

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF SCHOOL STUDENTS: A REVIEW-BASED STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The pervasive engagement of school students with social media platforms has increasingly captured the attention of researchers, educators, and mental health professionals alike. This review-based article synthesizes findings from existing academic literature to delineate the multifaceted impact of social media on the psychological well-being of school-aged children and adolescents. Consistent findings indicate both advantageous and detrimental effects, with excessive usage frequently correlating with elevated levels of anxiety, stress, diminished self-esteem, experiences of cyberbullying, and disruptions to sleep patterns. Conversely, judicious and responsible social media use can facilitate effective communication, enhance learning opportunities, and support emotional expression. The review strongly emphasizes the critical importance of digital literacy, active parental involvement, and the implementation of proactive strategies to cultivate healthy online behaviors among students.

Keywords: social media; well-being; self-esteem; mental health;

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a dominant part of students' everyday lives. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and YouTube provide avenues for communication, entertainment, and learning. However, the psychological vulnerability of children and adolescents raises concerns about their exposure to online risks. This review synthesizes existing research to provide an overview of how social media impacts student mental health, highlighting patterns, risks, and protective strategies. Specifically, this paper aims to delineate the multifaceted relationship between social media engagement and adolescent psychological well-being, considering both the prevalence of use and its diverse manifestations across various platforms (Kumar, 2025; Anguyo et al., 2023).

1. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Social Media

Social media refers to digital platforms that enable the creation, sharing, and exchange of information, ideas, and content. These platforms promote interaction and immediate connectivity. For adolescents, social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook have become integral to their daily interactions, influencing self-

perception and social dynamics (Talukdar, 2024). While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for connectivity and self-expression, they also introduce significant risks such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and excessive screen time, which can contribute to various psychological concerns among adolescents (Anguyo et al., 2023; Talukdar, 2024). The nuanced relationship between social media usage and adolescent mental health necessitates a thorough exploration of both detrimental and beneficial outcomes (Bear et al., 2025). Understanding this complexity is crucial for developing targeted interventions and educational programs that promote healthier digital citizenship among younger populations (Sulaiman et al., 2024).

Mental Health

Mental health involves emotional, psychological, and social well-being. For school students, mental health significantly impacts academic performance, relationships, coping abilities, and overall development. It encompasses an individual's capacity to handle stress, maintain productivity, and contribute meaningfully to their community. The definition aligns with the World Health Organization's holistic view, emphasizing a state of well-being where an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to their community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, increased screen time significantly impacted the mental health of adolescents and students through social media, with many studies observing negative effects like anxiety, depression, and stress (Draženović et al., 2023). Prolonged and more active social media engagement during this period was particularly associated with adverse mental health outcomes, although some studies did note potential positive effects like enhanced social connection for isolated individuals (Draženović et al., 2023).

Why Social Media Matters in Adolescence

During adolescence, identity formation, peer approval, and social comparison are particularly intense. Social media becomes a space where these developmental needs play out, making students more sensitive to online interactions. This heightened sensitivity, combined with the pervasive nature of social media, can significantly influence their mental well-being, fostering both opportunities for connection and risks of psychological distress (Aulia & Setiawan, 2024). For instance, prolonged exposure to social media content, coupled with peer comparison and cyberbullying, frequently exacerbates mental health issues such as anxiety and depression among adolescents (Aulia & Setiawan, 2024). Conversely, digital literacy education, supportive school environments, and policy interventions are critical for promoting safe online interactions and mitigating these negative effects (Anwar, 2024).

The emotional volatility and developmental shifts characteristic of adolescence further amplify the impact of social media, leading to potential fluctuations in self-esteem and behavioral patterns. Furthermore, the adolescent period, marked by significant brain maturation in areas governing social and cognitive control, is particularly susceptible to external stimuli, including those encountered through digital media (Marciano et al., 2022). This vulnerability underscores the necessity of examining the specific ways in which social media usage patterns, content exposure, and online interactions shape adolescent mental health trajectories (Falcón-Linares et al., 2023). Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed a significant increase in psychological problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, among sampled youth, further exacerbating the urgency of understanding these dynamics (Draženović et al., 2023).

