

Exploring the impact of social media on adolescent and young adult mental health

Received: 21 April 2025

Accepted: 6 August 2026

Published online: 11 August 2026

Cite this article as: Alhaj, H., Jaber, M.O., Assaf, M. *et al.* Exploring the impact of social media on adolescent and young adult mental health. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* (2026). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-026-08709-4>

Hamid Alhaj, Mahmoud Odwan Jaber, Marwan Assaf, Farah Awadhalla, Rita Alkhatib & Khaled Obaideen

We are providing an unedited version of this manuscript to give early access to its findings. Before final publication, the manuscript will undergo further editing. Please note there may be errors present which affect the content, and all legal disclaimers apply.

If this paper is publishing under a Transparent Peer Review model then Peer Review reports will publish with the final article.

Exploring the impact of social media on adolescent and young adult mental health

ARTICLE IN PRESS

ABSTRACT

Social media platforms offer potential benefits for mental well-being by fostering social connections, enabling self-expression, and democratizing access to mental health resources. Yet, concerns have been raised regarding their association with mental health problems, particularly among young people. This narrative review examines findings from longitudinal studies, cross-sectional surveys, and qualitative research, with a focus on adolescents and young adults. Evidence suggests that social media can enhance social support and community building, particularly for individuals experiencing offline isolation. It also serves as a platform for sharing personal experiences, helping to destigmatize mental illness and promote societal understanding. Conversely, key themes related to problematic social media use identified in the literature included a strong link to cyberbullying and symptoms of depression and anxiety. The pervasive culture of social comparison and exposure to unrealistic portrayals of others' lives has been identified as potential triggers for low self-esteem, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Excessive social media use has been shown to be associated with risky behaviors, including disrupted sleep and unhealthy alcohol consumption. However, the link between problematic social media use and mental health problems may reflect reciprocal processes, such as time-lagged or bidirectional effects. While existing research employs diverse methodological approaches, there remains a critical need for longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of social media use. Intervention-based studies examining strategies to promote healthier usage patterns are also scarce. Future studies should aim to address these gaps to improve our understanding and mitigate the impact of social media on adolescent and young people's mental health.

Keywords: Social media; Mental health; Anxiety; Depression; Cyberbullying; Self-esteem; Health advocacy; Social comparison; Adolescents; Young Adults.

1. Introduction

In the era of digital interconnectedness, social media platforms have emerged as central to our daily lives, shaping the way we communicate, consume information, and perceive the world around us. The inception of platforms like SixDegrees in the late 1990s marked the dawn of what we now recognize as social networking sites, setting the stage for the emergence of giants like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram in the early 21st century (Sponder & Khan, 2017). This evolution from simple message boards to complex networks capable of connecting billions of users illustrates a significant transformation in how people communicate, share, and interact across the globe, setting the groundwork for an in-depth exploration of social media's impact on mental health (Gilmour et al., 2020). Mental health is described as the state of emotional, psychological, behavioral and social wellbeing (Alhaj & McAllister-Williams, 2008; World Health Organization, 2022). It influences every aspect of people's lives, from decision-making and stress management to interpersonal relationships and overall quality of life. This review conceptualizes mental health as encompassing both the presence of positive states (e.g., well-being) and the absence of negative conditions (e.g., depression), with well-being being a key component of overall mental health.

Social media platforms, beyond their potential drawbacks, could play a crucial role in enhancing various aspects of mental well-being through the fostering of social connections (Winstone et al., 2021), empowerment via self-expression, and the democratization of access to mental health resources (R. Zhang, 2017). They serve as pivotal venues for individuals to express their identities, share personal experiences, and showcase creativity, contributing to an enhanced sense of self-esteem, and personal validation (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2018). Social media has become a critical conduit for mental health advocacy, raising awareness on issues that were once stigmatized and promoting a culture of openness and support (Robinson et al., 2015). Through the lens of positive psychology, studies have indicated that when used intentionally and mindfully, social media can contribute to greater subjective well-being, fostering connections that are both meaningful and supportive in nature. Acting as a platform to help overcome challenges through interactions with groups and communities with similar issues, and facilitating online intervention programs (Herrera-Peco et al., 2023). This dual role of social media, as both a platform for individual expression and a community space for collective support, underscores its potential to positively influence mental health outcomes.

While these platforms present positive impacts through enhanced social connections, avenues for creative expression, and broadened access to information, concerns have been raised about their association with a range of mental health concerns, including anxiety, depression, decreased self-esteem, and poor sleep quality (Woods & Scott, 2016). These platforms can perpetuate unrealistic standards of beauty and success, foster environments ripe for cyberbullying, and encourage compulsive use patterns that disrupt sleep and real-world relationships.

The role of content and context in social media use significantly influences its impact on mental health. For instance, exposure to idealized images, lifestyles, and social figures can lead to unhealthy social comparisons, while engagement with uplifting content may boost mood and self-esteem (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). Similarly, the context of social media usage, such as passive scrolling versus active engagement, plays a critical role (Thorisdottir et al., 2019). Thus, understanding the types of content consumed and the way individuals engage with social media is essential for comprehending its complex effects on mental health.

Studies have shown that social media platforms are not all the same; each has unique features that shape how users interact and how these interactions affect mental health. For instance, Instagram and Snapchat, which focus heavily on visual content, have been linked to body image concerns and social comparison (Burnell et al., 2022; Fardouly et al., 2018). This is largely due to the prevalence of highly curated and idealized images, which can make users feel inadequate. TikTok, with its short-form videos and algorithm-driven content, tends to encourage compulsive use and fragmented attention, especially among younger users (Qin et al., 2022). Facebook, known for its emphasis on social networking and community building, has been associated with both positive outcomes, such as increased social support, and negative outcomes, including cyberbullying and depressive symptoms (Ademiluyi et al., 2022; Gilmour et al., 2020). Twitter, later called X, with its real-time text-based interactions, can raise awareness of mental health issues but also expose users to toxic discourse, potentially increasing anxiety and stress. Finally, Snapchat's temporary posts might reduce the pressure for perfectionism but could also encourage risky behaviors, as users may feel their posts are less permanent. These differences highlight the need to consider how each platform's unique environment influences mental health in distinct ways.

This narrative review examines the multifaceted relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes, considering both its potential harms and benefits. The focus is on adolescents and young adults, developmental periods marked by rapid biological maturation and major social role transitions. Adolescence has been proposed to span approximately ages 10–24, reflecting extended patterns of physical growth and psychosocial development (Sawyer et al., 2018). This stage is strongly shaped by evolving social forces, marketing environments, and digital media ecosystems. Heightened neuroplasticity, identity formation processes, and increased sensitivity to peer evaluation during these years may amplify susceptibility to both protective and adverse influences associated with social media engagement. From a legal perspective, most countries recognize individuals aged 18 and above as adults. Importantly, patterns of social media use vary substantially across the lifespan. Empirical evidence indicates meaningful differences between young adulthood (18–40 years), middle adulthood (40–65 years), and older adulthood (65+ years), underscoring the need to examine age-specific mechanisms and outcomes (Van den Broeck et al., 2015). By centering on adolescents and young adults, this review targets

populations for whom social media exposure coincides with critical windows of psychological and social development.

