

LGBTQ+ Youth and Digital Media Use

2025

Like most adolescents today, LGBTQ+ youth report high rates of digital media usage, with 36% reporting using social media “almost constantly.” Moreover, research indicates total daily screen time for LGBTQ+ youth averages several more hours a day than non-LGBTQ+ peers, with a unique set of benefits and risks to this usage.

(Nagata et al., 2023; Parent et al., 2024)



LGBTQ+ youth report access to more affirming spaces online than any other venue, including home and school.



Community/Belonging

- Using LGBTQ+ –specific social media is associated with lower levels of internalized stigma, higher levels of community connectedness, and better well-being.
- Social media serves as a space for building connections, relationships, community, and finding refuge against discrimination, especially for rural LGBTQ+ youth.
- Exposure to LGBTQ+ YouTubers positively contributed to individual and collective self-esteem in members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Sharing Knowledge



- Social media offers access to information on sexual and gender minorities often not available in youths’ offline environments, helping them feel understood and less alone.
- LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to access health and LGBTQ+ news information, including sexual health information, online compared to offline.
- LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to have shared their own health stories online, or watched and read other people’s stories, compared to heterosexual peers.

Creating Community Safe Places



Getting Support

- 74% of LGBTQ+ youth say social media platforms help them feel less alone (compared to 52% of non-LGBTQ+ youth).
- Sexual minority youth more often report joining a group or web-based community to make themselves feel less alone than heterosexual youth.
- Feeling safe and understood in online spaces reduces the likelihood LGBTQ+ youth will attempt suicide and/or experience anxiety.
- Online therapy is more widely embraced by LGBTQ+ young people (compared to non-LGBTQ+ young people).

Identity Exploration/Formation



- Social media can be a supportive bridge for positive identity development for LGBTQ+ youth during a period of identity concealment.
- Participation in online fandoms help some youth to recognize their sexual and gender minority identity and learn new identity terminology.
- Transgender and gender diverse youth report using the internet to experiment with their identity (60%) and their social transition (88%).

Almost 40% of sexual minority youth say they have no one to talk to about their sexual orientation.

(Berger et al., 2021; Bond & Miller, 2024; Brinkman & Francot, 2022; Chan, 2023; Charamaraman et al., 2021; Common Sense Media, 2024; Downing, 2013; Escobar-Viera et al., 2022, 2023; Fisher et al., 2024; Heibert & Kortes-Miller, 2021; Herrmann et al., 2023; Madden et al., 2024; McInroy et al., 2019; McInroy & Craig, 2018; Nath et al., 2024; Rideout & Fox, 2018; The Trevor Project, 2023)

Cyberbullying



- Cyberbullying of LGBTQ+ youth occurs via multiple electronic sources including texts, social media platforms, and apps.
- 35% of LGBTQ+ young people aged 13-17 reported experiencing cyberbullying in the past year (2024) with the highest risk for bisexual youth.
- 18% of LGBTQ+ young people who experienced either in-person bullying or cyberbullying in the past year attempted suicide in the past year, compared to 6% of LGBTQ+ youth who were not bullied.
- The most common negative effects of cyberbullying:
 - Psychological and emotional (*suicidal ideation and attempt, depression, lower self-esteem*)
 - Behavioral (*physical aggression, poor body image, isolation*)
 - Academic performance (*lower GPAs*)
- 72% of LGBTQ+ young people feel that posting content to public accounts would open themselves up to harassment (compared to 47% of non-LGBTQ+ young people).



Discrimination

- 97% of LGBTQ+ youth report at least one instance of exposure to anti-LGBTQ+ web-based discrimination during the previous month.
- LGBTQ+ youth report experiencing web-based discrimination about half the time they are on social media.
- 94% of LGBTQ+ youth report experiencing subtle forms of anti-LGBTQ+ bias online that have negative impacts on their well-being and trigger coping responses.

Mental Health



- Discrimination online is associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and substance use among LGBTQ+ youth.
- Sexual/gender minority children are more at risk than non-SGM children to have negative social media experiences that contribute to their mental health burden.
- Sexual minority youth experience more loneliness and social isolation than heterosexual students, are more likely to show clinically significant symptoms of depression, and are twice as likely to have attempted self-harm in the past.

Risks To LGBTQ+ Youth From Digital Media Use



LGBTQ+ teens are more likely than non-LGBTQ+ peers to cope with feeling unsafe online on their own.

(Thorn, 2023)



Sexual Exploitation

- Sexual minority adolescents are more likely than non-sexual minority adolescents to sext, experience sexual orientation and gender-based victimization, unwanted sexual attention, and sextortion.
- LGBTQ+ minors are twice as likely than non-LGBTQ+ minors to report sharing their own nude photos or videos, and to have experiences with their nudes being leaked without permission.

Problematic media use



- Sexual minority youth status is associated with higher amounts of digital media use and higher probability of problematic video game, social media, and mobile phone use than non-LGBTQ+ youth.

(Abreu & Kenny, 2018; Angoff & Barnhart, 2021; Charmaraman et al., 2021; Fisher et al., 2024; Gámez-Guadix & Incera, 2021; Khanna et al. 2023; Kahle, 2020; Madden et al., 2024; McInroy et al., 2024; Nagata et al., 2023, 2024; Nath et al., 2024; Pagliaccio et al., 2024; Tao & Fisher, 2023; Thorn, 2023; Ybarra et al., 2015)

