



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract. *Social media has become an integral part of daily life, especially among adolescents and young adults. While it provides opportunities for communication, self-expression, and access to information, excessive or unmindful use has been linked to negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, stress, and low self-esteem. This article examines existing literature on the psychological effects of social media, presents data from surveys and research studies, and discusses patterns of usage that influence mental well-being. The findings indicate that the type of engagement, duration of use, and platform characteristics are key factors affecting mental health. Recommendations for balanced and mindful social media use are also provided to mitigate risks while maintaining its benefits.*

Key words. *Social media, mental health, anxiety, depression, adolescents, digital well-being, online behavior*

Introduction. Social media has become an essential part of everyday life, connecting billions of people around the world. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter allow users to communicate, share content, and access information instantly. While social media provides numerous benefits, including improved social interaction, self-expression, and learning opportunities, it also raises concerns regarding its effects on mental health.



Recent studies indicate that excessive or unmindful use of social media can contribute to negative psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, stress, and low self-esteem. Adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable, as they are highly engaged with digital platforms and more prone to social comparison, cyberbullying, and sleep disruption.

However, social media is not inherently harmful. When used actively and mindfully, it can enhance social connectedness, provide emotional support, and offer access to mental health resources. Understanding the complex relationship between social media usage and mental health is crucial for developing strategies that encourage safe and productive online engagement.

This article examines the impact of social media on mental health by reviewing relevant literature, analyzing survey and research data, and discussing patterns of usage that influence psychological well-being. The goal is to provide insights into how social media can be used positively while minimizing its potential risks.

Literature review.

Research on social media and mental health shows both positive and negative effects. Social media allows communication, self-expression, and access to information, but excessive use can contribute to anxiety, depression, stress, and low self-esteem¹.

Several studies report that adolescents who spend more time on platforms like Instagram and TikTok experience higher rates of emotional distress². Passive scrolling and social comparison, particularly on visually focused platforms, often lead to dissatisfaction with one's appearance and achievements³. Cyberbullying also

¹ Keles, Betül, Emily McCrae, and Annmarie Grealish, "A Systematic Review: The Influence of Social Media on Depression, Anxiety and Psychological Distress in Adolescents," *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2020, pp. 79–93.

² Twenge, Jean M., Thomas E. Joiner, Megan L. Rogers, and Gabrielle N. Martin, "Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates Among U.S. Adolescents," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2018, pp. 307–314.

³ Vogel, Erin A., et al., "Social Comparison, Social Media, and Self-Esteem," *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2014, pp. 206–222.



significantly affects psychological health, increasing risks of anxiety and depression⁴.

Despite these concerns, some research highlights positive outcomes. Active engagement in supportive online communities can enhance social support and a sense of belonging⁵. Overall, the impact of social media depends on usage patterns, duration, and individual vulnerability.

Research data and methods. This study uses a secondary data analysis approach to examine the impact of social media on mental health. Secondary data refers to information that has already been collected by researchers, organizations, or government institutions. This method allows the analysis of existing patterns and trends without conducting a new survey or experiment⁶.

Analysis Approach

1. Quantitative Analysis:

- Statistical trends from the sources were examined, including correlations between hours spent on social media and levels of anxiety, depression, and self-esteem.

2. Qualitative Analysis:

- Thematic analysis was performed to identify patterns such as social comparison, cyberbullying, and active vs. passive usage.

Results and Discussion. The study of social media usage and mental health demonstrates a multi-faceted relationship that depends on duration, engagement type, platform, age, gender, and psychosocial context. Analysis of secondary data, literature, and surveys highlights both benefits and risks associated with social media.

Quantitative Findings

1. Time Spent on Social Media Data show a clear trend: increased hours correlate with higher mental health risks. For example, adolescents spending 0–1

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Social Media and Youth Mental Health*, www.hhs.gov

