

Student's Name

Institution's Affiliation

Course Code and Section

Instructor's Name

Date

### The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health

Social media usage, especially among youth and during the COVID-19 pandemic, has risen significantly and has raised concerns regarding its impact on mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic era, which has led to increased social distancing and the use of technology, has highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of social networking sites on youth. Research works comparing the relationship between social media usage, mental health, and youths offer valuable information regarding the impact of social media platforms. The studies of Draženovic et al., Fruehwirth et al., and Yu et al. are aimed at exploring the complex nature of social media effects on adolescents' and young adults' mental health focusing on anxiety, depression, sleep, and social support. This essay takes a look at these influences and makes a call for moderation in the use of digital technology for the sake of mental health.

In their systematic review, Draženovic et al. examined the effects of social media use on the mental health of adolescents and students during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic when many aspects of life shifted online. Their findings reveal the complex interplay between social media and mental health, noting that although youths engaged in social media during the pandemic received numerous benefits, social media is a threat to their

well-being. One of the research outcomes is that social media allowed people to maintain social interactions that are normally done face-to-face because of the social distancing and lockdown policies. To most adolescents, these platforms were a source of comfort since they enabled them to feel connected, communicate with friends, and discuss events during what was a very lonely time. For example, connectivity through online forums, support groups, and friendships lessened experiences of loneliness and isolation, offering soothing and reassurance of normalcy (Draženovic et al.). This was especially so given that during that period, face-to-face interactions were not possible hence people relied on digital platforms to interact.

Nevertheless, Draženovic et al. also stress that there are negative consequences of the overuse of social media, despite these positive changes. As the youth spent more time on screens, they were constantly comparing themselves with others, making the feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem worse. Young people are most susceptible to social comparison because they are still in the process of development, and social media presents others' lives as perfect. Furthermore, the nature of news in recent years, particularly about the ongoing pandemic, created another source of stress and concern. This constant stream of negative messages resulted in the increased feelings of fear and powerlessness among the youth, which added to mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

The findings by Draženovic et al. about the dual role of social media use during the pandemic paint a clear picture about the multifaceted nature of the effects of social media on the mental health of adolescents. On the one hand, social media platforms were useful for communication, and everyone needed emotional support during this period. On the other hand, they emerged as stressors that negatively impacted the mental health of the people. In light of these findings, it can be concluded that social media is indeed a resource for

resilience; however, its usage in excess is likely to have detrimental effects as long as appropriate guidance and moderation measures are not taken. The study stresses the need to be more careful with the use of social media and to reduce the amount of negative content that young people are subjected to in order to reduce the negative impacts on their mental health.

Fruehwirth et al. provide a closer look at the potential consequences of social media use on college students, taking into account the information collected during different periods of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study found that although social media use did not seem to worsen mental health problems in the early days of the pandemic, continued use led to a significant decline in mental health. In particular, they determined that depression and anxiety were higher during the 18 months of the pandemic than in the earlier months. The study showed that students who were more socially disconnected were most at risk, reporting higher levels of psychological distress due to limited face-to-face communication and more reliance on online platforms.

According to Fruehwirth et al., social support and resilience are essential in reversing these mental health impacts. Based on their study, they postulate that students who reportedly had close family, friends or university counselling services support are less likely to experience serious adverse mental health effects even when they are active on social media. However, the research also revealed that for most students, social media use did not offer the same kind of supportive interaction, which instead resulted in increased loneliness and deterioration of the mental state. This insight supports the concept that despite the connectivity brought about by social media sites, it can never fully substitute actual human interaction needed for a healthy emotional/social life.

This long-term aspect of this study is useful in extending the knowledge of the effects of the social media over time. It implies that the effects of digital addiction are not necessarily observable in the short term, but are likely to develop over time and in the context of limited real-life relationships. This is why there is a need to encourage the development of digital resilience and awareness among the youth and young persons especially during disasters.

