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**ARTICLE TITLE** INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON MENTAL HEALTH IN ADOLESCENTS – LITERATURE REVIEW

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## INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON MENTAL HEALTH IN ADOLESCENTS – LITERATURE REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

In this era of rapid technological advancement, and consequently the rise of social media, these platforms have become an integral part of adolescents' daily lives. Adolescence is a unique period characterized by lower sensitivity to criticism and a stronger need for acceptance by others; therefore, excessive and inappropriate use of social media can have negative consequences. These include the risk of developing depression and anxiety, as well as reduced self-esteem. The aim of our study was to analyze the impact of social media on the mental health and well-being of adolescents. In our study, we considered both the positive aspects and the negative impact on development and mental health. To obtain high-quality and up-to-date data, we conducted a literature review using the PubMed and Google Scholar databases, focusing on studies published between 2020 and 2025. A detailed analysis of the studies we selected—including ABCD, HBSC, and LIFECOURSE—highlights the complexity of the topic and the need to evaluate it on multiple levels, taking into account various factors influencing the results. The studies we analyzed demonstrated that intensive social media use during adolescence often correlates with higher levels of social anxiety and depression. This problem particularly affects girls, who are more vulnerable to the negative public health effects of social media use. In addition, the “LifeOnSoMe” study confirmed that negative experiences with social media are more strongly linked to the onset of mental health disorders than the amount of time spent using social media. However, the results of a study conducted in the UK suggest that, when socioeconomic status is taken into account, the impact of social media use on mental health is reduced. The most important protective factor in preventing the onset of mental health disorders induced by social media use is parental support and the development of appropriate digital hygiene.

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## KEYWORDS

Social Media, Mental Health, Adolescent, Depression

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## CITATION

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## 1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of technology in the 21st century has made social media an integral part of our lives. It is accessible to people of all ages. Adults and teenagers use it, but increasingly so do children, which affects many aspects of their development. Social media has many functions, but it is most often used for communication, sharing experiences, showing off achievements, describing interests, and helping people cope with boredom; it is also often a place where people find support or acceptance from others. Unfortunately, they also play a negative role, which involves constant—and very often unfair—judgment that leads to hatred and artificial competition for popularity. The opportunities offered by social media particularly affect adolescents, specifically those between the ages of 10–12 and 18–24. This period is crucial for the formation of one's identity, personality, and emotional development. Unfortunately, it is severely disrupted by widespread access to social media. Additionally, numerous studies indicate that excessive use of social media contributes to the development of depression in teenagers. According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 7 people aged 10 to 19 experience mental health disorders, and for half of them, these symptoms are diagnosed before the age of 14. This represents a significant increase compared to previous years. [Plackett & Sheringham 2023]. It is also worth noting that the rise in the popularity of social media was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a survey of Italian teenagers, usage increased from 85.8% in 2019 to approximately 95% during and after the pandemic [Bozzola, Spina 2022]. However, it should be emphasized that the impact of social media on adolescence is highly complex and involves many aspects. These factors include screen time, platform usage, individual characteristics, and the people with whom one interacts via social media. In this article, we will attempt to describe both the advantages and disadvantages of social media, their impact on adolescence, the development of depression, emotional disorders, and self-esteem, as well as the positive opportunities these platforms offer. We will also propose ways to minimize negative impacts and strategies for addressing the problems and challenges we face in this area.

## 2. Methodology

The aim of this study was to collect and select relevant scientific studies on the impact of social media on adolescence, including both its positive and negative effects. The review was qualitative in nature and focused primarily on the impact of social media on mental health, sleep, and emotional development during adolescence. This review utilized a literature search method in the electronic databases PubMed and Google Scholar. The search for studies containing information helpful in reaching the intended conclusions was based on keywords such as social media, adolescence, depression, and mental health. The searches were conducted primarily in English, using various combinations of words. Publications meeting the criteria for publication date, topics, and the age group included in the studies were included in the analysis. The studies used to gather the information necessary to draw conclusions were published between 2020 and 2025 in English and focused on adolescents as the study group. Selections were made during the writing of this paper. In the first stage, 30 studies were identified. After analyzing the studies and excluding those based on similar subjects and failing to meet our criteria, 17 studies that met the study's objectives were ultimately selected and included in further analysis and comparisons. After compiling the studies, the necessary information for writing this review was obtained. The selected studies underwent qualitative and comparative analysis. The various positions of the authors and the conclusions drawn from their studies were taken into account. The aim was to gather reliable and up-to-date data that would enable us to write this paper. The only limitation of the review we conducted may have been our subjectivity and the fact that we searched only two databases.

