

# A Review on the Influence of Social Media on Youth Mental Well-Being

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## Abstract:

Social media now plays a central role in the daily lives of young people, deeply affecting their psychological health. This review examines both the advantageous and detrimental effects of social media, highlighting both its benefits and challenges. On the positive side, social media enables building relationships, expressing oneself, and obtaining mental health support, helping create a feeling of belonging and mutual assistance. However, it also presents difficulties such as stress, mood disorders, concerns over appearance, and online harassment, often amplified by excessive use and social comparison.

The paper synthesizes findings from existing literature, identifying key factors that moderate these effects, such as individual personality traits, usage patterns, and platform-specific features. It also reviews interventions designed to address negative outcomes, including digital literacy programs, parental guidance, and technological solutions like screen time monitoring tools.

While the findings emphasize the need for responsible and moderate engagement with social platforms, they also reveal gaps in current research, particularly in understanding long-term effects and cultural differences. The paper concludes with recommendations for a collaborative approach involving educators, policymakers, parents, and technology developers to foster safer and more supportive online spaces for young users. This analysis offers an in-depth perspective of the impact of social media on youth mental well-being and serves as a foundation for upcoming investigations and policy actions.

**Keywords:** Social media, mental health, mental wellbeing, youth, digital environment.

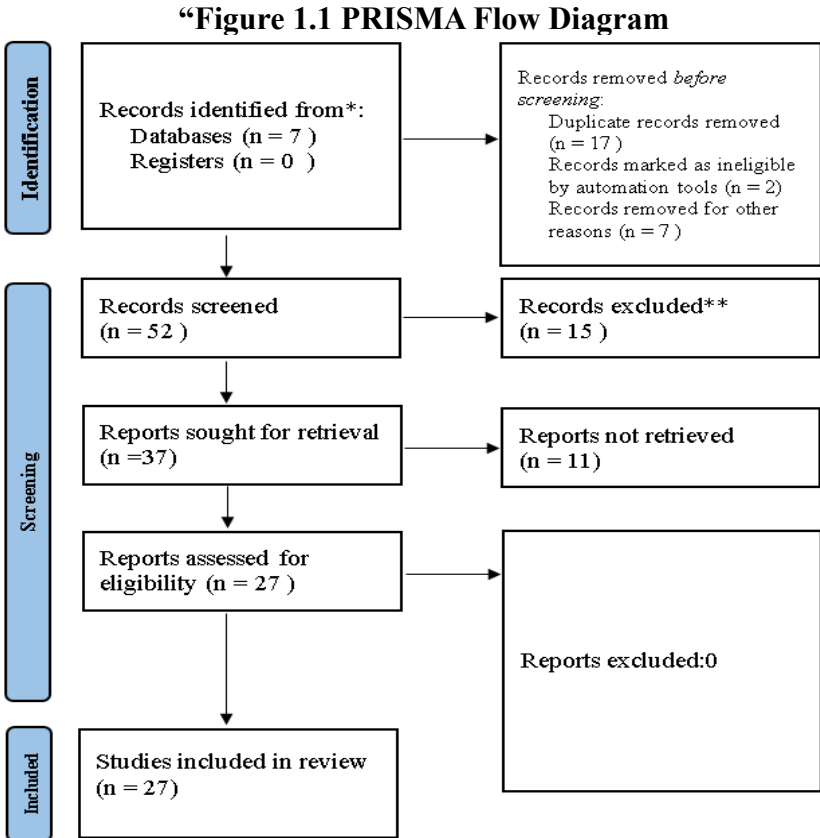
## 1. Introduction:

Humans need other people's company in order to survive due to their innate social nature. So, while having social connections with other people can help reduce stress, anxiety, and sadness, not having social connections can seriously harm one's mental health. Significant changes in how people connect and communicate have resulted from the quick rise of social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others during the past ten years. Facebook is the biggest social networking site, with over a billion active members at the moment. It is projected that this number will rise significantly over time, particularly in developing nations. Both personal and professional interactions take place on Facebook, and its use has improved online learning, connectedness, and idea exchange in several ways. Digital technology has permeated every aspect of young people's life. For many young people, screen time starts early; in the US, children under the age of two use screens for an average of 42 minutes per day. By adolescence, the majority of young people are completely engrossed in the world of social media, computers, and smartphones. 95% of teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 have access to a smartphone, according to recent nationally representative figures,

and 88% have a desktop or laptop at home. The percentage of US teenagers who said they were online "almost constantly" increased from 24% only three years ago to 45% in 2018 Social media's rapid and widespread growth may have led to the creation of a "cyber carriage," where a large number of people are oblivious to their physical surroundings while glued to the internet, which they access through handheld devices. Is it detrimental to younger people's social and emotional development, well-being, and mental health to live in the virtual world of social media, or are the risks overstated by older generations? This is an important question because there have been reports of rising mental health issues in children, and challenges faced at this age may have long-lasting effects.

**2. Research Methodology:**

“The methodology for this review was designed to ensure a systematic and comprehensive synthesis of existing research on the impact of social media on the mental well-being of youth. A structured search was conducted across multiple databases, including Scopus, Research Gate, Google Scholar, Jstor, Proquest, EBSCO, and Springer, using a combination of keywords such as "social media," "mental well-being," "youth," "adolescents," and "mental health." Inclusion criteria were set to focus on studies examining individuals aged 13–25 years, exploring the relationship between social media use and mental well-being, and employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. Studies unrelated to youth, non-peer-reviewed articles, editorials, and duplicates were excluded. The screening process followed PRISMA guidelines, beginning with an initial review of titles and abstracts to identify relevant studies, followed by a detailed evaluation of full-text articles that met the inclusion criteria.” Any disagreements between reviewers during the selection process were resolved through discussion. Key data extracted from the selected studies included participant demographics, study design, type of social media use, and mental well-being outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.



*Source: Page MJ, et al. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71.*

### 3. Thematic Analysis of Literature

#### 1. Risks and Negative Impacts of Social Media Use

**i. Cyberbullying and Cybervictimization:** Several studies, including those by Nesi (2020) and Khalaf et al. (2023), highlight cyberbullying as a critical factor contributing to increased anxiety, depression, and suicidal tendencies among adolescents. Jackson et al. (2025) further emphasize the heightened vulnerability of neurodivergent youth to cyberbullying, necessitating targeted interventions. Cyberbullying not only causes immediate emotional distress but also has long-term consequences, leading to chronic stress, social withdrawal, and difficulties in academic and social development.

**ii. Social Comparison and Self-Esteem Issues:** Braghieri et al. (2022) and McCrae et al. (2017) explore how unfavorable social comparisons on platforms like Facebook and Instagram lead to lower self-esteem and increased depressive symptoms, particularly among adolescent girls. The constant exposure to curated, idealized versions of others' lives fosters feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction, which can contribute to the development of body image issues and eating disorders.

**iii. Sleep Disruption and Mental Fatigue:** Khalaf et al. (2023) and Daniellette Tan et al. (2021) report that excessive social media use disrupts sleep patterns, leading to mental fatigue, stress, and diminished academic performance. Blue light emitted from screens interferes with melatonin production, causing insomnia and reduced sleep quality, which in turn affects cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and decision-making.

**iv. Addiction and Emotional Dysregulation:** Studies by Santini et al. (2024) and Wang et al. (2025) reveal a strong association between social media addiction and mental health issues like depression, loneliness, and emotional avoidance. These findings highlight the cyclical relationship between social media use and declining mental health. Addiction to social media can lead to neglect of offline relationships, decreased physical activity, and a reliance on online validation for self-worth.

**v. Exposure to Harmful Content:** The Bipartisan Policy Center (2024) and Kim et al. (2025) discuss the risks of exposure to harmful content, including gambling-related media and radical online communities, which can exacerbate anxiety, promote risky behaviors, and contribute to cognitive distortions among youth. The algorithmic nature of social media platforms often amplifies exposure to extreme content, leading to the normalization of harmful behaviours and ideologies.

