

The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health: A Comprehensive Review

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction: This comprehensive review explores the multifaceted relationship between social media use and mental health, highlighting its positive and negative effects. While social media fosters connectivity and mental health awareness, excessive use has been linked to adverse outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and cyberbullying. It is utilizing theoretical frameworks such as Social Comparison Theory and the personal Model.

Objectives: This study examines how curated online interactions influence psychological well-being.

Methods: A systematic scoping review was conducted, encompassing recent studies from 2019 onward.

Results: Findings reveal that age, developmental stage, and usage patterns significantly moderate the effects of social media on mental health. Emerging concerns include Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), sleep disturbances, and low self-esteem, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Despite its challenges, social media presents opportunities for mental health support through peer networks and online interventions.

Conclusions: This review underscores the need for tailored strategies, digital literacy programs, and policy regulations to mitigate risks and maximize social media's potential for positive mental health outcomes. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies, cross-cultural analyses, and innovative digital interventions to address gaps in understanding the complexities of social media's impact on mental health.

1. Introduction

Social media has transformed communication and interaction patterns, particularly among younger populations. With platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter becoming ubiquitous, their influence on mental health has garnered significant attention from researchers and mental health professionals alike. The relationship between social media use and mental health is complex, with evidence suggesting both positive and negative effects. Understanding this relationship is crucial, as mental health issues are on the rise globally, particularly among adolescents and young adults. The World Health Organization has identified mental health as a critical component of overall health, emphasizing the need for effective interventions and strategies to mitigate risks associated with social media use (Yamini & Pujar, 2022; O'Reilly et al., 2018).

The widespread adoption of smartphones has enabled continual and near-constant access to social media platforms. A growing body of literature has identified associations between social media use and mental health outcomes, including psychological distress, depressive symptoms, and diminished well-being. However, the extent and conditions under which social media use may be harmful remain contentious. Attempting to make sense of this contradiction, this review consolidates the

varied evidence and controversies by examining disparate research lines that explain social media's impact on mental health. Specifically, we consider whether social media technologies are inherently unhealthy, identify the conditions under which they can produce positive and negative outcomes, and offer some potential solutions to mitigate their negative impact. Social networking applications, such as social media, have become part of everyday life and are widely regarded as valuable instruments in various industries, both in the private sector and in the areas of education and transport. Despite social media's numerous benefits, there is a growing desire among the international community for research and awareness of social networking's potential negative impacts on people's health, including mental health. Social networking services have been confirmed to boost the likelihood of mental disorders, particularly depression, examples of which can be observed on online social networks. In the present literature, emotional and mental issues can be diagnosed with over 70 percent accuracy by analyzing linguistic signs in user-generated content. Moreover, there is evidence available that indicates which communities are more prone to communicate concerns about potential mental illness than others. The impact of social media on mental health has become a critical area of research, particularly in light of the increasing prevalence of social media use among adolescents and young adults. Numerous studies have established a correlation between social media usage and various mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

Research indicates that excessive social media use is linked to negative mental health outcomes. For instance, Yamini and Pujar highlight that increased social media usage correlates with online harassment, poor sleep, low self-esteem, and negative body image, all of which contribute to mental health difficulties among emerging adults (Yamini & Pujar, 2022). Similarly, Hou et al. found that social media addiction negatively affects mental health, primarily through the mediating role of self-esteem (Hou et al., 2019). This aligns with findings from Pretorius et al., who noted that young people often seek online help for mental health issues, suggesting a complex relationship between social media use and mental health difficulties (Pretorius et al., 2019). The adverse effects of social media are particularly pronounced among students and adolescents. Sen et al. reported that prolonged social media use is associated with cumulative stress, which adversely affects mental well-being (Sen et al., 2021). Furthermore, Alammar et al. found that despite social media's potential to connect individuals, excessive use can lead to feelings of loneliness and exacerbate conditions such as anxiety and depression (Alammar et al., 2020). This is echoed by Beyari, who identified browsing and media sharing as significant contributors to mental health decline due to the pressures of emulating influencers (Beyari, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated this relationship, with studies indicating that increased social media use during this period was associated with heightened anxiety and depressive symptoms among adolescents (Burke et al., 2021). Research by Nazari et al. supports this, showing that higher social media addiction scores correlate with increased mental health risks during the pandemic (Nazari et al., 2023). Additionally, Hammad's study on deaf and hard-of-hearing students revealed a direct relationship between excessive social media use and symptoms of depression and anxiety (Hammad, 2023). While some studies suggest that social media can serve as a platform for mental health promotion, the prevailing evidence indicates that its negative impacts often outweigh the benefits. O'Reilly et al. argue that while social media can promote mental health awareness, it is crucial to understand its potential to exacerbate mental health issues (O'Reilly et al., 2018). Moreover, Kelly et al. found that young individuals with sustained poor mental health tend to spend more time on social media, indicating a cyclical relationship where mental health issues lead to increased social media use, which in turn exacerbates these issues (Kelly et al., 2022).