## 3. Results:

This study included several research studies that featured distinct study groups and data collection methods.

### 3.1 UK Longitudinal study

One of the studies we included in this work consisted of annual interviews conducted from 2009 to 2019 in the United Kingdom. This study utilized a youth self-report questionnaire. Parents had to give verbal consent for their children to participate in the study. Ultimately, 4,899 teenagers out of the 6,627 invited participated in the study. The aim of the study was to assess mental health issues in children and adolescents using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). This is one of the most commonly used tools for assessing mental health in the 4–17 age group. Problems related to social media use were examined in this study using two questions regarding which social media platform the participant used. The first question included Facebook, Myspace, and Bebo. The second question asked how many hours per day the participant spent chatting or interacting with friends via social media. The subsequent research process involved dividing the participants into groups based on their answers to the first question. If a participant answered “No,” they were classified as not spending time on social media. However, if the respondent answered “Yes” to the first question, their answers to the second question regarding time spent on social media were taken into account depending on the amount of time spent on a 5-point scale. The next stage of the study involved asking 8 questions related to self-esteem and coping with failure, which were rated on a point scale. Subsequent questions assessed the closeness and number of friends. After collecting the data, an analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between social media use and self-esteem, and consequently, its impact on mental health. Preliminary results indicated that more time spent on social media is associated with a greater number of mental health issues. However, the researchers noted that this result did not account for baseline mental health, gender, and socioeconomic status, which could have significantly influenced the findings. Therefore, after accounting for these factors, the researchers reached surprising conclusions indicating that there is little evidence suggesting that time spent on social media is associated with subsequent mental health problems among adolescents in the UK. This is a rather unusual finding, as previous studies—as the authors of this study themselves note—have shown a significant association between social media use and mental health. It is worth noting, however, that this study has several strengths, including a representative sample from a single country and a long data collection period that accounted for many covariates. The study also had its limitations, including self-reporting of data, which may not have been entirely objective, and the use of fairly rigorous measures to assess the impact of social media use on self-esteem and, consequently, on mental health. The study also focused on the 12–13 and 14–15 age groups, which may have limited the results. [Plackett & Sheringham 2023].

### 3.2 LIFECOURSE

Another study we included in our work was the LIFECOURSE study, which examined risk factors and protective factors for healthy adolescent development. Importantly, only adolescents who answered the question regarding the respondent's gender were included in the study. Ultimately, the study included a sample of 2,211 participants. The study was conducted in February 2017, 2018, and 2019 in schools across Iceland using procedures developed by the Icelandic Center for Social Research and Analysis (ICSAR). Each respondent was assigned a unique identifier. The study examined time spent on social media, symptoms of physical and social anxiety, and depression. The study used three control variables: gender, family structure, and parental support. Time spent on social media was assessed with a single question: "On average, how much time do you spend on social media each day (e.g., Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram)?" Physical and social anxiety symptoms were measured at three time points using the Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC). The MASC is a self-report questionnaire used to diagnose anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents. This scale is typically used for individuals aged 8 to 19. For the purposes of this study, the MASC was translated and adapted for Icelandic adolescents. Additionally, depressive mood was also measured at three time points. After conducting an analysis using SPSS and taking into account variables. The results showed that symptoms of low mood, social anxiety, physical symptoms of anxiety, and time spent on social media increased across the three phases of the study, while parental support decreased. It was also noted that the effects of psychological stress were less pronounced when the adolescents in the study reported parental support. Finally, the study authors proposed three hypotheses. Hypothesis number one was that, after controlling for time and other variables, time spent on social media was significantly positively associated with depressive mood. The second hypothesis was that there was a significant interaction between time spent on social media and depressive mood symptoms, but no such interaction was found for social anxiety symptoms. The third hypothesis was that there is a significant interaction between time spent on social media, gender, and the impact on depressive mood symptoms. According to the authors, among the girls participating in the study, there is a stronger interaction between time spent on social media and symptoms of depression, social anxiety, and physical symptoms compared to the group of boys participating in the study. The authors concluded that time spent on social media is associated with both physical symptoms of anxiety and symptoms of social anxiety. However, they note that this is a rapidly evolving field and that further research is needed to explore the impact of social media on adolescence [Thorisdottir & Sigurvinsdottir 2020].

