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Social Media's Effect on Children

MedicalXpress's Megan Moreno makes an unpopular claim in her article "What does the research say about social media and children's mental health?". Published June 19, 2023, this comprehensive exploration delves into the mental distress that is caused when children use social media. Moreno asserts that the negative effects of social media depend on how media is used; social interaction and information found can be seen as an immense advantage. On the other hand, "teens who use social media in a passive way" are more likely to develop depression, according to Moreno. Also, the author goes on to disprove an earlier study that stated that there was no correlation between social media use and mental disorders by explaining that the way social media was used was not a factor in the study. The author claims that the quality of screen time is the true villain, not the actual time spent on these devices. Moreno introduces two studies that align with her views. One of these studies shows a negative correlation between less communication about social media with parents and bad health outcomes, showing that fewer conversations regarding social media are more likely to cause adverse mental health outcomes. The other study shows that higher depressive symptoms in children are linked to how much their parents use media and how parents are, therefore, role models for their children, per the author. This article claims that quality matters when children are exposed to various social media platforms, introducing a new perspective on the controversy of children's well-being on social media.

While lacking in some respects, this article overall achieves its outset goal of informing and cautioning the audience of the adverse effects that social media has on children through both logical and emotional appeals, alongside rhetorical elements. At a glance, the article is organized with a pro and con writing approach. First, Megan Moreno evaluates the positive aspects of social media, such as communication and education. However, she then goes on to exploit the negative aspects of children on social media. Organizationally, this setup makes the most sense. She addresses the other side of her argument by concession. She admits that social media does have its place, and it is not entirely negative. With this agreement with her opposition, she starts the article out by using a common ground rhetorical device. This device is especially useful to inexplicitly persuade the audience to listen to the rest of her argument against the media. By beginning with simple statements that the majority of people would agree on, she starts the article very agreeable, convincing the audience to read the rest of her article. Also, to get her point across, she does not fall into the usual rhetorical fallacies, like an ad hominem or a hasty generalization. Rather than personally attacking those who disagree with her or making a conclusion about those who allow their children freely on social media, she instead uses logic and reasoning to convince the audience otherwise. The assembly of the article and the lack of rhetorical mistakes allows Moreno's work to be easily followed and to gain credibility with her readers.

Megan Moreno, the author of this article, does not make these accusations lightheartedly. Besides being a medical doctor, she also has a master's degree in education and a degree in public health. Also, she is currently a professor and Interim Department Chair for the Pediatric department at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health ("Moreno, MD, MEd, MPH, Megan."). According to the Department of Pediatrics page about Moreno, she

has received dozens of honors awards and has been a reviewer for a plethora of medical journals. Being a part of the pediatric field gives her firsthand experience of how the quality of social media affects the minds of adolescents, showing extensive experience within this field of study. Alongside this reputable author, the publisher of this article is considered “more reliable” and of “middle or balanced bias”, according to Ad Fontes Media (“Interactive Media Bias Chart.”). With the blend of an educated, experienced author and a reputable publisher, the article gains reputability with the audience.

To get her point across well to her audience, Moreno uses logical appeals through statistics and citing research done by other scientists to call attention to her topic. One of the targeted audiences of both Moreno and MedicalXpress is the medical community. The use of statistics and formal language allows her claim to be taken more seriously by a more professional community. For example, Moreno revealed that “More than one-third (35%) of 13- to 17-year-olds reported using social media sites such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook almost constantly’ in 2022” (Moreno 1). The use of this specific statistic is not only indicating a more logical appeal but with further research, it was found that the Mayo Clinic also used this statistic in the article “How to Help Your Teen Navigate Social Media”. Both this reputable source and Mayo Clinic, a well-known hospital, use this statistic demonstrating that the author chose her included information very carefully. The Child Mind Institute corroborates that teens on various social media sites can lead to increased feelings of depression and anxiety (*How using social media affects teenagers*). This institute is a globally known corporation that specializes in children’s mental health. With this other reputable source, the article’s claim is strengthened. Moreno also cites other experiments that correlate with the idea that the quality of social media and the amount that parents use social media influences a child’s mental status more

than the amount of time spent on social media. It is important to note that these studies were not specifically cited, and they could not be found for certain online, taking away from the legitimacy of the article. If these citations were included and by a credible scientist, then the claim would be strengthened. However, without proper citations, Moreno's argument loses a deal of credibility, in the eyes of the reader. Using logical appeals, the author is primarily imploring her claim through a professional lens, to be taken seriously and to attract the eyes of fellow medical community members, to show how social media scientifically affects children's mental health.

Not only was Moreno focused on drawing attention to this issue from medical professionals, but she also wanted parents of children to become concerned, in order to bring about change. Moreover, Moreno aims to engage parents, urging them to be concerned for their children's future. To get parents more invested in this topic, Moreno uses an identity rhetorical strategy, when an author allows the audience to identify with a specific group, hopefully defining their choices. The author's word choice of referring to adolescents as "your kids" throughout the article, evokes a sense of identity in some of the audience, making this article more personal to them and their families (Moreno 2). The article states that some parents can help curb the negative effects of social media on children by "serving as role models in monitoring their own social media use" (Moreno 6). By using words that would make parents feel more conscientious about how their social media habits affect their children's mental well-being, the author purposefully makes this article personal to some of the intended audience. Also, the words used by the author when referring to the children are connotatively innocent and almost accusing, exemplifying the innocence children play in this issue and how some people would fault the parents. Alongside this, the author lists ways to "promote positive social media use for your

child” (Moreno 6). With this specific word choice and exaggeration of parents’ role within this societal issue, the author calls parents into action to make a difference, showing that their own actions can affect their children. Agreeing with this assertion, Child Mind Institute asserts that parents should minimize the risk of their children developing a mental illness by limiting their own consumption of technology (*How using social media affects teenagers*). Since these sources are agreeable, this can further persuade parents to act on their own children’s mental health. By making this claim emotional and one’s own, the author is successful in bringing her point across to parents, effectively.

Utilizing rhetorical devices and appeals, Megan Moreno aimed to underscore the significance of both restricted parental social media use and the quality of content consumed by children. While credentials from the publisher and author contribute to the document's reliability, a more explicit ethical appeal would have enhanced the perception of open-mindedness and knowledgeable, thereby bolstering credibility. Both the Mayo Clinic and the Child Institute agreeing with Moreno’s claim heavily strengthens the argument and shows preciseness when Moreno was researching for this article. This careful reach adds to the document’s credibility. The article's credibility is somewhat compromised by the absence of specific scientific study sources and citations, necessitating additional clarification and support. Although both vertical and lateral readings enable a moderately trustworthy analysis, further refinement and substantiation could augment the article's overall impact. In conclusion, Megan Moreno’s “What does the research say about social media and children’s mental health?” moderately succeeds in illustrating the impact of social media on adolescents’ mental health through logical and emotional appeals. However, ongoing developments could fortify its claims, offering valuable insights to the debate about children’s well-being on social media.

Works Cited

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