Social media literacy adolescent social online behavior in Germany

# Details

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n = 1.508 students

## Implications For Parents About

# Abstract

The present study addresses the increased merging of adolescents’ online and social practices and provides a broad and developmental conceptualization, operationalization, and empirical investigation of social media literacy as a central resource in their everyday lives. Using a newly developed standardized instrument, the study investigated how different components of adolescents’ social media literacy (knowledge, abilities, and motivation) and aspects of their immediate social contexts (family and peers) influence their level of socially competent online behavior. In an initial empirical study, a large sample of 1,508 secondary school students in
Germany (ø 14 years, 66% females) was surveyed in a classic paper and-pencil setting. The findings confirmed that adolescents’ knowledge, abilities, and motivation positively predicted a higher level of participatory-moral, communicative, and educational behavior, with behavioral motivation playing the most influential role. Moreover, perceived parental mediation and peer communication pressure significantly influenced adolescents’ social behavior online, showing different effects for participatory-moral behavior versus communicative-integrative behavior with friends. The findings reveal that it may be challenging for young users to reconcile different social requirements online. Implications for a preventive promotion of media literacy are discussed.

# Outcome

"The findings confirmed that for all four components (knowledge, abilities, motivation, and behavior), the participatory and moral subdimensions built one common factor. (...) The descriptive results confirmed that adolescents indicated high levels of participatory-moral and communicative competencies, but they less often showed a correlative online behavior. In contrast, their educational competencies and behavior were clearly less pronounced. In general, these findings already point to a competence-performance gap, emphasizing the need to look more closely at the underling processes." (p. 17)

"The results confirmed a significant and hitherto underestimated role of respondents’ behavioral motivation. Compared to a person’s knowledge and abilities, behavioral motivation exerted the strongest influence on their participatory-moral and communicative behavior and exerted a comparably strong influence on adolescents’ educational behavior. (...) In general, educational behavior was influenced by more knowledge, higher motivation, and greater abilities of young users and, thus, might best reflect competence in its classic sense." (p. 17)

"Adolescents whose parents more actively mediated their online use by giving advice or talking with them about activities and risks showed more participatory moral, communicative, and educational online behavior." (p. 18)

"In general, the findings ["Adolescents who perceived more online communication pressure among their friends showed less participatory-moral but more communicative behavior" (p. 18)] stress the need to focus on processes of peer influence regarding adolescents’ online behavior, which surprisingly has been inadequately researched." (p.18)

"The results, finally, revealed that adolescents who generally act more prosocially in their everyday lives indicated more participatory-moral and educational but less communicative behavior online. This, again, emphasizes that a strong integration of friends into everyday online life seemed to conflict with the performance of prosocial behavior both online and offline." (p. 18)

"When it comes to a preventive strengthening of social media literacy among young digital users, the findings, in general, showed the necessity for a holistic approach. On the individual level, the focus needs to be more strongly directed toward adolescents’ situational motivation regarding their different online actions. Prosocial behavioral motivation needs to be reinforced as a preferred alternative to other usage motives. On a social level, parents need to be supported in applying more conversation-based strategies of media education and need to reduce their number of restrictions and limitations. Moreover, it is necessary to create inducements for adolescents to reflect on and reduce the communication pressure within their peer cliques on social media." (p. 20)