

Exploring The Impact of Social Media On Youth's Mental Health

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Abstract

This study investigates the complex relationship between social media use and youth's mental health. Drawing from theoretical perspectives such as social comparison theory, uses and gratifications theory, and cultivation theory, the research examines how social media platforms can contribute to both positive and negative mental health outcomes. Factors such as social media usage pattern, exposure to negative content, influence and addiction of the Internet. The study aims to provide insights into the potential risks and benefits of social media use for young people and to inform strategies for promoting mental well-being in the digital age. Data for this study was gathered through a survey of 333 respondents from mass communication students in Sunway University. A quantitative approach was used, analyzing the responses to understand the relationship between social media usage pattern, exposure to negative content, influence and addiction of the Internet. The results, presented through descriptive statistics and correlations, illuminating on how youth's mental health is impacted by social media in today's society. By providing fresh insights into the impact of social media in youth's mental health, this research highlights the importance of honest and strategic engagement.

Keywords

social media, mental health, youths, negative content, addiction of social media

1. Introduction

In the last decade, mental health issues are a significant health concern for young people. Worldwide, approximately 20% of youths encounter mental health challenges each year, and it is estimated that 31% of individuals aged 15 to 24 have faced mental health difficulties at some point in their lives (Jenkins et al., 2018). Moreover, social media can be described as a digital form of communication that transforms human existence into a global village, facilitating interactions on various levels. These interactions can occur through text messages, images, videos, or audio and video calls. Social media has emerged as a prevalent trend among diverse groups of people and age ranges, particularly among youth individuals. (Noori et al., 2023)

The increasing of social media platforms provides chances for connections as well as hazards from unfavorable interactions like cyberbullying and peer comparison. On the other hands, teenagers who use social media extensively run the danger of developing mental health issues and self-harming tendencies. As noted by Wood et al., (2015), adolescents raised in an environment of continuous online communication find it difficult to envision the childhood experiences of many clinicians, who grew up without such technology.

Consequently, the frameworks surrounding development, socialization, sexualization, and education have

undergone significant transformations.

Digital devices have simplified many aspects of our lives, yet they have also introduced complexities that may be overwhelming. Nowadays, our social interactions often take the form of impersonal mobile contacts or communication through various electronic media. Social media is gradually but undeniably influencing how we live and interact with one another (Muthuraman, 2024). For instance, social media has a significant impact on the youth demographic within Omani society. The rapid increase in the use of social networking platforms is likely to have various effects on Oman's social structure. Many Omanis dedicate themselves over six hours each day to social media, leading to excessive usage that has become a widespread phenomenon and a contentious topic. Additionally, Omani youth are influenced by social media, which has increased public exposure and raised awareness among young people. Given that social media provides adolescents with numerous opportunities to participate in risky behaviors, connect with questionable communities, and interact with strangers without parental supervision, it is likely that parents, policymakers, and researchers are eager to comprehend the impact of adolescents' extensive social media use on their mental health. (Valkenburg et al., 2021).

Recently, some experts have associated social media platforms with certain mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety. Given that social networking sites are a relatively recent phenomenon, many questions regarding their potential impact on mental health remain unanswered (Priya, 2020). According to her, social media is considered one of the worst platforms for youth due to its use for cyberbullying and trolling, which poses a significant risk to youth's mental health. A study conducted by Oberst et al. (2017) have identified that the effects of social networking significantly influence the mental health of youths, noting that influence of social media can lead to emotional health problems. It also begs the question on how influential can social media bring an impact on youth's mental health. Youth mental health is a significant public health issue that presents considerable societal and economic challenges worldwide. According to (Kelly et al., 2018), there are several credible potential pathways that connect young people's mental health to the time they spend on social media and the manner in which they engage and interact online. In correlation, the social media usage pattern youth's apply in their daily life can significantly affect their mental health. For instance, as mentioned by (Kelly et al., 2018) many people tend to sleep near their phones, and research indicates a connection between sleep and mental health. Social media usage can affect their sleep in various ways, for example, excessive time spent on social media may shorten sleep duration, while nighttime notifications and the anxiety of missing new content can disrupt sleep.