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The main objective of this review-based study is to examine how social media usage influences the mental health of school students. It aims to identify both the positive and negative effects of social media on adolescents' emotional well-being by analysing existing national and international research. The study also seeks to highlight major risk factors such as cyberbullying, anxiety, and depression, while exploring protective factors that support healthy online behaviour. Finally, it intends to provide practical suggestions for schools, parents, and policymakers to promote safe and responsible social media use among students.

Method of the Study

This study followed a review-based method, where information was collected from existing research rather than primary data. Research articles, reports, and empirical studies published between 2018 and 2025 were reviewed. Sources included journals, books, online databases, and government or institutional reports related to social media, adolescence, and mental health. After collecting the literature, the findings were analysed, compared, and summarised to understand common patterns, key issues, and recommendations.

Discussion

Students use social media to maintain friendships and develop communication skills. These platforms facilitate the maintenance of existing relationships and the formation of new social ties, contributing to a sense of belonging and support (Balamurali, 2025). This connectedness can be especially vital for adolescents, as it allows them to explore their identities and gain support from peer groups (Khalaf et al., 2023). Additionally, social media can serve as a crucial outlet for self-expression, allowing adolescents to explore and articulate their developing identities within a supportive online community (Anwar, 2024). However, the reliance on social media for validation can also lead to increased anxiety and decreased self-esteem if online interactions do not meet expectations (La-Rosa-Longobardi & Gallegos-Espinoza, 2024). Moreover, while social media platforms offer avenues for emotional support and sharing personal experiences, excessive engagement can paradoxically lead to feelings of isolation and inadequacy (Dharejo et al., 2023). Platforms like YouTube and educational groups help in collaborative learning. These platforms facilitate access to diverse learning resources, enabling students to clarify concepts, collaborate on assignments, and engage with academic content beyond traditional classroom settings (Anguyo et al., 2023). Such digital tools democratize access to knowledge, offering supplementary explanations and alternative perspectives that cater to varied learning styles and academic needs. Furthermore, these platforms can foster a sense of academic community, allowing students to exchange ideas and receive peer support, thereby potentially enhancing their overall academic performance and engagement.

This accessibility and interactivity can transform passive learning into an active, collaborative experience, yet it also requires critical evaluation skills to discern reliable information from misinformation (Bindra et al., n.d.). Despite these benefits, the integration of social media into academic practices must be carefully managed to avoid potential pitfalls such as distraction and information overload (Junaid & Faizan, 2022). Online communities allow adolescents to share concerns and seek support. This can be particularly beneficial for adolescents facing unique challenges, providing a platform for validation and shared experiences that might be absent in their immediate physical environments (Kostyrka-Allehorne et al., 2022). This ability to connect with like-minded peers can foster a strong sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation, especially for marginalized youth

(Anwar, 2024). However, the reliance on online platforms for emotional expression necessitates careful consideration of privacy concerns and the potential for cyberbullying, which can undermine the intended supportive environment. Moreover, the nuanced interplay between online social support and mental well-being means that the effectiveness of these communities is highly individualized and dependent on usage patterns and psychosocial makeup (Moreno et al., 2018; Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025). While online social support can offer benefits such as increased self-identity and reduced loneliness, its efficacy may not equate to real-life interactions, particularly concerning support from acquaintances (Zhou & Cheng, 2022). Nonetheless, for some adolescents, particularly those in marginalized groups, social media platforms can provide an essential lifeline, offering peer support and access to valuable resources that may otherwise be unavailable (Osborne, 2025). This is particularly salient for adolescents navigating complex developmental tasks, as digital platforms can facilitate identity exploration and foster crucial social connections that are vital for overall well-being (Zimmermann & Tomczyk, 2025). Content creation improves digital literacy and creativity. These platforms enable adolescents to develop various life skills, including problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication, through active engagement in digital content production and dissemination (Zimmermann & Tomczyk, 2025). This engagement can also enhance their digital citizenship, preparing them to navigate the complexities of the online world responsibly and ethically (Zimmermann & Tomczyk, 2025).

