

An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Social Media Platform's Impact on Mental Health

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This research paper will investigate the continuous increasing number of mental health crises linked to social media use and its effect on mental health, specifically young adults and teenagers. By investigating existing literature, it will determine if there is a connection between increased screen time and increasing rates of depression, anxiety, and self-esteem. This research paper will employ three distinct disciplines: psychology to consider cognitive comparison and addiction, sociology to consider peer influence and social isolation, and communications to consider how social media platform design fosters passive consumption. The discoveries suggest that while social media can offer support, problematic use is a strong link to unfavorable mental health effects and outcomes. The research concludes that the impact of social media use on young adults and teenagers is not applicable to all cases, rather it depends on the quality of use, with adolescents being particularly vulnerable to body image issues, and anxiety related to appearance-based social media platforms.

Introduction

The digital era has profoundly distorted how young adults and teens interact, see themselves, and cope with their emotional well-being. While social media platforms foster connection, they instantaneously have created a new environment for potential psychological stressors. Several studies have “explored patterns of social media use, impact of social media use on mental health and wellbeing, and the potential to leverage the popularity and interactive features of social media” (Naslund, J.A. et al. 2020) to deliver interventions. However, studies remain inconclusive to the risks and harmful effects of social media on mental health and well-being. The main question of this research paper is: How does excessive and inactive social media use affect young adults’ and teenagers’ mental health, and which specific processes steer negatively correlated outcomes? This research will examine this ongoing phenomenon through the discipline of psychology, sociology, and communications to understand the complexity between technology, society, and individual mental well-being; and what measures or

precautions society, policymakers, and individuals can take to approach social media platforms in a healthier alternative.

Psychology

From a psychological standpoint, the impact of social media is driven by cognitive processes and addictive-like behaviors. The impact of social media is propelled by thought processes like upward social comparison. For example, comparing someone's own life to the glorified and emphasized features of others. Research has indicated that the process of upward social comparison is directly correlated to lower self-esteem and increasingly higher depression symptoms. Although the relationship "does not necessarily imply cause-effect" (Agyapong-Opoku, N. et al. 2025), other studies confirm through diverse systems that there is a significant focus "between social media use in adolescents and increased depression, suicidal ideation, body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and other mental-health-related issues" (Agyapong-Opoku, N. et al. 2025).

Social media platforms are constructed to be addictive and foster a mindset of the fear of missing out that creates compulsive behaviors like phubbing, compulsive checks, and reduced self-regulation. For example, ignoring peers in social settings, picking up your phone every few minutes to check for updates, and an inability to limit social media use. Social media addiction can be directly related to the "dopamine-inducing social environments that social networking sites provide" (Hilliard, J. 2026), produce the same "neural circuitry that is seen in those with a gambling addiction and recreational drug users" (Hilliard, J. 2026), and maintain a goal to "keep consumers using their products as much as possible" (Hilliard, J. 2026).

Psychological Recommendations

Psychological recommendations to reduce negative cognitive processes and eliminate addictive behaviors with social media platforms include implementing self-compassion, identifying triggers, and cognitive behavioral therapy. For example, increasing self-compassion can reduce compulsive social

media usage by modifying the negative feelings of the fear of missing out that lead to excessively scrolling social media platforms; addressing the underlying reasons that one may use social media platforms rather than just the behaviors of boredom, anxiety, or depression; and effectively treat social media addiction by seeking a licensed therapist that can provide “a safe space to discuss” (Hilliard, J. 2026) thought “patterns surrounding social media” (Hilliard, J. 2026) and the necessary tools to “create a healthy relationship with social media” (Hilliard, J. 2026).

Sociology

From a sociological standpoint, social media influences mental health by changing patterns of interaction amongst peers and social support dynamics. While some studies have suggested that social media use can reduce isolation, a growing body of evidence-based research has indicated otherwise; online social interactions are not as rewarding as in-person connections, leaving individuals feeling lonelier than before, cyberbullying that is enabled by a shield for perpetrators to harass, threaten, and humiliate someone online has been connected “to increased anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation” (Al Musawi, H.K. 2025), and constant pressure from amplified, peer influence to maintain a certain image on social media platforms can create social anxiety. The addictive “nature of social media, including compulsive usage, and the fear of missing out can lead to significant mental health challenges” (Al Musawi, H.K. 2025) and the passive use patterns like mindless scrolling and doom scrolling are “more detrimental than active engagement” (Al Musawi, H.K. 2025).