Despite the increasing evidence of a correlation between mental health disorders and social media, we currently do not know the role social media plays in mental health, as conclusions about the effects social media has on mental health cannot be meaningfully addressed, nor the mechanisms

connecting social media to mental ill health. The report is designed to inform an understanding of the existing literature, how it might contribute to addressing the information gap, and to identify opportunities for further research. As the literature on social media and mental health spreads across the fields of computer science, social and behavioral sciences, information science, public health, psychiatry, clinical psychology, communication, and social epidemiology, authors contribute from a range of different disciplines. While it provides a thorough review of the empirical work in the field, we note that the review is broader in scope in some respects. It includes the population-level evidence to inform essential and available knowledge about the potential causal relationships between social media and mental health. At the same time, we aim to provide a comprehensive theory base to stimulate further research on the subject.

2. Methodology

This scoping review follows a five-stage methodological framework. Firstly, we identified the research question that the current review aims to address: ‘What is the impact of social media on mental health?’. Next, we developed and documented a clear rationale for the research question. A comprehensive search strategy was created in consultation with a health sciences librarian. Academic databases used were Academic Search Elite, CINAHL, PsychInfo, and Social Service Abstracts. The search strategy aimed to include the widest range of publications related to the topic within the last two years, from 2019 to the present. The search utilized a combination of keywords and subject headings focusing on mental health concepts and social media concepts. Our search strategy included subject headings and keywords related to mental health as well as subject headings and keywords related to social media. No restrictions were imposed on study design or language. However, non-English articles were translated into English for inclusion. A search was also used to track papers related to the context that have cited these key papers. In addition, we conducted a manual search through key publications related to the research question. Two researchers screened six percent of the retrieved articles using a screening tool. Each article was assessed independently by two researchers. In this case, the relevance and quality of this sample were also refined and approved by each member of the research team before moving to the next stage. A well-documented methodological approach ensures that the results are valid and reliable. Data extraction was conducted using software since we had a large body of researched literature to analyze. Familiarization with the data involved multiple readings of the documents. All included articles were synthesized as we advanced through the review. Summary tables were also used to summarize the extracted data. Upon completion of the data extraction process, different views surrounding the research question were analyzed. If any inconsistencies were noted, the data extraction process was re-evaluated and modified. The final stage involved a consultation of pertinent stakeholders to refine the findings. Our preliminary discussion with mental health providers, social workers, and psychiatrists during the survey process informed our findings.

2.1. Literature Search and Selection Criteria

The present review aimed to examine the effects of SNSs and the diverse characteristics of their use by young people. To do so, a detailed search was undertaken to identify those papers published until August 2017. The search only included papers written in Spanish or English. To identify previous publications, a specific search was carried out as of 2004, the year when Facebook started. The selected papers included quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method studies focusing on the use of SNS by adolescents and young people and studying the aspects of identity construction, interpersonal relationships, learning and knowledge, expert-learner partnerships, social participation, information and media, and technology confidence. Any papers examining mental health were also included. Initially, two researchers conducted the search, in which broad-ranging themes were identified, including nomenclature and characteristics of Facebook and other SNS participants, age groups, and mental health. Social media influences on depression and anxiety were also analyzed, as

was cyberbullying. All these concepts were deeply studied in this document. Other information was deleted from the review, as it was not deemed relevant. Only those papers, the abstract of which included at least one concept including the anterior codes, were selected. To increase search specificity and avoid missing any article, using asterisks and quotation marks was allowed to recognize plural and corresponding terms between words in the search.