#### 2. Benefits and Positive Impacts of Social Media Use

**i. Social Connectivity and Peer Support:** Nesi (2020), Oloyede et al. (2024), and Glassman et al. (2025) emphasize how social media fosters peer relationships, providing platforms for emotional support, community building, and shared experiences. Best et al. (2016) highlight the positive impact of online help-seeking behaviors among adolescent males. Social media can reduce feelings of isolation, especially for youth in marginalized communities or those with limited offline social opportunities.

**ii. Access to Mental Health Resources:** Studies like those by Sabatini (2023) and Jha et al. (2025) demonstrate how digital platforms enhance access to mental health resources and interventions, such as suicide prevention apps and online counseling services. Online communities and forums can provide a sense of belonging and validation, offering support from peers who share similar experiences and challenges.

**iii. Self-Expression and Identity Formation:** Social media serves as a critical space for youth to explore and express their identities. Steains (2025) and Melton (2025) delve into how platforms like TikTok and Reddit allow for the negotiation of cultural identities and gender discourse, influencing self-esteem and social belonging. Creative expression through social media, such as sharing art, music, or writing, can foster a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence.

**iv. Spiritual and Emotional Well-Being:** Anwar & Mujib (2022) explore how faith-based social media content fosters spiritual growth and emotional well-being, highlighting the diverse ways digital

platforms can positively influence mental health. Engaging with uplifting and inspirational content can provide comfort, motivation, and a sense of purpose.

### 3. Moderating Factors and Contextual Influences

**i. Gender Differences:** McCrae et al. (2017) and Orben (2020) note that adolescent girls are more susceptible to the negative effects of social media, particularly concerning body image and online validation-seeking behaviors. Boys, on the other hand, may be more influenced by online gaming communities and competitive social dynamics, which can also impact mental health.

**ii. Cultural and Socioeconomic Contexts:** Magis-Weinberg et al. (2021) highlight the unique vulnerabilities of young adolescents in low- and middle-income countries, where cultural factors and limited parental guidance amplify the risks of digital media use. Socioeconomic disparities can affect access to technology, digital literacy, and support systems, influencing the overall impact of social media.

**iii. Pre-existing Mental Health Conditions:** Santini et al. (2024) and de Moor et al. (2025) discuss how pre-existing mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, can increase susceptibility to the negative impacts of social media, while also reinforcing negative self-perceptions. Youth with mental health challenges may use social media as a coping mechanism, which can either provide support or exacerbate symptoms depending on their online experiences.

**iv. Digital Literacy and Algorithmic Influences:** Khalaf et al. (2023) and the Bipartisan Policy Center (2024) stress the importance of digital literacy in navigating online experiences and mitigating exposure to harmful content. The role of social media algorithms in shaping content exposure is also highlighted as a critical area for further research. Understanding how algorithms influence behavior and content consumption is essential for developing effective interventions.

### 4. Recommendations and Future Directions

**i. Promotion of Digital Literacy:** Emphasizing the need for digital literacy programs to help youth navigate online environments safely and critically (Khalaf et al., 2023; O'Brien, 2020). These programs should teach critical thinking skills, media literacy, and strategies for managing online interactions and content consumption.

**ii. Development of Tailored Interventions:** Jackson et al. (2025) and Wang et al. (2025) advocate for specialized interventions targeting vulnerable populations, such as neurodivergent adolescents and those prone to emotional avoidance. Interventions should be culturally sensitive and inclusive, addressing the unique needs and experiences of diverse youth populations.

**iii. Policy and Regulatory Measures:** The Bipartisan Policy Center (2024) calls for stronger regulatory frameworks to ensure safe social media use, including enhanced privacy protections and transparency from social media companies. Policies should focus on protecting youth from harmful content, promoting responsible platform design, and holding companies accountable for the mental health impacts of their products.

**iv. Encouragement of Balanced Usage:** Oloyede et al. (2024) and Kopecka-Piech (2025) recommend strategies for responsible and moderate engagement with social platforms, including self-regulation tools and fostering offline social connections. Encouraging activities that promote physical health, face-to-face interactions, and time management can help mitigate the negative effects of excessive screen time.

**v. Further Research Needs:** Many studies, including those by Nesi (2020) and McCrae et al. (2017), underscore the necessity for longitudinal and experimental research to establish causality and explore the long-term effects of social media on youth mental health. Future research should also examine the role of emerging technologies, such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence, in shaping digital experiences and mental health outcomes.

