

ALVIN L. SAMPAGAN (POSTAL DISTRICT)

COLUMN WRITING:

Behind the Screen: Social Media and Teen Mental Health

Scroll. Like. Comment. Share. Repeat.

For many teenagers, this has become part of everyday life. Social Media connects us with friends, gives us entertainment, and allows us to express ourselves. But behind the colorful screens and endless notifications lies a growing concern: Is social media becoming a threat to teenagers' mental health?

For today's generation, social media is more than a form of entertainment. It has become a place where young people compare themselves, seek approval, and measure their worth through likes, followers, views, and comments.

The problem begins when the virtual world becomes the standard where teenagers judge their real lives.

A teenager opens Instagram or TikTok and sees someone with perfect skin, expensive clothes, an exciting vacation, or a seemingly happy relationship. Without realizing that these images are often carefully selected and edited, they may begin asking: Why doesn't my life look like that? Why am I not good enough? This constant comparison can slowly damage self-esteem.

Social media can also create an unhealthy need for validation. A post that receives hundreds of likes may bring temporary happiness, while a post that receives little attention can make someone feel ignored and rejected. When self-worth becomes dependent on online reactions, confidence becomes fragile.

Then there is cyberbullying.

Unlike traditional bullying, online harassment can follow a teenager beyond the school gate. Hurtful comments, embarrassing photos, rumors and anonymous messages can spread rapidly and reach a larger audience. For victims, there may be no place that feels completely free from bullying.

Another concern is the endless scrolling that keeps teenagers glued to their screens. Hours intended for studying, sleeping, talking with family, or simply resting can disappear while scrolling through one video after another.

But should we blame social media entirely? Not necessarily.

Social media itself is not inherently evil. It can be a powerful tool for education, creativity, communication, advocacy and community building. Many teenagers use online platforms to learn new skills, discover opportunities, support causes and maintain friendships. The real danger lies in how much control social media has over our lives.

Teenagers should not have to abandon the digital world. Instead, they need digital discipline and awareness. They must learn to recognize unrealistic content, protect their privacy, reject online cruelty and understand that social media does not show the complete reality of another person's life.

Parents and teachers also have an important role. Instead of simply telling teenagers, "Put your phone down," adults should create spaces where young people can openly talk about what they experience online - without immediately judging or dismissing them. Most importantly, teenagers need to remember a simple truth:

Your worth cannot be measured by a number on a screen. You are more than your followers. More than your likes. More than the comments people leave on your posts. Social media should be a tool we use, not a mirror we use to define ourselves. The next time you find yourself endlessly scrolling, pause for a moment and ask: Am I using social media, or social media using me?

Joash Gideon D. Reputana
San Isidro North District

Column Article

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Likes, Lies, And Little Lives

As notification flashes. A thumb taps. A heart appears for a fleeting second, a teenager feels seen. Then another post appears — another perfect face, another perfect body, another perfect life and suddenly, being seen is no longer enough. In a world where a tap can validate a person and a scroll can destroy their confidence, the most dangerous thing about social media may not be what teenagers see, but what they begin to believe about themselves.

Social media was created to bring people closer, yet somewhere between the endless scroll and the desperate search for approval, many young people are becoming farther from themselves. According to the cited Pew Research Center Survey, 48 percent of U.S. teens aged 13 to 17 said social media has a mostly negative effect on people their age, a sharp rise from 32 percent two years earlier. More alarming is that 22 percent of teenagers identified social media as the single biggest threat to their mental health. Social media is no longer merely a communication tool, when its design exploits insecurity and encourages compulsive use, it becomes a serious threat to mental well-being of the young.

connection becomes dependence and validation becomes addiction. A platform becomes harmful when a teenager can no longer put down the phone without feeling that they are putting down their own worth. We should not raise a generation that knows how to gain followers but has forgotten how to find itself.

The real question, then, is not whether teenagers should leave social media. It is whether social media should learn to leave teenagers alone long enough for them to grow, fail, think, breathe, and discover who they are without an audience. A screen can show a thousand faces, but it cannot tell a young person what their life is worth. If we continue allowing algorithms to raise our children, we should not be surprised when they begin measuring their lives in likes.

↳ friend but enemy

"Digital Harm"

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When the teacher from Danao City, Cebu took to social media and threatened to shoot Police Officer Atty. Claire Castro in the mouth, it ceased to be simple case of venting or free speech. This post crossed a dangerous line from political criticism straight into criminal intimidation. This serve as challenge not only to legal justice, but also to the professional integrity of the teaching and the organization.

Atty. Castro raised a valid point when she questioned the Aot teachers Party-list regarding their stance and action. As the recognized representative of teachers in Congress, the party cannot remain silent or turn a blind eye when an educator commits an explicit violation of the law and professional ethics. Being a defender of teachers' rights comes with the responsibility of maintaining high standards of conduct among those they represent.

Teachers are considered public role models that shape and hold the minds of the youth. When a teacher openly incites violence, regardless of their personal anger, it can never be justified or brushed aside. The online threat made was not merely an expression of anger, it constitutes a grave threat subject to imprisonment under our laws.

