

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND ITS IMPACTS ON LEARNING

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Abstract

This study addresses the use of social media by children and young people and its impacts on learning, seeking to understand how these platforms, which are widely present in everyday life, influence academic performance, concentration, socialization, and knowledge construction. It is based on the recognition that social media can both facilitate access to information and new forms of pedagogical interaction and lead to distraction, cognitive superficiality, and difficulty focusing on studies. The general objective of this study is to analyze the positive and negative effects of social media use on the learning process of children and adolescents, discussing how conscious or excessive use interferes with the school environment and educational practices. This is a literature review based on books, scientific articles, official documents, and academic works addressing technology, education, child and adolescent development, and digital culture. Based on this survey, different authors who examine the relationship between social media and education are selected, compared, and discussed. It is concluded that social media, when used in a guided and critical manner, can support the teaching-learning process by expanding teaching resources, motivation, and collaboration among students. However, unregulated use without family and school supervision tends to impair concentration, academic performance, and the development of more complex cognitive skills. This highlights the importance of pedagogical mediation,

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ethical guidance, and the development of healthy digital habits so that children and young people can use social media in a balanced and educational manner.

Keywords: Children, Educational technology, Learning, Social media, Young people.

INTRODUCTION

Digital social media have become an integral part of the daily lives of children and young people, influencing how they communicate, learn, and construct their identities. According to Oliveira and Lopes (2025), so-called “digital natives” are immersed in technology-mediated environments, which directly affects the ways in which they learn and engage with knowledge. In this context, understanding social media use and its repercussions in schools is essential to rethinking pedagogical practices and teaching strategies.

According to Gil (2024), technologies and digital networks can enhance educational processes by fostering collaboration, authorship, and rapid access to information. However, the same environment that facilitates learning may also encourage distraction, the uncritical consumption of content, and cognitive superficiality. Ferreira et al. (2020) emphasize that we live in a “network society,” in which information flows profoundly affect the development of individuals, including those of school age.

In the Brazilian school context, studies have identified both benefits and adverse effects associated with the intensive use of social media and its influence on academic performance (Dias et al., 2021). On the one hand, opportunities for research, interaction, and creation have expanded; on the other, challenges have emerged concerning concentration, study time, and exposure to inappropriate content. It is therefore necessary to critically analyze how children and young people have been using these platforms.

The choice of this topic is justified by the pervasive presence of social media in the lives of basic education students and by teachers’ and families’ perceptions of changes in behavior, classroom attention, and learning outcomes. Understanding these impacts is relevant to supporting more conscious pedagogical practices and educational interventions that take students’ digital reality into account.

The research question guiding this study is as follows: How does social media use by children and young people influence the learning process, either facilitating or impairing their academic and cognitive development?

This is a literature review based on books, scientific articles, official documents, and academic works that discuss technology, education, child and adolescent development, and digital culture. Through a survey and critical analysis of these materials, different theoretical perspectives on the relationship between social media and learning are compared in an effort to develop a comprehensive and current understanding of the subject.

The general objective of this study is to analyze the positive and negative effects of social media use on the learning process of children and adolescents. Its specific objectives are to describe how children and young people use social media in their daily lives; identify the potential pedagogical contributions of these platforms to the teaching-learning process; discuss the risks and adverse effects associated with excessive and unregulated use; and reflect on the roles of schools and families in mediating this use and fostering healthy digital habits.

The study addresses fundamental concepts concerning social media and digital culture; characteristics of child and adolescent development associated with the use of technology; the impacts of social media on attention, memory, socialization, and academic performance; opportunities for the pedagogical use of digital platforms; risks associated with excessive use, misinformation, and inappropriate exposure; and, finally, practices involving mediation, ethical guidance, and the development of critical and balanced social media use in the school context.

DEVELOPMENT

SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The presence of social media in the daily lives of children and young people is one of the most significant manifestations of the technological transformations that have occurred in recent decades,

particularly because these platforms no longer serve solely as spaces for entertainment and have become integrated into various dimensions of social, communicative, and educational life. Frequent contact with smartphones, computers, tablets, and other internet-connected devices changes the ways in which students search for information, establish interpersonal relationships, share experiences, and develop particular forms of learning. This reality requires special attention in the educational environment because contemporary students are constantly exposed to large volumes of information presented through videos, images, messages, short texts, and interactive content. This dynamic can provide important opportunities to broaden knowledge and facilitate communication, but it can also cause difficulties when there is no balance between the time devoted to digital activities and that allocated to studying, in-person relationships, and other experiences necessary for development. In this regard, understanding the effects of digital technologies during childhood and adolescence is an educational necessity, particularly given the increasingly early and frequent use of screens and digital platforms (Dias et al., 2021).