Other than that, as mentioned by (Zhang et al., 2023), sharing topics related to mental illness and self-harm on social media may lead to exposure of negative content, such as increasing the risk of cyberbullying, triggering emotional responses, or encouraging harmful behaviors. Moreover, social media platform such as TikTok has become an overall trend among youths in today's generation. For instance, according to (Rathy, 2023), during the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath although TikTok has much work to be done, the platform has faced ongoing issues, particularly concerning the sexualization of youth. With 25% of TikTok users being under 19, it is essential for the platform to take all necessary measures to protect youths from the harm that other platforms, like Instagram, have inadvertently caused. Hence, how far does negative content on social media affects the youth's mental health?

Aside from that, the addiction of social media brings a turnaround in terms of giving an impact towards the youth's mental health around today's world. According to (Atwan et al., 2024), previous research has emphasized the serious issues linked to internet addiction, especially concerning social media encompasses disturbances in personal and social life, as well as declines in academic performance. Consequently, social media addiction among young people frequently impacts their mental well-being, resulting in a loss of self-control and heightened feelings of anger, anxiety, depression, and stress. It is crucial to comprehend the addiction of social media among youth's mental health in order to create strategies that supports mental health and self-esteem.

2. Literature Review

For the past decade, the introduction of social media and its technology, these platforms have clearly become a daily routine to youth nowadays. Most of the time it offers interaction and entertainment but one wrong step can lead to behavioral patterns that can endanger themselves in so many ways. This variable has some information on youths' usage of social media that contributes to their mental health.

As stated by (Hamilton & Lee, 2020), multiple studies have shown a correlation between social media usage and daytime sleepiness in adolescents. Nonetheless, only a limited number of studies have investigated how particular aspects of social media use influence sleep outcomes, such as the ways adolescents engage with social media for instance checking and posting behaviors and their perceived significance of using social media for social connections. It is important to add this study by figuring out the relationship between daytime sleepiness and bedtime technology use that are solely affected by the usage pattern of social media.

Social media has become an integral part of the lives of youths dealing with mental health challenges. The tendency of exposure to negative contents on social media that leads to cyberbullying, triggering emotional responses, or encouraging harmful behaviors are the most common ones happening around. For example, studies suggest that one mechanism is the use of social media for negative social comparison, which, when combined with rumination, can result in subsequent depression (Berryman et al., 2017). On the contrary, comparing oneself to the other falls under the negative contents on social media as well. Contents on social media appears to be associated with decreased face-to-face interactions, heightened social isolation, stress, depression, and sleep deprivation. Additionally, it has been suggested that cyberbullying, which involves using digital media to share threatening messages, embarrassing images, and rumors with the intent to harm others, continues to be a widespread issue (O'Reilly et al., 2018). Hence, it is crucial to explore how these negative contents on social media brings an impact towards youth's mental health.

Contemporary researchers across various disciplines are worried about the influence of social media on the mental health of children and adolescents. They believe these technologies may disrupt behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and volitional development, potentially leading to hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder. As stated by (Sharma et al., 2024), the constant quest for validation, fear of missing out (FOMO), and experiences of cyberbullying have influenced the psychological distress faced by young people, ultimately impairing their overall well-being. Social media, the internet, and mobile phones are expanding rapidly in terms of both users and service providers. The internet, as a transformative force, can significantly influence young people. To comprehend the role of social media in their lives, it's essential to move beyond a strictly deterministic view and acknowledge its influence (Nyambuga, 2014). Thus, there is significant attention and concern regarding how youths engage with social media, as they are viewed as the "digital generation." While they are exposed to new skills and technologies, they may also be vulnerable and susceptible to the effects of social media.

The significance of mental health in the context of social media towards youth is crucial in society nowadays. As conversations about mental health increase, more individuals are hiding behind screens, making hurtful and derogatory comments without facing any repercussions (Beattie, 2021). Continuously with the upgrowing of mental health awareness, youths are struggling to focus on their mental and cognitive tasks, even though they are regarded as the future productive members of society. Due to the fact that every day, youths communicate and interact with their peers using a wide variety of media and technological tools. Therefore, youths are always overseeing their own mental health.

