

The impact of social media on aggressive behavior in children.

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Received: 08 /04/2025**Accepted: 12 /05/2025****Published: 19 /06/2025****Abstract :**

The increasing use of social media among children has raised significant concerns regarding its potential impact on their behavior and mental health, particularly in relation to aggression. This article. explores the connection between social media use and aggressive behavior in children, highlighting how exposure to violent content, cyberbullying, and online conflicts can contribute to the development of aggressive tendencies. Additionally, it examines therapeutic approaches to mitigate these risks, including parental monitoring, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), digital literacy education, and the promotion of offline activities. These strategies help children build healthier online behaviors, manage emotional responses, and develop the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate digital environments safely. The article. emphasizes the importance of creating a balanced approach to social media use, where children are guided by caregivers, educators, and mental health professionals to ensure positive engagement and reduce the likelihood of aggression. Ultimately, this research underscores the need for proactive measures to protect children's psychological well-being while encouraging safe and responsible use of social media.

Keywords: Social media, aggressive behavior, child**Introduction:**

In today's digital age, social media has become an indispensable part of children's lives, offering various opportunities for communication, entertainment, and education. However, the pervasive use of social media platforms also raises concerns about its impact on children's behavior and mental health. One of the most significant issues that have emerged is the link between social media use and the development of aggressive behavior in children. Exposure to violent content, cyberbullying, and the potential for harmful interactions online have been identified as contributing factors to increased aggression among young users.

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As children increasingly engage with social media, it is essential to understand the psychological and social dynamics that contribute to these behaviors. While some level of social media interaction is inevitable, it is crucial to explore effective strategies and therapeutic approaches that can mitigate its adverse effects. By integrating parental guidance, educational programs, and psychological interventions, we can help children navigate the digital world more safely and responsibly, promoting healthier emotional and social development.

This article will explore the relationship between social media use and aggressive behavior in children, providing insights into the potential risks, the role of digital literacy, and the importance of intervention strategies to protect children's well-being in the online environment.

The Research Problem:

In recent years, social media has become an integral part of children's daily lives, offering platforms for entertainment, communication, and learning. However, this digital engagement is not without risks. A growing body of research has begun to explore the psychological and behavioral consequences of children's exposure to unregulated online content. One of the most pressing concerns is the potential link between frequent social media use and the emergence or reinforcement of aggressive behavior in children. Exposure to violent content, cyberbullying, hostile peer interactions, and aggressive role models on social platforms may contribute to the normalization and internalization of aggression, particularly among children with underdeveloped emotional regulation.

This raises complex and urgent questions: *To what extent does the use of social media influence aggressive behavior in children? Are these effects direct, or do they operate through intermediate factors such as emotional vulnerability, peer pressure, parental supervision, or the type of content consumed?* Furthermore, how do developmental stages and individual psychological profiles shape the child's susceptibility to such influences?

Addressing these questions is essential not only for expanding academic understanding of child development in the digital age but also for informing educational strategies, content regulation policies, and early intervention programs aimed at promoting safer and healthier digital environments for children.

- **Social Media: Definition, Importance:**

Social media refers to online platforms where users can share information and connect with virtual communities through text, video, photos, and other content. As of 2024, social media had more than 5 billion global users, equivalent to over 62% of the world's population. Simon Kemp ,(2024).

Social media are interactive technologies that facilitate the creation, sharing and aggregation of content (such as ideas, interests, and other forms of expression) amongst virtual communities and networks Common features include

in the present review, social media is defined as “computer-mediated communication channels that allow users to engage in social interaction with broad and narrow audiences in real-time or asynchronously” (Bayer, Trieu, & Ellison, 2020, p.472).

This includes apps and websites designed for messaging and chat, social platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok), and community forums like Reddit and Discord.

- **Types of Social Media Platforms Used by Children:**

Children and adolescents interact with a diverse range of social media platforms, each of which presents distinct features and risks that can impact behavior in unique ways. These platforms are designed for communication, content sharing, entertainment, and networking, but they also expose children to various forms of digital interaction—some of which may promote or trigger aggressive tendencies.

