



UNDERSTANDING THE ASPECTS BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND MENTAL WELL-BEING: A REVIEW-BASED QUALITATIVE STUDY

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.260402010>

Abstract

The present qualitative review based study accentuates the relationship between mental well-being and social media. Social media definitely has an impact on daily life, communication, knowledge and social connection etc. At the same time its rough use provokes anxiety, depression, loneliness and reduces self-esteem. Maximum studies taken from 2015 to 2025, this includes and synthesizes findings of psychological health's connectedness, physical self regard etc. It include both the negative and positive facets of social media use and emphasizing on more qualitative depth on the ascribed aspects, focusing on longitudinal investigations to better conceptualize these factors and their role in the improvement of mental well-being.

Keywords: *Social media, Mental Well-being, Qualitative Study and Review based*

Introduction

“Social media has become the crack cocaine of the digital world”-Simon Mainwaring (2023). No doubt mental health and well-being is a very important component of overall health, as it has a holistic influence on several factors like relationships, working aspects, academic performance and definitely on life satisfaction. In the recent decades social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram etc., these are the things deeply conjoining in the daily routine. From this context, here are two sides found, one children are getting a platform to communicate, information, sharing knowledge etc. The other one is how it is influencing psychological health?

If we look back in the past decades, social media helps people in different ways like to talk with people, by connecting each the by connecting each other they are sharing, sharing grief, interests and fun of life, definitely spending quality times with each other and watching too [Linda C. Ashar, J.D. (2024, 5 February) American Public University].

Reports also reveal that the countries have denied different social media platforms, those people are confined to kept away as they have limited access, as they are not becoming able to track what the other countries are doing (Surfshark, 2023). While people know that social media have facilitated opportunities for information sharing, social engagement etc.

According to “The office of the Surgeon General (2023)” on its entitled paper “Social Media and Youth Mental Health” says, there are indicators that social media can also have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents.

Mental health comprises social, emotional and psychological stability which impact cognition, perception and obviously human behaviour. It plays a crucial role in daily life. It may be about the matter of managing stress, building rapport etc. (Wikipedia, 2025). Robinson and Smith (2020) said “humans are born social beings. Everyone needs the company of others and that company has a huge impact on mental health and on the strength of human bonding. As humans are born connected with other beings, that's why anxiety, stress, loneliness, depression, provide comfort and joy, boost self-worth etc. will stay together.” Simultaneously on the other side, the lack of social connection or disconnection can bring serious risk to human mental health. If one's can try to comprehend the relationship of social media use and mental well-being, then one has to go through the environments, public health tactics etc.

Different studies clarified, there is a need for clarification about how rapidly evolving social media and how people are delving into it. Many research highlighted the importance of exploitation of the research of this situation and its direction, [1. Social Media and Mental Health: Benefits, Risks, and Practice by John A Naslund et. al (2020). 2. Social Media Use and Its Connection to Mental Health: A Systematic Review by Fazida Karim et. al (2020)].

Social Media: It is a way through which humans can connect socially, where they can share their emotions, thoughts, ideas etc. In other relatable words, it is a technology which provides facilitation of creating, sharing, aggregating of content into virtual networks and communities (Wikipedia, 2025).

Mental well-being: If it is carefully discussed, then it can say that when a person or a being is mentally well, then it can be referred to as mental well-being.

According to WHO (Mental health, 2022), well-being refers to a state, where persons realize their abilities and tackle different occurrences inside of them like to cope with the stress, can work productively etc.

Qualitative Study: It is a research method where the focus is to gain in-depth comprehension of human experience, behavior, social incident through non-numerical data.

Review based: It is a step of carefully, seeing, observing, and selecting from the actually existing copies.

Rationale of the Study

During these ongoing decades, social media has deeply involved daily life in different matters like making relationships, maintaining the personal well-being or healthy communication process (WHO, 2022). Social media can nurture connections and share knowledge and it can increase the risks of anxiety, loneliness, depression in the beings (Naslund et al., 2020. The office of the Surgeon General, 2023). While all the previous studies have explored the connection between social media and mental well-being, there are many studies which are related to cross-sectional, longitudinal, some are systematic reviews. So, to get more information, to strengthen the awareness of connection of social media and mental well-being there is a high need of qualitative study on them.

By examining the impactful connection between the variables like social media use and mental well-being, this study aims to generate insights that can inform practices related to education, public health and awareness among the people and obviously assure the young people of healthier engagement.