#### **4. Conclusion and Discussion**

The existing body of literature provides a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted impact of social media on the mental well-being of youth. The thematic analysis reveals a duality in social media's role, encompassing both risks and benefits. On one hand, cyberbullying, social comparison, sleep disruption, addiction, and exposure to harmful content are significant contributors to mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation. On the other hand, social media facilitates social connectivity, access to mental health resources, self-expression, and even spiritual growth, highlighting its potential as a tool for positive development.

##### **Risks and Negative Impacts**

The detrimental effects of social media are well-documented, with cyberbullying and cybervictimization identified as primary concerns. The heightened vulnerability of neurodivergent youth to such negative experiences necessitates tailored interventions. Social comparison, particularly prevalent on visually driven platforms like Instagram, exacerbates self-esteem issues and contributes to body image disorders, especially among adolescent girls. Furthermore, excessive use of social media disrupts sleep patterns, leading to cognitive impairments and academic underperformance. The cyclical nature of social media addiction fosters emotional avoidance and loneliness, while exposure to harmful content amplifies risky behaviours and cognitive distortions.

##### **Benefits and Positive Impacts**

Conversely, the literature underscores the positive dimensions of social media, emphasizing its role in fostering peer support and community building. Platforms provide critical spaces for emotional support and shared experiences, reducing feelings of isolation, particularly among marginalized youth. Access to mental health resources through digital platforms, such as online counseling and suicide prevention tools, enhances the availability of support services. Moreover, social media facilitates self-expression and identity formation, contributing to self-esteem and social belonging. Faith-based content further promotes spiritual and emotional well-being, showcasing the diverse ways social media can positively influence mental health.

##### **Moderating Factors and Contextual Influences**

The impact of social media on mental health is not uniform and is influenced by various moderating factors. Gender differences play a significant role, with adolescent girls more susceptible to the negative effects of social comparison and validation-seeking behaviors. Cultural and socioeconomic contexts further shape digital experiences, with youth in low- and middle-income countries facing unique vulnerabilities due to limited parental guidance and digital literacy. Pre-existing mental health conditions exacerbate susceptibility to negative outcomes, while digital literacy and algorithmic influences are critical in navigating online environments and mitigating risks.

#### **5. Overcoming Strategies and Recommendations**

Addressing the complex relationship between social media use and youth mental health requires a multifaceted approach:

**1. Promotion of Digital Literacy:** Implementing comprehensive digital literacy programs is essential for equipping youth with the skills to navigate online environments safely and critically. These programs should emphasize critical thinking, media literacy, and strategies for managing online interactions and content consumption.

**2. Development of Tailored Interventions:** Specialized interventions targeting vulnerable populations, such as neurodivergent adolescents and those prone to emotional avoidance, are crucial. These interventions should be culturally sensitive and inclusive, addressing the unique needs of diverse youth populations.

**3. Policy and Regulatory Measures:** Strengthening regulatory frameworks to ensure safe social media use is imperative. Policies should focus on enhancing privacy protections, promoting transparency from social media companies, and protecting youth from harmful content. Responsible platform design and corporate accountability are essential components of these measures.

**4. Encouragement of Balanced Usage:** Promoting responsible and moderate engagement with social platforms through self-regulation tools and fostering offline social connections is vital. Encouraging activities that enhance physical health, face-to-face interactions, and effective time management can mitigate the negative effects of excessive screen time.

**5. Further Research Needs:** Longitudinal and experimental research is necessary to establish causality and explore the long-term effects of social media on youth mental health. Future studies should examine the role of emerging technologies, such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence, in shaping digital experiences and mental health outcomes.

While social media presents significant risks to the mental well-being of youth, it also offers substantial benefits that can be harnessed for positive development. A balanced approach that incorporates digital literacy, tailored interventions, regulatory measures, and further research is essential for mitigating the negative impacts while maximizing the positive potential of social media. By understanding and addressing the multifaceted nature of social media's influence, stakeholders can foster healthier online environments that support the mental health and well-being of youth.

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