



Online Peer Influence and Emotional Intelligence in Adolescents: Emerging Trends in Digital Psychology

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Abstract: The proliferation of online communication technologies has changed the social landscape for adolescents, with online interactions becoming a key part of their lives. The teenage years are a pivotal period in which peer influence is heightened and has moved increasingly online. This systematic review will consolidate the empirical evidence on the link between online peer influence and emotional intelligence in adolescents. Emotional intelligence, which refers to the capacity to perceive, understand, regulate and manage emotions, is a crucial aspect of psychological well-being and social functioning in this developmental period. This review will be conducted by examining peer-reviewed articles obtained from databases like Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, PubMed and Google Scholar, within a specified time period. The studies will be screened based on inclusion and exclusion criteria and a narrative synthesis will be carried out to identify broad themes and patterns. The anticipated results are expected to reveal the positive and negative aspects of online peer interactions, such as support and cyberbullying, as well as social comparison. It will also investigate the effects of these influences on emotional intelligence. The results will offer insights to parents, teachers and health professionals in the development of programs to facilitate adaptive online interactions and the emotional development of adolescents.

Keywords: online peer influence, emotional intelligence, adolescents, social media, digital psychology

1. Introduction

The advent of digital technology has profoundly reshaped the social environment of adolescence, shaping young people's communication, interactions and relationships. In the modern world, social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and other social networking platforms play a pivotal role in the lives of adolescents. These offer perpetual connectivity with peers, allowing communication and connection to occur across geographical and temporal distances. Adolescence (generally between the ages of 10 and 19) is a time when young people are particularly attuned to social influences, experimenting with their identity and becoming more dependent on peer acceptance. In this environment, the online space is a significant contributor to adolescents' behavior, self-concept and emotional well-being. Digital interactions are persistent, publicly available, and can be quantified via likes, comments and shares, which are not the case with offline interactions. These characteristics amplify the effects of peer feedback, and online interactions have a profound impact on adolescent development. As a result, it's important to consider the consequences of this digital landscape in the context of examining adolescents' emotional and social development in the digital age.

In this rapidly changing digital environment, online peer influence plays an important role in adolescent behaviour and emotions. Peer influence is the phenomenon where people's attitudes, behaviours and emotional states are influenced by their peers. In the online environment, this is magnified by the reach, velocity and persistence of online interactions. Young people are exposed to a variety of peer-generated content, including beliefs, values, lifestyles, accomplishments, and norms. This can provide opportunities for positive and negative peer influence. On one hand, online peer interactions can be supportive, encouraging and inclusive, which can contribute to positive psychologies. For example, teens can find support and affirmation in online communities, boosting their self-esteem and sense of belonging. On the other hand, online interactions and platforms can also lead to negative experiences such as cyberbullying, social exclusion and social comparison. There may be feelings of stress, anxiety and lowered self-esteem due to the pressure of adhering to perceived social standards and wanting to maintain highly curated online personae. Moreover, the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) also enhances the use of social media and increases the risk of peer influence. Thus, online peer influence is a complex phenomenon that has both positive and negative mechanisms, affecting adolescent development.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a key psychological factor that significantly influences the way people recognise, understand and regulate emotions. It comprises skills such as emotional awareness, emotion regulation, empathy and social skills. Emotional intelligence is

especially important during adolescence, when young people face complex social and emotional situations. Adolescents with high emotional intelligence are able to cope with stress, build positive relationships, and make decisions aligned with their goals and values. It also helps to build resilience, enabling individuals to bounce back from setbacks and navigate through transitions. On the other hand, low levels of emotional intelligence can lead to emotional dysregulation, greater susceptibility to peer influence and greater psychological distress. When it comes to digital communications, the development of emotional intelligence may be supported or hindered by the type of interaction, which may lack non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and vocal tones. This may affect the acquisition of empathy and understanding of emotions. On the other hand, online interactions may offer opportunities for emotional expression and social learning, depending on the nature of interactions. Therefore, it is important to understand the concept of emotional intelligence in the context of online peer influence to better understand well-being in adolescence.

Understanding the connection between online peer influence and emotional intelligence can be explained by Social Comparison Theory and Social Learning Theory. Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory suggests that people assess their own opinions, abilities and self-esteem through comparisons with others. In the online environment, social media offers a vast range of comparison targets, often showcasing carefully crafted and aspirational lifestyles. Upward social comparison, in which adolescents compare to peers they perceive as more attractive, popular and successful, is common among adolescents. These comparisons may result in feelings of inferiority, low self-esteem and emotional distress, which in turn impact emotional regulation and awareness - two pillars of emotional intelligence. Although downward comparisons can temporarily boost self-esteem, they do not necessarily promote emotional growth. Thus, the "comparison cycle" driven by digital media plays a significant role in emotional intelligence.

Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura, also helps to understand how adolescents learn and develop their emotional responses through social means. This theory postulates that people learn through observing the behaviour and its outcomes. In the digital world, adolescents observe a variety of behaviours from their peers, celebrities and digital influencers. These actions are frequently reinforced through positive feedback (likes and comments). Young people may adopt positively reinforced behaviours and steer clear of negatively reinforced ones. This not only affects individual behavior but also emotional reactions and coping mechanisms. For instance, exposure to positive and empathetic interactions can improve emotional intelligence, while exposure to negative interactions can

hinder emotional regulation skills. Therefore, Social Learning Theory offers insights into the way online peer influence plays a role in developing emotional intelligence through observational processes.

Although there is growing academic interest in online behaviour and emotional development, there is still a lack of research on the direct impact of online peer influence on the emotional intelligence of adolescents. Although there is a growing body of research exploring the effects of social media on mental health indicators including anxiety, depression and self-esteem, few have investigated social media impact on emotional intelligence. Moreover, prior research tends to conflate online experiences, without considering various kinds of peer interactions, such as positive exchanges, social comparisons, and cyberbullying. There is also a lack of investigations of moderators and mediators of this association, such as gender, age and socio-cultural factors. Also, the ever-changing and fast-paced environment of online platforms requires ongoing research to keep up with new trends and developments. It is crucial to address these gaps in order to gain a better understanding of the impact of online peer influence on emotional intelligence in young people.

To address these limitations, the current study seeks to explore the association between online peer influence and emotional intelligence in adolescents. The goal is to understand the effects of various online peer interactions (positive and negative) on different aspects of emotional intelligence. Through a review of previous studies and identification of emerging themes, the study aims to add to the emerging discipline of digital psychology. The results are anticipated to yield insights for parents, teachers and psychologists that can be used to build strategies to encourage positive online behaviours and enhance emotional skills in teenagers. The research questions of the study are:

- (1) What is the influence of online peers on adolescents' emotional intelligence?
- (2) How do positive and negative online peer interactions affect emotional intelligence?
- (3) What moderates and mediates this relationship?

2. Literature Review

The rising popularity of online media in young individuals has resulted in a growing body of research on the effects of online peer interactions and their effects on mental health. Research on online peer influence has continuously emphasized on its dualism with both positive and negative aspects. Good interactions, like befriending and peer support, have been linked to increased self-esteem, peer acceptance, and well-being. The social network is a

platform of social interaction especially to the teens who may have difficulties in the real world social life.

But, adverse psychological effects, such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem have been strongly associated with negative peer interactions, such as cyberbullying, social exclusion, and social comparison. Studies show that teenagers who face greater negative online relationships tend to develop emotional distress and develop maladaptive coping mechanisms.

Emotional intelligence of adolescents has also been extensively examined as a major predictor of psychological and social fitness. Emotionally intelligent people will have superior social interactions, academic achievement, and stress management. EI helps one to control emotions, show empathy and cope with complicated social circumstances. Emotional intelligence is affected by various aspects during adolescence, such as family, peer, and educational settings. Over the past few years, scholars started to examine the impact of the digital environment on emotional intelligence, as the researchers realized that online communication could either promote or inhibit the development of emotions.

Recent research has also paid attention to the overall effects of social media on the behavior of adolescents. Social media creates a means of self-expression, communication and social interaction but also creates issues connected to social comparison and identity construction. There is empirical evidence that too much use of social media is related to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and loneliness. The desire to identify with the sometimes idealized images of other people may result in unrealistic expectations and low self-esteem. Moreover, the stress of having an attractive online presence can lead to psychological burnout and stress. However, social media may also be beneficial and may offer supportive communities and useful resources that enhance well-being. Thus, the effects of using social media are multidimensional.

Online peer influence and emotional intelligence are a relatively new field of study. The initial results indicate that positive peer relationships are likely to boost emotional intelligence, which may be encouraged with the help of empathy, communication, and emotional expression. Conversely, adverse peer effects, including cyberbullying and social exclusion, can disrupt emotional control and lead to psychological distress. In addition, individual differences such as personality traits, coping styles and socio-cultural backgrounds affect this relationship. Nevertheless, the insights still indicate that there is no thorough and systematic research on the direct correlation between online peer influence and emotional intelligence which points to the necessity to conduct additional research in the field.