The growth of internet use among adolescents must also be understood in light of the characteristics of the digital environment that can influence different aspects of human development. During adolescence, a period marked by the progressive construction of identity, the expansion of social relationships, and the search for a sense of belonging to groups, social media becomes considerably relevant because it provides immediate opportunities for communication, the expression of opinions, the monitoring of trends, and interaction with people from different contexts. However, prolonged engagement in these environments can interfere with the organization of daily routines and the ways in which young people manage the time assigned to their academic responsibilities. When access is balanced, the internet can facilitate communication, research, and knowledge acquisition, allowing students to engage with a wide range of educational materials. Conversely, excessive use can produce repercussions that extend beyond the virtual environment and affect family, school, and social relationships. Schools must recognize these transformations in order to develop educational strategies consistent with students' experiences, considering that the effects of the internet are not limited to a single

dimension of development but involve interrelated physical, psychological, and social elements (Ferreira et al., 2020).

Social media has also come to occupy an important place in the organization of young people's experiences because it provides mechanisms for rapid and continuous interaction. Likes, comments, shares, instant messages, short videos, and continuous updates make these platforms particularly attractive to children and adolescents. This characteristic may lead users to remain connected for increasingly long periods, often without realizing how much time they have devoted to digital activities. In education, this condition warrants attention because learning depends on processes involving concentration, organization, continuity of activities, and students' conscious engagement with the knowledge being addressed. When interruptions caused by notifications and the frequent need to check digital content become constant, sustaining attention during an academic task may become difficult. This does not mean that social media should be regarded as inherently harmful, but rather that its forms of use must be critically analyzed. The development of balanced digital habits must take into account the frequency, duration, purpose, and characteristics of the content consumed, particularly because certain patterns of social media use may be associated with consequences for well-being and various dimensions of the daily lives of adolescents and young adults (Gil, 2024).

The relationship between social media and learning is complex because the same technologies capable of causing distraction can be used as resources for communication, research, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. Among high school students, digital platforms are deeply integrated into daily activities, making the boundaries between periods of study, entertainment, and socialization increasingly blurred. Within a short period, a young person may use the same device to attend a class, conduct academic research, talk to classmates, watch entertainment videos, and access different social media platforms. This range of possibilities underscores the need to develop skills related to organization and the conscious use of technology. Schools play a relevant role in this process because simply preventing access to digital resources does not eliminate their presence in students' lives. Educational initiatives must

be developed to help young people understand when, how, and for what purpose a particular technology can contribute to their education. Studies conducted with students show that young people themselves recognize both positive and negative aspects of social media, including difficulty staying away from these platforms during periods set aside for studying, which demonstrates the need for critical and responsible digital education (Hansen and Lorandi, 2026).

The constant presence of social media can interfere with this process when students develop the habit of rapidly switching between academic tasks and digital stimuli. During an activity that requires reading, solving exercises, or understanding scientific concepts, for example, frequent interruptions to check messages and notifications can fragment the performance of the task and make it difficult to maintain focus. This issue is particularly relevant to science and chemistry education, fields that often require the interpretation of phenomena, comprehension of models, analysis of representations, calculations, and the establishment of relationships among macroscopic, microscopic, and symbolic aspects. Students require appropriate conditions to follow sequences of reasoning and progressively develop an understanding of the subject matter. Intensive social media use during study periods may compete with these cognitive demands, particularly when access becomes automatic and repetitive. Research conducted with adolescents indicates relationships between social media use and aspects associated with attention, reinforcing the importance of understanding how digital habits can interfere with academic activities (Lourenção et al., 2024).

Analyzing the presence of social media among children requires even greater care because of the particular characteristics of this stage of development. Elementary school students are in the process of consolidating various cognitive, emotional, social, and communicative abilities, meaning that experiences both inside and outside school contribute significantly to their development. Engagement with digital environments can facilitate certain forms of learning when appropriate supervision, careful content selection, and clearly defined educational objectives are present. Educational videos, interactive activities, scientific experiments presented in audiovisual formats, and communication spaces can stimulate

curiosity and broaden access to knowledge. However, prolonged and unstructured use can reduce the time devoted to fundamental activities such as reading, playing, in-person interaction, sports, family life, and completing school assignments. It is therefore insufficient to analyze only whether a child uses social media; the conditions under which access occurs, the length of exposure, the type of content consumed, and whether adult supervision is provided must also be examined. Children's development in the school context is related to the digital experiences that form part of their everyday lives, making joint action by teachers, guardians, and other educational stakeholders necessary (Nascimento et al., 2025).

