



Survey of Informed Population about Social Media Impacts on Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The survey asked about social media impacts on adolescents' health. The surveyed audience was more informed on the subject than the average population. **62%** of respondents think that social media is **very harmful** for adolescents. **94%** of the respondents think that social media is harmful (**very harmful** or **slightly harmful**).

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1. Methodology

The aim of this study was to survey a population that is likely to be familiar with the impact of social media on adolescents' mental health, either through extensive direct observations or professional knowledge. The survey has been conducted as a series of targeted polls on Twitter. The Twitter campaign has been optimized for *Reach with Engagement*. The targeting parameters included age (35-54) and Twitter's "follower look-alikes." It is not certain which fraction of the survey respondents belongs to a population with either direct observations or scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, a significant part of it probably does, and the "look-alike" audience is probably better informed on the subject compared to the general population. In this sense, the survey represents an "informed population," although how much it is informed is not clear.

The main survey asked a single question without explanation: "*How does social media typically influence mental health of adolescents, in your opinion?*" A viewer could answer on the scale from *Seriously Improves* to *Seriously Harms*. Viewers who were not sure or felt that effects were not significant were encouraged not to vote: "*Disregard the poll if you have no opinion.*" 6% of the viewers did answer. I am grateful to one of the viewers for replying that the correct word was *Significantly* rather than *Seriously*. Two variants of the poll were offered – one with the answers ordered from *Seriously Improves* to *Seriously Harms*, and one with the opposite order. The results were almost same, showing that the respondents read and understood the question, and responded intentionally. Almost all responses asserted harm.

Is it expected that people with negative opinions are more likely to respond to such polls (a negativity bias). A control survey was administered with the same methodology and targeted audience, but with a question which I expected to be neutral. Only about 3% of viewers responded, most responses indicated slight effects. The average response was slightly negative. It is not clear whether it is an artifact of the methodology (the negativity bias), or a reflection of a genuine negative opinion. However, the conclusions do not change even assuming negativity bias and adjusting the results of the main survey accordingly.

2. Survey Data

2.1. Main Survey

Dates: July 5 – July 8, 2018.

Views: 28,697.