3. Theoretical Framework

The fundamental idea behind the Uses and Gratifications thesis is that the primary issue with media use is not how it becomes a tool for communication but rather how it may satisfy users' social and personal needs. It is believed that users actively use the media to achieve their objectives and meet their own demands. Using media to achieve psychological gratifications has been the subject of several communication studies (Alimuddin & Latepo, 2021).

As mentioned by (Patidar & Shukla, n.d.), mass communication research served as the foundation for uses and gratification theory. According to the theory, there are social and psychological reasons to use any kind of media, and using a certain media in comparison to others might help an individual achieve specific goals. It states that a user's behaviour is influenced by a wide range of gratifications. Both the reasons for using social media in general and the reasons for using any specific media are reflected in the theory.

Nowadays, almost all types of mediated communication instruments are considered to be compatible with the uses and gratification hypothesis. The study of how teenagers used new technology, such as video cassette recorders, the effect of VCRs and cable TV on leisure time, and the companion satisfaction that comes with viewing television, for instance, used the uses and gratification theory. Uses and Gratification approach is essential to this study that seeks to explore the impact of social media on youth's mental health. Applied to this study, this approach by knowing why people use social media will make it easier to pinpoint particular actions that are linked to either good or bad consequences for mental health. Additionally, this theoretical approach emphasizes how crucial it is to take into account the individual differences among young people, including personality qualities and pre-existing mental health disorders, as these factors may influence how they interact with social media.

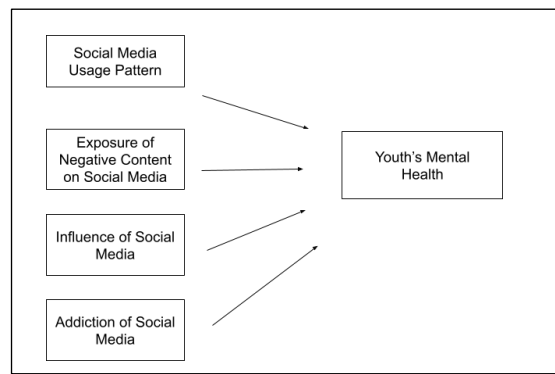


Fig. 1: Research framework

4. Methodology

For these research findings, a questionnaire had been constructed. The five parts of the questionnaire are: demographics; exposure to negative content; social media usage pattern; addiction of social media and influence of social media.

The demographic question aims to identify the respondent and collect information about their age, gender, and course of study. Part B's social media usage pattern is to see if it brings a huge impact to their mental health. To investigate exposure to negative content, turn to Part C. Respondents must select from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, and Strongly Agree for every point discussed in this section. As we move forward to Part D, this section consists of questions that dives deeper into the effects of being addicted to social media. Some of the options available to respondents are Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. This section looks into how social media can bring an addiction to youth and affect their mental health. For the last section, Part E, revolves around the questions on how influential social media can be towards youth's mental health. To determine whether the variable is significant, respondents must select between Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

For this research, the respondent's population that has been chosen is diploma and degree students from Management and Science University (MSU), Shah Alam. The analysis will focus on the frequency of these students' social media usage pattern, how influential social media is towards them, exploring the addiction and exposure of negative content through measures of overall well-being. Hence, correlated with the patterns of social media use to identify potential impacts. Not to neglect, this analysis will also explore mental health outcomes through measures of anxiety and depression to provide a nuanced understanding of how specific social media brings an impact to youth's mental health.

5. Result and Discussion

This sub-topic discussed the frequency of the respondents that participated in this study. Table 1 shows that 136 (40.8%) of the respondents were male while 197 (59.2%) respondents were female respondents. For the age category, Table 1 shows that 55 (16.5%) of the respondents were aged between 19 until 21 years old. For age 22 until 24, there were 202 (60.7%) of the respondents that were involved. 76 (22.8%) of the respondents were aged 25 years old and above. For the education level category, Table 1 shows that out of the 333 respondents, 75 (22.5%) of the respondents were in Diploma level, and as for Bachelor Degree, there were 222 (66.7%) respondents involved and for Master's, there were 36 (10.5%) involved. For marital status, Table 1 shows that 210 (63.1%) of the respondents are single while 123 (36.9%) are married. On the other hand, out of 333 respondents, 206 (61.9%) are Malays, 82 (60.7%) are Chinese while the remaining 45 (13.5%) are Indians.