To address this issue, the legal system must ensure strict accountability through a thorough investigation. The Department of Education (DepEd) and teachers' association must reinforce reminders regarding the code of ethics and proper conduct on social media platforms.

Shut the f**
from here!

Beyond penalties, Depted and teachers' associations must actively conduct digital citizenship workshops, mental health support, and strict monitoring of social media guidelines. Proactive measures that educators remain positive role models both inside and outside the digital classroom.

Freedom of expression will always remain a vital right, but it must be exercised with restraint and responsibility. Allowing violent threats to pass without consequence damages public trust in the education system, making swift accountability necessary to protect both society and the teaching profession.

Baganga North District

Jolina B. Cortez

Column Writing

Kinabangan Elementary School

(D)

Virgin May G. Addy
Maragtas Integrated School
Lupon West - Cebu Writing Eng

When the Scroll Starts Controlling the Child

By Virgin May G. Addy

Social media was created to bring people closer; but for many teenagers, it may be doing the opposite. Behind the likes, comments, videos, and endless scrolling is a generation quietly struggling with pressure, comparison and the fear of not being good enough. The question is: How much of their lives are willing to let social media control?

The figures presented by Statista and based on Pew Research Center's 2024 survey reveal something more troubling than a simple dislike of social media. Parents and teenagers may see the problem differently, but both groups recognize that young people are facing a growing mental-health challenge. Parents are particularly likely to point to social media, while teenagers also identify bullying, pressure, expectations, and other problems much louder.

What worries me most is the culture of comparison that social media creates. Teenagers constantly see carefully edited pictures, expensive lifestyles, achievements, relationships, and seemingly perfect lives. They may begin asking themselves, "Why don't I look like that?" or "Why am I not successful as them?" A teenager should be learning who he or she is - not measuring self-worth through likes, followers, and comments.

Yet social media should not be treated as an enemy either. It can help young people stay connected with friends, express their creativity, find information, and even discover support when they are struggling. Pew Research Center found that many teens recognize these positive sides of social media. According to Pew Research Center, the problem begins when a useful tool becomes a

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a constant companion that dictates how a young person thinks, feels and sees himself or herself.

This is where parents, teachers, and the teenagers themselves must take responsibility. We cannot simply tell young people to "stop using their phones." Instead, we must teach them how to use technology wisely. Schools should give students spaces where they can talk about pressure, bullying, self-esteem, and responsible social-media use. Parents should listen before judging. Most importantly, teenagers should be reminded that a social-media post is not a measurement of their worth.

Social media is not automatically the biggest threat to teenagers' mental health. But when it becomes a source of constant comparison, pressure, distraction and isolation, it can certainly become a serious one. We should not allow an algorithm to raise a generation that learns to value online approval more than real human connection. The goal is not to take the phone away - it is to make sure that the phone never takes away the person holding it.

Column Writing - English

Beyond Likes: Mental Health at Risk

Michelle C. ^{by:} Alfonso / Baganga South District



Teenagers today live in a world where likes, shares and followers define their sense of worth. Social media has become the loudest voice in their lives, often drowning out healthier sources of validation. This constant chase for approval is not harmless—it is a growing threat to mental health.

Surveys show that 53% of teens believe social media harms their mental well-being, more than bullying, family problems, or school pressures. The Ateneo de Zamboanga shooting incident is a painful reminder that mental health struggles, whether triggered online, can escalate into tragic outcomes.

The pursuit of digital validation creates anxiety when expectations are not met. Teens who feel ignored online may internalize rejection, leading to isolation or anger. In extreme cases, unresolved emotional pain can manifest in destructive behavior, as seen in the Ateneo tragedy.

This connection between digital stress and real-world violence shows that mental health risks cannot be dismissed as "just online drama". They spill over into classrooms, families, and communities, demanding urgent attention. The Ateneo de Zamboanga incident is a stark reminder that when emotional struggles are ignored, they can erupt into tragedies that affect entire communities.

Bullying, both online and offline, intensifies these struggles. Cyberbullying follows teens into their private spaces, while school bullying erodes their confidence face-to-face. Without intervention, these pressures can push vulnerable minds toward dangerous decisions.

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In the Ateneo case, unresolved conflicts and emotional turmoil played a role. Just as bullying online leaves scars, peer disputes in school can escalate when mental health support is absent. The tragedy illustrates

how fragile young minds can be under compounded stress.

Family dynamics and academic pressures further complicate the picture. Teens who feel unsupported at home or overwhelmed in school often turn to social media for escape. Instead of relief, they encounter curated perfection that deepens feelings of inadequacy. The digital world becomes both refuge and trap.

The Covid-19 pandemic worsened these vulnerabilities, pushing teens deeper into screens and reinforcing habits of over-reliance on digital validation. As schools reopened, reintegration was uneven, leaving some students emotionally fragile. The Aeneas incident reminds us that these cracks in support systems can have devastating consequences.

The way forward requires collective responsibility. Schools must prioritize counseling and safe spaces, families must foster open dialogue, and social media companies must recognize their role in shaping teen well-being. Beyond likes and fleeting validation lies the urgent need to protect young minds - because their futures should never be at risk for the sake of online approval or unresolved pain. (#30)