

Unveiling the Impact of Internet and Social Media on Students' Mental Wellbeing: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Social media and internet have had both positive and negative impacts on mental health, particularly as the world entered a new digital age. In the digital age, the rise of social media has changed how adolescents and young adults, particularly students in secondary and tertiary education connect, share, and communicate, though concerns have been raised about its potential psychological consequences. This study examines existing literature, draws upon empirical evidence, and reviews the impact of internet and social media on students' mental health, addressing negative aspects. While acknowledging the benefits of social media, this paper underscores the negative implications, such as cyberbullying and online harassment, social media dependency, and information overload and distraction, as these issues pose significant risks to students' mental health and warrant focused attention.

Keywords: Social media, Mental Health, Internet, Cyberbullying

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Introduction

Internet and social media

In today's world, the Internet and social media have become deeply ingrained in our routines, fundamentally changing how we communicate, gather information, and engage with the world (Aral et al., 2013). The Internet, a network connecting computers worldwide, has transformed how we seek knowledge, conduct business, and stay connected with others. Social media platforms, products of the era, have further revolutionized communication by giving people opportunities to share stories express viewpoints, and form communities. The Internet acts as a reservoir of knowledge offering access to a range of resources such as educational materials, news updates, entertainment content, and online shopping platforms (Liao et al., 2022). With a click of a button, users can explore viewpoints connect with global communities and take part in virtual collaborations (Vesselinov et al., 2021). This unrestricted access to information has the potential to make learning more accessible and empower individuals to pursue their interests and hobbies effortlessly; however, it remains dependent on equitable access to the internet, which is not universally available.

The evolution of communication and social interaction has been revolutionized by various social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok (Masciantonio et al., 2021). These platforms make it easy for users to instantly share their thoughts, experiences, and multimedia content. Social media platforms arguably break down barriers between people from places and backgrounds allowing us to build relationships and engage with cultures (Kross et al., 2021). Additionally, social media serves as a tool for self-expression, activism, and driving change by giving users a platform to raise their voices for causes they care about (Hautea et al., 2021). Despite the numerous advantages of the Internet and social media, including enhanced connectivity, ease of information access, a greater motivation to learn, improved self-image and identity development (Nicolini

et al., 2017), deeper and more complex dynamics of peer interaction within the class and opportunities for personal expression (Allen et al., 2014; Chui et al., 2012), there are growing concerns about their impact on individuals' well-being and mental health. Research has documented various negative effects, such as increased exposure to cyberbullying, heightened feelings of loneliness and isolation, and negative impacts on self-esteem due to constant comparisons with others (Keles et al., 2020; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). The ubiquity of current technology has sparked worries like information overload, reliance on devices, and online harassment, causing stress, anxiety, and a feeling of isolation (Marsh et al., 2022). Moreover, the algorithm-driven personalization of social media platforms, which tailors content to individual users, may cultivate unrealistic comparisons and feelings of inadequacy, worsening psychological issues like low self-esteem and depression (Sharma, 2024).

Addressing the complexities of contemporary life, it's vital to assess the negative influence of the World Wide Web and social media on adolescents and young adults, particularly students in secondary and tertiary education, as they are particularly vulnerable to its impacts due to developmental and social pressures unique to their age group (Kross et al., 2021).

Evolution of Internet use among students

The internet has significantly evolved, becoming integral to students' lives worldwide (Smith et al., 2021). Initially, it served as a research tool, providing access to academic articles and resources in digital form. As technology advanced, internet shifted towards broader applications, including digital books and online libraries, which revolutionized the way students accessed educational content (Lytras et al., 2022). Over time, the traditional use of paper and printed books was complemented by the growing use of digital formats, offering students a more convenient and accessible means of studying. This transition from paper to digital learning tools paved the way for the rise of learning platforms such as online courses, e-books, and virtual

classrooms, which now provide flexible, self-paced learning opportunities (Ebbini, 2023; Kumar et al., 2021). These platforms have not only transformed traditional educational practices but also expanded access to education, overcoming geographical barriers and offering more personalized learning experiences (Zeb et al., 2024).

In addition to educational tools, communication has also been revolutionized by the internet. Digital channels like email, social media, and instant messaging have replaced traditional methods of communication (Kellerman, 2022). Social media, in particular, has seen explosive growth, becoming a key tool for social interaction and information sharing among students (Barrot, 2021; Sultan, 2023). While social media platforms provide students with enhanced connectivity, enabling them to engage with peers, share knowledge, and access academic content (Sivakumar et al., 2023), they also introduce challenges. These include privacy concerns, information overload, and potential negative effects on mental health (Boursier et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2023). Though the educational potential of social media platforms like YouTube, academic forums, and student groups cannot be overlooked, they are not without their risks.

The rise of these platforms has been linked to feelings of loneliness, stress, and decreased self-esteem among students, often as a result of the constant comparisons and idealized portrayals on social media (Zubair et al., 2023). This negative self-perception can lead to declines in students' mental well-being, resulting in symptoms like anxiety and depression, which in turn can impair their focus, motivation, and overall academic performance (Murari et al., 2024). For instance, students may struggle to concentrate on their studies due to the compulsive checking of social media feeds, leading to a decrease in productivity and time spent on academic tasks. This challenge of balancing online social interaction with academic responsibilities often affects their engagement and success in educational activities.

