

Social Media Effects on Mental Health

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Abstract: As digital engagement continues to rise, the connection between social media use and mental health has become a critical area of study. This review explores current understanding of how platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter influence mental well-being. Research has highlighted several negative outcomes, such as increased rates of anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem. These issues are often linked to social comparison, online harassment, and the addictive nature of these platforms. Evidence suggests that adolescents who spend more than three hours daily on social media are twice as likely to experience mental health challenges compared to those with lower usage. Despite these concerns, social media can also offer valuable opportunities for connection, emotional support, and self-expression. Some platforms even provide tools and resources for mental health support. Still, interventions aimed at improving mental health through social media tend to show limited effectiveness. This review underscores the importance of developing approaches that minimize potential harms while maximizing the positive aspects of social media use.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, social media, mental health, depression, anxiety, social comparison, adolescents.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The fast growth of social media over the last twenty years has changed how people talk to each other, find information, and see themselves and others. From early sites like Myspace and Friendster to popular ones like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Snapchat, these platforms are now a big part of our lives. While social media can connect people across distances and share information widely, it can also have complicated effects on mental health. These platforms are always available on many devices, leading to new ways people interact online. Users are often looking for approval, comparing themselves to others, and consuming information all at the same time. This paper reviews current research on how using social media affects mental health, showing both good and bad effects for different groups of people. We look at studies that track changes over time, compare different groups, and analysis trends to find out what affects mental health. We consider how things like the amount of time spent online, the type of content, the features of different platforms, and personal habits can impact well-being. We also think about how changes in platform design can make certain mental health effects stronger. These findings are important for more than just research; they can help create programs for individuals, communities, and policies. As social media continues to change and become a bigger part of our lives, it's essential

to understand its effects on mental health for professionals, teachers, parents, developers, and policymakers. This review aims to provide a clear understanding of these issues and point out areas where more research is needed.

II. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and Snapchat are now a big part of daily life, especially for young people. Over 4.7 billion people around the world use social media, spending more than two hours a day on it. This has led researchers to study how these platforms affect our minds and behaviour. Social media began in the early 2000s with sites like Friendster and Myspace, then Facebook came along in 2004 and changed how we connect online. In the next ten years, many new platforms appeared, each with different ways to share content, like Twitter's short posts, Instagram's photos, Snapchat's disappearing messages, and TikTok's quick videos. Each platform has its own features to keep users engaged. Different social media sites attract different age groups. For example, Facebook has users from many ages, while TikTok and Snapchat are mostly popular with younger people. This variety makes it both interesting and challenging for researchers to learn how each platform affects different groups. The rise of smartphones has made social media even more common, allowing people to

connect all the time. About 85% of teenagers say they check their social media several times a day, and nearly 45% feel "almost constantly online." This high level of use raises important questions about how it affects young people's thinking, feelings, and social skills, especially during important growth stages. The COVID-19 pandemic made people rely more on social media because they could not meet in person. During lockdowns, many used these platforms for connection, entertainment, information, and support, leading to a sharp rise in usage. This situation has helped researchers learn more about how online interactions can replace face-to-face ones and its effects on mental health.

A. Positive Effects of Social Support and Community Building

- **Connection and Belonging:** social media help people stay in touch, find groups with similar interests, and get support from others, which can help reduce feelings of loneliness. These platforms let people connect no matter where they are, making it easier to feel understood and accepted. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media was especially important for keeping friendships strong when people had to stay apart.
- **Mental Health Awareness:** Platforms make it easy to share mental health information, lower stigma, and offer help for those in need. Hashtag campaigns like #BellLetsTalk and #WorldMentalHealthDay have reached many people, making it normal to talk about mental health. These efforts help people notice symptoms, learn about treatment options, and find professional help when necessary.
- **Identity Exploration:** Social media helps people, especially teens, to discover and show who they are in friendly spaces. By creating profiles, sharing creative content, and connecting with different groups, users can try out different parts of their identity. This can help them feel better about themselves and improve their mental health.
- **Advocacy and Activism:** People can speak up for mental health issues and help make things better. Social media helps share the voices of those who are often ignored and allows them to tell their stories. Movements like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter show how social media can bring people together to take action on issues that affect mental health for individuals and society.
- **Digital Literacy and Communication:** Using social media often helps improve communication skills, technology use, and understanding of media. These skills are becoming more important in school and work.