Furthermore, participation in online communities for creative endeavors can foster a sense of belonging and provide constructive feedback, nurturing talent, and building confidence (Moreno et al., 2018). However, concerns exist regarding the potential for creative expression to be stifled by algorithmic biases or the pressure to conform to popular trends, which could limit genuine innovation and individuality (McAlister et al., 2024). Moreover, the pervasive influence of social media algorithms on content suggestion can lead to echo chambers, potentially restricting exposure to diverse viewpoints and hindering the development of independent thought and creative exploration (Kostyrka-Allchorne et al., 2022). Despite these challenges, the ability of social media to serve as a conduit for creative expression and skill development remains significant, offering unique opportunities for self-actualization and the cultivation of diverse competencies. However, these benefits are contingent upon a balanced approach to usage, as excessive social media engagement has been linked to negative psychological outcomes (McAlister et al., 2024).

Many studies report that excessive time on social media increases anxiety, particularly due to fear of missing out (FOMO), continuous comparison with others pressure for online visibility (O'Reilly, 2020; Kennedy, 2019). This constant exposure to curated and often idealized portrayals of others' lives can lead to heightened feelings of inadequacy and social comparison, exacerbating existing anxieties and contributing to body image concerns. Furthermore, the pervasive nature of cyberbullying and online harassment contributes significantly to stress and anxiety among adolescents, creating an environment where constant vigilance is required (Zimmermann & Tomczyk, 2025).

The pressure to maintain an online persona and the fear of negative social evaluation further intensify these psychological burdens, particularly given the lack of youth protection standards on many platforms (Zimmermann & Tomczyk, 2025). Additionally, the incessant notifications and the expectation of immediate responses can create a perpetual state of alert, disrupt sleep patterns, and contribute to chronic stress (Khalaf et al., 2023). This can precipitate a vicious cycle where individuals seek solace or distraction on social media,

inadvertently worsening their mental health (Talukdar, 2024). This addictive quality, fueled by design features such as infinite scrolling and notifications, can lead to decreased productivity and disrupted sleep, intensifying mental health struggles (Titusuk et al., 2023). The intricate relationship between social media use and mental health challenges, particularly in young people, has been a focus of extensive academic scrutiny, highlighting how these platforms can simultaneously offer support and exacerbate issues like anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances (Maltby et al., 2024) (Ventriglio et al., 2024). The pervasive nature of social comparison on these platforms, where curated representations of life often distort reality, can further contribute to dissatisfaction and low self-esteem among users (Ajewumi et al., 2024). Such comparisons can lead to increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, and lower psychological well-being (Shannon et al., 2022). This constant digital engagement, particularly when coupled with fear of missing out, is strongly correlated with increased psychosocial distress, including heightened levels of anxiety and depression among adolescents (Tanrikulu & Mouratidis, 2022) (BAKIR & Dilmaç, 2025).

Exposure to idealized images, negative comments, and cyberbullying can decrease students' self-worth. Research shows a clear link between long screen time and depressive symptoms. Specifically, excessive and compulsive social media use, often termed problematic media use, is associated with a greater likelihood of experiencing feelings of loneliness, shame, and fatigue, which are hallmarks of depressive states (Fasihi & Rostami, 2023) (Domoff et al., 2024). This phenomenon is further compounded by the anonymity offered by online platforms, which can facilitate cyberbullying and negative social interactions, significantly diminishing an individual's self-esteem (Tamrakar et al., 2023). Moreover, continuous exposure to idealized lifestyles and body images can foster unhealthy comparisons, contributing to body dissatisfaction and exacerbating depressive tendencies among vulnerable individuals (La-Rosa-Longobardi & Gallegos-Espinoza, 2024) (Kaewpradit et al., 2025). These negative comparisons between users' lives and others idealized online portrayals can distort self-perception, diminish self-esteem, and contribute to long-term psychological distress (Chauhan et al., 2025).

This is especially true for adolescents, who are particularly susceptible to the negative mental health effects of excessive social media use, with studies indicating a significant correlation between increased screen time and higher rates of depression and anxiety (Gupta et al., 2022) (Aslan & Polat, 2024). Late-night browsing can disrupt sleep cycles, leading to fatigue, irritability, and poor academic performance. The blue light emitted from screens suppresses melatonin production, further interfering with circadian rhythms and making it harder to fall asleep (Jabali et al., 2023). Furthermore, the constant stream of notifications and the psychological need to stay updated can lead to fragmented sleep, diminishing both its quantity and quality (Al-Shahrani, 2025). This, in turn, can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression, creating a detrimental feedback loop between poor sleep and mental health (Qutishat et al., 2022). A major concern highlighted in multiple studies is cyberbullying, which increases feelings of fear, loneliness, and emotional trauma. Victims of cyberbullying often experience a range of psychological issues, including stress, depression, isolation, and low self-esteem (Zhang et al., 2023). The anonymity and pervasive nature of online platforms allow cyberbullies to inflict harm without immediate accountability, intensifying the psychological distress experienced by their targets (Lyyra et al., 2022). The persistent and widespread dissemination of cyberbullying content, accessible 24/7, can further amplify feelings of helplessness and isolation among victims, intensifying their

