

How life online influences young people

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Young people spend a lot of their time online. Even so, we still know very little about how this intensive use of social media influences their development. Brain researcher and Spinoza Prize winner Eveline Crone from Leiden University and media psychologist Elly Konijn (VU) describes what the research has already generated in terms of usable information and what kinds of urgent questions have to be answered. The study is published in *Nature Communications*.

Never before have young [people](#) spent so much time online. And it seems more or less certain that intensive use of online media influences the brains of young people. Research has provided extensive evidence for the fact that adolescence is a time when the brain is in full

development and is open to outside influences, from peers, for example. At the same time, the influence of parents is slowly being reduced. What could be the advantages and disadvantages for the [adolescent brain](#) of the use of social media, in particular the intensive use of it?

Sensitivity

A series of studies in recent years has shown that the brains of young people are highly susceptible to reward and social acceptance, but also to rejection and not belonging. In addition, young people—and adults, too—are sensitive to the opinions of others online, such as comments on their music choice or their outward appearance. Impulse control in young people is still in the development stage which means they are extra sensitive to media expressions that arouse emotion.

In this period [young people](#) who frequently use [social media](#) respond on the one hand extra strongly to signals that they belong, for example via likes that they receive on Instagram, but on the other hand they are extra sensitive to exclusion, such as via group apps. Not only this, their emotions often get the upper hand in assessing media messages, including fake news.

Structural changes

Research on how intensive use of online media structurally influences the brain in development is still in the early stages, Crone and Konijn explain. How changes in the brain can predict social behaviour and emotional reactions is still an open question. More intensive collaboration between [brain](#) researchers and [media](#) researchers will expand our understanding of how this works.

More information: Eveline A. Crone et al. Media use and brain

development during adolescence, *Nature Communications* (2018). [DOI: 10.1038/s41467-018-03126-x](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-03126-x)

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