

Focus question: Does social media provide a supportive place for young people in society?

Social media has a way of making young people feel included in society. It has designed platforms, features and contents that ensures that everyone, regardless of their background or abilities, can fully engage on social media. Social media creates a feeling of inclusion because it allows individuals to share stories, experiences, and information about their cultures and traditions. It allows people from diverse backgrounds to connect, collaborate and take part in conversations that encourage understanding and acceptance. Social media allows young individuals who are part of supportive online communities to be compassionate and empathetic towards others who are sharing similar experiences and thoughts. Years ago, young people who were struggling with things in their life often felt marginalised and alone. This is because not many people had access to social media or there were no online communities. Today, young people can connect with others through social media which can help them feel secure with who they are. They can find support online without leaving the house. This is especially helpful for young people living in small communities or rural areas where resources are limited.

Social media platforms have become a way for people to be inspired and involved in movements that fight for human rights. A BBC article about movements led by Gen Z, written in 2022, states that 'Technology has given young people a louder voice than ever before'. Generation Z are people born in the late 1900's or the early 21st century. This generation is noticed for being familiar with the use of digital technology, the internet and social media from a very young age. This means more young people are being involved in the online community. A study in 2022 found that 76% of internet users participate in an online community and 98% of those who belong to online communities feel the sense of belonging to the group.

The internet can spread social awareness and encourage supporters to take action about an issue. Social media has become the place for young people to share their negative experiences of marginalisation, discrimination, and racism, and turn their anger into something positive and impactful that will benefit themselves and others who are suffering. Being able to connect and relate with others around the world can benefit young people because it will teach them to have courage to stand up for the rights of others and try to change things that can affect their future. A 2020 study from the UK Safer Internet Centre showed 34% of 8-17 year olds say the internet has inspired them to take action about a cause and 43% say it makes them feel like their voices matter. Young people on social media platforms can share, discuss and raise funds about social injustices. Social media is an easy and great way for young people to look at and support social issues across the globe, like the Black Lives Matter Movement, #MeToo, etc. For example, a few days after George Floyd's death in 2020, over 8 million tweets on Twitter had been tagged with #BlackLivesMatter, according to The New York Times. This shows that social media allows people to quickly communicate with each other about important issues and express their opinions about it.

Young people who are a part of supportive social media communities may feel like they have gained more courage and confidence to stand up for themselves and others. Climate justice activist Elijah Mckenzie-jackson says “It’s more of a community and family, versus a workplace, which is probably why so many of us are involved in movements.” This tells us that he believes being part of movements through social media or in real life can give us a sense of belonging that can be similar to a family. Belonging in a family can make you feel loved, understood and cared for. It means that young people can share their experiences and worries, and in return, they can gain advice from others who have learnt to get through those situations. Inclusion will very likely result in a high self-esteem which helps young individuals know that they are a great additional value in the world.

Being digitally included in the social media society allows young people to quickly communicate and discuss social issues. It allows them to have important values like compassion and empathy. Young people can find happiness from connecting with others and enjoy participating in movements. Elijah says that “Once you’re involved, you can’t stop because you learn and understand more.” This proves that being part of a supportive society will definitely benefit the younger generation in a way that makes them feel like their life is more meaningful. Their participation and actions will not only benefit themselves but others as well.

I can conclude that, over the years, as social media has increased in usage and development, it has become more of a supportive place for young people. This is because recent statistics (from 2022) show that social media has positively impacted many young people by enhancing engagement through online communities. Online communities have allowed many young people to share experiences, discover new identities, participate, and support movements online or in real life, and much more.