Objectives of the Study

- **Objective One:** To accentuate key insights from earlier studies which explore the connection between social media use and mental well-being.
- **Objective Two:** To examine and synthesize existing research on the relation between social media use and mental well-being.

Research Questions

- How does social media use influence mental well-being?
- What are the key findings in existing research on social media use and mental well-being?

Method of Review

The approach of this paper is a narrative review. After searching and going through different databases, webpages such as Taylor & Francis, Google Scholar, Sodhganga, Research Gate using the Key terms including 'Social media', 'Mental well-being', 'Review Based', and 'Qualitative study'. The maximum number of papers are between 2015 to 2025. Different webpages, articles and research studies which are related to this study were considered.

Objective wise Discussion Reviewing the Existing Studies

Objective One: (To accentuate key insights from earlier studies which explore the connection between social media use and mental well-being).

In the first objective with the line- to accentuate key insights from the earlier studies- This area presents a thematic overview of prior studies done by the researchers. The findings are grouped in some dimensions:

- (i) Social media and Psychological health:
- (ii) Social media and Social connectedness:
- (iii) Social media and Physical self-regard:

This organization helps to generate ideas about different aspects of social media.

Social media and internal health: Various studies which have been carried out in the past show that social media use is excessive and has various psychological implications. To illustrate the point, consider the following example, heavy use of social media and prolonged time in the social media platforms may built up risk, and a variety of mental health issues, especially in young people (Naslund et al, 2020). Social media use among the highest quartile significantly increases depression, it was found in the study of Lin et al, (2016). In a study, it was confessed that participants with their higher social media use had significantly greater sleeping disturbance (Levenson et al, 2016). In the study of Shesna et al, (2017), it was exposed that over social media use is strongly correlated with an increase of depressive symptoms.

Another study (Verduyn et. al 2017) which says about the side of a being's involvement in social media. One is negative relation when passively using social networks and second one is positive relation when actively using social networks. The first one

provokes envy and social comparison, which have negative consequences. In contrast, active users have a greater impact on social connectedness. Indicating both sides of social media.

Social media and social connectedness: In this regard, not all the findings are negative but a mixed result found, some of the studies and insides of these studies are enclosed. For instance, Winstone et al. (2021) confessed in their study, social media displacing face to face socializing, making social obligations, personal/group identity. The study also expressed that parents should take initiatives for properly managing time with social media. A study done by Saggar (2021), found that the consequences of social media involvement and social connectedness and self esteem. Findings talks about higher involvement with social media was negatively influencing both self esteem and social connectedness as well. This study gave importance to making low use of social media and also gave importance to nurture real life relationships. In another study of Allen (2014), it was found that social media is helpful for making online groups, communities, simultaneously it leads to alienation and ostracism.

Social media and physical self regard: The effect of social media on physical self regard is quite a complex matter. For instance, Perloff (2014) explained social media can impact perceptions of body image and disturbance too. Another study explained digital proliferation like Instagram, Facebook have reconfigured body image concerns, even maximum time it leads to dissatisfaction and several psychological issues or distress may arise due to constant exposure to idealized images and a social comparison (Merino, 2024). Social Media use, notably social comparison and deep emotional attachment, is linked to poorer physical health, highlighting the requirement for further research on its long-term consequences, comprehension of these interactions is important to mitigating prospective negative impacts on well-being, physical health and quality of life. One of the studies (Nelson s et al. 2022) showing exposure to body positive content raised body appreciation and gratification regardless of age. This study also suggested body positive social media subject matter can be a worthy tool for boosting body image in adult women.

If one sees the things altogether, the research has already been done previously explaining both the advantages and risks in the context of mental well-being. Although the results are consistently linked passive or over use to weaken psychological outcomes while some of the other studies also say its role in constructing social connectedness and support too. so, the thing is these mixed findings increase the demand for more interpretation. To address this, the next section will add some relevant and relatable context.

Objective Two: (To examine and synthesize existing research on the relation between social media use and mental well-being).

The aim of this objective is to examine and synthesize the existing studies to move for more integrated understanding, the discussion are separated into two parts.

- (i) Contradictions across studies.
- (ii) Methodological considerations along with findings and Future Directions.