Figure 1. Main Survey, Poll 1

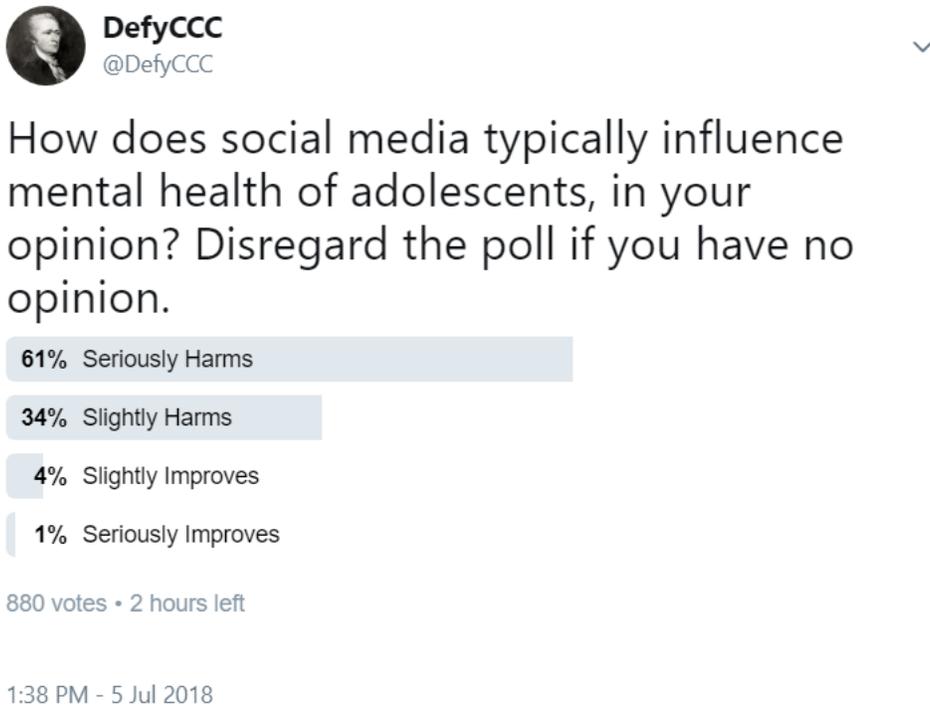


Figure 2. Main Survey, Poll 2

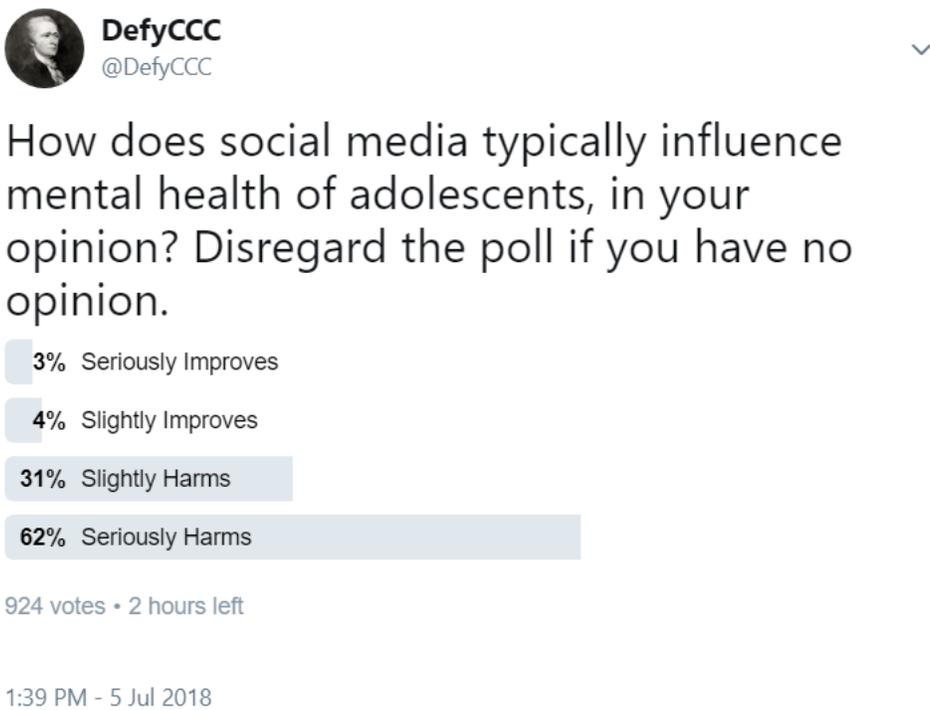


Table T1. Main Survey

Social Media	Weight	Poll 1	Poll 2	Total
Seriously Harms	-100	61%	62%	61.5%
Slightly Harms	-40	34%	31%	32.5%
Seriously Improves	40	4%	4%	4.0%
Slightly Improves	100	1%	3%	2.0%
<i>Votes</i>		<i>880</i>	<i>924</i>	
Total				-71

Total on the scale from -100 to 100 points: -71, about in the middle between seriously (significantly) harms than slightly harms. Adjusted for the negativity bias, indicated by the control survey: $-71 - (-23 * 0.03 / 0.06) \approx -60$, still between “slightly harms” and “seriously harms”.

Targeting Data: ages 35-54, anywhere in the United States audience “follower look-alikes” of *Mental Health America*, *Social Psychology Network*, *Association for Psychological Science*, and leading peer reviewed journals in psychiatry and psychology, as shown in Figure 3 below. Twitter estimates the total audience size as 132,000 – 197,000 accounts.

Viewers left comments visible to subsequent viewers. I believe that did not materially affect the results.

Figure 3. Audience break down as “follower look-alikes”

Handles	12 targeted	Handle	Impressions
Locations	1 targeted	Total for ad group	28,697
Ages	1 targeted	@MentalHealthAm	21,955
Genders		@PsychNews	5,519
Languages		@PsychScience	3,244
Platforms		@WileyPsychology	2,066
Interests		@JAMAPsych	2,017
		@YalePsych	1,287
		@ColumbiaPsych	1,042
		@TheLancetPsych	639
		@ColumbiaPSYC	612
		@OxPsychiatry	170
		@LancetChildAdol	83
		@ChildPSYCHOLOGY	78

2.2. Control Survey

Dates: July 6 – July 8, 2018, same methodology and targeting as the Main Survey, but about 1/3 of its size.

Views: 9,156.