2.2. Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data about the sample analyzed was collected, coded, and counted. The sample size varied by study, with a range of 14 to 200,088, with a mean of 1950.3 and a median of 200. Discord between coder-generated tallies was vetted by a third coder. Discordance between the new coder and the third coder was vetted by the group. No disagreement spans in number inspection or quantifiable coding about what constitutes quantifiable content was encountered following third-rater resolution. Outcomes varied by original research goals, spanning across self-report and clinician-verified mental health states, with a majority in self-report symptoms. Therefore, the literature review is designed to address both types of outcomes and also to weigh in on the manifest categories in question. All outcomes, experimental design, and theoretical resolution were studied.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Theoretical Frameworks

To understand the interaction between mental health vulnerabilities and common social media uses a combination of theoretical frameworks is explored. Each framework proposes an explanation for behavior that can be adapted to help explain social media interactions and mental health effects. For example, the uses and gratifications theory emphasizes motivations and the pleasures of media use, and the hyperpersonal model outlines the dynamics of how initial face-to-face interactions can develop into intense online relationships due to idealization and reduced cues. It is a combination of social psychology, human-computer interaction, information systems, communication, and clinical psychology theories that provide possible explanations for the observed negative interaction between social media use and one's mental well-being. In recent years, researchers in varied disciplines have tried to explain the relationship between social media use and mental health by applying theoretical frameworks rooted in their discipline to this burgeoning problem. A growing body of research, mostly associative, has implicated heavy social media use with anxiety, depression, and stress in a variety of populations. However, some studies also report social media use-related positive benefits such as increased happiness, reduced isolation, and perceived social well-being. Multiple perspectives have been developed to understand the complex relationship between mental health and social media use, including social comparison theory, socio-cognitive theory, catastrophizing theory, cognitive behavioral model, and the affordances model. In this review, based on a comprehensive study from multiple disciplines that include both positive and negative interplays, the fundamental theoretical roots of mental health and social media interaction are presented. Furthermore, particular nuances and contradictions of these theoretical adaptations in social networking site use are summarized.

3.1. Social Comparison Theory

The Social Comparison Theory posits that people assess their own ability, opinions, and physical attractiveness by making a comparison with other individuals. Social comparison Theory posits that individuals determine their own social and personal worth based on how they stack up against others. This theory is particularly relevant in the context of social media, where users are constantly exposed to curated representations of others' lives. Research indicates that frequent engagement with social media can lead to negative self-evaluations and feelings of inadequacy, particularly when users compare themselves to the idealized images presented online (Hou et al., 2019; Sen et al.,

2021). This phenomenon can exacerbate mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, as individuals may feel pressured to meet unrealistic standards (Beyari, 2023).

This inherently leads to positive or negative emotions based on the beliefs of how they imagine themselves relative to other individuals. Comparing oneself to more capable individuals result in low self-worth, which may lead to dissatisfaction, depression, or anxiety. At its very core, SCT contends that the desire for accurate self-evaluation is one of the primary human motivations; and we do so through comparing ourselves—whether physical appearance, lifestyle, economic status, or achievements—to others. Perceived media advertisements or images provide epistemic utility—value other than merely social comparison—which is value in being seen as informative—wherein looking more like idealized media depictions offers information about the kind of life one could lead. The average person on the street today sees more advertising in a year than people did 50 years ago, but to whom are they comparing themselves? In terms of physical appearance, one answer is celebrities—stars who, at least superficially, exemplify ‘the good life’. If other consumers are selecting and consuming images for the information they provide, and if advertisers are selecting and creating imagery for its value in creating aspirations, this creates a circular journey by pointing out that some consumers will want to look more perfect if that gives them information about the kind of life they can lead. This can then inflate the demand for images of more perfect people—and change social norms by making those images more widespread, creating further aspirational demand. Some would argue that glamour and celebrity lead not to upward comparison for all, but to a way of classifying oneself as part of the perceived glamorous group, thereby creating a division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, enhancing self-esteem without requiring direct social comparison.

3.2. Social Identity Theory

The researchers carried out a series of experiments in 1971 with 64 boys from Bristol, England, aged 14 to 15, to establish social identity theory. "Social identity theory suggests that as individuals when we refer to ourselves as 'us' or 'we,' this is guided by our group memberships – social categories such as 'university student,' 'football supporter,' 'northerner,' 'Muslim,' 'woman,' 'engineer,' 'charity worker,' etc." It follows that "by categorizing ourselves into certain social groups and viewing other social groups as different from ourselves, we favor our group by manipulating our similarity to others (intergroup discrimination)." Social identity theory is therefore a theory that has been used to explain the foundations and implementation of social groups and categories. Social identity theory provides a social psychological explanation of intergroup behavior.