Table 1: Frequency of the respondents

Demography Factors		n	%
Gender			
I.	Male	136	40.8%
II.	Female	197	59.2%
Age			
I.	19 – 21	55	16.5%
II.	22 – 24	202	60.7%
		76	22.8%

III. 25 and above			
Marital Status			
I.	Single	210	63.1%
II.	Married	123	36.9%
Race			
I.	Malay	206	61.9%
II.	Chinese	82	24.6%
III.	Indian	45	13.5%
Level of Education			
I.	Diploma	75	22.5%
II.	Bachelor's of Degree	222	66.7%
III.	Masters	36	10.5%

In this section, the differences between Social Media Usage Pattern and Youth's Mental Health will be explained as the first objective of the study is to examine the relationship between these two variables. The revealed a moderate relationship between Social Media Usage Pattern and Youth's Mental Health, with a significant value or ($r = .850$, $p > 0.01$). The result in Table 2 indicated that these two factors will have an impact on one another, therefore the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2: Correlation between Social Media Usage Pattern and Youth's Mental Health

Social Media Usage Pattern	Youth's Mental Health
r	.850**
n	333
p	0.01

The revealed a moderate relationship between Exposure to Negative Content and Youth's Mental Health, with a significant value or ($r = .915$, $p > 0.01$). The result in Table 3 indicated that these two factors will have an impact on one another, therefore the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 3: Correlation between Exposure to Negative Content and Youth's Mental Health

Social Media Usage Pattern	Youth's Mental Health
r	.915**
n	333
p	0.01

The revealed a moderate relationship between Addiction of Social Media and Youth's Mental Health, with a significant value or ($r = .906$, $p > 0.01$). The result in Table 4 indicated that these two factors will have an impact on one another, therefore the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4: Correlation between Addiction of Social Media and Youth's Mental Health

Social Media Usage Pattern	Youth's Mental Health
r	.906**
n	333
p	0.01

The revealed a moderate relationship between Influence of Social Media and Youth's Mental Health, with a significant value or ($r = .866$, $p > 0.01$). The result in Table 5 indicated that these two factors will have an impact on one another, therefore the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 5: Correlation between Influence of Social Media and Youth's Mental Health

Social Media Usage Pattern	Youth's Mental Health
r	.866**
n	333
p	0.01

6. Conclusion

According to the outcomes of the study, social media plays a significantly big role in influencing young people's mental health in both good and bad ways. In order to fully understand how individual characteristics, such as personality traits and their coping mechanisms, social media's effect on mental health, further research is necessary. Since the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) proposes that media consumption is driven by personal needs, future studies should examine whether traits like resilience, emotional intelligence, or self-esteem minimize the effects of social media use. This would support the establishment of individualised plans for much healthier online interaction management.

Additionally, follow-up studies should be the main focus of future research in order to assess long-term effects of social media on youth's mental health. While this study provides insightful information on current behaviors, understanding how social media habits change over time might help uncover the patterns in mental health risks and resilience-building techniques. Analysing the function of algorithm-driven content personalisation is also crucial, as platforms tailor content based on user's engagement, potentially will reinforce either positive or negative emotional states

Efficacy of mental health therapies and digital literacy initiatives should also be concentrated on future studies. Evidence-based strategies need to be implemented by schools, parents, and policymakers to help the youths develop critical thinking skills, recognise or identify harmful information, and to practice self-regulation when using social media. Future studies should also look at the creative approaches to enhance digital wellbeing and assess whether or not current educational initiatives minimize the detrimental psychological effects of excessive social media use.

By addressing these areas, future studies can expand on the present findings and provide a more thorough understanding of the complex relationship between social media and youth's mental health by tackling these topics. Implementing tools and regulations that encourage healthy social media practices while sustaining meaningful digital engagement will require a multidisciplinary approach that includes psychology, media studies, and technology study.

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