### 3.3 HBSC study

Another significant study that provides valuable insights is the Health Behaviour in School-age Children (HBSC) study, which was conducted in 2017/2018. HBSC is an international study conducted every four years. The study aims to assess the health behaviors of 11-, 13-, and 15-year-olds in Europe, North America, and the Middle East. The 2017/2018 study involved adolescents from 47 countries. To assess the impact of social media on adolescent development, 29 of the 47 countries were selected as they met the study's criteria. Ultimately, 154,981 adolescents participated in the study, 51% of whom were female. To minimize errors, each participant received a questionnaire in their own language, which was checked to ensure the meaning had not changed upon translation. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, and consent was required from both the participants and their parents, as well as from the schools. Four elements were assessed during the study. The first was a question about how often they interact with close friends, peers, acquaintances they met online, and other people (e.g., parents, siblings, schoolmates, or teachers). The assessment was conducted on a 5-point scale. Another component of the study was the assessment of the impact of and dependence on social media, rated on a 9-point scale. Other components of the assessment involved evaluating psychological well-being using the Cantril Ladder. This is a simple research tool used for the subjective assessment of life satisfaction on a 10-point scale. Additionally, school satisfaction, family support, and parental support were examined. To ensure high-quality data, the analyses were controlled for gender, age, and family income. Ultimately, the study authors demonstrated that in countries with lower prevalence of heavy social media use, heavy users reported lower levels of satisfaction and family support, as well as more psychological problems, than participants from those countries who used social media less frequently. In contrast, in countries with high prevalence of heavy social media use, heavy users reported higher levels of family support and life satisfaction than those who used social media less frequently. The final conclusion of this study was that adolescents reporting heavy social media use are potentially at greater risk of reduced well-being. This is particularly important in the context of future national policies and guidelines regarding social media use during adolescence. Additionally, special attention and support should be directed toward adolescents who use social media intensively in countries with lower access to social media. It is worth noting,

finally, that this study had strengths related to the number of countries included in the analysis and its two-stage design. However, it also had limitations; as the authors note, the results should be interpreted with caution because there were limitations in the assessment of mental health and a lack of a clear cause-and-effect relationship [Boer & Eijnden 2020].

### **3.4 LifeOnSoMe study**

Another study examining the impact of social media use on adolescents' mental health was the "LifeOnSoMe" study. The study participants were high school students aged 16 or older. The study was conducted in Bergen, Norway. The sample size was 3,253 participants, and data collection took place from September to October 2020 and from June to September 2021. The study was conducted via an online survey. Study participants were provided with a specific link to the online survey. Before accessing the survey content, participants were presented with information about the study and asked to consent to participation. The study authors sought to explore aspects of social media use, including what motivates people to use it. Positive and negative experiences with social media use, as well as how they use it and in what situations. Additionally, the aim was to examine the correlation between social media use and significant areas of adolescents' lives, particularly mental health and well-being. In the study, participants answered 8 questions primarily regarding negative experiences with social media use on a 5-point scale; subsequently, anxiety symptoms were assessed using the GAD-7 questionnaire. In addition, symptoms of depression were measured using the SMFQ questionnaire, and mental well-being was assessed using the WEMWBS scale. At the end of the survey, there was a question about the participant's gender and age. Also at the end, there was a question about social and economic status, as well as how often and for how long participants spend time on social media. After conducting and analyzing the survey, it was found that the median age was 17 years and 56% of the participants were female. The study concluded that there is a consistent association between reporting negative experiences on social media and symptoms of anxiety and depression, and consequently, reduced mental well-being. This is particularly significant because 74.5% of participants reported at least one negative experience. A positive association was found across all variables between depression and anxiety and negative experiences on social media. It is also important to note that the study has both strengths and limitations. Its strengths include the assessment of negative experiences in multiple ways using validated scales, a large sample size, and the use of a broad definition of social media, thereby preventing the exclusion of social media platforms. However, the limitations of this study include the fact that it is cross-sectional, which may limit the ability to draw a single, definitive conclusion. It is worth noting that, although negative experiences across several dimensions were addressed, this is not an exhaustive topic, and there are other common experiences that affect mental health [Skogen & Andersen 2023].