- **Creative Expression:** Websites and apps for making videos and writing allow people to express themselves, tell stories, and be creative. These can help them deal with their feelings and learn more about themselves.
- **Educational Content:** Social media is a way to find educational information about mental health, ways to cope, and self-care tips that might not be easy to get from regular sources.
- **Crisis Support:** Many platforms have added help features, like Instagram's resources for eating problems and Facebook's tools for preventing suicide, to support users in need.

B. Negative Effects of Social Media on Mental Health

- **Comparative Behaviour:** Seeing perfect images of other people's lives can make us feel bad about ourselves, lowering our self-esteem and increasing feelings of depression and anxiety. Studies show that people who often compare themselves to others on social media sites like Instagram and Facebook feel more depressed and less satisfied with their lives over time.
- **Cyberbullying:** Online harassment and bullying are common on social media, causing mental health problems, thoughts of suicide, and self-harm, especially in young people. Research shows that those who are bullied online feel much more anxious, depressed, and lonely, and these feelings can last a long time after the bullying happens. The anonymity on some platforms can make these harmful interactions worse and happen more often.
- **Information Overload:** Seeing a lot of bad news, world problems, and upsetting topics can cause increased worry, tiredness, and feeling powerless. This is often called "doom scrolling."
- **Compulsive Use:** Things like endless scrolling and alerts can make people addicted, causing trouble with sleep, less work done, and problems in real-life relationships. The brain's reward system that gets activated when using social media is similar to what happens with drug addiction, as it releases dopamine that keeps people coming back even when it has bad effects.
- **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):** Always being connected can make fear of missing out (FOMO) worse, leading to more anxiety and unhappiness with what we do. This feeling pushes people to check their social media many times a day, which creates a cycle of stress, short moments of relief, and renewed worry.

that greatly affects their ability to focus and enjoy the present.

- **Withdrawal Symptoms:** Regular users often say they feel real withdrawal symptoms when they try to cut back on use. These symptoms include feeling annoyed, restless, having trouble focusing, and constantly thinking about checking their accounts. This shows how addictive social media can be.
- **Appearance-Focused Content:** Social media platforms that focus on pictures and videos, like Instagram and TikTok, can make young women feel unhappy with their bodies. This can lead to unhealthy eating habits and extreme dieting. The use of filters and editing tools sets impossible beauty standards that even the people who create these posts can't keep up with in real life.
- **Pro-Eating Disorder Communities:** Even though there are rules against harmful content, groups that support dangerous weight loss methods and unhealthy eating habits keep changing and finding ways to avoid being caught. They use hidden language and symbols to escape detection while encouraging harmful behaviours.
- **Fitness and Wellness Culture Distortion:** Even content that seems to promote health can encourage unrealistic body images and extreme workout routines in the name of "wellness," making it hard to tell the difference between healthy habits and unhealthy obsession with looks and weight.

C. Mechanisms Linking Social Media and Mental Health

- **Social Comparison Theory:** People often assess their own worth by comparing themselves to others, a process that is amplified by the idealized images and lifestyles they encounter on social media. This comparison often happens without conscious thought and can result in negative feelings about oneself, especially when users compare their everyday lives to the polished moments shared by others. Studies indicate that upward social comparisons—where individuals compare themselves to those they view as better off—are especially common on visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok.
- **Reinforcement and Feedback Loops:** Likes, comments, and shares give instant feedback that encourages certain behaviours and can even lead to addiction. This is like the concept of variable-ratio reinforcement in behavioural psychology, where unpredictable rewards motivate people to keep engaging. When users anticipate social validation, their brains release dopamine, creating patterns that are like those found in other types of addiction.
- **Displacement Hypothesis:** Using social media too much can take away time from healthy offline activities like exercise and in-person conversations, which are good for mental health. This can mess up your sleep, make it

harder to form strong social bonds, and keep you from spending time in nature, which is good for your well-being. Research shows that every hour on social media might mean an hour less doing these positive activities.

- **Attention Economy Dynamics:** Social media platforms are made to keep users engaged by using algorithms, notifications, and endless scrolling. These features can make it hard to focus, increase stress from always being connected, and make it difficult to stay mindful and present.
- **Identity Formation Processes:** Online self-presentation involves choosing what to show or hide about yourself, which can lead to differences between how you appear online and in real life. This difference can cause stress and worries about being true to yourself, especially during times when figuring out who you are is important.