Among the educational consequences that warrant attention is the relationship between problematic patterns of social media use and academic performance. Internet access has become a reality for a significant proportion of students. For this reason, educational discussions should not focus solely on the presence or absence of technology, but primarily on how it is used. In their investigation of high school students, Isidório et al. identified different levels of internet use and analyzed their relationship with academic indicators. The authors report that “there was a significant negative correlation between academic performance and addiction scores” (Isidório et al., 2026, p. 23).

Digital platforms have considerably expanded opportunities for interaction, but they have also changed certain characteristics of these relationships by making rapid, brief, screen-mediated forms of communication commonplace. For children and adolescents in the process of development, the use of these technologies must be accompanied by diverse social experiences, including in-person situations that facilitate dialogue, cooperation, and the development of empathy. Schools can contribute to this process by promoting activities that use technological resources without entirely replacing collective and in-person experiences. In chemistry education, for example, group work, experiments, collaborative problem-solving, and the discussion of phenomena can be combined with digital resources, providing an education that integrates scientific knowledge and social skills. Studies analyzing the excessive use of digital technologies specifically draw attention to its possible relationship with the development of socioemotional skills during adolescence (Oliveira et al., 2024).

Educational intervention should prioritize awareness rather than being limited to prohibition. Children and adolescents live in a society deeply shaped by digital technologies and will continue to engage with different platforms throughout their academic, professional, and social lives. Consequently, one of the responsibilities of contemporary education is to prepare students to use these tools with autonomy, responsibility, and critical judgment. This preparation involves teaching students to select reliable sources, verify information, recognize misleading content, manage their time online, respect others in virtual environments, and understand that not all information circulated on social media is scientifically valid. This competence is particularly important in natural science education because content concerning health, chemical substances, the environment, food, medications, and scientific phenomena circulates widely on digital platforms and is often accompanied by incomplete or inaccurate information. Teachers can turn this reality into a pedagogical opportunity by encouraging the critical analysis of content found online. Awareness-oriented intervention strategies are relevant precisely because they seek to develop a more responsible understanding among adolescents of their own habits regarding digital technologies (Oliveira and Lopes, 2025).

Understanding social media use by children and young people requires an educational perspective capable of simultaneously recognizing its possibilities and challenges. Digital technologies can broaden access to information, facilitate communication, diversify teaching resources, and connect certain school subjects with the forms of communication students use in their daily lives. However, these benefits depend on the existence of criteria, supervision, and self-regulation skills because excessive use can interfere with concentration, the organization of studies, the completion of school activities, and various dimensions of adolescent development. This discussion is relevant to chemistry teacher education because contemporary teacher preparation requires skills that extend beyond mastery of discipline-specific knowledge. Future teachers need to understand the characteristics of students immersed in digital culture and develop strategies capable of using technologies in pedagogically meaningful ways. In this context, guiding students toward a balanced relationship with digital media is also an educational action,

particularly given the possible relationships among excessive social media use, student well-being, and the development of the learning process (Tchicusse, 2025).

IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LEARNING, ATTENTION, AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The use of social media by children and adolescents has brought about important transformations in how students engage with knowledge, organize their academic activities, and direct their attention during study periods. Easy access to different types of digital content allows information to be found quickly, facilitating research and broadening opportunities to engage with educational materials. However, the continuous presence of notifications, messages, videos, and updates can divide students' attention among several activities at once. This condition warrants attention in the school context because learning requires engagement, continuity, and the ability to concentrate on a particular activity for a certain period. In chemistry education, this need becomes even more apparent given subject matter that requires the interpretation of formulas, comprehension of models, performance of calculations, and association between abstract concepts and observable phenomena. The effects of screens on children and adolescents must therefore be considered in educational planning and the organization of study habits (Dias et al., 2021).

Attention is an essential capacity that enables students to select relevant information, follow explanations, understand concepts, and establish relationships among different areas of knowledge. Frequent engagement with social media characterized by the rapid and successive presentation of stimuli may contribute to the development of habits marked by constant switching between different types of content. In an academic setting, this behavior may occur when students repeatedly interrupt their reading or work on an exercise to check messages, watch videos, or view updates on digital platforms. These interruptions can compromise the continuity of reasoning, particularly during tasks that require greater cognitive effort. In chemistry education, for example, understanding a chemical transformation or solving a problem involving stoichiometric calculations requires attention to the different stages of the problem.