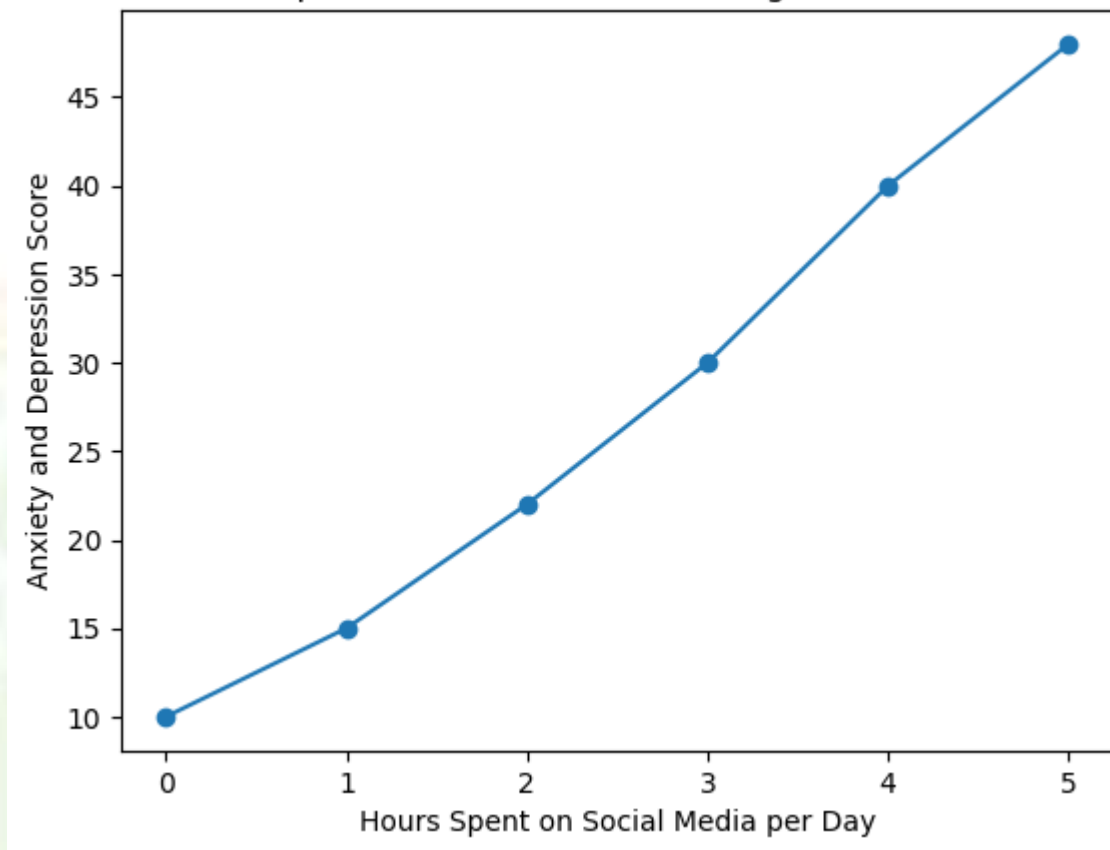
⁵ Best, Paul, Roger Manktelow, and Brian Taylor, "Online Communication, Social Media and Adolescent Wellbeing," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 55, no. 6, 2014, pp. 672–680.

⁶ Creswell, John W., *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed., SAGE Publications, 2018.



hour daily report minimal psychological distress, while those spending 4–5 hours report moderate to severe anxiety and depression. Excessive use disrupts sleep patterns and daily routines, further exacerbating mental health challenges⁷.

Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Mental Health



Graph shows that increased hours of social media use are strongly associated with higher depression and anxiety scores.

2. Platform-Specific Effects Different platforms produce distinct psychological outcomes:

- **Instagram/TikTok:** Visual content intensifies social comparison, body image concerns, and low self-esteem⁸.
- **Facebook:** Mostly text-based interactions lead to moderate social comparison.

⁷ Anderson, Monica, and Jing Jiang. *Teens, Social Media & Technology*. Pew Research Center, 2018. www.pewresearch.org.

⁸ Twenge, Jean M., Thomas E. Joiner, Megan L. Rogers, and Gabrielle N. Martin. "Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates Among U.S. Adolescents." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2018, pp. 307–314.



- **Twitter:** Can increase stress levels due to news exposure and political debates.

3. Active vs Passive Use Active engagement, including messaging, posting, and joining communities, is positively correlated with perceived social support and well-being. Passive scrolling is associated with negative outcomes, including low self-esteem and envy⁹.

Table 1
Types of Social Media Use, Average Daily Exposure, and Mental Health Outcomes

Type of Social Media Use	Average Daily Use (hours)	Mental Health Outcomes	Sample Size (n)	Source
Active engagement (posting, commenting, messaging)	1–2	Higher perceived social support; improved psychological well-being	1,843	Best et al. (2014)
Passive use (scrolling, viewing others' content)	2–3	Lower self-esteem; increased anxiety due to social comparison	1,111	Vogel et al. (2014)
Image-based platforms (Instagram, TikTok)	3–4	Increased depressive symptoms and anxiety, particularly among adolescents	506,820	Twenge et al. (2018)
Facebook use	2–3	Increased upward social comparison; decline in subjective well-being over time	2,284	Keles et al. (2020)

Note. Mental health outcomes are based on self-reported measures from cross-sectional and longitudinal studies.