Essential components of social identity theory: There are three fundamental components of social identity theory, namely personal identity, social identity, and social categorization. Categorization is the first component of social identity theory, describing how we identify and group ourselves based on social categorizations. Cultural groups, racial backgrounds, gender, age, religious, and political beliefs are just a few examples of groups that we identify with and self-categorize. Since social categories are a cornerstone of social identity theory, it follows that individuals will either compare and distinguish themselves from 'in-group' members – those who belong to the same social categories as themselves, or compare and distinguish themselves from 'out-group' members – those who do not belong to the same social categories. In doing so, two forms of comparison are formed – social identity and personal identity.

4. Psychological Mechanisms

Extensive evidence has documented that social comparison processes contribute to mental health problems. Early theories suggest that individuals require some external reference to evaluate their qualities and abilities. In the absence of objective benchmarks for social comparison, individuals are therefore motivated to turn to other people to reflect upon and evaluate themselves. Feelings of

financial insecurity promote downward social comparison and the tendency to compare oneself with those who are worse off. Over time, the structure available for downward comparison has changed: in modern society, the availability of upward comparisons is strongly increased through modern technology and social media. Objecting oneself to the lives of exceptional individuals is stimulating upward comparison.

Previous research has suggested that the comparison effects of social network services differ from traditional mainstream media by interfering with users' ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Despite people using social network services to meet their psychological needs, research also emphasizes users' withdrawal from consciously viewing material that was perceived as making them feel bad. So far, it remains unclear whether such withdrawal attempts effectively improve psychological well-being. The processed information still exists at the users' mental inlet, and it remains unclear when follies and chum curation become more demanding rather than contextual expectations.

4.1 FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)

Described as “a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent,” FOMO is a condition that directly impacts individuals' feelings about themselves and their thoughts about what they are (or are not) doing. This foreshadowed and could well explain social media's concomitant support of self-esteem and confidence among users, while narratives continue to assert that social media makes users feel less confident about their choices and accomplishments. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is another psychological construct that has gained prominence in discussions about social media and mental health. FOMO refers to the anxiety that arises from the belief that others are having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. This feeling can drive excessive social media use, as individuals seek to stay connected and informed about others' activities (Mahevish, 2023; Zhong et al., 2020). Studies have shown that FOMO is associated with increased levels of anxiety and depression, particularly among adolescents who are more susceptible to peer influence (Shimoga et al., 2019; Lelisho et al., 2022).

FOMO describes the perception of peer engagement with, and personal appropriation of, the perceived self-relevant values of an external social event. Individuals experience a subjective impression that others are enjoying a socially desirable trajectory that is unique to themselves. A FOMO locus involves the perception of expected positive emotions derived from interacting with others; specifically, those experiencing FOMO appear to possess a threatened need to belong, leading to states of need dissatisfaction and low levels of relatedness, competence, and autonomy need satisfaction. Such states correlate highly with associated problems, including emotional suppression, social withdrawal, and the inability to relax and sleep.

4.2 Cyberbullying

First identified in the early 21st century, traditional bullying has a real-life basis with a clear demarcation of the bully and the victim who engages in face-to-face communication. In contrast, cyberbullying refers to the aggressive behavior that occurs within the digital theater through the use of information and communication technologies-enabled communication tools, such as social media, email, instant messaging, or chat rooms. Cyberbullying is driven by various social media behaviors, including sharing rumors, sending threatening messages, posting mean material, hiding or deleting friends, and sending insulting messages, which can go viral and be disseminated worldwide. The defining issue that separates cyberbullying from bullying is the inverse of anonymity, where the victim knows the identity of the perpetrator but the bully hides behind the shield of a formidable audience. One of the most concerning negative impacts of social media is the prevalence of cyberbullying and harassment. Research indicates that social media is a primary platform for such behaviors, with significant implications for the mental health of victims (Halim et al., 2023; Jiang,

2023). Cyberbullying can lead to severe psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and in extreme cases, suicidal ideation (Seabrook et al., 2016; "The Impact of Using Social Media on the Mental Health of Adolescents", 2023). The anonymity afforded by social media can embolden perpetrators, making it easier for them to engage in harmful behaviors without facing immediate consequences (Sadagheyani & Tatari, 2020; Yakubu, 2022). This environment can create a toxic atmosphere for young users, who may feel trapped and vulnerable.