Specifically, we will explore a range of mental health conditions exacerbated by social media usage, including anxiety, depression, feelings of loneliness, and the impact of unrealistic expectations and social comparisons. Furthermore, we will examine the correlation between social media engagement and risky behaviors, compulsive usage patterns, sleep disturbances, and substance use. Our paper specifically focuses on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (previously Twitter), evaluating their potential contributions to these mental health challenges. While Facebook and X may be less used at the current time by adolescents and young adults, much of the foundational research on social media and mental health in adolescents and young adults was conducted when these platforms were dominant. This exploration is crucial for developing evidence-based guidelines and interventions that can harness the positive aspects of social media while mitigating its risks, ultimately guiding users towards healthier digital habits in an increasingly online world.

To guide this paper, the following research questions and objectives are addressed:

1. How does social media facilitate social support, community building, and access to mental health resources?
2. What is the association between social media use and adverse mental health conditions (e.g., anxiety, depression) and risky behaviors?
3. Through what psychological mechanisms, such as social comparison and exposure to unrealistic standards, does social media shape self-esteem and body image?
4. What are the patterns of compulsive social media use and how are they correlated with sleep disturbances and substance use?
5. What gaps exist in the current literature and what are the key future research directions necessary to understand the long-term psychological effects of social media?

By addressing these key questions, our review aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on the dual role of social media in mental health, offering insights that can inform strategies for promoting healthier digital engagement.

2. Data Collection and Search Strategy

Although this study was conducted as a narrative review, we aimed to capture the breadth of relevant empirical literature to provide a comprehensive and accurate synthesis of the evidence. Studies examining the relationship between social media use and mental health among adolescents and young adults were identified through searches of PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they provide broad, interdisciplinary coverage of biomedical, psychological, and social science research.

The search strategy combined the term “**social media**” with the names of major platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook) and mental health–related keywords, including “**mental health**”, “**anxiety**”, and “**depression**”. Searches were conducted in titles, abstracts, and keywords. No publication year restrictions were applied; the search covered the period from database inception through January 2025.

Eligibility criteria were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles written in English and studies involving participants under 40 years of age. Grey literature, including conference proceedings, reports, dissertations, and other non–peer-reviewed sources, was excluded to prioritize methodological rigor and consistency in evidence quality. Following application of these criteria and screening for relevance to the review objectives, 33 key studies were retained for narrative synthesis. These studies were examined in detail to extract methodological characteristics, population features, and reported mental health outcomes relevant to adolescents and young adults (see supplementary table).

3. Positive Impacts of Social Media on Mental Health

3.1 Enhanced Social Support and Community Building

Several studies highlighted how social media platforms serve as pivotal spaces for self-expression, empowerment, and community engagement. This facilitates a sense of belonging and identity among users, contributing positively to their mental health. A 2017 study investigated the impact of expressing personal thoughts on platforms such as Facebook on the well-being of young adults, especially in challenging circumstances (R. Zhang, 2017). The study demonstrated that during periods of stress, sharing on Facebook can mitigate the effects on mental health among college students. Furthermore, sharing results in increased online support from friends, enhancing feelings of connection, happiness, and alleviating sadness. These conclusions propose that social media platforms like Facebook may serve as a valuable source of support during difficult times, indicating a promising platform for enhancing online mental well-being. Although the study's findings primarily highlight the significant role of social media in modern communication, they also suggest the potential for these platforms to enhance social support by allowing individuals to maintain and strengthen connections across geographical distances. This indicates a broader capacity for social media to contribute to community building and support systems, especially for those who might be isolated or seeking niche communities. Social media can further have a generalized positive impact as demonstrated by a study of German students which demonstrated a positive link between general Internet and social media use, particularly Facebook and Instagram, and mental health indicators (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2018). Specifically, this study linked social media use to positive indicators such as life satisfaction and self-esteem.

Although social media platforms support can be beneficial, it may not perfectly replace real-world interactions. The lack of depth and the connection level of face-to-face interactions can be missed

on social media, even though it might provide immediate emotional support and a sense of connection. Studies have shown that excessive reliance on online interactions can sometimes lead to feelings of superficiality or even exacerbate loneliness if offline relationships are neglected (Primack et al., 2017; Uhls et al., 2014). Furthermore, the quality of online support can vary significantly, with some interactions being less meaningful or supportive than others. Therefore, while social media can complement real-world support systems, it should not be viewed as a complete substitute for in-person connections.

3.2 Information Access and Mental Health Advocacy

Robinson (2015) highlighted the importance of social media, particularly Facebook, as an effective resource for suicide prevention (Robinson et al., 2015). The study demonstrated that these platforms offer emotional support, a space for expressing feelings, connecting with individuals facing similar challenges, and accessing help. It emphasized the broad recognition among various stakeholders of the substantial benefits social networking sites offer for suicide prevention initiatives. On the other hand, Rus (2018) also explored the advantages of Facebook, particularly its ability to mitigate stress under acute social situations through psychosocial and physiological benefits (*Rus & Tiemensma, 2018*). The study suggested that even passive engagement with the platform could evoke a sense of social support, aiding stress reduction. It also noted that the timing and context of using Facebook play crucial roles, with neutral interactions possibly offering psychosocial advantages. The relevance of this study to mental health advocacy lies in its demonstration of how platform features can be leveraged to provide low-threshold psychosocial support.

An example of a practical use of social media to increase positive advocacy is the recent study conducted in Korea which explored the psychological effects of consuming content on platforms like Mukbang and Cookbang (*Kwon & Kwon, 2024*). While the study primarily focuses on the impact of these broadcasts on adolescent health, it indirectly touches upon the broader implications for information access. It suggests that the same platforms that host Mukbang and Cookbang could be leveraged for mental health advocacy and the dissemination of healthier lifestyle information, highlighting the dual nature of social media as both a source of entertainment and a potential vehicle for positive health messaging. However, relying on a few examples like this is anecdotal; more robust evidence is needed to fully support the role of social media in information access and advocacy.

4. Negative Impacts of Social Media on Mental Health

4.1 Association of Social Media Use with Anxiety

A significant body of research from the included studies demonstrated correlations between social media use and increased levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness, pointing to the

mental health risks of problematic social media use. A study in a sample of adolescents showed that frequent use of Instagram is linked to negative outcomes such as poor body image, anxiety, and increased pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards among adolescents, both male and female (Verrastro et al., 2020). This pressure often leads adolescents to edit their online appearance in pursuit of popularity. Adolescents, already a vulnerable period, are particularly susceptible to developing eating disorders, anxiety, and body dysmorphia, with social media exacerbating these risks, especially for young girls. An Iranian study revealed that individuals not using social networking platforms experienced lower anxiety and depression levels than those engaged with various social networking apps (Khodarahimi & Fathi, 2017). The study also highlighted variations in anxiety levels associated with different apps and found that girls reported higher anxiety levels than males. Moreover, a notable difference in anxiety was observed between age groups, with young adults showing higher levels of anxiety compared to adolescents. A study by Turel (2018) concluded that taking a brief break from using social networking sites leads to a decrease in perceived stress levels, particularly among individuals who excessively use these platforms (Turel et al., 2018). Temporarily refraining from engaging with social networking sites has been shown to have a beneficial effect on perceived stress levels, particularly for those who spend a significant amount of time on these platforms. This suggests that taking a short break from social media can be beneficial for managing stress, especially for individuals who heavily rely on these platforms. A study on Icelandic adolescents shows how passive social media use increases, while active use decreases, anxiety and depression symptoms in adolescents (Thorisdottir et al., 2019).