### **3.5 ABCD study**

An important study that we also analyzed is a prospective cohort study that utilized data from the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study (ABCD). ABCD is the largest study of adolescent health and cognitive development in the United States. Study participants were aged 9 to 10 years and came from 21 locations across the United States. The study was conducted between October 2016 and October 2018. Participants were assessed in four waves, the last of which took place in 2022. After excluding participants with missing data, the study included 11,876 participants, of whom 5,680 were girls and 6,197 were boys. The study also identified demographic groups of participants, as well as their parents' economic status and educational level. After analyzing the data, it was concluded that there is a positive correlation between a higher number of hours spent on social media and the severity of depressive symptoms. Additionally, the study demonstrated that an increase in screen time in one year was followed by an increase in symptom severity in the following year. The study also showed that among girls, there is a stronger link between time spent on social media and symptoms of depression compared to boys, among whom a causal relationship also exists, though it is weaker. Another important finding revealed by the study through its annual assessment is that when a particular participant began spending more time on social media, their mood deteriorated year over year. These findings suggest that the ages of 9 to 14 are particularly sensitive to acceptance by peers and society, and that a lack of such acceptance contributes to mood disorders and a decline in self-acceptance later in life. Finally, it is worth noting that this study is particularly valuable due to its assessment of participants over a 4-year period and its annual monitoring of well-being and time spent on social media. Additionally, the study included a large group of adolescents and various demographic groups in the United States, which enhanced the study's value [Nagata & Otmar 2025].

#### **4. Discussion**

In this literature review, we focused on assessing the impact of social media on mental well-being, as well as the development of anxiety and other aspects of emotional development during adolescence. An analysis of numerous studies from various parts of the world has shown that this is a complex topic in which not only time spent on social media plays a role, but also gender, family economic status, peer support, and many other factors.

##### **4.1 Time Spent on Social Media**

An interesting point of discussion is the discrepancy between the results of studies conducted in the United Kingdom [Plackett & Sheringham 2023] and other studies cited in this work [Nagata & Otmar 2025; Thorisdottir & Sigurvinsdottir 2020; Skogen & Andersen 2023; Khalaf & Alubied 2023]. In a study from the United Kingdom, the researchers found no significant association between mental health and the amount of time spent using social media. In contrast, a study conducted in the United States [Nagata & Otmar 2025] provides strong evidence of a link between the duration of social media use and its subsequent impact on mental health. The difference in results may be related to the evolution of social media over the years. The British study covered data from 2009 to 2019, a period of very dynamic changes in the functioning and use of social media. The more recent studies cited in this paper already included modern platforms based on visual experiences, which often evoke stronger emotions. In contrast, during the initial period of the UK study, due to the limitations of the platforms, interaction consisted mainly of text messages, which likely did not have such a negative impact on the mental health of adolescents. The discrepancies between these studies underscore that demographic and economic contexts, as well as patterns present in a given population, are also crucial when assessing the impact of social media [Nagata & Talebloo 2025; Vidal & Lhaksampa 2020].

##### **4.2 Gender Differences in the Impact on Mental Health During Adolescence**

Our analysis and review of various studies have shown that girls are a group more susceptible to the negative effects of social media use. This is associated with a stronger need to compare themselves with peers and greater sensitivity to potential rejection. In addition, modern algorithms are increasingly promoting unnatural and unrealistic beauty standards to young girls, thereby exacerbating their self-esteem issues and negatively impacting their well-being. [Nagata & Otmar 2025; Khalaf & Alubied 2023]. An important factor that may protect against this is parental support, which can act as a buffer against anxiety symptoms [Thorisdottir & Sigurvinsdottir 2020].