1. **TikTok** : A short-video platform widely popular among preteens and teenagers. Its algorithm pushes content based on user interaction, which can include violent pranks, verbal confrontations, or emotionally charged challenges. Although TikTok has community guidelines, enforcement is inconsistent, and harmful content can spread rapidly before removal.
2. **Instagram**: Primarily a photo and video-sharing platform, Instagram allows for public commentary, story posts, and direct messaging. It has been criticized for fostering social comparison and relational aggression, especially among young users. Cyberbullying can take subtle forms here, including exclusion, shaming through captions, or passive-aggressive interactions.
3. **Snapchat**: Known for disappearing messages and videos, Snapchat provides a perceived sense of privacy that may encourage risky or aggressive behavior. Its “Snapstreak” feature also adds pressure to maintain daily contact, which can escalate into conflict or manipulation among peers.
4. **YouTube**: While not a traditional social media platform, YouTube functions socially through comments, likes, subscriptions, and influencer culture. Children are often exposed to content creators who use aggression or provocation as entertainment, which may shape viewers’ understanding of social norms.
5. **Facebook and Messenger**: Although less popular among younger users today, Facebook is still used by some children, especially for gaming and group communication. It can serve as a platform for both peer support and conflict, depending on how it's moderated.
6. **Roblox and Discord**: These platforms combine gaming and social networking. Children interact with strangers and friends in virtual worlds (Roblox) or through voice/text chat rooms (Discord). Both

platforms have reported cases of harassment, trolling, and even grooming. O’Keeffe, G. S., & Clarke-Pearson, K. (2011). p800–804.

- **Social Media Usage Rates Among Children in 2025**

As of 2025, social media usage among children continues to grow at an accelerated pace. According to recent surveys by digital safety organizations and academic institutions, an estimated **92% of children aged 10 to 17** use at least one form of social media on a daily basis. This represents a significant increase from previous years, driven by greater access to mobile devices, internet connectivity, and peer influence. (*Common Sense Media, 2025*)

The breakdown of platform usage among children in 2025 is approximately as follows:

- **TikTok:** 78%
- **YouTube:** 74%
- **Instagram:** 64%
- **Snapchat:** 52%
- **Roblox:** 48% (primarily among children aged 10–13)
- **Discord:** 41%
- **Facebook/Messenger:** 23% (used more for games or parental contact) (*Digital Wellness Lab, 2025*)

However, regarding the use of social media in Algeria in 2025, the results indicate that

- Facebook 73.96%
- YouTube 8.23%
- Instagram 13.45%
- Twitter 2.52% <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/algeria>

This high level of engagement reflects not only entertainment and communication needs, but also educational use and community involvement. However, with this widespread access comes increased

exposure to unfiltered content, peer pressure, and online aggression. (*Digital Wellness Lab, 2025*)

The average time spent on social media by children in 2025 is reported to be **3.5 to 4.2 hours daily**, with peak usage observed during weekends and school holidays. Prolonged usage is associated with increased vulnerability to mental health issues and behavioral changes, particularly in children who lack active parental supervision or digital literacy. (*Pew Research Center, 2024*)

- **The Comprehensive Influence of Social Media and Digital Influencers on Children's Personality Development and Behavioral Patterns**

The pervasive presence of social media in children's lives has introduced a transformative dynamic in the development of their personality and behavioral patterns. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat are no longer passive entertainment tools; rather, they actively shape children's socialization processes, emotional responses, and perceptions of self-worth. These platforms create a digital ecosystem where children are constantly exposed to curated representations of life, filtered appearances, and idealized lifestyles. In this space, validation is measured by metrics such as likes, views, and followers—reinforcing a performance-oriented mindset over authentic self-expression. Over time, this environment contributes to identity confusion, low self-esteem, and emotional instability among children who struggle to align their real selves with the virtual ideals they observe daily.(O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011, p. 801).