4.2 Association with Depression and Loneliness

A nationally representative study from the United States reported that the use of multiple social media platforms is independently associated with symptoms of depression among young adults (Shensa et al., 2017). This is in keeping with a study of Facebook users, which demonstrated that Facebook use predicts negative shifts in subjective well-being in young adults, highlighting the potential emotional costs associated with frequent social media use (Kross et al., 2013). Similarly, Rosenthal 2016 underscored that negative Facebook experiences, especially bullying, were strongly associated with depression among users, pointing to the emotional risks inherent in social media interactions (Rosenthal et al., 2016). Further exploring the nuances of social media's impact, both Shensa (2017) and Marino (2018) closely examined recognized maladaptive use patterns: problematic social media use (PSMU) and problematic internet and Facebook use (PIU, PFU), respectively (Marino et al., 2018; Shensa et al., 2017). Shensa (2017) identified a strong independent association between PSMU and depressive symptoms in young adults, suggesting that the nature of social media use is a more significant risk factor than the frequency of use [15]. Conversely, Marino (2018) identified positive mental health (PMH) as a protective factor against PIU and PFU, as well as their negative impact on young adults (Marino et al., 2018). Furthermore, Jeri-Yabar (2019) explored social media dependency, finding a significant association with depressive symptoms among sampled university students (Jeri-Yabar et al., 2019).

Khoury (2019) studied a sample of young adults and discovered that those with both smartphone addiction (SA) and Facebook addiction (FA), assessed via the Mini-International Neuropsychiatric Interview (MINI), showed a higher incidence of substance abuse, depression, and anxiety disorders compared to individuals with only SA (Khouri et al., 2019). This emphasizes the adverse effects and social support dissatisfaction stemming from these addictions. Similarly, Iovu (2020) and Frison (2017) established a connection between social media engagement, specifically on Facebook and Instagram—and increased depressive symptoms, further evidencing the complex relationship between social media usage and mental health (Frison & Eggermont, 2017; IOVU et al., 2020). Negri (2019) demonstrated that depressive symptoms in mid-adolescence predict higher social media use in late adolescence, suggesting a bidirectional relationship where depression can lead to increased social media use, which in turn, may exacerbate depressive symptoms (Negri, 2019).

An ecological study from Norway examined a large sample of adolescent students between 1996 and 2021 (Lien et al., 2023). The survey gathered data on self-reported depressive symptoms and the use of antidepressants and hypnotics. The results demonstrated a significant increase in signs of depression and the use of antidepressants, hypnotics, and sedatives among this group, with the sharpest rise occurring between 2006 and 2012. This trend varied over time, notably spiking after the introduction of social media platforms in Norway. Girls consistently reported higher levels of depression symptoms compared to boys, highlighting the importance of educating adolescents about the potential negative effects of excessive social media use on mental well-being (Lien et al., 2023).

4.3 Unrealistic Standards and Social Comparison

Studies such as those by Shensa (2017) (Shensa et al., 2017) and Marengo (2018) (Marengo et al., 2018) explored how social media may perpetuate unrealistic standards of beauty and success, leading to unhealthy social comparisons and decreased self-esteem. Marengo (2018) delves into the dynamics of social media interaction among adolescents, with a specific focus on Instagram. This research highlights the pressures young users face to conform to idealized lifestyles and appearances, contributing to unrealistic standards that can negatively impact self-esteem and body image. This is further illuminated by Papageorgiou (2022) that examined the influence of social media on adolescent girls' body image where participants expressed significant concern about body image, noting that social media exposure led to negative comparisons and increased appearance-related worries [26]. These comparisons exacerbated anxieties and influenced efforts to alter appearance and seek validation online.

A study from the US was conducted to explore the complex relationship between Instagram use, social comparison, number of strangers followed, and depressive symptoms (Lup et al., 2015). The results demonstrated a small but significant association with increased depressive symptoms

overall, yet a decrease in the depressive symptoms through positive social comparison (Lup et al., 2015). The impact varies significantly depending on the user's social circle on the platform, those following fewer strangers experienced positive effects, while those following more strangers demonstrated increased depressive symptoms. The study highlights that the number of strangers followed moderates how Instagram use affects depressive symptoms directly and indirectly through social comparison, with more positive outcomes at lower levels of stranger interaction. Verrastro (2020) explored the phenomenon of "selfie" culture and its implications for self-esteem and social comparison among teenagers (Verrastro et al., 2020). The study suggested that the act of taking and sharing selfies can be linked to an increased propensity for comparing oneself unfavorably to others. This is particularly relevant in the context of social media, where the curated presentation of self and life achievements sets a high bar for personal success and beauty, often leading to feelings of inadequacy among peers. Similarly, Fardouly (2020) demonstrated that users of YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat expressed higher concerns about body image and eating disorders compared to non-users. Interestingly, there were no significant differences in depressive symptoms or social anxiety between the two groups (Fardouly et al., 2020). The research emphasized that valuing appearance highly correlated with depressive symptoms, and comparing appearances was linked to various aspects of mental well-being, with these associations being more pronounced among girls. This indicates potential gender-specific differences in appearance-related behaviors and mental health outcomes, further complicating the impact of social media on young individuals' self-perception.

A study examined the social media's impact on young individuals, with a particular emphasis on how these platforms facilitate social comparison that can lead to issues like body dissatisfaction and eating disorders (Vannucci & McCauley Ohannessian, 2019). The study underscored the role of visual platforms, like Instagram and Snapchat, in perpetuating idealized standards of beauty and lifestyle, which can exacerbate body image concerns and unhealthy comparisons among susceptible individuals. Hanna (2017) provided an analysis of social media use and its correlation with self-esteem and body image issues (Hanna et al., 2017). This research extended the discussion by pointing out how social media not only serves as a platform for unrealistic comparisons but also can contribute to a distorted perception of body image norms, encouraging unhealthy behaviors and attitudes toward body size and shape.

4.4 Risky Behaviors and Compulsive Use

Problematic social media use, characterized by symptoms such as loss of control, tolerance, and withdrawal, is distinct from frequent but regulated use. Research studies such as Wartberg (2020) highlighted the potential for problematic social media use, linking it to risky alcohol consumption, and negatively affected real-world relationships (Wartberg et al., 2020). Azhari (2022) demonstrated that adolescents with social media disorder have reported fewer sleeping hours and higher levels of loneliness (Azhari et al., 2022). This study associated the high frequency

of Facebook posting with poorer sleeping outcomes. Oliva (2018) further emphasized the influence of social media on alcohol consumption, revealing that 6.4% of youths noted Facebook's role, particularly through alcohol ads (Oliva et al., 2018). Facebook usage correlated with perceived stress levels, and significant relationships were observed between Facebook usage patterns, perceived stress, age, gender, and harmful alcohol consumption among university students, underlining the importance of considering social media in designing mental health interventions.