Frequent fragmentation of attention can make such comprehension more difficult, demonstrating that habits developed in digital environments are related to how adolescents direct and sustain their attention during educational activities (Lourenção et al., 2024).

Academic performance may also be influenced by how children and young people manage the time they spend on social media. The problem does not necessarily lie in the existence of these platforms, but in excessive use that may occupy periods previously devoted to reading, completing assignments, reviewing material, and resting. When students do not establish limits on their time online, their academic responsibilities may be postponed or completed hastily, compromising the quality of the work performed. The situation becomes particularly concerning when social media is accessed during study periods, resulting in successive interruptions and reducing the concentration necessary to understand the subject matter. Research on students' internet use shows that problematic levels of use may be related to academic indicators. This finding reinforces the importance of recognizing that managing time spent online is also an educational issue and should be discussed by teachers, students, and guardians (Isidório et al., 2026).

In this regard, when analyzing the relationship between excessive social media use and student performance, Isidório et al. present an important finding for understanding the potential effects of digital habits on academic life: “there was a significant negative correlation between academic performance and addiction scores” (Isidório et al., 2026, p. 25).

This finding does not support the assertion that all social media use necessarily results in poor performance, given that various individual, family, social, and school-related factors also influence the learning process. However, the identified association demonstrates that the use of digital platforms should be considered among the elements capable of interfering with young people's academic organization. Establishing limits, defining study schedules, and encouraging conscious forms of technology use are therefore measures that can promote a more balanced relationship between digital life and educational responsibilities (Isidório et al., 2026).

In addition to potentially interfering with attention and academic performance, social media changes how students access and process information. The speed characteristic of digital environments facilitates exposure to large quantities of content over relatively short periods, but the quantity of information does not necessarily translate into knowledge construction. To learn, students must interpret, compare, question, relate concepts, and critically evaluate what they encounter. This competence is particularly important in chemistry education because of the circulation of videos, posts, and information relating to medications, food, chemical products, the environment, cosmetics, fuels, and various experiments presented as scientific. Some of these publications may contain inaccurate or oversimplified explanations. Teachers must therefore help students develop assessment criteria and understand that popular social media content is not necessarily scientifically reliable, thereby fostering a critical stance toward cyberconsumption and the information made available in digital environments (Koffermann and Aguaded, 2023).

The consequences of excessive digital platform use may also affect emotional factors that have an indirect but significant relationship with learning. Students do not perform their academic activities in isolation from their emotional, social, and family circumstances. Constant concern about virtual interactions, the need to follow updates, or difficulty disengaging from social media can interfere with the organization of students' routines and their readiness to participate in school activities. Excessive time online may also compete with important periods of rest, family interaction, physical activity, and in-person socialization. All these elements contribute to students' holistic development and may affect their readiness to learn. Understanding the impacts of social media therefore requires considering students across multiple dimensions and recognizing that emotional balance, organized routines, and responsible digital habits are important conditions for a healthier and more productive educational experience (Noronha et al., 2024).

Socioemotional skills must also be considered in this discussion, particularly because childhood and adolescence are important periods for the development of communication, cooperation, empathy,

autonomy, and the ability to cope with conflict. Social media provides opportunities for interaction, but it should not entirely replace in-person experiences that are fundamental to students' development. In the school environment, group activities allow children and young people to learn to listen to different opinions, share responsibilities, formulate arguments, and solve problems collaboratively. In chemistry classes, these abilities can be fostered through group experiments, investigative projects, debates on environmental issues, and problem-solving activities. Technology can complement these experiences, but its use must be planned so that it contributes to educational objectives. Excessive use of digital technologies may have repercussions for adolescents' socioemotional skills, indicating the need for a balance between virtual and in-person experiences during their education (Oliveira et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, social media should not be understood solely as harmful to the teaching-learning process. When used with clearly defined objectives and pedagogical supervision, it can provide new opportunities for disseminating knowledge, facilitating communication among students, sharing materials, and developing educational activities. In chemistry education, teachers can use digital content to present interesting scientific facts, discuss phenomena encountered in everyday life, analyze science-related news, or encourage students to produce educational materials. A post about water treatment, for example, may introduce discussions concerning mixtures, material separation, the properties of substances, and environmental issues. The determining factor lies in the purpose assigned to the technology and in the ability of teachers and students to use these resources consciously. Young people themselves are capable of recognizing the advantages and difficulties associated with social media, indicating that their participation in discussions about responsible digital practices may facilitate educational strategies that more closely reflect their reality (Hansen and Lorandi, 2026).

