lead to the distortion of personal identity. Adolescents may begin to prioritize their virtual “self-image” over their authentic sense of self. This tendency can result in: identity fragmentation; psychological instability; loss of life direction and personal goals.

For adolescents, understanding and accepting their core identity is a crucial part of psychological development. How they evaluate themselves, envision their future self, and interact with society directly influences the process of identity formation [8].

Social media platforms often expose youth to curated and idealized images of others. As a result, adolescents are more likely to engage in upward social comparisons. Psychological research shows that such comparisons frequently lead to: low self-confidence; persistent self-evaluation against unrealistic standards.

These internal conflicts may hinder the formation of a stable, resilient personality. Digital communication plays a significant role in the everyday interactions of modern youth. However, alongside its advantages, several critical drawbacks have been identified. Communication without live interpersonal interaction reduces the ability to interpret emotional signals such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language. This, in turn, contributes to: a decline in social skills; difficulty in recognizing natural interpersonal differences; challenges in expressing thoughts clearly; increased emotional instability and feelings of loneliness. Emotional instability and loneliness are key psychological consequences frequently observed among adolescents who spend excessive time on the internet and social media platforms. As face-to-face interaction decreases, young people tend to rely more heavily on virtual communication.

In digital environments, it becomes difficult to fully understand emotions, provide support, or build warm interpersonal relationships. This leads to emotionally distant and artificial interactions, which can hinder the development of empathy and deeper social connections.

As a result: adolescents may struggle to express their emotions appropriately and experience difficulties in understanding the emotions of others; despite having many virtual “friends,” they begin to feel lonely due to the lack of genuine emotional support; these factors often contribute to emotional instability, increased anxiety, and, in some cases, depressive symptoms. In summary, the deeper young people immerse themselves in the virtual world, the more they distance themselves from authentic social interactions, leading to a heightened sense of loneliness and emotional emptiness. Adolescents who increasingly rely on social media as a primary means of communication risk undervaluing real-life interpersonal relationships. Compared to face-to-face interactions, virtual communication tends to be emotionally shallow, which reinforces feelings of isolation and social withdrawal. The global digital space cannot fully replace the social environment of real life. The gap between virtual and actual reality leaves profound psychological and cognitive impacts on youth, shaping how they form identity, relationships, and emotional resilience.

Real life is defined by emotional connections, meaningful responses, and physical engagement. Face-to-face interaction, the perception of human emotions, and the evaluation of immediate reactions are all essential components in the development of one’s personality and identity. In contrast, the virtual world represents a sublimated reality, constructed through visual content and digitally enhanced images. Online, idealized versions of life are often displayed—versions that rarely align with real-life behavior or experiences. Young people, when comparing themselves to these virtual ideals, frequently face challenges in identifying genuine values and may struggle to distinguish between constructed digital personas and authentic personal identity.

To reduce the negative impact of the internet, it is necessary to implement the following practical measures:

1. Integration of Media Literacy into School Curricula. Educational institutions should incorporate subjects that teach digital literacy, emotional intelligence, and the risks associated with

internet use. This will equip young people with the knowledge and skills to use online platforms responsibly and safely.

2. Parental Education. Parents should not only monitor their children's internet usage but also be educated about healthy digital habits and the psychological effects of excessive screen time. This will help them guide their children more effectively.

3. Community and Psychological Support. Schools should involve professional psychologists, organize training sessions to prevent internet addiction, and establish emotional support centers. Such measures are crucial for protecting and strengthening the mental health of young people. Adolescents who spend excessive time online often struggle with identity formation and self-understanding. The use of social media is significantly correlated with increased feelings of loneliness and symptoms of depression among adolescents. Virtual content has a direct negative impact on children's mental health. Their research highlights how idealized images and narratives on the internet distort self-perception and hinder the development of a stable personal identity.

Based on the conducted research, the psychological, cognitive, and social negative impacts of the internet and social media on the identity formation of children and adolescents have been extensively examined. Drawing on empirical and theoretical sources, the study identified key risk factors such as excessive dependency on internet and social media content, heightened social comparison, social isolation, and the blurring of boundaries between virtual and real life.

These factors significantly hinder the development of core personal qualities in adolescents, adversely affecting their psycho-emotional stability and social adaptation within society. Consequently, phenomena such as decreased self-esteem, depressive states, emotional instability, and difficulties in social integration may arise among children and youth.

To mitigate the negative effects of the internet, it is recommended to introduce media literacy programs within the educational system, provide training for parents, and strengthen psychological support mechanisms at the school level. These measures will facilitate a safer and healthier digital environment for young people, promoting their successful adaptation in the digital age.

To prevent and minimize such problems, a systematic and comprehensive approach is required. For example, it is crucial to enhance media literacy, strengthen the roles of parents and teachers in digital education, and develop psychological support services within educational institutions. Additionally, it is important to develop strategic policies at the state level aimed at protecting the digital safety and health of children and adolescents.

Given the deep integration of the internet into everyday life, supporting the identity formation of children and adolescents is a shared responsibility of society, the education system, and families.

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