2.1 Results of Previous Studies

Several empirical studies have examined the impact of online peer influence and social media on adolescents' emotional and psychological outcomes. The findings from these studies provide important insights into how digital interactions shape emotional intelligence and overall well-being.

Research has consistently shown that **positive online peer interactions** contribute to improved emotional and social outcomes. For instance, studies have found that adolescents who receive support, encouragement, and positive feedback through social media tend to exhibit higher self-esteem, better emotional regulation, and stronger interpersonal skills. These findings suggest that online environments can facilitate emotional learning and development when interactions are constructive and supportive.

Conversely, **negative online peer influence** has been strongly associated with adverse psychological outcomes. Studies indicate that experiences such as cyberbullying, social exclusion, and peer pressure significantly increase levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress among adolescents. Exposure to negative interactions can impair emotional regulation and reduce overall emotional intelligence.

Another key finding from previous research is the role of **social comparison in digital environments**. Adolescents frequently compare themselves with peers on social media platforms, often engaging in upward comparison with individuals perceived as more successful or attractive. This has been linked to lower self-esteem, dissatisfaction, and reduced emotional well-being.

Studies have also highlighted that **high social media usage** is associated with increased psychological distress, particularly when engagement is passive in nature. Adolescents who spend excessive time consuming content without meaningful interaction are more likely to experience loneliness and emotional difficulties. In contrast, active engagement, such as communication and participation in supportive communities, is associated with better emotional outcomes.

Furthermore, research on emotional intelligence suggests that individuals with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to manage online peer influence. They demonstrate stronger coping strategies, greater emotional awareness, and improved resilience in dealing with negative experiences. This indicates that emotional intelligence may act as a protective factor in digital environments.

Overall, previous studies demonstrate that online peer influence has both **facilitating and inhibiting effects** on emotional intelligence. The nature of interaction—whether positive

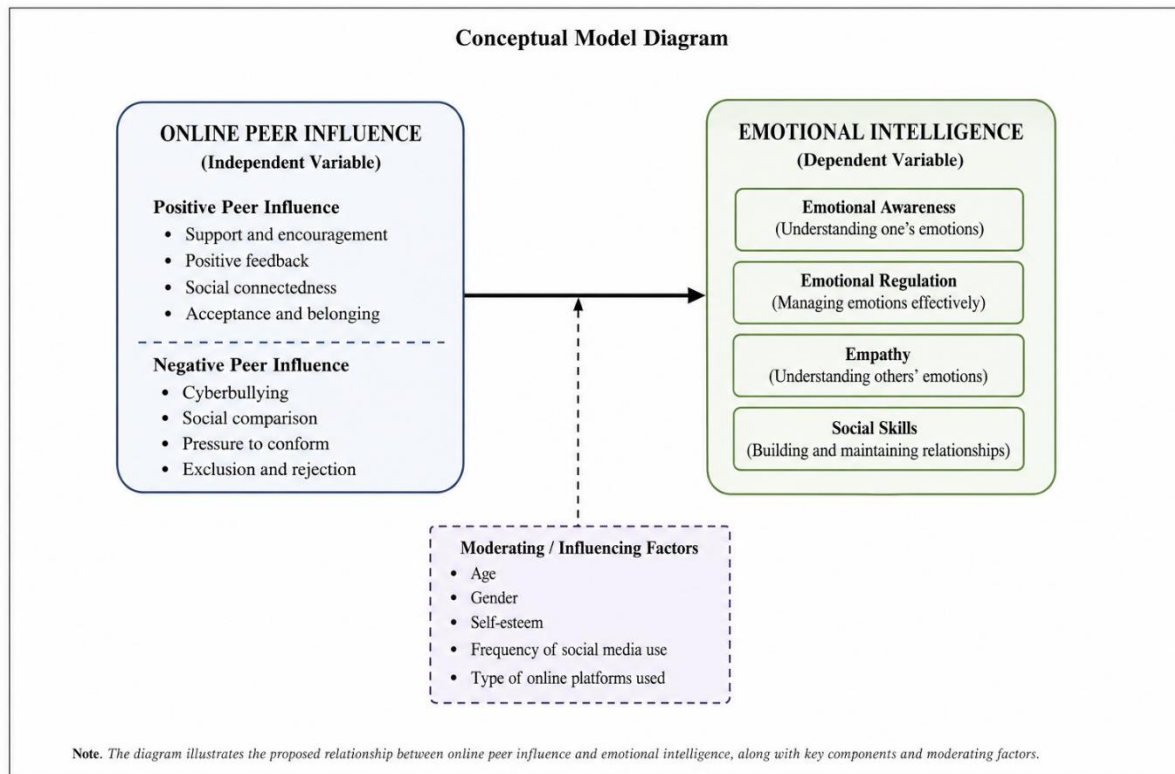
or negative—plays a critical role in determining its impact on adolescent emotional development.