D. Moderating Factors

- **Age and Developmental Stage:** Teens and young adults are more sensitive to peer feedback and shaping their self-identity. They are greatly influenced by social validation online, especially during critical developmental stages. Studies show that pre-teens (ages 10-12) react differently than older teens (16-18), with the latter being more concerned about their online reputation.
- **Type and Purpose of Use:** Actively engaging with friends online is better than just mindlessly scrolling through content. Talking to close friends online can make people feel more connected, while passive browsing can lead to feeling worse about oneself. How social media is used—whether for school, fun, or connecting with others—affects the experience, with purposeful use usually leading to positive outcomes.
- **Individual Differences:** Personal traits, existing mental health conditions, and offline support can change how social media affects someone. People who are more anxious or compare themselves often may feel worse from social media, while those who handle emotions well tend to be more resilient. Factors like income and cultural background also influence how social media impacts mental health, as they affect how people use and interpret online content. Knowing how to navigate digital platforms and being aware of media influence can help users have healthier interactions online.

III. OBJECTIVE

The objective is to explore the connection between social media usage and mental health results. This includes understanding the ways in which social media can influence mental health in both beneficial and detrimental manners. Additionally, the study will investigate the various platforms that may affect mental health. It will assess the effects of social media on sleep quality, depression, and overall well-

being. Furthermore, the aim is to create and assess strategies that encourage healthy social media practices and enhance mental health outcomes.

IV. LITERATUR REVIEW

The paper provides a comprehensive literature review on the impact of social media on mental health. It examines both the positive and negative effects of social media use, discussing how it can foster social connections and provide access to mental health resources, as well as how it can contribute to increased depression, anxiety, and social isolation. The paper highlights the need for a balanced approach to social media engagement, where users are mindful of their online interactions and implement strategies to protect their mental well-being.[1] It also emphasizes the importance of future research to explore the evolving trends and long-term effects of social media use on mental health across diverse demographics.[2][3] The unique insights uncovered from the document suggest that the relationship between social media and mental health is complex and multifaceted. While social media can offer opportunities for social connection and mental health support, its excessive and unregulated use can also contribute to adverse mental health outcomes. Addressing this challenge requires a collaborative effort among mental health professionals, educators, policymakers, and technology companies to create a digital environment that prioritizes mental well-being. (Nyiramana Mukamurera P. et. al., 2025) [4]

This document presents a comprehensive review of the impact of social media on mental health. The authors, from various universities in Malaysia and Indonesia, explore both positive and negative effects of social media use on psychological well-being. The review utilizes theoretical frameworks such as Social Comparison Theory and examines how curated online interactions influence mental health outcomes. The study employs a systematic scoping review methodology, analysing recent research from 2019 onward. Key findings reveal that age, developmental stage, and usage patterns significantly moderate the effects of social media on mental health. The review identifies emerging concerns such as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), sleep disturbances, and low self-esteem, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Despite these challenges, the authors note that social media also presents opportunities for mental health support through peer networks and online interventions. (Wan Anor Wan Sulaiman et al., 2024) [5]

This paper reviews the experimental literature concerning the impact of social media use on mental health, emphasizing the need for clinicians to understand and address their clients' social media habits. The research highlights the positive outcomes associated with active social media use that fosters connections and warmth, as well as the negative consequences of exposure to idealized content or an emphasis on appearance and feedback. It suggests that promoting skills like reappraisal, self-compassion, and mindfulness can lead to healthier social media engagement. The findings underscore the importance of clinicians guiding clients towards more constructive

social media behaviours rather than advocating complete avoidance in today's digitally pervasive environment. The existing experimental literature highlights the dual nature of social media, outlining its advantages and disadvantages concerning mental health. For clinicians, a key focus should be not only on assessing the frequency of clients' social media engagement but also on evaluating the nature and quality of this interaction. . (Kaitlyn Burnell et al., 2024) [6]

The paper by de Hessels and Montag (2024) investigates the effects of a 14-day social media abstinence intervention on various mental health factors, particularly focusing on problematic smartphone use (PSU), body image dissatisfaction, and feelings of loneliness. It combines longitudinal design with experimental methodology to assess changes over time. The paper provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between social media use, mental health, and individual psychological traits. It emphasizes the need for further longitudinal studies to fully understand the dynamics at play and suggests that interventions targeting social media use should consider the multifaceted nature of user motivations and psychological outcomes. (Lea C. de Hessels et al., 2024) [7]