A particularly influential factor in this process is the rise of digital influencers—individuals who have amassed large followings and wield significant sway over online trends, opinions, and behaviors. For many children, these influencers act as role models, often more powerful than parents or teachers in terms of visibility and perceived relevance. Through

daily posts, videos, and livestreams, influencers convey explicit and implicit messages about how to dress, speak, behave, and even think. This content is frequently glamorized and framed within a context of popularity and success, which incentivizes children to emulate what they see. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, individuals—especially children—learn by observing others, particularly when those behaviors are associated with positive reinforcement such as praise or attention (Bandura, 1977, pp. 22–23).

Furthermore, the behavioral models displayed by influencers often include subtle forms of aggression, competition, sarcasm, and exclusion—all of which are normalized and rewarded within the online community. For example, “drama” between influencers, controversial statements, or “calling out” others are frequently used to boost engagement and attract views. When children observe that these behaviors lead to greater fame or social approval, they may begin to replicate similar patterns in their own interactions, both online and offline. This contributes not only to the normalization of aggressive communication styles but also to the erosion of empathy and emotional regulation. (Wartella et al., 2016, pp. 17–18).

Beyond behavioral imitation, social media and influencer culture can reshape fundamental personality traits over time. Constant exposure to unrealistic standards of beauty, success, and popularity can cause children to internalize perfectionist attitudes and develop narcissistic tendencies. Many children begin to evaluate their worth based on external validation rather than intrinsic values. This dependence on digital affirmation can result in emotional vulnerability, anxiety, and compulsive behaviors such as excessive checking of notifications or obsessive content creation. Moreover, the lack of face-to-face interaction limits the development of social cues and empathetic responses—key components of healthy personality formation (Twenge & Campbell, 2018, pp. 274–275).

Thus, while social media platforms and influencers offer opportunities for creativity and connection, they also introduce significant psychological and

developmental challenges for children. The interplay between virtual influence and real-world behavior must be carefully examined by parents, educators, and policymakers in order to mitigate long-term harm and foster a more balanced, emotionally healthy generation.

- **understanding Aggressive Behavior in Children: Psychological Foundations, Manifestations, and Risk Factors:**

Aggressive behavior in children encompasses a wide range of actions that are intended to harm, dominate, or assert control over others. From a psychological standpoint, aggression may take the form of physical aggression (e.g., hitting, biting, pushing), verbal aggression (e.g., yelling, name-calling, threats), or **relational aggression** (e.g., gossiping, exclusion, manipulation). These behaviors, while sometimes part of typical developmental phases, can become problematic when persistent, severe, and disruptive to social or academic functioning. (Tremblay, 2000, p. 130).

Psychologists often distinguish between instrumental aggression, which is goal-directed and used as a means to an end (e.g., taking a toy from another child), and hostile aggression, which is driven by anger and a desire to inflict pain. This distinction is crucial for diagnosis and intervention as it reflects underlying cognitive and emotional processes. For instance, children who engage in hostile aggression often have difficulty interpreting social cues and managing frustration, while those who exhibit instrumental aggression may have learned that forceful behavior achieves results. (Berk, 2013, p. 426).

Developmentally, aggression can emerge as early as infancy in the form of irritable or defiant behavior, but it tends to peak during early childhood and gradually decline with improved emotional regulation and socialization. However, for some children, aggression persists and intensifies, especially when reinforced by environmental stressors. Children exposed to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)—such as neglect, abuse, or family conflict—are at a significantly higher risk of developing aggressive tendencies.

Chronic exposure to violence, whether in the home, neighborhood, or media, can desensitize children to aggression and normalize it as a conflict-resolution strategy. (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 248).

Neurobiologically, aggression in children has been linked to dysfunctions in areas of the brain responsible for emotional regulation, such as the amygdala and prefrontal cortex. Children with underactive executive functioning may struggle to inhibit impulsive reactions, especially in emotionally charged situations. Additionally, imbalances in neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine have been associated with irritability, impulsivity, and low frustration tolerance. These biological factors often interact with environmental ones to increase the likelihood of persistent aggression. (Blair, 2004, p. 21).