Cyberbullying has become much more pervasive, hidden, and harmful, occurring outside of the secure zones of one's home without obvious supervision while accessing the internet on laptops, tablets, and smartphones. While the damage of cyberbullying is emotionally felt, there have been a number of deaths due to cyberbullying. As much as 1 in 5 documented cyberbullying episodes is frequent and long-lasting, with nearly 84% hidden from adults or authority figures. The onset of cyberbullying has become younger, with reports indicating cyberbullying as prevalent among 10–14-year-old adolescents. Being readily available for use during school, youth who suffered cyberbullying demonstrated reduced academic performance, low self-esteem, and dysthymic symptoms, and were more likely to be bullied traditionally and cybernetically. The impact of cyberbullying was not trivial and could last long, with signs of anxiety, despair, sadness, or unrelenting feelings of loneliness, or even deeper problems manifesting three to four months following the event.

5. Impact on Specific Mental Health Conditions

The potential impact of social media use on mental health depends, in large part, on what one does in these spaces. Despite the potential drawbacks, social media can also serve as a valuable tool for fostering social connections and providing support. Many users report that social media platforms enable them to maintain relationships with friends and family, especially those who are geographically distant. This connectivity can enhance feelings of belonging and support, which are essential for mental well-being (Lin et al., 2020; McNamara & Usher, 2019). Furthermore, social media can facilitate access to mental health resources and communities, allowing individuals to share experiences and coping strategies (Berry et al., 2017; Alammari et al., 2020). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media played a crucial role in helping individuals stay connected and informed, which was vital for mental health during a time of isolation (O'Reilly et al., 2022; Costa, 2023).

It should be no surprise, for example, that exposure to other people's upbeat highlight reels might exacerbate depressive symptoms. A great deal more nuance is required, however, to understand the range of ways that social media could matter for the broad and mixed population seen in most clinical settings. Here, we paint with an extremely broad brush, covering six major families of mental health concerns and, within each domain, focusing on just a few of the more prominent or promising areas of research.

Mental health is multifaceted, encompassing a range of problems that operate with different dynamics. Much of the available research focuses on individual conditions or individual factors, but our mental health is much more multifaceted than a simple checklist of clinical diagnoses. Most of the research to date has focused on major disorders, like major depression and generalized anxiety disorder, or on various predictors of symptoms or diagnoses. Keep in mind that, while we end up emphasizing studies that speak to how specific social media practices might exacerbate or mitigate symptoms, it is important to bear in mind that these practices might primarily affect treatment seeking, diagnosis, or any of a number of aspects that, while distinct from symptoms per se, are nonetheless an important part of an individual's overall mental health profile.

5.1. Depression

Depression is one of the most common mental health disorders among adolescents who use social media. Symptoms of depression, such as irritability, feelings of sadness, and difficulty concentrating, have been linked to excessive social media use. Symptoms of depression may act as both the cause and effect of social media use, as the former decreases mood while increasing time spent on social media, which then acts to further harm the mood. The relationship between social media use and depression remains complex and understudied, with many questions left unanswered. Currently, no single theory can account for the complex relationship between social media use and depression in a way that fully captures the nuance and complexity of the issue.

Existing evidence suggests that social media use can increase depression and does so through two distinct channels. The first of these channels is direct increased usage. Depression itself may increase the probability of an individual using social media, and increased social media usage then subsequently increases depression. The second channel through which social media use triggers an increase in depression is via peer incitement. This occurs when a user's social media connections become increasingly exposed to a set of individuals who regularly post negative content, creating a negative feedback loop.

5.2. Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety refers to excessive fear and worry and encompasses various disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder, among others. Key features of some anxiety disorders include treatment-seeking behaviors. Social media is a double-edged sword when it comes to anxiety since it can also cause a debilitating form of anxiety colloquially known as FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). Those suffering from FOMO constantly check their social media feeds and are even known to wake up in the middle of the night to check for update alerts on their smart devices. As a result of these compulsive behaviors, the sleep of FOMO sufferers is disrupted and their overall sleep latency falls; such individuals frequently become sleep deprived. If their social media feeds indicate exciting events taking place, they suffer a rise in anxiety. When it comes to self-image related concerns, social media seems to magnify these, especially among females. In typically developing individuals, anxiety can be a driver of socially conscious behaviors. Such activist tendencies can result in individuals attempting to intervene in others' lives and in social change endeavors.