Table 1. *Summary of Previous Study Results*

Author	Sample	Key Findings
Anderson et al. (2017)	Adolescents	Excessive internet use linked to emotional instability and behavioral issues
Brackett et al. (2011)	Students	Higher emotional intelligence improves stress management and social skills
Valkenburg & Peter (2011)	Adolescents	Online communication influences emotional and social development
O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson (2011)	Adolescents	Social media use associated with both positive support and cyber risks
Rideout & Robb (2018)	Teenagers	High social media usage linked to emotional changes and social behavior patterns
Kuss & Griffiths (2012)	Adolescents	Online addiction related to emotional and psychological problems
Jose et al. (2012)	Adolescents	Social connectedness improves well-being and emotional stability
Lemmens et al. (2011)	Youth	Online engagement affects emotional and behavioral outcomes

2.2 Conceptual Framework

Our study's conceptual framework rests on the assumption that online peer influence plays a crucial role in adolescents' emotional intelligence. Online peer influence is the independent variable, including both positive peer interactions (such as social support and encouragement) and negative peer interactions (such as cyberbullying and social comparison). Emotional intelligence is the dependent variable, which includes aspects such as emotional recognition, emotional management, social skills, and empathy. The framework suggests that positive online peer interactions might contribute to higher emotional intelligence through supportive relationships and emotional learning, while negative interactions might have a detrimental effect on emotional intelligence via stress and emotional instability. Further, variables like self-esteem, gender, and age may be moderating or mediating factors.



3. Objectives and Hypotheses

Objectives

- To study the effect of online peer influence on the emotional intelligence of adolescents.
- To explore the association of online peer influence on emotional intelligence.
- To compare patterns of online peer influence on adolescent emotions.

Hypotheses

- H1: Online peer influence plays a crucial role in emotional intelligence of teenagers.
- H2: Negative peer influence on social network sites reduces emotional intelligence.
- H3: Positive online peer influence increases emotional intelligence.

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design, investigating the association between peer influence online and emotional intelligence in adolescents. The quantitative approach is suitable for this study given it enables the measurement of variables and the application of statistical methods to detect patterns, associations, and predictive relationships. This is a cross-sectional study, which involves gathering data from participants at one time. This approach is ideal for assessing the current status of adolescents' online interactions and emotional skills, uninfluenced by changes over time. While cross-sectional studies cannot

prove causality, they can help detect patterns and relationships which can then be explored in longitudinal studies.

This study is aimed at adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 years. This is because this age group is at a stage of development where emotions are highly valued and peer pressure is prevalent. The sample size will be between 80 and 120 participants, deemed sufficient for statistical analyses like correlation and regression. Sampling will involve a non-probability method, which is convenience sampling, considering the practical and accessibility aspects. We will strive to recruit a representative sample to improve the validity of our study. Participants will be required to be in the target age range, regular users of social media platforms, and give informed consent. Additional consent from parents or legal guardians will be sought for those under 18 years of age in line with ethical guidelines. Incomplete questionnaires and inconsistent responses will be removed from the analysis to maintain data integrity and accuracy.

The research will use an online questionnaire, delivered via Google Forms, to gather data. An online survey is deemed suitable because of the digital theme of the study and the convenience it offers to young people. The survey instrument will be developed to be clear, brief and simple for participants to understand and complete. The survey tool may be tested with a small sample of participants before the main data collection to ensure that there are no problems with clarity, layout or technical aspects. Appropriate changes will be incorporated. The final version of the survey link will be shared via social media, messaging apps, and academic networks to access the population of interest. We will explain to the respondents the intent of the study, voluntary participation, and the anonymity of the responses. We won't ask for their name or any other personal information, and we won't use their data for any purpose other than academic research.