The paper examines the relationship between social media use and various mental health conditions, particularly focusing on depression and anxiety disorders. It highlights that excessive social media use has been linked to symptoms of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, especially among adolescents and young adults. The paper discusses various interventions and strategies to mitigate the negative effects of social media on mental health, including digital well-being tools, educational programs, and the concept of digital detox. The review concludes by highlighting emerging research areas and ethical considerations in social media research, emphasizing the need for more nuanced studies on the combined impact of multiple social media channels and the potential for digital interventions. The document also discusses various interventions and strategies to mitigate the negative effects of social media on mental health. These include digital well-being tools, educational programs promoting digital literacy, and encouraging positive online behaviours. The review emphasizes the need for tailored strategies, digital literacy programs, and policy regulations to address the complexities of social media's impact on mental health. (Wan Anor Wan Sulaiman et al., 2024) [8]

V. DATA COLLECTION

Social media and Mental Health Insights: While social media serves various purposes, it often poses significant risks to younger users. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges linked to social media, a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to increased screen time and social media engagement. This surge provided more chances for teens to face online issues, further complicating their mental health. However, social media also allows teens to connect with communities, engage with live streams, and support meaningful causes. Feeling welcomed and secure online is

crucial for U.S. teens. Despite the challenges, social media presents numerous opportunities for connection and enjoyment.[9]

Current Research: This study aims to build on earlier findings by exploring the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes among a large group of young adults. The findings will enhance existing literature by investigating various dimensions of social media use and their effects while accounting for relevant third variables. According to social media mental health statistics, nearly 87% of teens report experiencing cyberbullying on these platforms. Additionally, individuals who spend more than two hours daily on social media are 2.7 times more likely to be diagnosed with depression, and those using seven or more platforms are three times more likely to experience anxiety.

A. Different Social Media Platforms and their uses

- YouTube (95%) enables users to share videos covering a wide range of subjects, including music, cooking, makeup tutorials, and vlogs (video blogs).
- TikTok (67%) serves as a platform for producing short videos lasting between 15 to 60 seconds, primarily focused on entertainment and comedy, but also featuring informative content. Influencers on TikTok engage their audience by offering quick tips and advice while promoting their personal brands.
- Instagram (62%) provides a 24-hour “stories” feature alongside permanent photo and video posts. Unless an account is set to “private,” these posts are accessible to anyone. Instagram is widely used for sharing vacation highlights, daily activities, and interests in areas such as art and cooking.
- Snapchat (59%) allows users to send photos that disappear after being viewed, as well as “stories” that are available for 24 hours. These stories enable users to share their experiences with followers through images or videos.
- Facebook (32%) is utilized for sharing photos, videos, articles, personal updates, and for communicating with friends.
- These platforms are frequently employed to maintain connections with friends and are also popular sources for news and updates about celebrities.

B. Mental Health and Social media: what Message prevails?

Almost 41% of women using social media experience pressure to conform to specific self-presentation standards. Additionally, 63% of social media users report feelings of loneliness. A significant 37% of these users suffer from FOMO, or the fear of missing out. According to Social Media Mental Health Statistics, nearly 63% of parents believe that social media has detrimental effects on their children's mental well-being. Furthermore, around 32% of teenagers indicate they have been victims of cyberbullying. After engaging with social media, 40% of users report feelings of anxiety or depression. Approximately 60% of individuals on these platforms feel the need to take a break from social media. Moreover, 70% of teenagers believe that

social media companies do not take sufficient action to combat cyberbullying. About 42% of users feel more insecure about their appearance following their social media interactions. Lastly, nearly 37% of social media users find that political discussions online have a negative impact on them.[10]

