

IS SOCIAL MEDIA BAD FOR OUR MENTAL HEALTH?

THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF LEARNERS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA PRIOR TO THE LESSON, ACTIVITY TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.

INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Learners can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

RESEARCHERS STUDY EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUNG MINDS

NPR Hidden Brain | August 9, 2016 | Audio

3:08 minutes

NPR's Shankar Vedantam discusses a UCLA study that looked at the effects of social media on young minds.

- Lauren Sherman and her colleagues at UCLA scanned the brains of a few dozen adolescents as they watched a fake Instagram feed. Sherman and her colleagues found that when a photo had more likes, it generated greater activation in the reward centers of the brain.
- When subjects saw that their own pictures had received many likes, they showed a greater activation in an area of the brain called the nucleus accumbens, which is a part of the brain's reward circuitry and makes us feel good about ourselves.
- The brains of the teenagers responded very strongly to the pictures deemed popular. When asked to like photos that they admired, researchers found that if a teen saw a picture with lots of likes, they tended to like it themselves. If another teen saw the same picture with only a few likes, they tended not to like it.

#BLESSSED: IS EVERYONE HAPPIER THAN YOU ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

NPR | August 6, 2018 | Audio

3:33 minutes

A social media trend asked users to share a photo they shared to social media where they looked great but were going through a difficult time.

- Dr. Brian Primack is Director of the Center for Research on Media Technology and Health at the University of Pittsburgh.
- Primack has done multiple studies where he found that people who checked social media the most frequently had almost three times the risk of depression, compared with people who checked less often.
- However, other studies about social media and brain development found that for 9- and 10-year-old children, greater social media use, such as scrolling through Instagram and texting, was associated with some positive effects, including increased physical activity, less family conflict, and fewer sleep problems.
- Children who had a higher use of general media, like Internet, TV and video games, were more prone to having worse sleep and more family conflict.

Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help learners to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.

HOW REMOVING 'LIKES' FROM INSTAGRAM COULD AFFECT OUR MENTAL HEALTH

PBS NewsHour | November 25, 2019 | Article

1240 words

Concerns about social media addiction led Instagram to test out a policy that would remove visible likes from the platform in 2019.

- When we post on social media, we don't know how many likes we'll get or when. This causes us to check social media more frequently because we don't know when this new information will appear.
- Cognitive neurologist Ofir Turel believes that younger Instagrammers are more tempted by social media's reward system because the brain's reward systems develop very quickly and mature at a young age, but the mental regions that manage self-control don't finish developing until later on.
- Although it may not be as severe, checking social media for interactions activates the brain's reward system in ways that are similar to other addictions, like a gambler pulling the lever at a slot machine.
- However, the consequences of a social media addiction are minor and withdrawal symptoms aren't as extreme as with other addictions, such as drug or alcohol addiction.

KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your learners and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Neurology
- Brain reward system
- Online engagement

CONTEMPLATE

Learners will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help learners answer these five questions about each piece of media.

DEBATE

Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form evidence-based responses to the debate question.

Thinkalong is designed to help learners engage with real issues that are relevant to their lives. [Structured discussions](#) allow learners to practice their critical thinking skills through evidence-based debate with their peers. Discussions are designed to take about 30 minutes. Educators are encouraged to modify aspects that work best for their learners.

To encourage civil discourse, please review the [Code of Conduct](#) with your learners.

Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help learners to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.