

Study designs novel approach for better understanding teens and technology

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Researchers at UW have designed a scale, The Adolescents' Digital Technology Interactions and Importance, that measures the importance of social media interactions. This novel approach proposes a brand-new

way to design future studies of adolescent health and social media.

The study, led by Megan Moreno, MD, MPH, professor of pediatrics at University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, was published today in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*.

"Previous research has focused on the quantity of social [media](#) use and health outcomes such as depression and anxiety. These studies find very mixed results. We thought it may be more important to consider what teens felt were important interests and interactions on social media rather than how many minutes they spend," said Moreno. "We hope this study and new method can advance the field by understanding what people find important about social media and their interactions."

To develop this scale, several steps were used to identify common interests and interactions on social media, including a convening with experts in the field and review with teens themselves. Once the preliminary survey was created, a total of 761 adolescents between the age of 12 to 18 took this [online survey](#). The survey asked respondents to rate the importance of using social media for different reasons, including:

- to provide an important accomplishment or update on your life using social media
- to plan an event
- to post a photo for artistic reasons
- to manage your mood
- to [video chat](#)
- to build a brand

After analyzing the data and validating the survey, they identified three subscales representing general categories of importance for teens:

1. Technology to bridge online/offline experience and preferences. This subscale includes items such as posting about an accomplishment or updating your life using social media or looking for an event to attend. These types of interactions represent teens sharing something about their offline life to the online world, or connecting to a business they use offline by following them online.
2. Technology to go outside one's offline identity. This subscale includes an individual [teen](#) using [social media](#) to manage their mood, creating a new profile with a different identity, or using a digital tool that creates or transports them to a virtual environment.
3. Technology for social connection. This subscale includes items such as having a video chat, seeing what people are up to without asking them about it (checking their profile or feed) and contributing to a private conversation.

"We hope this new scale impacts the field of adolescents digital technology research. For some time now there has been healthy skepticism for studies that focus on minutes. We hope to advance our ability to provide information and education to teens and families by considering the quality of their children's technology use and not just quantity," said Moreno.

More information: Megan A Moreno et al. Measuring Interests Not Minutes: Development and Validation of the Adolescents' Digital Technology Interactions and Importance Scale (ADTI), *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (2019). [DOI: 10.2196/16736](https://doi.org/10.2196/16736)

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