Yu et al. further discusses the significant interaction between social media usage, sleep problems, and mental health in youth, with specific emphasis on the detrimental effects of night-time digital behaviors, especially using devices before bed, on sleep quality and aggravation of mental health conditions. Their scoping review incorporates various studies and highlights an emerging body of evidence that associates poor sleep quality with the exacerbation of mental health symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and mood swings in adolescents and young people. This is due to the blue light that is produced from the screens and affects the production of melatonin, a hormone that regulates sleep. Yu et al. note that this blue light, especially before bedtime, has the effect of delaying the onset of sleep and thus impacts the ability of youth to get quality sleep. Based on this, while the light emitted by the screens affects the physical side of the body, the mental activity that results from using social media before sleeping contributes to the disruption of sleep. Youths are most often exposed to stimulating, stressing or anxiety provoking stimuli before sleeping, meaning their minds cannot easily get to rest.

The effects of sleep disruption are especially crucial since sleep has a vital function in managing mental health, cognition, and mood. In the developmental phases of adolescence and young adulthood, short or low-quality sleep could result in adverse impacts on the psychological well-being of young people. According to the research reviewed by Yu et al.

young people who use social networks at night have sleep onset latency, shorter total sleep time, and worse sleep quality. These sleep disturbances are linked to heightened feelings of irritability, anxiety and depression and therefore a vicious cycle is created whereby poor sleep increases mental health issues which in turn decrease the ability to sleep.

According to Yu et al. recommendations concerning the limitation of screen exposure before going to bed like the “digital curfew” or the use of blue light filters might help enhance the quality of sleep and mental health. These outcomes support the necessity of proper sleep habits in minimizing mental health hazards connected to social media overuse. To extend the understanding of the adverse effects of youth’s social media usage, the review also examines the physiological outcomes of sleep disturbance. In addition, Yu et al. also emphasized the importance of public health interventions promoting positive sleep and a more moderate use of social media for the enhancement of mental health instead of the adverse impact of digital media.

As most of the presented research points to the detrimental impact of social media on mental health, it is essential to also highlight the positives of using these platforms, especially in the light of current social distancing measures. According to Draženovic et al., social media served as a crucial source of support for adolescents and young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they were able to compensate for the lack of physical contact. Social media enabled people to stay connected, exchange stories, and seek comfort from others, which could have assisted in mitigating the psychological effects of loneliness.

Likewise, Fruehwirth et al. argue that through social media platforms, students are able to engage with other students thus reducing on feelings of loneliness and isolation. However, the study also reveals that students who spent time in supportive online communities had lower levels of psychological distress. This implies that when utilized

properly, social media is a useful resource for coping with stress and can help young adults get the necessary support during difficult times.

However, these benefits are only possible if social media is used appropriately. Social media should be consumed in moderation or actively, especially when the content involves social comparison or negative content that can worsen mental health. However, the networking and positive interactions in such supportive groups can really help. Therefore, the effects of social media on mental health cannot be regarded as positive or negative by default but depend on the nature of the interaction.

In conclusion, the studies conducted by Draženovic et al., Fruehwirth et al., and Yu et al. show that social media has both positive and negative effects on the mental health of youth. On the one hand, social media can provide important sources of social support, connection, and a sense of belonging while, on the other hand, it is linked to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and sleep problems, especially when the use is excessive or mindless. These effects have been further amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic where young people had to rely on social media since physical interactions were limited.

As a result, it is crucial to encourage users to be more moderate and pay attention to the impact of social media on their mental health. Promoting positive sleep practices, building coping skills, and valuing authentic relationships are key approaches that can help safeguard the psychological well-being of youth. While social media can foster connection and support if used intentionally and in moderation, it has the potential to be destructive. In addressing the impact of social media on youths, it is important to consider both positive and negative impacts so as to make proper recommendations for the future generations.

### Works Cited

- Draženovic, Marija, Tea Vukušić Rukavina, and Lovela Machala Poplašen. "Impact of Social Media Use on Mental Health within Adolescent and Student Populations during COVID-19 Pandemic: Review." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 20, no. 3392, 2023, pp. 1-22. MDPI, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20043392>.
- Fruehwirth, Jane Cooley, Alex Xingbang Weng, and Krista M. Perreira. "The Effect of Social Media Use on Mental Health of College Students during the Pandemic." *Health Economics*, vol. 33, no. 10, 2024, pp. 2229-2252, <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.4871>
- Yu, Danny J., Yun Kwok Wing, Tim M. H. Li, and Ngan Yin Chan. "The Impact of Social Media Use on Sleep and Mental Health in Youth: a Scoping Review." *Current Psychiatry Reports*, vol. 26, no. 104, 2024, pp. 104-119, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-024-01481-9>.