The association between suicide and social media was examined by Brailovskaia (2020) (Brailovskaia et al., 2020). The results identified addictive Facebook to play an important role in increasing the risk of suicide-related outcomes. Furthermore, the study showed that a positive mental health state can buffer this increased risk. Social media bullying as WhatsApp on Facebook was also found to significantly increase the risk of committing a suicidal attempt, as Khuzwayo (2018) suggested (Khuzwayo et al., 2018). Witnessing self-harm on social media itself was linked to thoughts of suicide, self-injury, and feeling emotionally distressed in Arendt 2019 (Arendt et al., 2019). Risky alcohol consumption in Tarriño-Concejero (2022) was studied among adolescents, investigating its correlation with Instagram use (Tarriño-Concejero et al., 2023). Participants reported increased risky drinking due to multiple reasons including alcohol promotions on the platform and the impact of alcohol-related content shared by other users.

4.5 Cultural Influences on Social Media Use and Mental Health

A key cultural factor influencing social media's impact on mental health is individualism versus collectivism (Choi & Kim, 2019; Cui et al., 2022). Research by Gordesli et al. (2024) highlights how individualistic values shape adolescents' experiences with social media (Gordesli et al., 2024). Their study demonstrated that adolescents with higher vertical individualism, emphasizing personal achievement and competition, were more prone to depression, possibly due to the pressure to curate a flawless online identity. In contrast, those with horizontal individualism, which prioritizes autonomy and self-expression, also showed some susceptibility to depression but to a lesser degree. Interestingly, the study's findings in Turkey indicate that adolescents who used social media less and had lower horizontal individualism reported lower levels of depression. This suggests that a more communal culture, with less emphasis on self-promotion and comparison, may offer some protective factors against the negative effects of social media.

Cultural perspectives on body image also influence how social media affects mental health (Merino et al., 2024). In Western societies, where beauty standards are often shaped by highly edited and idealized imagery, social media platforms have been linked to increased body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, and low self-esteem, especially among young women. In contrast, some non-Western cultures place less emphasis on thinness or specific beauty ideals, potentially reducing the impact of social comparison. However, globalization and social media exposure have introduced Westernized beauty norms into many cultures, increasing body image

concerns even in traditionally collectivist societies. For example, in South Korea, the rise of K-beauty culture has led to heightened beauty expectations, with social media reinforcing cosmetic surgery trends and filtered online appearances (Suh, 2024). Conversely, in certain African cultures, curvier body types are often more culturally accepted (Balogun-Mwangi et al., 2023), which may offer some resilience against Western-driven beauty standards, although social media is gradually altering these perceptions.

It is therefore crucial to consider cultural context, especially individualistic values, when creating interventions to help with the mental health impacts of social media. Rather than focusing solely on limiting screen time, interventions need to also understand how cultural beliefs influence how adolescents interact with online platforms. By integrating cultural and socioeconomic perspectives, mental health professionals and policymakers can create more effective, context-specific interventions to mitigate social media's negative effects while maximizing its potential for positive social support.

5. Discussion

This narrative review synthesized evidence on how social media use relates to mental health and wellbeing in adolescents and young adults. Rather than treating social media as uniformly harmful or beneficial, the reviewed literature points to a pattern of conditional effects: outcomes depend on developmental stage, individual vulnerabilities, forms of engagement, and social context. The central contribution of this review is to organize a heterogeneous body of findings into a set of interacting pathways that help explain why social media functions as a “double-edged” environment for youth mental health.

5.1 Dual pathways: connection and risk

Across countries and cultural settings, social media platforms appear to serve as infrastructures for social connection (R. Zhang, 2017). Many studies converge on the idea that online communities can strengthen belongingness, peer support, and identity exploration, particularly for young people who experience marginalization offline. For adolescents and young adults navigating identity formation, access to niche communities and mental health discourse can reduce stigma, normalize help-seeking, and provide informational and emotional resources. These processes are consistent with uses-and-gratifications perspectives, in which social media functions as a tool for affiliation, validation, and self-expression.

At the same time, intensive or dysregulated use is repeatedly associated with elevated symptoms of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and body dissatisfaction (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Azhari et al., 2022). Further compounding these concerns, studies such as Marengo (2018) (Marengo et al., 2018), within our review draw attention to the pervasive culture of social comparison and the pursuit of unrealistic standards fueled by social media. Importantly, the evidence reviewed does

not support a simple unidirectional model. Instead, many findings are consistent with reciprocal processes: young people with pre-existing distress may be drawn to heavier or more maladaptive use, which can in turn reinforce negative affect through social comparison, rumination, cybervictimization, or sleep disruption. This feedback-loop model helps reconcile inconsistent effect sizes across studies and underscores that risk is concentrated in specific patterns of engagement rather than in social media use per se.

Risk pathways extend beyond internalizing symptoms. Associations with disrupted sleep, alcohol use, and other risk behaviors suggest that compulsive engagement can spill over into health-related domains (Wartberg et al., 2020). From a clinical and public health perspective, problematic social media use may function as a behavioral amplifier, intensifying existing vulnerabilities rather than acting as an isolated causal agent (Al-Marzooqi et al., 2024).

5.2 Integrating theory: a susceptibility framework

The findings are best interpreted within a susceptibility framework that emphasizes person $\times$ context $\times$ media interactions (Feng et al., 2025). The Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model (DSMM) provides a useful scaffold by proposing that media effects are conditional on dispositional, developmental, and social factors. Within this structure, several established theories illuminate specific mechanisms.

Social Comparison Theory explains how exposure to curated and idealized portrayals can distort self-evaluation, particularly in visually oriented environments. Adolescents and emerging adults—developmental periods characterized by heightened peer salience and identity work—may be especially sensitive to appearance-based and status-based comparisons (Jin et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2017).

Uses and Gratifications Theory helps explain why the same platforms can produce protective effects. Young people often use social media deliberately to seek support, experiment with identity, and maintain social ties (Falgoust et al., 2022). When engagement is active and relational rather than passive and evaluative, outcomes tend to be more positive.

Cognitive-behavioral perspectives highlight how reinforcement loops, attentional biases, and maladaptive cognitions can sustain problematic use (Zhou et al., 2021). Repeated exposure to negative content, cyberbullying, or self-harm imagery may strengthen cognitive distortions and emotional dysregulation in vulnerable users.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that social media is not a single exposure but an ecosystem of affordances. Mental health outcomes emerge from how individuals navigate that ecosystem, shaped by developmental tasks, personality traits, and social environments.

5.3 Developmental and demographic variation

A key theme in the literature is heterogeneity. Adolescents, emerging adults, and young adults do not engage with social media in identical ways, nor do they face identical developmental pressures. Adolescence is closely tied to peer evaluation and body image formation; emerging adulthood emphasizes identity exploration and autonomy; later young adulthood involves role consolidation and relational stability. These shifting tasks likely moderate how online feedback is interpreted and internalized.