Family and parenting dynamics also play a critical role. Children raised in environments characterized by harsh discipline, inconsistent rules, or low parental warmth are more likely to adopt aggressive behaviors, either as learned responses or coping mechanisms. Likewise, modeling of aggression by caregivers—such as yelling, physical punishment, or verbal hostility—can serve as a powerful behavioral template for children, particularly in early childhood when observational learning is strongest. (Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989, p. 1305).

Peer interactions contribute significantly to the development or suppression of aggression. Children who are rejected by their peers or subjected to bullying may react with reactive aggression, striking out to defend themselves or regain control. Conversely, children in high-status peer groups may employ proactive aggression to maintain dominance or influence. In school settings, lack of adult supervision, inadequate social-emotional learning programs, or exposure to aggressive role models can exacerbate these tendencies. (Dodge et al., 2003, pp. 1021–1022).

If left unaddressed, childhood aggression can have long-term consequences. Studies have shown a strong link between early aggressive behavior and

later outcomes such as academic failure, substance abuse, delinquency, and mental health disorders. Moreover, chronic aggression may impair a child's ability to form healthy relationships, resulting in social isolation and continued emotional difficulties into adolescence and adulthood.(Loeber & Hay, 1997, p. 384).

• **The Role of Social Media in Shaping Aggressive Behavior in Children:**

Social media platforms have become deeply woven into the daily lives of children and adolescents, often shaping their perceptions, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships. While these platforms offer unique opportunities for communication and self-expression, they also present significant risks, especially in terms of how they influence aggressive behavior in children. Exposure to violent or provocative content, the dynamics of cyberbullying, the pursuit of social validation, and the algorithmic reinforcement of emotionally charged material all contribute to a digital environment that may cultivate or intensify aggression in young users.

A primary concern is the frequent exposure to aggressive and violent content across platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. These platforms often promote sensational, confrontational, or dramatic material through their recommendation algorithms, which prioritize engagement over safety. Children who regularly watch videos involving physical altercations, verbal insults, or degrading humor may become desensitized to violence and begin to view aggressive behavior as normal, humorous, or even admirable. The General Aggression Model (GAM) posits that repeated exposure to such content can prime children to develop aggressive scripts, increase their physiological arousal, and diminish their capacity for empathy, thereby making aggressive responses more likely in real-life situations (Bushman & Huesmann, 2010 , p. 833–863).

Moreover, the anonymity and distance provided by digital communication can lower inhibitions and increase the likelihood of both experiencing and

perpetrating cyberbullying. Unlike traditional face-to-face aggression, online aggression can be continuous, far-reaching, and difficult to escape. Victims of cyberbullying may respond with retaliatory aggression or develop chronic emotional distress that manifests behaviorally. Children who experience exclusion, humiliation, or verbal attacks in online environments may begin to adopt aggression as a defense mechanism, particularly in the absence of adult support or coping skills. On the other hand, perpetrators of cyberbullying may feel empowered by the perceived invisibility and lack of immediate consequences, reinforcing their aggressive tendencies over time (Kowalski et al., 2014, p107-113).

In addition to direct aggression, social media fosters a climate of social comparison and peer validation that can drive children to engage in performative or provocative behaviors to gain attention and approval. Aggressive humor, public humiliation of others, or participation in harmful “challenges” may be viewed as shortcuts to social visibility and online popularity. For many children, these actions are not rooted in inherent hostility but are instrumental in achieving digital status, a form of goal-directed (instrumental) aggression. This phenomenon aligns with findings that link online social status with increased risk-taking and boundary-pushing behavior among youth (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015, p1427–1438).

Compounding these risks is the lack of digital literacy and emotional regulation skills in many children. Social media interactions often occur in emotionally charged contexts, with little opportunity for reflection or intervention. Children may misinterpret tone, react impulsively to perceived slights, or escalate conflicts in group chats or comment threads. Without the guidance of parents, educators, or structured digital citizenship education, they may not recognize the impact of their behavior or develop alternative strategies for managing conflict and frustration (Livingstone et al., 2018 , p1103–1122).