##### **4.3 Negative experiences with social media use**

Recent research addressing this issue from multiple angles indicates that it is often not the amount of time spent on social media, but rather the nature of the experiences one has while using it, that has a greater impact on mental health. This was examined in detail in the “LifeOnSoMe” study mentioned earlier, which showed that experiencing negative situations on social media is strongly linked to anxiety and depression [Skogen & Andersen 2023]. These risks include cyberbullying, sleep disturbances, lack of acceptance, and social competition. Meta-analyses and other review studies also confirm that negative experiences with social media use are predictors of mental health disorders and self-esteem issues among adolescents and young adults [Cabezas-Klinger & Fernandez-Daza 2025; Agbo 2021].

##### **4.4 Prevention and interventions to reduce negative consequences**

Because of the growing prevalence of problematic social media use [Nagata & Talebloo 2025], it is necessary to implement targeted interventions to reduce the negative effects of excessive use and, consequently, social media addiction. This would aim, in particular, to reduce the incidence of mental health problems [Nagata & Hur 2025]. Another important aspect is that, according to new research, social media should not be completely restricted, but rather efforts should focus on fostering good digital habits. [McAlister & Beatty 2024]. A multi-level approach is crucial in this context, taking into account the role of parents, school education, and peer support, which significantly influence mental health in the context of social media use [Khalaf & Alubied 2023; Cabezas-Klinger & Fernandez-Daza 2025; Leijse & Koning 2023; Gong & Zhou 2022].

#### 4.5 Positive Aspects of Social Media Use Among Adolescents

In addition to the negative impact of social media use on mental health, there are also positive effects associated with its use. These include strengthened social bonds and greater peer support [Boer & Eijnden 2020]. They also provide a sense of belonging and enable the maintenance of relationships, which prevents isolation [McAlister & Beatty 2024; Valkenburg & Meier 2022]. Additionally, an interesting finding from the HBSC study is that active users reported higher levels of life satisfaction and greater family support [Boer & Eijnden 2020]. Social media also give teenagers the opportunity to express their emotions and themselves, and foster creativity by often serving as a source of inspiration, which helps in shaping their own identity [Vidal & Lhaksampa 2020; Khalaf & Alubied 2023].

#### 5. Conclusions

In summary, when assessing the impact of social media use on psychological development during adolescence, it is important to remember that this impact is not clear-cut. When assessing this impact, one must consider the differences between intensive use—such as frequent communication with peers—and problematic use, which is often synonymous with addiction and frequently leads to mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. [Boer & Eijnden 2020; Valkenburg & Meier 2022; Nagata & Hur 2025; Cabezas-Klinger & Fernandez-Daza 2025]. One should also bear in mind the difference in the impact of social media use between genders. Girls show a stronger correlation between time spent on social media and the likelihood of developing mental health disorders such as social anxiety and depression. This is particularly evident during early adolescence, when there is a greater tendency toward comparison and jealousy among teenagers [Thorisdottir & Sigurvinsdottir 2020; Skogen & Andersen 2023; Nagata & Otmar 2025]. Therefore, it is important to note that parental support acts as a protective factor against the negative effects of social media use on adolescents' mental health; it is the strongest factor in mitigating the negative impacts of social media on adolescent development. It's also worth remembering the important role schools play in educating students about the proper and safe use of social media and in supporting teenagers with any issues they may face related to its use [Thorisdottir & Sigurvinsdottir 2020; Leijse & Koning 2023; Gong & Zhou 2022]. In addition, it is important to foster digital well-being among teenagers, which should focus on the mindful use of technology [McAlister & Beatty 2024; Khalaf & Alubied 2023]. We should not ban or limit teenagers' use of social media, because it is not the amount of time spent on these platforms that harms mental health, but rather the content and interactions they experience there [Plackett & Sheringham 2023; Skogen & Andersen 2023; N. Agyapong-Opoku & F. Agyapong-Opoku 2025; Nagata & Hur 2025; Agbo 2021]. Social media plays many roles during adolescence, such as providing peer support, a sense of acceptance, and strengthening relationships with friends. At the same time, it is important to remember the essential support needed from parents, psychologists, and psychiatrists, as adolescence is a formative stage, and negative experiences on social media can have very serious consequences for mental health in the future.

HBSC – Health Behaviour in School-aged Children

SDQ – Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire

GAD-7 – Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7

SMFQ – Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire

ABCD - Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study

WEMWBS – The Warwick-Edinburg Mental Wellbeing Scale

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