Gender-related patterns also recur across studies. Several key studies (Fardouly et al., 2020; Haj Hussain et al., 2025; Lup et al., 2015; Marengo et al., 2018; Papageorgiou et al., 2022) highlight disparities in body image concerns, anxiety, depression, and risky behaviors, revealing that girls and young women are disproportionately affected by social comparison and appearance-related stress, while boys and young men tend to engage in problematic behaviors linked to social media in different ways. Studies consistently show that girls and young women experience greater body image concerns and engage more frequently in social comparison, particularly on highly visual platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat (Fardouly et al., 2020; Lup et al., 2015; Marengo et al., 2018; Papageorgiou et al., 2022; Verrastro et al., 2020). This heightened sensitivity to appearance-related stress is driven by societal pressures that reinforce unattainable beauty standards, leading to increased self-objectification and dissatisfaction with physical appearance. Additionally, girls and young women are more likely to experience anxiety and depression linked to social media use, a trend attributed to passive engagement patterns such as scrolling without interaction, cyberbullying, and greater emotional investment in online relationships (Frison & Eggermont, 2017; Khodarahimi & Fathi, 2017; Kross et al., 2013; Negri, 2019; Rosenthal et al., 2016; Shensa et al., 2017; Thorisdottir et al., 2019). In contrast, boys and young men demonstrate a lower prevalence of body image distress but are more likely to exhibit problematic behaviors associated with social media, such as excessive screen time, compulsive gaming, and engagement in risky substance use linked to online interactions (Azhari et al., 2022; Brailovskaia et al., 2020; Khoury et al., 2019; Oliva et al., 2018; Tarriño-Concejero et al., 2023; Wartberg et al., 2020). Furthermore, compulsive social media use has been shown to disproportionately affect girls in terms of sleep disturbances and emotional distress, whereas males are more likely to develop maladaptive coping mechanisms through substance use and excessive online activity. These findings underscore the necessity for gender-sensitive interventions that address the distinct ways in which boys and girls engage with and are affected by social media. Targeted strategies, such as promoting digital literacy and critical engagement with online content for girls and young women and addressing problematic online behaviors and substance use among males, may help mitigate the negative psychological impact of social media and foster healthier digital interactions.

Individual differences in psychological and personality traits play a significant role in determining how social media use affect mental health. For instance, individuals with low self-esteem may be more vulnerable to the negative effects of social comparison on platforms like Instagram, where

idealized images can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy (Fardouly et al., 2018; Marengo et al., 2018). Similarly, those with high levels of impulsivity may be more prone to developing problematic social media use patterns, as they are more likely to engage in compulsive scrolling or posting without considering the long-term consequences (Khouri et al., 2019; Wartberg et al., 2020). On the other hand, individuals with higher levels of resilience may be better equipped to navigate the challenges of social media, using these platforms in ways that enhance their well-being rather than undermine it (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2018; Marino et al., 2018). For example, resilient individuals may be more likely to seek out supportive communities online or use social media as a tool for self-expression and connection, rather than as a source of validation.

Equally as important of a factor is the type of content consumption in itself as it plays a crucial role in shaping its impact on mental health, with different forms of engagement leading to varied psychological outcomes. Studies suggest that passive content consumption, such as scrolling through idealized images on Instagram or viewing influencer-driven content, is strongly associated with increased social comparison, body dissatisfaction, and depressive symptoms, particularly among female users (Fardouly et al., 2020; Lup et al., 2015; Marengo et al., 2018; Papageorgiou et al., 2022; Verrastro et al., 2020). This is because highly visual platforms encourage users to engage with curated and often unrealistic portrayals of success, beauty, and lifestyle, fostering feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. On the other hand, active content engagement, such as creating and sharing content or interacting with supportive communities, has been linked to more positive mental health outcomes, offering a sense of self-expression, validation, and social support (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2018; Robinson et al., 2015; R. Zhang, 2017). Studies indicate that when individuals use social media to engage in discussions about mental health or access online support networks, they are more likely to experience reduced feelings of isolation and an improved sense of well-being.

However, not all forms of engagement yield positive effects. Compulsive or problematic content consumption, such as excessive exposure to distressing news, cyberbullying, or self-harm-related content, has been associated with heightened anxiety, depressive symptoms, and increased risk of suicidal ideation (Arendt et al., 2019; Brailovskaia et al., 2020; Rosenthal et al., 2016). Exposure to self-harm imagery or suicide-related content on platforms like Instagram has been found to significantly increase distress levels, particularly among vulnerable adolescents, emphasizing the need for better content moderation policies. Similarly, alcohol- and substance-related content on social media has been linked to risky behaviors, with studies showing that adolescents exposed to alcohol promotions or peer-generated content related to drinking are more likely to engage in harmful consumption patterns (Oliva et al., 2018; Tarriño-Concejero et al., 2023).

5.4 Algorithmic environments

Algorithmic curation likely intensifies these dynamics by selectively amplifying emotionally salient material (Negri, 2019; Thorisdottir et al., 2019). For vulnerable users, recommender systems may inadvertently reinforce cycles of negative exposure, contributing to maintenance of distress.

At the same time, algorithmic systems can also facilitate access to supportive resources. The mental health impact of algorithms therefore depends on governance, moderation, and user literacy, highlighting an emerging interface between psychology, platform design, and policy (Robinson et al., 2015; Rus & Tiemensma, 2018).

5.5 Moderating and protective factors

Protective factors operate at multiple levels. For adolescents, parental mediation, school-based digital literacy, and peer norms shape online behavior. Effective mediation extends beyond restriction toward guided co-use and critical discussion, helping young people build digital competence (Y. Zhang, 2023). For young adults, whose online lives are less parent-regulated, self-regulation strategies, identity-supportive communities, and coping skills become more salient.

Digital literacy emerges as a cross-cutting moderator. Young people who can critically evaluate content, manage exposure, and reflect on their own usage patterns appear better able to extract benefits while limiting harm. This suggests that educational and preventive efforts should emphasize skills, not only restrictions (Harris & Jacobs, 2023).

5.6 Limitations of the present review

This study has limitations inherent to narrative reviews. Although we employed a structured search strategy, study selection and synthesis involve interpretive judgment and may be vulnerable to selection bias. The included literature is methodologically heterogeneous, with a dominance of cross-sectional designs that constrain causal inference. The broad age range (10–40 years) increases conceptual coverage but introduces heterogeneity that may limit direct comparability across developmental stages. Finally, rapid platform evolution means that findings may age quickly as digital environments change.

5.7 Literature Gap and Future Research Directions

The findings from this literature review highlight several critical avenues for future research in the realm of social media and mental health. There is a pressing need for longitudinal studies that can more definitively ascertain causal relationships between social media use and mental health outcomes. Such designs are especially valuable as they can help clarify whether observed associations are causal or shaped by pre-existing vulnerabilities, and can track the dynamics of these relationships over time. Such studies would offer deeper insights into how long-term engagement with social media platforms impacts the psychological well-being of individuals across different life stages. Furthermore, daily diary and ecological momentary assessment studies are needed to capture day-to-day fluctuations and near-real-time associations, allowing for the distinction between within-person and between-person effects. Additionally, research should explore the moderating effects of individual differences, such as personality traits, resilience factors, and pre-existing mental health conditions, on the relationship between social

media use and mental health. This would enable a more personalized understanding of risk and protective factors.