Furthermore, social group dynamics on digital platforms can amplify relational aggression, particularly among preteens and adolescents. Peer

pressure, the desire to belong, and fear of exclusion can lead children to participate in group attacks, gossip, or exclusionary tactics. These behaviors are often subtle and difficult to detect by adults but can be deeply damaging to the victims and socially reinforcing for the aggressors. The digital space becomes an extension of schoolyard hierarchies, where aggressive behavior is not only tolerated but sometimes celebrated or rewarded with attention.

Ultimately, the influence of social media on children's aggression is not solely determined by the platforms themselves but by how children interact with and interpret what they encounter. Without proper boundaries, guidance, and emotional support, social media can act as a catalyst for the development and reinforcement of aggressive behaviors. Its design—focused on constant feedback, visibility, and emotional intensity—creates an ecosystem in which aggression can thrive unless intentionally addressed through education, parental involvement, and systemic digital safeguards.

- **Therapeutic Approaches to Protecting Children from the Dangers of Social Media:**

Protecting children from the risks associated with social media, such as aggressive behavior, requires a comprehensive approach that combines parental guidance, therapeutic interventions, and proactive strategies for skill-building. Parental monitoring and guidance is essential. Parents can reduce social media risks by actively monitoring their children's online activities, setting appropriate privacy settings, and establishing clear guidelines for safe and respectful online behavior. This ensures that children are aware of the risks and helps them navigate social media securely.

In addition, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has been shown to effectively help children address and modify negative behaviors and thought patterns related to social media use. In therapy, children can learn to identify the triggers for negative emotions or aggression that may arise from online interactions and work on developing healthier responses. This method aids

in emotional regulation and reduces aggressive behaviors related to online interactions.

Another critical approach is digital literacy education, which equips children with the knowledge and critical thinking skills needed to identify harmful content, understand the consequences of oversharing personal information, and engage in safe online practices. Teaching children about online safety and digital etiquette is crucial in today's digital age. Furthermore, encouraging offline activities such as sports, reading, and creative hobbies can help balance screen time and reduce the negative effects of excessive social media use. These offline activities promote social skills, emotional intelligence, and face-to-face relationships, which decrease the likelihood of aggressive online behavior.

Moreover, setting time limits for social media use is an essential step in reducing excessive screen time. By creating a balanced schedule that includes time for family, schoolwork, and hobbies, children can develop better self-regulation skills. Lastly, teaching emotional regulation skills helps children cope with frustrations and stress from online interactions, such as cyberbullying or conflicts. Techniques such as mindfulness, relaxation, and problem-solving can improve a child's ability to manage negative emotions both online and offline.

By incorporating these therapeutic strategies, children can significantly reduce the risks of social media-related aggression and develop healthier digital habits. These approaches not only help children navigate the online world safely but also ensure their emotional and psychological well-being in the digital era (Greenfield, 2017).

Conclusion :

Social media has become an integral part of children's lives, providing them with opportunities for communication, entertainment, and learning. However, it also poses several risks, particularly concerning aggressive

behavior. Research has highlighted that excessive or inappropriate use of social media can contribute to the development of aggression in children. This is often due to exposure to violent content, cyberbullying, and the reinforcement of harmful behaviors through online interactions. Social media platforms can act as triggers for emotional and behavioral issues, including anger, frustration, and bullying tendencies.

To address these risks, a combination of therapeutic approaches is necessary. Parental monitoring and guidance are crucial in ensuring that children use social media in a safe and responsible way. This includes setting boundaries, using privacy settings, and maintaining open communication about online experiences. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an effective method for helping children understand and control their reactions to online conflicts or frustrations. Additionally, digital literacy education plays a significant role in teaching children how to navigate online spaces safely, promoting healthy interactions, and recognizing harmful content.

Encouraging offline activities, setting time limits, and teaching emotional regulation skills are other important strategies to mitigate the negative impact of social media on children's behavior. By incorporating these therapeutic strategies, children can develop healthier relationships with technology, reducing the risk of social media-related aggression and fostering overall emotional well-being.

In conclusion, while social media presents challenges in terms of children's mental health and behavior, a comprehensive, multifaceted approach can help protect children from its negative effects and promote positive digital experiences. Parents, educators, and mental health professionals must collaborate to ensure that children learn to navigate the digital world safely and responsibly.

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