Youth Participatory Action Research in Latinx adolescent social media use and wellbeing

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Latinx youth are the fastest growing minority population in the US and among the highest users of social technologies, yet the impacts of social technologies on their wellbeing remains understudied. This is critical to support positive development in the digital age for this population given existing systemic barriers which increases vulnerabilities on- and offline. Through a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) design with Latinx adolescents in the community, we explore experiences on social media and how it affects wellbeing. The YPAR curriculum consisted of 15 virtual sessions which incorporated modules on (1) building teen-adult research partnership, (2) research methods and study design, (3) fieldwork led by teen researchers (TRs), and (4) research interpretations and application. Key findings identified by the teen research partnerships included the variation on perceptions of healthy use of social media among teens, cultural differences related to how social media use changes throughout adolescence and how the impact to wellbeing evolves. TRs were able to apply their research to assess survey design and evaluate an established mental health social media campaign, which implemented the real-time integration of current Latinx adolescent experiences into research practices and is critical in a rapidly changing digital ecosystem. This also provided empowerment in a space in which minoritized youth are vastly underrepresented. The YPAR approach has allowed for re-evaluation of vulnerabilities related to social media use, as well as identifying opportunities to leverage the ubiquity of social media in the Latinx adolescent wellbeing context.