Furthermore, there is a critical need for intervention-based studies to assess the effectiveness of strategies aimed at fostering healthier social media habits (Kruzan et al., 2022). These include actionable strategies that promote healthier engagement with social media such as mindfulness-based interventions and tools for managing online exposure. Research has shown that stress is closely linked to cognitive function (Alhaj et al., 2008, 2012), underscoring the importance of addressing the psychological impact of social media use. Enhancing digital literacy among adolescents is essential, as it empowers them to engage with social media more safely and critically. Studies indicate that young people already utilize strategies such as content filtering, taking breaks, and cognitive reframing to mitigate the negative effects of social media, reflecting a high level of media literacy (Samari et al., 2022). A systematic review by Wright et al. found that digital intervention tools—such as mobile apps and web-based programs designed for youth aged 10–18 years—show small but promising effects in improving well-being and alleviating anxiety among adolescents (Wright et al., 2023). Additionally, parental mediation is widely recognized as one of the most effective approaches for mitigating online risks faced by young people. A systematic review by Sevilla-Fernández et al. (2025) analyzed six studies examining the relationship between parental mediation strategies, including restrictive and enabling mediation, and social network risks on youth health (Sevilla-Fernández et al., 2025). The review concluded that restrictive mediation effectively reduces social media fatigue, fear of missing out (FoMO), and social network addiction in childhood. However, the review also linked this approach to increased mental health issues in adolescence, particularly Social Media Disorder and heightened FoMO. Findings on enabling mediation were inconsistent; while the review associated it with a higher risk of social media addiction and fatigue, another study suggested it could lower these risks. Despite these mixed results, the evidence underscores the significant impact parental mediation strategies can have on adolescent mental health, highlighting the need for further research to determine the most effective approaches.

A more granular analysis of specific content types within social media could enhance our understanding of its differential impact on mental health. For instance, exposure to health misinformation may contribute to increased anxiety, distrust in medical professionals, and engagement in harmful self-treatment practices. Similarly, content related to self-harm—particularly in unregulated spaces—can normalize or even encourage maladaptive behaviors, increasing the risk for vulnerable individuals. On the other hand, celebratory and supportive online communities can foster resilience, provide emotional validation, and serve as protective factors against psychological distress. In contrast, toxic online communities, characterized by cyberbullying, social exclusion, and reinforcement of negative beliefs, may exacerbate symptoms of depression and anxiety. Future research should focus on distinguishing the psychological effects of these different content types and exploring targeted moderation strategies to minimize harm while promoting positive online interactions. Such insights could inform evidence-based interventions aimed at safeguarding the mental well-being of at-risk users.

By addressing these gaps in the literature, future research can significantly advance our understanding of the complex dynamics between social media and mental health, leading to more effective approaches for leveraging social media as a force for good in individuals' lives.

6. Conclusion

The review ascertains the paradoxical influence of social media on mental health amongst adolescents and young adults, noting both positive aspects, like increased interactions and self-presentation, and negative aspects, such as anxiety, depression and exposure to harmful content. Stricter moderation of social media content and promotion of digital literacy are the recommended solutions to these problems, while parents should regulate the amount of time their children spend on various devices and display healthy lifestyle practices. Media literacy must be integrated into children's education so that students learn how to use social media positively. For young adults, interventions could focus on fostering identity exploration through positive online communities and teaching mindful usage habits.

In conclusion, constructive social media engagement entails conscious effort and meaningful offline interactions that promote healthy social behavior. To ensure social media platforms aid rather than harm mental health, there needs to be more focus on promoting mindful and balanced social media engagement. Future research should prioritize longitudinal and intervention-based designs to better establish causality and test effective strategies for harm reduction.

Conflict of Interest: No funding was provided from any pharmaceutical or technology companies to carry out this research.

Data Availability

This review did not involve the collection or generation of original human participant data. No primary dataset, survey instrument, interview protocol, or statistical analysis code was generated for this study. The evidence and information synthesized in the review are presented in the main manuscript and accompanying supplementary materials, where applicable. The sources underpinning the review are identified through the cited references.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study because it is a narrative review of previously published literature and did not involve the recruitment of human participants, the collection of

primary human data, the use of identifiable personal information, or experimentation involving human or animal subjects.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was not applicable because this study did not involve human participants or the collection of primary data from individuals.

REFERENCES

- Ademiluyi, A., Li, C., & Park, A. (2022). Implications and Preventions of Cyberbullying and Social Exclusion in Social Media: Systematic Review. *JMIR Formative Research*, 6(1), e30286. <https://doi.org/10.2196/30286>
- Ahmad, A. R., & Murad, H. R. (2020). The Impact of Social Media on Panic During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iraqi Kurdistan: Online Questionnaire Study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 22(5), e19556. <https://doi.org/10.2196/19556>
- Alhaj, H. A., Massey, A. E., & McAllister-Williams, R. H. (2008). Effects of cortisol on the laterality of the neural correlates of episodic memory. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 42(12). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2007.11.008>
- Alhaj, H. A., & McAllister-Williams, R. H. (2008). Chapter 5.7 Adrenal steroids and episodic memory: relevance to mood disorders. In *Handbook of Behavioral Neuroscience* (Vol. 18). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1569-7339\(08\)00232-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1569-7339(08)00232-4)
- Alhaj, H. A., Selman, M., Jervis, V., Rodgers, J., Barton, S., & McAllister-Williams, R. H. (2012). Effect of low-dose acute tryptophan depletion on the specificity of autobiographical memory in healthy subjects with a family history of depression. *Psychopharmacology*, 222(2), 285–292. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00213-012-2644-x>
- Al-Marzooqi, N., Al-Suhail, H., AlRefai, M. O., & Alhaj, H. A. (2024). Genomic factors associated with substance use disorder relapse: A critical review. *Addictive Behaviors Reports*, 20, 100569. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.abrep.2024.100569>
- Arendt, F., Scherr, S., & Romer, D. (2019). Effects of exposure to self-harm on social media: Evidence from a two-wave panel study among young adults. *New Media & Society*, 21(11–12), 2422–2442. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819850106>
- Azhari, A., Toms, Z., Pavlopoulou, G., Esposito, G., & Dimitriou, D. (2022). Social media use in female adolescents: Associations with anxiety, loneliness, and sleep disturbances. *Acta Psychologica*, 229, 103706. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103706>