- **Social media and Teens Statistics:** 41% of teens who use social media the most rate their mental health as poor or very poor, as per Social Media Mental Health Statistics. This is higher than the 23% of teens who use social media the least. For instance, 10% of heavy social media users have had thoughts of suicide or self-harm in the past year, compared to 5% of light users. Additionally, 17% of heavy users feel poor about their body image, while only 6% of light users feel the same. On average, US teens spend 4.8 hours each day on seven popular social media apps. YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram make up 87% of their social media time. Specifically, 37% of teens use these apps for five or more hours a day, 14% use them for 4 to less than 5 hours, 26% use them for 2 to less than 4 hours, and 23% use them for less than 2 hours a day.[11]
- **Social Media Mental Health and Parental Concerns [12]:** A survey conducted in 2024 revealed that a significant number of parents attribute the increase in teenage depression to social media. Their primary concern centers around Instagram, followed by Snapchat and TikTok. As of June 2020, 58% of parents expressed that social media usage contributes to their teenagers' lack of sufficient sleep. Furthermore, parents worry that social media encourages their teens to seek excessive validation and attention, as well as to encounter bullying. Additionally, 17% of parents feel that social media induces feelings of anger in their teens, while 15% believe it leads to feelings of depression.
- **Cyberbullying and Its Consequences:** Cyberbullying refers to the act of using online platforms, such as social media, to harass or intimidate others. This issue is prevalent among children and adolescents. Research indicates that nearly 34% of young individuals have experienced cyberbullying at some point, with 10% having been targeted within the last month. The repercussions of cyberbullying extend beyond mere emotional distress, as highlighted by Social Media Mental Health Statistics. Adolescents who endure cyberbullying are at a heightened risk of developing mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, diminished self-esteem, and suicidal ideation. Furthermore, it can result in academic challenges, substance abuse, and feelings of isolation. Notably, there are significant gender disparities in the prevalence of cyberbullying, with girls being more frequently affected than boys. Approximately 36.4% of girls report experiencing cyberbullying, in contrast to 31.4% of boys. These variations may stem from the differing ways in which boys and girls engage with and experience social media.

- **Potential Benefits:** Social media can offer opportunities for connection, social support, and finding communities based on shared interests. It can also provide a platform for self-expression and creativity.
- **Important Considerations:** The connection between social media and mental health is intricate and varied, necessitating further investigation to comprehend the fundamental mechanisms involved. Personal differences and existing mental health issues can affect an individual's reaction to social media platforms. It is essential to find a balance between the possible advantages and dangers associated with social media usage while prioritizing mental health.

VI. FUTURE SCOPE

The results offer important new information about the connection between social media use and mental health, especially when it comes to determining depression predictors.

Variations in activity interest, insomnia, and social media using patterns. self-comparison, anxiety, and trouble focusing. age, marital status, and the social media platforms utilized. These results highlight the complex effects of social media on mental health and lay the groundwork for focused interventions.

VII. LIMITATION

This research offers important insights into the effects of social media on mental health; however, it involved a relatively small participant pool, primarily consisting of students and young adults. Consequently, the sample may not accurately reflect the broader population, particularly older individuals or those residing in rural areas. Data collection relied on self-reported surveys, which can introduce biases, exaggerations, or inaccuracies in recall. Furthermore, mental health symptoms were assessed based on participants' perceptions rather than through clinical diagnoses. The experimental phase, which involved a one-week reduction in social media usage, was insufficient to evaluate long-term psychological effects. Additionally, the study did not differentiate between the types of content consumed (such as entertainment, educational, or political), which can have varying impacts on mental health. Different social media platforms possess distinct features and cultures, yet the study categorized them broadly. Mental health can also be influenced by numerous factors, including academic stress, personal circumstances, sleep patterns, and dietary habits, making it challenging to isolate the specific effects of social media from these other influences. The homogeneity in age and cultural background among participants further restricts the study's applicability on a global scale.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Social media has both good and bad effects on mental health. It can help people connect and find support, but it also has risks, especially for those who are vulnerable. Social media lets us join communities, get validation from others, and access helpful information that can make us feel better and less alone. For groups that are often left out, social media is a way to express themselves and feel like they belong somewhere when they might not in real life. But social media can also make us compare ourselves to others, be bullied online, see wrong information, and use it too much like an addiction. The way these platforms are set up to keep us interested can sometimes make us focus on negative things and get stuck in bad habits. Studies show that how social media affects our mental health depends on things like our age, gender, money situation, and any mental health issues we already have.

To make sure we get the most out of social media while staying safe, experts in different fields need to work together to come up with smart plans based on facts. It's not just about how much we use social media but how we use it that matters most for our mental health. This means looking closely at how we use social media and finding ways to help that suit each person best. Instead of saying social media is all good or all bad, we need to understand that it's different for everyone and in different situations. To do better in the future, we should give users more control over their online experiences, design platforms responsibly, and teach people how to use digital tools wisely.

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