Schools therefore bear an important responsibility for developing a form of digital education that extends beyond exclusively prohibitive measures. Preventing social media use at certain times may be necessary to ensure concentration and the organization of activities, but this measure alone does not teach children and adolescents to manage their relationship with technology. Educational initiatives must

promote autonomy, responsibility, time management, and critical thinking. Teachers can address issues related to the reliability of information, digital safety, respect in virtual interactions, and recognition of the appropriate times to use devices. These skills are especially relevant to future chemistry teachers because teaching science in contemporary society also means preparing students to critically evaluate the large volume of scientific and pseudoscientific information circulated online. Awareness-oriented educational interventions can help adolescents recognize their own usage patterns and develop more balanced digital behaviors (Oliveira and Lopes, 2025).

The impacts of social media on learning, attention, and academic performance depend primarily on the characteristics and intensity of its use. Digital platforms can broaden access to knowledge and provide educational opportunities; however, excessive and unstructured use can compete for the time and attention necessary to perform academic activities. For chemistry students, whose learning involves observation, interpretation, experimentation, symbolic representation, and problem-solving, maintaining appropriate conditions for concentration is important to understanding the subject matter. Schools are responsible for incorporating this reality into the educational process, helping children and young people develop more conscious digital habits and demonstrating that technology can be used as a learning tool when clear objectives and criteria are established. This perspective makes it possible to acknowledge digital resources without disregarding the challenges associated with excessive exposure to social media and its possible repercussions for students' learning processes (Tchicusse, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The analysis conducted in this study demonstrates that social media use by children and young people significantly influences the learning process and may produce benefits or adverse effects depending on the frequency, purpose, and conditions under which these tools are used. In response to the research question, social media cannot be classified as exclusively positive or negative for academic and cognitive development. When used consciously, in a planned manner, and in alignment with educational

objectives, these platforms can broaden access to information, facilitate communication, stimulate curiosity, and provide different opportunities for engaging with knowledge. However, when used excessively and without guidance, they can compete with the time allocated to studying and make academic activities more difficult to organize.

The aspects analyzed showed that one of the principal challenges associated with excessive social media use is maintaining attention during academic activities. Constant exposure to notifications, messages, short videos, and different digital stimuli may encourage frequent interruptions and make it difficult to concentrate on tasks that require continuity of reasoning. This situation is relevant to chemistry education because learning various topics in the discipline requires careful reading, interpretation of phenomena, comprehension of representations, calculations, and the establishment of relationships among different concepts. Unstructured digital habits may therefore interfere with academic achievement when they reduce the time and attention devoted to educational activities.

Digital technologies provide important opportunities for the teaching-learning process when incorporated in a pedagogically guided manner. Social media can facilitate the sharing of scientific content, research, communication between students and teachers, and the development of activities related to the knowledge addressed in the classroom. In chemistry education, these tools can help connect scientific concepts with situations found in students' daily lives, enabling discussions about the environment, food, medications, chemical products, transformations of matter, and various phenomena presented in digital media. In this context, teachers play an indispensable role in guiding the selection of information and encouraging a critical stance toward content found online.

The issue investigated also highlights that families and schools have complementary responsibilities in developing more balanced digital habits. Simply prohibiting access to social media does not fully address the existing challenges because children and adolescents live in a society characterized by the constant presence of technology. Educational processes must be developed to help students manage their time online, identify reliable sources, understand the risks of excessive use, and use

technological resources responsibly. Schools can contribute to the development of this digital autonomy through practices that integrate technology and scientific knowledge without abandoning activities that require concentration, in-person interaction, experimentation, reading, argumentation, and problem-solving.

It is concluded that social media use influences the learning of children and young people in different ways, with its effects primarily determined by the intensity and purpose of use and the availability of guidance. Conscious use can transform these platforms into complementary resources for research, communication, access to information, and knowledge construction, whereas excessive and unregulated use can impair concentration, the organization of studies, and academic performance. The principal educational challenge is therefore not to remove children and young people entirely from social media, but to prepare them to develop a critical, responsible, and balanced relationship with digital technologies. In chemistry education, this perspective makes it possible to use technological resources as allies in scientific education while simultaneously fostering autonomy, critical thinking, and the ability to evaluate the information circulating in digital environments.

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