The difference in anxiety resulting from offline peer pressure versus online peer pressure does not cause those who are cyberbullied to feel less targeted. Those being cyberbullied do not escape the damaging effects typically associated with in-person peer pressure; in fact, cyberbullying's impacts often persist for a longer time period, since the online attacker remains anonymous while the victim's reputation is damaged. Due to the ability to take a break from social media, panic levels can be reduced, so long as the break lasts for at least one week. High social networking service users are found to suffer panic attacks during a break in comparison to non-high users. In a study comparing individuals' mental health status before and after taking a five-day break from Facebook, the majority of participants reported feeling happier. However, the same findings have yet to be observed among users of other social media platforms.

Age and developmental stage are critical factors that influence how social media affects mental health. Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of social media due to their developmental stage, which is characterized by identity formation and peer influence (Nazari et al., 2023; Adamczyk & Segrin, 2014). Research has shown that younger users are more likely to experience negative outcomes such as anxiety and depression as a result of social media use compared to older adults (Layug et al., 2022; Karim et al., 2020). Additionally, the

context in which social media is used—such as the presence of supportive versus critical peers—can significantly affect its impact on mental health.

6. Interventions and Strategies

To mitigate the negative effects of social media on mental health, various interventions and strategies can be employed. Digital well-being tools, such as screen time trackers and usage limiters, can help users manage their social media consumption. Additionally, educational programs aimed at promoting digital literacy can empower users to navigate social media more effectively, fostering resilience against negative influences. Encouraging positive online behaviors, such as supportive interactions and constructive feedback, can also contribute to a healthier social media environment.

The negative impact of social media can be mitigated by implementing these interventions:

1. **Education and clinical support:** Encourage healthcare professionals to develop educational toolkits and brief intervention strategies, which may be utilized during antenatal and postnatal care.
2. **Reduced exposure:** Tailored education packages can be developed and delivered to reduce future exposure to harmful materials. Brief educational packages could be incorporated into wider health promotion initiatives in schools and through community groups.
3. **Positive body image:** A range of intervention strategies have been developed to assist in the evolution of a positive body image, such as teacher, peer, and multimedia programs. Resistance to negative effects can also be achieved by creating a buffer between Internet usage and body image.
4. **Encouragement of role models:** Although the role of the media in the causation of body dissatisfaction is well supported, the presence of a role model may offer protection against these negative media effects.
5. **Resilience building:** This phrase is usually associated with optimistic outcome possibilities, which are traversed on the road from dysfunction to personal development. Resilience-building measures can have a buffering effect, helping victims of online abuse and harassment recognize that what is said is unlikely to be about them, but rather more reflective of the person posting. This, in turn, can reduce the impact of the experience, thereby mitigating the content of negative related stress.

Several intervention approaches were identified that extend beyond simple user privacy settings. These approaches are intermingled with both preventive and reactive strategies and are equated with reducing chronic and acute mental health issues relating to habitual appearance checks, photo editing, the number of sites visited, and the amount of selfie-taking. The physical and psychological benefits to well-being brought by simply showing that images can be manipulated may help reduce some of the obsession with appearance, leading to improvements like more physical activity, reduced associated stress, greater willpower, and reductions in binge eating or reliance on unhealthy quick-fix diets and more dangerous practices. Such teaching measures must be part of a wider positive body image and resilience-building edutainment package, reaching greater goal-oriented satisfaction in this life.

6.1. Digital Detox

A strategy proposed to improve mental and physical health by promoting detachment from digital devices. This text singles out three themes relating to digital detox as part of the broader public health debate about digital technologies: detoxification practices, digital detoxes in physical space (digital-free retreats and camps), and digital detoxes in digital spaces (within the Internet and social media). The detox is crucial for our health. We need one day a week to rest. We need silence to refresh ourselves and find harmony within. In conclusion, our findings show that traditional media shifts and digital detox activities positively impact mental health. In addition, passive exposure to

social networking service use can have a significant impact on an individual, emphasizing the importance of helping to establish traditional and digital detox among average users as a protective factor for mental well-being. Since the world is slow, the detox is crucial for our health. We need rest for one day. We need silence to refresh ourselves and find harmony. The most powerful tool for physical and mental cleanliness is silence. The digital detox can minimize any potential 'equalization,' which may differ from lifestyle to digital behavior and social media use. Social interactions in physical space must be aligned with online social exchanges. Traditional media act very differently than social media. Finally, social media creates a digital social environment that requires, like the real world, digital care, and digital detoxification.