overall psychological distress (Talukdar, 2024). These experiences are often exacerbated by the feeling that there is no escape from the harassment, as digital interactions can follow individuals into their personal spaces (Oprea & Bâră, 2024). The cognitive load associated with media multitasking further diminishes academic performance, hindering the development of sustained attention necessary for learning (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020).

This reduction in sustained attention can also manifest as decreased critical thinking skills and a diminished capacity for problem-solving, both crucial for academic and future professional success. This constant digital engagement and exposure to digital media can lead to significant academic failure and withdrawal from academic settings due to a diminished capacity to reason and concentrate (Olivella-Cirici et al., 2021). Such prolonged exposure has been linked to symptoms of prefrontal malfunction, affecting memory and higher cognitive functions essential for academic achievement (Quizhpe et al., 2024).

Furthermore, cyberbullying significantly impairs academic achievement, as victims frequently experience reduced academic performance, lower self-esteem, anxiety, and even violent behavior (Yosep et al., 2023; Inchaurtieta et al., 2022). This pervasive digital harassment can disrupt students' ability to concentrate on their studies, leading to a decline in grades and overall academic disengagement (Coutinho et al., 2025; Ragusa et al., 2024). The unrelenting flow of digital information and notifications further exacerbates these issues, contributing to heightened stress levels, reduced attention spans, and impaired academic performance (Bharaty & Das, 2023).

3. RESULTS OF THE REVIEW

The review of more than 60 national and international research articles revealed several consistent patterns regarding the relationship between social media usage and adolescent mental health:

1. High Prevalence of Daily Social Media Use

Adolescents typically engage with social media for 3–7 hours daily. This excessive screen time is consistently linked to diminished sleep quality, poorer academic outcomes, and heightened psychological distress.

2. Increased Risk of Anxiety, Depression, and Emotional Problems

Unregulated social media use is linked to increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, low self-esteem, and emotional instability in students. This is primarily driven by the fear of missing out, online social comparison, and cyberbullying, all of which elevate the risk of persistent mental health issues.

3. Problematic Social Media Use as a Behavioral Disorder

Problematic social media use is frequently characterized as a behavioral addiction, exhibiting patterns similar to other addictive tendencies. Users often engage in compulsive checking, experience discomfort when offline, and gradually lose control over their online time, leading to the neglect of academic, social, and personal responsibilities. These addiction-like symptoms are particularly noticeable in adolescents with existing mental health vulnerabilities, increasing their susceptibility to the negative emotional and behavioral consequences of excessive social media engagement.

These factors underscore the critical need for interventions designed to promote balanced social media usage among adolescents, particularly given that over 90% of individuals aged 13-18 actively use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat daily (Kumar, 2025).

4. Dual Nature of Social Media:

Despite extensive documentation of its detrimental effects, social media also presents significant benefits for adolescent development. Online platforms can foster meaningful peer connections, enhance social communication skills, and provide emotional support during challenging periods. Furthermore, social media offers a valuable medium for health promotion, life-skills acquisition, and the dissemination of positive coping strategies. Consequently, its influence is inherently dual, functioning both as a supportive resource that can enhance well-being and a potential risk factor when usage is excessive or unsupervised.

5. Strong Links Between Cyberbullying and Psychosocial Harm

Cyberbullying consistently emerged as one of the most harmful consequences of online engagement for adolescents, causing deep emotional trauma, increased social withdrawal, and a noticeable decline in academic performance. In severe cases, persistent cyberbullying has also been linked to suicidal thoughts. Victims reported significantly lower levels of emotional well-being, underscoring the urgent need for preventive measures and supportive interventions.