- Balogun-Mwangi, O., Robinson-Wood, T. L., DeTore, N. R., Edwards George, J. B., Rodgers, R. F., & Sanchez, W. (2023). Body image and Black African women: A comparative study of Kenya and Nigeria. *Body Image*, 45, 331–342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2023.03.017>
- Brailovskaia, J., & Margraf, J. (2018). What does media use reveal about personality and mental health? An exploratory investigation among German students. *PLOS ONE*, 13(1), e0191810. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0191810>
- Brailovskaia, J., Schillack, H., & Margraf, J. (2020). Tell me why are you using social media (SM)! Relationship between reasons for use of SM, SM flow, daily stress, depression, anxiety, and addictive SM use – An exploratory investigation of young adults in Germany. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 113, 106511. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106511>
- Burnell, K., Kurup, A. R., & Underwood, M. K. (2022). Snapchat lenses and body image concerns. *New Media & Society*, 24(9), 2088–2106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444821993038>
- Choi, Y., & Kim, J. (2019). Influence of Cultural Orientations on Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) in Social Media. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 48(3), 292–313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2019.1627388>
- Cui, G.-Q., Zeng, J.-Y., & Jin, C.-H. (2022). The Impact of Vertical/Horizontal Individualism and Collectivism on Ethical Consumption. *Sustainability*, 14(21), 14254. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142114254>
- Falgoust, G., Winterlind, E., Moon, P., Parker, A., Zinzow, H., & Chalil Madathil, K. (2022). Applying the uses and gratifications theory to identify motivational factors behind young adult's participation in viral social media challenges on TikTok. *Human Factors in Healthcare*, 2, 100014. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hfh.2022.100014>
- Fardouly, J., Magson, N. R., Rapee, R. M., Johnco, C. J., & Oar, E. L. (2020). The use of social media by Australian preadolescents and its links with mental health. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 76(7), 1304–1326. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.22936>
- Fardouly, J., Willburger, B. K., & Vartanian, L. R. (2018). Instagram use and young women's body image concerns and self-objectification: Testing mediational pathways. *New Media & Society*, 20(4), 1380–1395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817694499>
- Feng, C., Zhang, H., Yu, K., Zhao, W., & Wu, A. M. S. (2025). Application of the differential susceptibility to media effects model to comprehend emerging adults' problematic smartphone use: A one-year longitudinal study. *Addictive Behaviors*, 108568. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2025.108568>
- Frison, E., & Eggermont, S. (2017). Browsing, Posting, and Liking on Instagram: The Reciprocal Relationships Between Different Types of Instagram Use and Adolescents' Depressed Mood. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 20(10), 603–609. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2017.0156>

- Gilmour, J., Machin, T., Brownlow, C., & Jeffries, C. (2020). Facebook-based social support and health: A systematic review. *Psychology of Popular Media*, 9(3), 328–346. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000246>
- Gordesli, B. K., Leamy, M., Murrells, T., & Grealish, A. (2024). Moderating effect of cultural differences on the association between social media use and mental health outcomes in adolescents: A cross-cultural comparison study. *PLOS ONE*, 19(12), e0316365. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0316365>
- Haj Hussain, K., Al Midani, A. R., Abdallah, M., Alyassi, A., Alzubaidy, H., Alrashed, S., Muhammad, J. S., & Alhaj, H. A. (2025). The influence of social media and cultural ideals on body dysmorphic disorder among adult males in the UAE. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2025.1613623>
- Hanna, E., Ward, L. M., Seabrook, R. C., Jerald, M., Reed, L., Giaccardi, S., & Lippman, J. R. (2017). Contributions of Social Comparison and Self-Objectification in Mediating Associations Between Facebook Use and Emergent Adults' Psychological Well-Being. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 20(3), 172–179. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2016.0247>
- Harris, L. E., & Jacobs, J. A. (2023). Emerging Ideas. Digital parenting advice: Online guidance regarding children's use of the Internet and social media. *Family Relations*, 72(5), 2551–2568. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12813>
- Herrera-Peco, I., Fernández-Quijano, I., & Ruiz-Núñez, C. (2023). The Role of Social Media as a Resource for Mental Health Care. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 13(6), 1026–1028. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe13060078>
- Hoffner, C. A., & Bond, B. J. (2022). Parasocial relationships, social media, & well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 45, 101306. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101306>
- IOVU, M.-B., RUNCAN, R., RUNCAN, P.-L., & ANDRIONI, F. (2020). Association between Facebook Use, Depression and Family Satisfaction: A Cross-Sectional Study of Romanian Youth. *Iranian Journal of Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.18502/ijph.v49i11.4728>
- Jeri-Yabar, A., Sanchez-Carbonel, A., Tito, K., Ramirez-delCastillo, J., Torres-Alcantara, A., Denegri, D., & Carreazo, Y. (2019). Association between social media use (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook) and depressive symptoms: Are Twitter users at higher risk? *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 65(1), 14–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764018814270>
- Jin, T., Chen, Y., & Zhang, K. (2024). Effects of social media use on employment anxiety among Chinese youth: the roles of upward social comparison, online social support and self-esteem. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1398801>

- Khodarahimi, S., & Fathi, R. (2017). The Role of Online Social Networking on Emotional Functioning in a Sample of Iranian Adolescents and Young Adults. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 35(2), 120–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228835.2017.1293587>
- Khoury, J. M., Neves, M. de C. L. das, Roque, M. A. V., Freitas, A. A. C. de, da Costa, M. R., & Garcia, F. D. (2019). Smartphone and Facebook addictions share common risk and prognostic factors in a sample of undergraduate students. *Trends in Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*, 41(4), 358–368. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2237-6089-2018-0069>
- Khuzwayo, N., Taylor, M., & Connolly, C. (2018). High risk of suicide among high-school learners in uMgungundlovu District, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. *South African Medical Journal*, 108(6), 517. <https://doi.org/10.7196/SAMJ.2018.v108i6.12843>
- Kross, E., Verduyn, P., Demiralp, E., Park, J., Lee, D. S., Lin, N., Shablack, H., Jonides, J., & Ybarra, O. (2013). Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults. *PLOS ONE*, 8(8), e69841. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0069841>
- Kruzan, K. P., Williams, K. D. A., Meyerhoff, J., Yoo, D. W., O'Dwyer, L. C., De Choudhury, M., & Mohr, D. C. (2022). Social media-based interventions for adolescent and young adult mental health: A scoping review. *Internet Interventions*, 30, 100578. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.invent.2022.100578>
- Kwon, J., & Kwon, Y. T. (2024). Does Watching Mukbang and Cookbang Broadcasts Affect Subjective Body Image, Perceived Stress, and Physical Activity Levels among Korean Adolescents? *Iranian Journal of Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.18502/ijph.v53i2.14921>
- Lien, L., Bonsaksen, T., Holte Stea, T., Kleppang, A. L., Steigen, A. M., & Leonhardt, M. (2023). Time trends in self-reported depressive symptoms, prescription of antidepressants, sedatives and hypnotics and the emergence of social media among Norwegian adolescents. *PLOS ONE*, 18(12), e0295384. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295384>
- Lup, K., Trub, L., & Rosenthal, L. (2015). Instagram #Instasad?: Exploring Associations Among Instagram Use, Depressive Symptoms, Negative Social Comparison, and Strangers Followed. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 18(5), 247–252. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2014.0560>
- Marengo, D., Longobardi, C., Fabris, M. A., & Settanni, M. (2018). Highly-visual social media and internalizing symptoms in adolescence: The mediating role of body image concerns. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 82, 63–69. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.01.003>
- Marino, C., Gini, G., Vieno, A., & Spada, M. M. (2018). The associations between problematic Facebook use, psychological distress and well-being among adolescents and young adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 226, 274–281. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2017.10.007>