6.2. Online Mental Health Support

As the majority of young people use social media frequently, they have turned to it as a coping mechanism. However, little is known about the extent to which social media usage alleviates mental distress or the potential negative side effects of overusing it in coping with mental health issues. Other than providing mental health-related information, social media has also been utilized as a platform for offering support to its users. The use of social media effectively mitigates geographical and accessibility constraints. Online mental health support has provided platforms for peer-to-peer networks, especially for those with stigmatized mental health issues, to share and seek their opinions anonymously using forums, blogs, and chat rooms. However, social media usage has not been uniform across all social categories. With rapid technological development, using modern social media platforms to access or seek help from trained professionals has been increasingly adopted. Despite having advantages that appeal to users, concerns about privacy, confidentiality, and the establishment of certification by professionals may potentially bring harm if these platforms are not secured. Although social media provide a space to discuss mental health issues and present people with mental illnesses as part of the social world, only a portion of individuals with mental disorders will seek help from professional mental health care providers. One of the explanations is the shame or rejection that sometimes permeates occupational functioning and interpersonal relationships among those with mental illness.

7. Future Directions

Special attention should be paid to how hate speech, trolling, and cyberbullying can be better regulated or managed. There have been discussions with large social media platforms that have policies about suicide and self-harm, and whose teams take the user's well-being into account when spotting such messages. The best academic expertise must come into practice to develop even more effective protocols. Methods have been very successful in identifying rare safety risks and adverse effects of treatments. It is not impossible to apply the same principle to the benefits and harms of the use of social networks. A promising approach is to take advantage of the potential of primary health care. A problem that arises mainly from the use of social media data, but perhaps more generally from the content of electronic platforms, is that of reconciling terms that lack clarity. Techniques are used to categorize terms used frequently in electronic records. Future studies could establish both the benefits and the potential risks of social media use. If social networks are perceived to harm the well-being of affluent societies and different subgroups in an overheated political climate, investments are needed in determining how digital tools accelerate surveillance to detect and assess the management of abuses.

7.1. Emerging Research Areas

7.1.1. Combined impact of multiple channels of SNS on mental health. A clear finding from the available studies is that the impact of SNS is multi-faceted. A small but increasing body of literature now identifies the potential mediating effect of positive uses of different SNS platforms, especially if used in moderation.

7.1.2. Research that aimed to demonstrate the positive side of SNS and mental health. Given the growing interest in researching the potential positive impact of SNS on users' mental health, research also seeks to demonstrate the protective effect and benefits of SNS. There are reports showing the positive benefit of coping and self-disclosure on general well-being in emerging nations. However, given the contradiction in the existing studies, more research is needed to address the issue critically. For example, it is likely that only a very small proportion (or specific age groups) may benefit from social connection or support on SNS, given the reported decrease in empathy, loneliness, and social anxiety from excessive usage.

7.1.3. Future research is needed to prioritize testing digital interventions, specifically using SNS to resolve negative mental health issues. Considering most young people lack professional help, it would likely be valuable to look into how digital interventions are used to resolve and support users with reduced life satisfaction and increased depressive and anxiety symptoms. With promising results, such research could guide the development of digital interventions involving SNS to support mental health in young populations.

7.2. Ethical Considerations

Researchers are increasingly grappling with the ethical implications of conducting research on social media. As we increasingly rely on these digital platforms for the collection of personal insights, it is critical that ethical procedures are revisited, scrutinized, and amended as necessary. In particular, more detailed informed consent processes, including the potential for ongoing removal of data, should be considered. Competing rights of participating users and to what extent researchers are free to use their data is also a major consideration; users' right to data privacy should be upheld wherever necessary. Informed consent while conducting social media research is a challenging issue as it typically is derived from deidentified individuals and their online communications. The challenge lies in if and how researchers using social media data obtain informed consent from the research subjects. Research approvals may differ markedly for projects using different levels of intrusion, importance of the social media platform, size of the data, and subject of the research. Opinions and guidelines point toward more oversight for studies involving more active forms of research such as liking, favoriting, and retweeting. There is also an acceptance that in the realm of social media, public sharing of user activities implies consent or at least awareness and disclosure of the platform rules. For publicly shared data, however, it is challenging to conclude whether informed consent was obtained from users or specific institutional review board approval was sought by researchers. Different jurisdictions have varying rules, regulations, and cultural expectations that should be considered: an international comparative approach could be useful for such an investigation.