6. Social Comparison Negatively Shapes Self-Concept

Constant exposure to idealized images and lifestyles on social media distorts adolescents' self-perception. This often leads to increased body dissatisfaction, social anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy as young users engage in comparisons with unrealistic online standards. Such negative comparisons can hinder healthy identity formation, decrease overall life satisfaction, and heighten vulnerability to emotional and psychological issues.

4. MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Excessive social media use is strongly associated with mental health issues, including anxiety, stress, and depression.
2. Cyberbullying remains a critical threat to adolescents' emotional and behavioural health.
3. Problematic or addictive use contributes to poor sleep, reduced concentration, and decreased academic achievement.
4. Online social comparison significantly influences self-esteem and body image issues.
5. Moderate and purposeful use can support positive mental health through peer bonding, communication, and emotional support.
6. Adolescents with pre-existing psychological conditions show higher vulnerability to negative online experiences.
7. Parental monitoring, digital literacy, and strong family communication act as protective factors.
8. Life skills, resilience, and emotional regulation skills reduce vulnerability to social media harm.
9. There is a need for policy-level interventions, including school-based digital wellness programs.
10. Studies indicate that balanced usage, not complete restriction, leads to healthier outcomes.

5. SUGGESTIONS

1. Promote Digital Literacy and Healthy Online Behaviour-

Schools should integrate comprehensive digital literacy programs into the curriculum to foster healthy online behavior. These programs must equip students with essential skills like safe practices, effective time management, and critical evaluation of online content. This empowers students to develop strong digital judgment and resilience, enabling confident navigation of the digital world and minimizing harmful influences.

2. Life skills

Life skills like emotional regulation, decision-making, and stress management are vital for responsible social media use. They help adolescents control impulses, make thoughtful online choices, manage digital stress, and interact respectfully, leading to balanced social media engagement.

3. Encourage Balanced and Mindful Screen Time

Encourage students to develop healthy digital habits by setting clear daily screen-time limits and having technology-free hours. Guide them to pursue offline hobbies, physical activities, and creative interests to reduce dependence on digital devices. These practices support better mental and physical well-being and foster a disciplined, mindful approach to social media use.

4. Enhance Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is crucial for fostering healthy digital habits and safe online engagement. This includes active monitoring, open communication about digital challenges, and modeling healthy technology use. When appropriate, parental control tools offer supplementary safety and guidance. Collectively, these practices cultivate a supportive environment for responsible and balanced online engagement.

5. Provide School-Based Mental Health Support

Schools should appoint trained counselors to address challenges from social media use. These professionals can help manage stress, educate students on safe online behavior, and monitor psychological distress. Their presence ensures early intervention and fosters a supportive school environment.

6. Prevent and Address Cyberbullying

Schools must establish strong, transparent policies to address online harassment, including clear reporting procedures and timely emotional and academic support for victims. Firm disciplinary actions against offenders are crucial to discourage harmful behavior, reinforce accountability, and create a safer digital environment that strengthens overall school well-being.

7. Government and Policy Measures

Policymakers are responsible for promoting safe digital environments for youth. This involves prioritizing national digital safety guidelines outlining protections for children and adolescents, investing in adolescent mental health programs for support and early intervention, and launching awareness campaigns against risky online trends to educate families and foster safer digital behavior.

8. Integrate Peer Support Programs

Peer mentoring plays an important role in promoting positive online behaviour and strengthening mental health awareness among students. Trained peers can guide classmates, making discussions about safe digital practices more relatable and impactful. They model responsible social media use, encourage respectful interactions, and help counter harmful

trends, fostering a supportive school culture and empowering students to collectively manage their digital well-being.

6. CONCLUSION

This review reveals social media's mixed influence on adolescent mental health. While beneficial for communication, information access, and emotional support, uncontrolled use often leads to serious psychological risks. Key concerns identified are anxiety, depression, social comparison, cyberbullying, addiction-like behaviors, and sleep problems. Evidence suggests that responsible social media use—with support from parents, educators, policymakers, and adolescents themselves—can maximize benefits and minimize harm. Improving digital literacy, life skills education, and emotional resilience are crucial for helping adolescents navigate the digital world safely and positively. Ultimately, creating a healthy digital environment needs teamwork from families, schools, society, and digital platforms. With proper guidance and support, adolescents can use social media effectively without harming their mental health.

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