- Merino, M., Tornero-Aguilera, J. F., Rubio-Zarapuz, A., Villanueva-Tobaldo, C. V., Martín-Rodríguez, A., & Clemente-Suárez, V. J. (2024). Body Perceptions and Psychological Well-Being: A Review of the Impact of Social Media and Physical Measurements on Self-Esteem and Mental Health with a Focus on Body Image Satisfaction and Its Relationship with Cultural and Gender Factors. *Healthcare*, 12(14), 1396. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare12141396>
- Negriff, S. (2019). A pilot study examining risk behavior in facebook posts for maltreated versus comparison youth using content analysis. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 96, 104091. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104091>
- Oliva, E. I. P. N., Gherardi-Donato, E. C. da S., Bermúdez, J. Á., & Facundo, F. R. G. (2018). Uso de Facebook, estrés percibido y consumo de alcohol en jóvenes universitarios. *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva*, 23(11), 3675–3681. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1413-812320182311.27132016>
- Papageorgiou, A., Fisher, C., & Cross, D. (2022). “Why don’t I look like her?” How adolescent girls view social media and its connection to body image. *BMC Women’s Health*, 22(1), 261. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-022-01845-4>
- Primack, B. A., Shensa, A., Sidani, J. E., Whaitte, E. O., Lin, L. yi, Rosen, D., Colditz, J. B., Radovic, A., & Miller, E. (2017). Social Media Use and Perceived Social Isolation Among Young Adults in the U.S. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 53(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2017.01.010>
- Qin, Y., Omar, B., & Musetti, A. (2022). The addiction behavior of short-form video app TikTok: The information quality and system quality perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.932805>
- Robinson, J., Rodrigues, M., Fisher, S., Bailey, E., & Herrman, H. (2015). Social media and suicide prevention: findings from a stakeholder survey. *Shanghai Archives of Psychiatry*, 27(1), 27–35. <https://doi.org/10.11919/j.issn.1002-0829.214133>
- Rosenthal, S. R., Buka, S. L., Marshall, B. D. L., Carey, K. B., & Clark, M. A. (2016). Negative Experiences on Facebook and Depressive Symptoms Among Young Adults. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 59(5), 510–516. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.06.023>
- Rus, H. M., & Tiemensma, J. (2018). Social media as a shield: Facebook buffers acute stress. *Physiology & Behavior*, 185, 46–54. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physbeh.2017.12.021>
- Samari, E., Chang, S., Seow, E., Chua, Y. C., Subramaniam, M., van Dam, R. M., Luo, N., Verma, S., & Vaingankar, J. A. (2022). A qualitative study on negative experiences of social media use and harm reduction strategies among youths in a multi-ethnic Asian society. *PLOS ONE*, 17(11), e0277928. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0277928>

- Sawyer, S. M., Azzopardi, P. S., Wickremarathne, D., & Patton, G. C. (2018). The age of adolescence. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 2(3), 223–228.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(18\)30022-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(18)30022-1)
- Sevilla-Fernández, D., Díaz-López, A., Caba-Machado, V., Machimbarrena, J. M., Ortega-Barón, J., & González-Cabrera, J. (2025). Parental mediation and the use of social networks: A systematic review. *PLOS ONE*, 20(2), e0312011.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0312011>
- Shensa, A., Escobar-Viera, C. G., Sidani, J. E., Bowman, N. D., Marshal, M. P., & Primack, B. A. (2017). Problematic social media use and depressive symptoms among U.S. young adults: A nationally-representative study. *Social Science & Medicine*, 182, 150–157.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.03.061>
- Sponder, M., & Khan, G. F. (2017). Social Media History. In *Digital Analytics for Marketing* (pp. 55–70). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315640914-3>
- Suh, H. (2024). Negotiating attractiveness: Korean American perceptions of body image and identity in light of the Korean Wave. *Feminist Media Studies*, 24(5), 1095–1111.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2023.2229052>
- Tarriño-Concejero, L., de Diego-Cordero, R., & García-Carpintero Muñoz, M. Á. (2023). Instagram, risky drinking and main health effects in Spanish adolescents in the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative study. *Public Health Nursing*, 40(2), 222–228.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/phn.13156>
- Thorisdottir, I. E., Sigurvinsdottir, R., Asgeirsdottir, B. B., Allegrante, J. P., & Sigfusdottir, I. D. (2019). Active and Passive Social Media Use and Symptoms of Anxiety and Depressed Mood Among Icelandic Adolescents. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 22(8), 535–542. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2019.0079>
- Turel, O., Cavagnaro, D. R., & Meshi, D. (2018). Short abstinence from online social networking sites reduces perceived stress, especially in excessive users. *Psychiatry Research*, 270, 947–953. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2018.11.017>
- Uhls, Y. T., Michikyan, M., Morris, J., Garcia, D., Small, G. W., Zgourou, E., & Greenfield, P. M. (2014). Five days at outdoor education camp without screens improves preteen skills with nonverbal emotion cues. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 39, 387–392.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.05.036>
- Van den Broeck, E., Poels, K., & Walrave, M. (2015). Older and Wiser? Facebook Use, Privacy Concern, and Privacy Protection in the Life Stages of Emerging, Young, and Middle Adulthood. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115616149>

- Vannucci, A., & McCauley Ohannessian, C. (2019). Social Media Use Subgroups Differentially Predict Psychosocial Well-Being During Early Adolescence. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 48(8), 1469–1493. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-01060-9>
- Verrastro, V., Fontanesi, L., Liga, F., Cuzzocrea, F., & Gugliandolo, M. C. (2020). Fear the Instagram: beauty stereotypes, body image and Instagram use in a sample of male and female adolescents. *Qwerty. Open and Interdisciplinary Journal of Technology, Culture and Education*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.30557/QW000021>
- Wang, J.-L., Wang, H.-Z., Gaskin, J., & Hawk, S. (2017). The Mediating Roles of Upward Social Comparison and Self-esteem and the Moderating Role of Social Comparison Orientation in the Association between Social Networking Site Usage and Subjective Well-Being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00771>
- Wartberg, L., Kriston, L., & Thomasius, R. (2020). Internet gaming disorder and problematic social media use in a representative sample of German adolescents: Prevalence estimates, comorbid depressive symptoms and related psychosocial aspects. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 103, 31–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.09.014>
- Winstone, L., Mars, B., Haworth, C. M. A., & Kidger, J. (2021). Social media use and social connectedness among adolescents in the United Kingdom: a qualitative exploration of displacement and stimulation. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), 1736. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11802-9>
- Woods, H. C., & Scott, H. (2016). #Sleepyteens: Social media use in adolescence is associated with poor sleep quality, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. *Journal of Adolescence*, 51(1), 41–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.05.008>
- World Health Organization. (2022). *World mental health report: Transforming mental health for all*. World Health Organization.
- Wright, M., Reitegger, F., Cela, H., Papst, A., & Gasteiger-Klicpera, B. (2023). Interventions with Digital Tools for Mental Health Promotion among 11–18 Year Olds: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 52(4), 754–779. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-023-01735-4>
- Zhang, R. (2017). The stress-buffering effect of self-disclosure on Facebook: An examination of stressful life events, social support, and mental health among college students. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 75, 527–537. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.05.043>
- Zhang, Y. (2023). Analysis of Coping Mechanisms and the Effects of Social Media on Teenagers. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 4(1), 1006–1013. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/4/2022722>
- Zhou, X., Rau, P.-L. P., Yang, C.-L., & Zhou, X. (2021). Cognitive Behavioral Therapy-Based Short-Term Abstinence Intervention for Problematic Social Media Use: Improved Well-Being and

Underlying Mechanisms. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 92(2), 761–779.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-020-09852-0>

ARTICLE IN PRESS