Figure 4. Control Survey, Poll 1

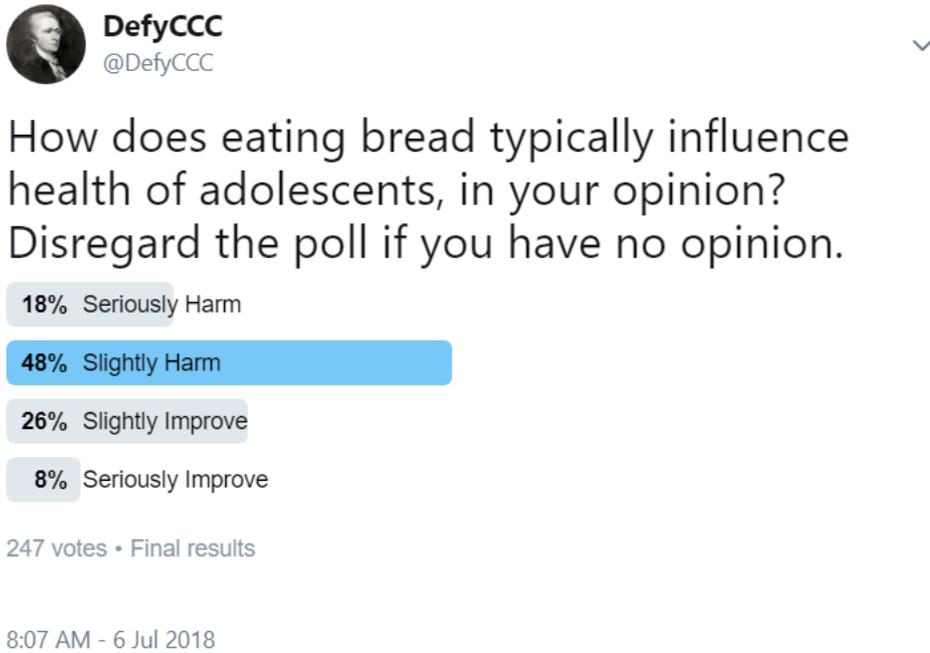


Figure 5. Control Survey, Poll 2

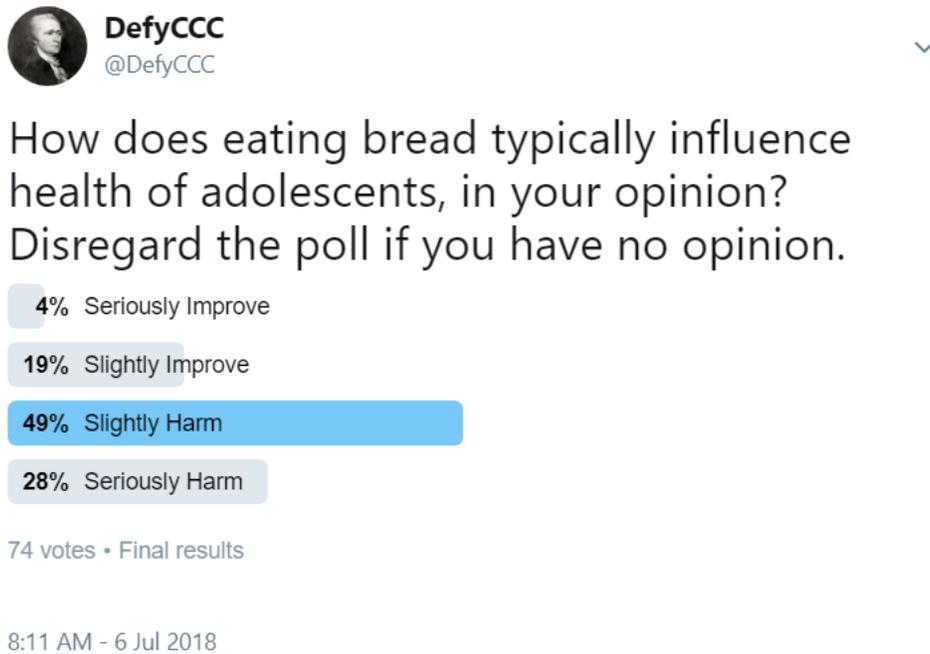


Table T2. Control Survey

Eating Bread	Weight	Poll 1	Poll 2	Total
Seriously Harms	-100	18%	28%	20.3%
Slightly Harms	-40	48%	49%	48.2%
Seriously Improves	40	26%	19%	24.4%
Slightly Improves	100	8%	4%	7.1%
<i>Votes</i>		247	74	
Total				-23

Control Total on the scale from -100 to 100 points: -23. Even if the control survey probably indicates the existence of a negativity bias in the survey design, it is not big enough to significantly affect the results of the main survey.

3. Conclusions

94% of the “informed population”, as responded to the survey, thinks that social media has a negative or a very negative impact on adolescents’ mental health.

4. Disclosure Statement

I hold short positions (bet against) in the stock of the major social media companies, including Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Apple.

5. References

None provided.