Sociological Recommendations

Sociological recommendations for modifying the risks of excessive social media usage include active use, establishing social media boundaries, and implementing social media regulations. For example, actively engage in social media by commenting, liking, sharing, or messaging rather than passively scrolling through social media platforms; specify times during the day, during meals, or before bed for no phone use to protect social well-being and quality of sleep; and use fewer social media

platforms and monitoring tools that help reduce upward social comparison, and reduce the risks of anxiety and depression. Social media platform companies can contribute to the modification of risks from excessive social media usage by “moderating harmful content and providing mental health resources” (Al Musawi, H.K. 2025). A balanced approach “involving individuals, platforms, and policymakers” (Al Musawi, H.K. 2025) is necessary for encouraging improvements to the digital world that we are part of, to ensure maximal benefits of social media while reducing the harmful risks of it.

Communications

From a communications standpoint, it examines the design and layout of social media platforms and how they influence an individual’s behavior. Passive social media use patterns like doom scrolling and lurking have been identified to be more damaging to mental health than actively engaging with peers through posts and interactions. Research on social media and its connection to mental health has yielded mixed results. However, several studies have indicated that “passive social media use, or consuming information without direct social interactions” (Yue, Z. et al. 2022) has negatively affected individuals’ mental well-being; this discovery has often been “attributed to social comparison with those better off than oneself” (Yue, Z. et al. 2022) like social upward comparison and envious feelings. By showcasing the best, happiest, and select filtering on social media, “browsing content on social media can make people feel inferior to others and experience envy and frustration” (Yue, Z. et al. 2022). Passive social media usage is “positively related to both upward contrast and downward identification” (Yue, Z. et al. 2022) which predicts higher levels of stress in teens and young adults.

Communications Recommendations

Communications recommendations for effective social media communication require limiting daily screen time, curating social media feeds to remove negative content, and developing in-person connections to reduce anxiety. For example, designate phone-free times or set app time limits to reduce the fear of missing out, social anxiety, and protect sleeping windows; actively unfollow or mute

accounts that cause feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and self-esteem difficulties; this can be established by social media platform settings that “assist users to manage content that can trigger unhealthy social comparison” (Yue, Z. et al. 2022); some social media platforms even have chatbots that “can help users analyze the factors that may trigger the negative affect and provide personalized suggestions” (Yue, Z. et al. 2022); and strengthen real-world relationships to offset potential mood disorders that stem from digital isolation.

Conclusion

Based on investigation and research, I have determined that social media does not pose a permanent threat to mental health. However, its problematic and excessive use does impose a considerable number of risks to teens’ and young adults’ mental health. My research has identified and confirmed that social media impacts teens’ and young adults’ mental health through upward social comparison, mindless scrolling, and addictive features; the severity of social media use is often directly proportional to the frequent use and intensity of it. Psychology, Sociology, and Communications intersect by identifying how digital media impacts mental well-being through the fear of missing out, which is a widespread anxiety driver of viewing others’ highlights, feeling disconnected, and leads to increased screen time and dissatisfaction; sleep disruption because the nature of social media platforms is always on and available for use, leading to later bedtime and sleeping patterns, anxiety, depression, and physical performance issues; and cyberbullying that acts as a major risk factor for suicide and self-harm among young adults and teens. The issue is complex; social media platforms can be valuable tools, but the current designs and layouts seem to prioritize engagement to reflect usage, over users’ mental well-being. It is essential that individuals, social media platforms, and policymakers engage in a multidisciplinary approach involving psychological, sociological, and communicational tactics to minimize the harmful effects of social media and take advantage of the potential benefits that come with it. A common agreement between all disciplines: psychology, sociology, and communications is

necessary to develop better moderation policies, and educational instruments to encourage a healthier online environment.

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