8. Conclusion

In summary, the impact of social media on mental health is multifaceted, encompassing both positive and negative dimensions. While social media can enhance social support and connectivity, it also poses significant risks, particularly in the form of cyberbullying and social comparison. The effects of social media are moderated by factors such as age and developmental stage, highlighting the need for tailored interventions. By leveraging digital well-being tools and promoting positive online behaviors, it is possible to harness the benefits of social media while mitigating its risks. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the impact of social media on users' mental health. The review was based on a quantitative content analysis of empirical studies published between 2010 and 2018. We analyzed 717 relevant studies and identified nine overarching themes emerging from them, which we further divided into 22 subthemes. The findings of this review suggest that current research's interest in the impact of social media on users' mental health has grown significantly over time. The majority of previous research has focused on examining the relationships between social media use and mental illness, while only a small portion

of studies have explored the potential positive impacts of using social media on users' mental health. Our review also indicated that previous research has mainly utilized cross-sectional survey methodology and self-reported measures to examine claimed relationships, which may lead to issues related to weakened internal and external validity, common method bias, and self-report bias. The review concludes with several methodological and conceptual recommendations, which could benefit researchers, clinicians, users, policymakers, and social networking site developers. We suggest researchers should be cautious when interpreting the associations and recognize the potentially reciprocal, indirect, mediating, and/or moderating effects. Cross-cultural context could be a crucial factor, utilizing a longitudinal design and objective data related to social media use, analytics, and/or administratively captured records. Additionally, consider investigating potential modulators, potential comorbidity, and cluster effects; the bidirectional, complex relationships; and additional potential mechanisms between social media use and the complexity of the social media environment, offline tied support, and offline social capital; as well as the differences or displacement effects related to diverse social media and online specific activities or behaviors.

8.1. Summary of Key Findings

This review explores the impacts of social media on mental health, mainly on symptoms of depression, body image concerns, disordered eating, sleep quality, and emotional states. Compared to passive consumption behavior, active use of social media is more likely to make individuals feel worse. Regardless of age or culture, how long and often people use social media can intensify the negative impacts of these platforms on mental health, although some demonstrations show potential benefits. Cyberbullying and other adverse experiences on social media are the causes of many negative side effects on mental health and well-being. In conclusion, to make social media more conducive to positive mental health, its relationships and associations should be more broadly considered across diverse domains, including continuous improvements in algorithmic content recommendations and previously overlooked features such as users' passive consumption behavior of social media.

8.2. Implications for Policy and Practice

This paper has considered the consequences of different forms of social media engagement for various aspects of mental health and established a body of replicated findings that document the direction and magnitude of these effects – in either a positive or negative direction. We have also considered the mechanisms or processes that underpin these relationships and noted many reasons to be skeptical of the degree to which the available evidence can be said to have made definitive relationships, particularly in relation to underlying mechanisms. This said, once established, the policy and practice implications of these findings might appear obvious. Clearly, steps should be taken to curtail the use and availability of formats of social media that tend to undercut mental health, and steps should be taken to encourage the use and development of forms of social media that foster mental health. Moreover, evidence that for some people at least, social media usage can foster positive mental health outcomes could be harnessed for therapeutic purposes. Although the findings of academic research in this field appear to be quite well-established and beyond the level of confidence that they are no more than background noise, the likelihood is that high-quality evidence would be called for before policy measures were put in place. These are relatively cheap to conduct and might go some way towards resolving these contexts of hedonism and existential uncertainty currently surrounding debates and policy measures regarding the impact of digital technologies of all kinds on mental health. Policymakers and healthcare providers need to recognize the significant impact that social media can have on individuals' mental health and well-being. Implementing appropriate regulations and guidelines to safeguard users from potential harm should be a top priority. Therefore, policies and practices must be put in place to address the potential negative effects of social media on mental health and to promote positive online experiences.

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