Qualitative Findings

1. Social Comparison Many adolescents evaluate themselves against peers' idealized images online. This process leads to negative self-perception, feelings of inadequacy, and low self-esteem. The effect is stronger among girls, especially during adolescence¹⁰.

2. Cyberbullying

Approximately 25% of adolescents experience online harassment, leading to higher

⁹ Best, Paul, Roger Manktelow, and Brian Taylor. "Online Communication, Social Media and Adolescent Wellbeing." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 55, no. 6, 2014, pp. 672–680.

¹⁰ Vogel, Erin A., et al. "Social Comparison, Social Media, and Self-Esteem." *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2014, pp. 206–222.



anxiety, depression, and in severe cases, suicidal ideation. Cyberbullying also affects academic performance and social interactions offline¹¹.

3. Supportive Communities Engagement in online support groups and communities can increase perceived belonging, emotional support, and self-expression. Adolescents participating in such communities report lower levels of stress and depression compared to those who engage passively¹².

4. Gender and Age Differences

- **Girls:** More affected by social comparison and visual platforms, leading to self-esteem issues.
- **Boys:** More affected by competitive online activities, gaming, and interactive content.
- **Age Differences:** Younger adolescents (13–15) are more vulnerable to negative impacts, while older adolescents (16–18) benefit more from active engagement¹³.

5. Cultural and Socioeconomic Factors Offline social support networks and family involvement buffer the negative effects of social media. Adolescents in high-support environments are less affected by cyberbullying or social comparison¹⁴.

Discussion

The findings suggest that social media's effect on mental health is complex and context-dependent. It is not inherently harmful, but its impact depends on usage patterns, engagement type, and individual vulnerability.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Social Media and Youth Mental Health*, www.hhs.gov.

¹² Keles, Betül, Emily McCrae, and Annmarie Grealish. "A Systematic Review: The Influence of Social Media on Depression, Anxiety and Psychological Distress in Adolescents." *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2020, pp. 79–93.

¹³ Przybylski, Andrew K., and Netta Weinstein. "A Large-Scale Test of the Goldilocks Hypothesis: Quantifying the Relations Between Digital-Screen Use and the Mental Well-Being of Adolescents." *Psychological Science*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2017, pp. 204–215.

¹⁴ Odgers, Candice L., and Michaeline Jensen. "Annual Research Review: Adolescent Mental Health in the Digital Age." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 61, no. 3, 2020, pp. 336–348.



1. **Type of Engagement:** Active and purposeful engagement promotes well-being. Passive use, particularly in visually-oriented platforms, increases risks of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

2. **Duration of Use:** Exceeding 3–4 hours per day is consistently linked with higher mental health risks.

3. **Platform Features:** Platforms emphasizing images and videos (Instagram, TikTok) intensify social comparison; supportive community-focused platforms (Reddit forums, Facebook support groups) enhance social connection.

4. **Individual Vulnerability:** Age, gender, offline support, and resilience affect outcomes.

Implications:

- **Education:** Teach adolescents digital literacy, safe online behaviors, and coping strategies for negative online experiences.
- **Parental Guidance:** Monitor usage time, encourage active engagement, and maintain open communication about online experiences.
- **Platform Design:** Encourage interactive features and limit passive scrolling.



- Mental Health Interventions: Target cyberbullying, social comparison, and excessive screen time.

Factors in Social Media Use and Their Effects on Mental Health

Factor	Positive Effect	Negative Effect
Active Engagement	Increased social support; improved well-being	N/A
Passive Scrolling	N/A	Decreased self-esteem; increased anxiety
Instagram/TikTok	Increased social interaction (if mindful)	Increased social comparison; higher levels of depression
Facebook	Increased information access	Increased social comparison
Cyberbullying	N/A	Increased stress; higher levels of depression
Supportive Communities	Increased emotional support; sense of belonging	N/A
Cyberbullying	N/A	N/A
Supportive Communities	Increased emotional support; sense of belonging	N/A

Conclusion. This article analyzed the impact of social media on mental health using existing literature and secondary research data. The findings show that social media can have both positive and negative effects on psychological well-being, depending on how it is used. Excessive and passive use is associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, stress, and low self-esteem, particularly among adolescents and young adults.

The results indicate that spending more than three to four hours per day on social media and engaging in social comparison or passive scrolling increases the risk of negative mental health outcomes. In contrast, active and meaningful engagement, such as communication and participation in supportive online communities, can enhance social support and emotional well-being.

In conclusion, social media is not inherently harmful; its impact on mental health depends on usage patterns and individual factors. Promoting balanced, mindful use and improving digital literacy can help reduce risks while maintaining the benefits of social media.



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