This study will employ standardized and self-developed scales to assess the variables. To measure emotional intelligence, a standardised Emotional Intelligence Scale will be used, which measures factors such as emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills. The scale will contain several items that will be rated on a Likert-type scale, with participants rating the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements. Participants with higher scores on the scale will have greater emotional intelligence. The scale has been shown to be reliable and valid in prior research, and will be used in this study. Alongside the emotional intelligence scale, we will create a self-designed Online Peer Influence Scale to assess participants' experiences of online peer influences. This will contain items measuring positive influences, such as support, and encouragement, and negative influences, such as

cyberbullying, comparison and peer pressure. The items will be developed based on current research and theories to ensure their content validity. It will also employ a Likert response scale, which will allow responses to be quantified and analysed.

The responses obtained will be meticulously organized and analysed statistically. Firstly, descriptive statistics will be calculated to describe the sample and the distribution of important variables. This will include central tendency, variability, frequency and percentage. Next, a correlation analysis will be performed to assess the association between online peer influence and emotional intelligence. Pearson correlation coefficient will be used to measure the magnitude and direction of the correlation. This will determine if greater online peer influence is related to greater or lesser emotional intelligence. In addition, regression analysis will be used to determine the predictive relationship between online peer influence and emotional intelligence. This method will help to establish the proportion of variance in emotional intelligence that can be attributed to online peer influence. The regression analysis will also shed light on the role of both positive and negative peer interactions in emotions. All statistical calculations will be conducted using a statistical software program such as SPSS or Excel, to ensure validity and precision of the results.

The study will be conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines. Information about the study and participants' rights will be clearly explained to them. They will be asked to provide informed consent before the data collection, and will be allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Anonymity will be ensured by not collecting or sharing any personal information. Data collection, storage and analysis will be restricted to the researcher for research purposes. Furthermore, the research will not cause any psychological harm as the questionnaire will not contain any distressing material. These ethical considerations are crucial for ensuring the validity and integrity of the study.

5. Expected Outcomes

The research is likely to yield valuable insights into the impact of online peer influence on emotional intelligence in teenagers. A key expected finding is an understanding of the impact of various types of online peer influence - positive and negative - on emotional development. Positive peer influence, which involves supportive messages, encouragement and feedback, is expected to have a positive impact on emotional intelligence. These interactions may promote emotional awareness, empathy, and social skills, leading to improved psychological functioning. Negative peer influence, such as cyberbullying, social comparison

and peer pressure is expected to be negatively associated with emotional intelligence. Such interactions may result in poor emotional regulation, low self-esteem, and stress and anxiety.

A further significant finding of the study will be the understanding of the impact of social media usage on adolescents' emotional intelligence. The results will likely reveal how social media use, in terms of the volume of usage, content viewed, and interactions with others, affect emotional intelligence. For example, exposure to content promoting an unattainable ideal may result in negative social comparisons, whereas active engagement in supportive social media groups may promote development of emotional intelligence. The research may also highlight variations in the effects of online peer influence according to individual characteristics including age, gender, and usage patterns, leading to a more complex understanding of peer influence.

The knowledge gained from this study is likely to benefit multiple stakeholders, such as parents, teachers and mental health practitioners. The study findings may guide the creation of educational initiatives and interventions to foster positive online behaviour and improve emotional skills during adolescence. Educational institutions may integrate digital and emotional skills training into their programs to support students' online interactions. Parents may be advised on how to support safe and healthy online behavior, and mental health practitioners may apply the insights to develop interventions for adolescents who may be struggling with online social interactions. In summary, the study is likely to contribute to the emerging field of digital psychology, offering insights into the relationship between online peer influence and emotional development.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present proposal highlights the significant role of online peer influence in shaping the emotional intelligence of adolescents in the digital age. The review of existing literature indicates that online interactions can have both positive and negative effects on emotional development. Supportive peer engagement through social media can enhance emotional awareness, empathy, and interpersonal skills, while negative experiences such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and peer pressure can adversely affect emotional regulation and psychological well-being.

The findings from previous studies suggest that the impact of online peer influence largely depends on the nature and quality of interactions. Emotional intelligence emerges as a crucial factor that can help adolescents navigate digital environments effectively and cope with challenges associated with online communication.

This study aims to further explore this relationship and contribute to the growing field of digital psychology. The outcomes are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, parents, and mental health professionals in developing strategies to promote healthy online behavior and emotional well-being among adolescents.

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