Contradictions across studies: Studies on social media and mental well-being, don't always lend to one direction. Some are saying it's harmful, some are saying it's helpful. This is making contradictions. Previous studies, exhibits a mixed scenario. One of the study saying atleast one hour per day spending time with screen (like cellphones, e-devices, computer or TV) making lower psychological well-being which includes lower self-control, lack of curiosity less emotional stability etc. (Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

Zubair et al (2023) said in their study that this is the second cause for psychiatric disorders. It leads to depression, stress, insomnia and mental deprivation.

Social media can give facilities like opportunity for self expression, positive community and they can connect with each other (Office of the surgeon general, 2023).

In a single study, it is found, since 2000 to one and half decades it was the time when social media was like an avenue where people can connect, increase self-esteem, they can improve belongingness but in recent times, as per their research people are spending 2/3 hours daily on different social media platforms. Although quality over quantity of social media use determines its impact on mental health (Zsila and Reyes, 2023).

Methodological Considerations along with Findings and Future Directions

Some of the works have been reviewed, which are already inside of the text. Methods, findings and future indications have been discussed here. Although, not only the research studies that has been done was used in the current work, but also many web pages, news and information were included here too. Now, some of the works that have already been discussed, detailing the methodology they used, what kind of direction they provided for the future and their findings are discussed below.

1. From the study of Naslund et. al (2020), they had used a narrative review based approach from the different data bases. They found a widely operated, which can lead to mental illness and it also offers advantages for peer support, co-operation with special connection etc. The study talks about using data science and machine learning on social media data as it can detect mental disorders or any issues related to mental well-being. It helps to detect how mental illness starts and evolves.
2. Karim et. al (2020) had used a systematic review system. They shortlisted 50 papers and selected 16 papers from there. They had used a cross sectional, longitudinal and qualitative approach. The outcomes of this study summarize the effects of social media use on mental aspects; specially on anxiety and depression, they synthesized their findings. Suggested for more qualitative and longitudinal study. To determine the better relationship among social media use and mental health need to

enhance the use of longitudinal studies. They have also suggested examining mediating factors to clarify the complex relationship and why it has different effects like negative, positive and neutral.

3. Twenge and Campbell (2018) had Conducted a study and said that they have used population based study using cross-sectional study having a large nation wide random sample. The findings of the study reveal that a consistent negative relationship between daily screen time and lower psychological well-being, proportionately using that per day. In the future direction, they said to confirm the relation between social media or screen time and mental well-being, more longitudinal research right evaluation on time limits and guidelines.
4. Another study, which was conducted by Shensa et. al (2017) used a large sample of 1749 young adults through randomly selected methods and it was an online survey. The outcomes of this study exposed that problematic social media use (PSMU) was a strong and independent constant which was associated with increased depressive symptoms. They suggested for future direction to reduce the depressive symptoms in young adults, intervention strategies should give priorities not to just reduce it but also for identifying the addictive components.
5. A study was conducted by Lin et. al (2016), they chose 1787 U.S. young adults and surveyed which nationally represented sample used logistic regression to assess the connection among social media time, frequency, visits and depression. Findings of the study said there was a leaner relation between all facets of social media use and increase of depression in young adults. Future direction asked for the mechanisms and the direction of relation of social media use and depression to inform the intervention strategies.

Conclusion

The present qualitative review based work highlights a complex relationship between social media use and mental well-being, characterized by both risks and benefits. It facilitates things like communication, connectedness, self-expression, but simultaneously on the other side it leads to depression, psychological distress, sleep disturbances, poor self esteem, anxiety etc. especially in young adults. After reviewing those studies, it collectively express that the determinant of mental health outcomes is more qualitative than quantitative.

The contradiction across the studies highlights the need of more longitudinal and qualitative inquiries to make a sense of how different factors like psychological, social and cultural factors work together. Based on the previous studies and with their diverse methodological approaches, the evidence indicates mixed method research including digital behaviors patterns.

Furthermore, a need is there for more mental health awareness programs, technology use strategies, and digital literacy. It has to be spread that social media is not a source of harm rather it integrates insights from education, psychology and public health. Ultimately the aim should be to achieve genuine well-being in this interconnected society.

Acknowledgment: Dedicated to the memory of my father, Late Shri Arnab Banerjee, for his lifelong inspiration and support towards my pursuit of higher education.

Author's Contribution: Kiran Banerjee: Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

Funding: No

Declaration: Not Applicable

Competing Interest: No

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