Additionally, teachers face the complex role of integrating the internet as an effective pedagogical tool while managing its potential as a distraction. Although digital platforms offer valuable resources and interactive opportunities to enhance learning, they also introduce risks of distraction for students, who may shift focus away from ac-

ademic content to social media during instructional time (Van Den Beemt et al., 2020). Teachers, therefore, must navigate these challenges by promoting responsible internet use and creating strategies that keep students engaged with educational materials, thereby minimizing the internet's distracting effects on students' learning experiences

Aims of the study

This article presents a scoping review of the impact of internet and social media on school students' mental health, focusing on a critical issue in the educational context (Grassini, 2023). By synthesizing findings from existing literature, this research provides a nuanced perspective on how digital engagement affects students' well-being, bridging gaps in understanding and offering practical implications.

The insights gained from this study are particularly valuable for educators, as they highlight the need to incorporate mental health awareness and digital literacy into educational practices. Educators can leverage these findings to design interventions that promote healthier digital habits among students, fostering a balanced approach to online engagement that supports mental health. Additionally, the study offers psychologists and mental health professionals a framework to understand the psychological effects of prolonged internet and social media use, such as anxiety, stress, and self-esteem issues. This framework can guide the development of targeted therapeutic interventions and coping strategies to address these specific issues, enabling psychologists to tailor their approaches to the unique challenges faced by students in the digital age. For instance, techniques like cognitive-behavioral strategies, mindfulness practices, and resilience-building exercises could be adapted to help students manage the mental health impacts of their digital interactions.

Overall, this research connects technology, education, and mental health, expanding academic knowledge while equipping practitioners with evidence-based strategies to address digital-era challenges. By highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, the study lays the groundwork for future research and practical applica-

tions that benefit students, educators, and mental health professionals alike.

Negative impacts of social media on student mental health

Negative impacts of social media on student mental health can encompass cyberbullying and online harassment, social media dependency, and information overload and distraction (Ives, 2013).

Cyberbullying and online harassment

Today, modern communication nearly exclusively relies on online technology, which can increase destructive or harmful behaviors. Cyberbullying is identified by a change from traditional bullying forms to online forms (Li, 2007) through social media platforms. Continual exposure to and interaction with online technologies, despite the convenience they provide, also exposes its users to special online connections that may at some point put their security and emotional and psychological well-being at risk. Cyberbullying is regarded as one of the most significant risks of relying on online technologies. According to recent studies, cyberbullying and online harassment are remarkable problems for users of social media platforms, especially young students (Abaido, 2019). The most common definition of online harassment is an aggressive behavior that occurs by means of electronic media (Slaughter & Newman, 2022).

Cyberbullying and online harassment, such as trolling, have become crucial issues influencing student mental health because of the pervasive nature of social media platforms. Trolling, characterized by intentionally provocative or offensive online behavior, can cause diverse psychological impacts on students. Trolling has detrimental negative effects on mental health (Kapse & Gupta, 2023). Continual exposure to disrespectful comments, insults, and personal attacks can lead to feelings of anxiety, stress, depression, low self-esteem, and even suicidal attention (Mao et al., 2023). Students may also experi-

ence a loss of trust in others and a sense of powerlessness in the face of relentless online harassment (Dennehy et al., 2020).

The next problem is related to privacy issues that have emotional consequences for the students. Social media platforms often blur the lines between public and private areas, making it easier for cyberbullies to target students without repercussions. Mobile devices including laptops and smartphones enable students to share and receive school-related information regardless of location and time (Forssell, 2020). Privacy settings may not always provide suitable protection, causing the dissemination of personal information and the elaboration of cyberbullying incidents. This absence of privacy intensifies emotional consequences, as students may be perceived as exposed and vulnerable to further attacks (Aliyu et al., 2023).

Furthermore, cyberbullying can result in long-term trauma that persists beyond the immediate harassment (Turner et al., 2020). Victims may feel emotional scars into adulthood, influencing their relationships, educational performance, and overall well-being (Siddique et al., 2023). In addition, student victims can be emotionally distressed as a result of being harassed on the internet (Nixon, 2014). Influential management strategies include fostering resilience in students, providing access to mental health resources and support networks, and conducting preventive measures including education on digital citizenship and responsible online behavior (Harris & Johns, 2021).

To sum up, cyberbullying and online harassment – including trolling, stalking, threats, and the spreading of harmful materials – pose significant threats to student mental health due to their prevalence, privacy implications, emotional consequences, and potential for long-term trauma. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes prevention, intervention, and support for affected students.

Social media dependency

Social media dependency among students can intensify the fear of missing out (FOMO) and anxiety because of constant exposure to curated, usually, idealized representations of others' lives, causing feelings of imperfection and comparison (Koller, 2021). Social media platforms often display and highlight reels of others' lives, portraying apparently perfect moments and experiences. Continuous exposure to these idealized representations can create feelings of imperfection and anxiety in students who fear they're missing out on the same experiences (Romero Saletti et al., 2022). This fear can lead to compulsive checking of social media feeds, even in situations where it interferes with academic or personal responsibilities (Alutaybi et al., 2020). In addition, according to systematic review the by Keles, McCrae, and Grealish (2020), there is a meaningful relationship between social media use and depression. In that review of the 13 studies, depression was the most commonly measured consequence.

Furthermore, excessive use can lead to a decrease in self-esteem and body image as students may constantly compare themselves to unrealistic standards developed on social platforms (Yang et al., 2020). Social media platforms are popular for developing unrealistic beauty standards and lifestyles (Monks et al., 2021). Constant exposure to these images can develop a distorted perception of students' own appearance and achievements, creating feelings of imperfection and dissatisfaction with themselves (Fiaz et al., 2023).

Additionally, spending too much time on social media can reduce real-life social interactions, causing feelings of loneliness and isolation, which further affect mental well-being (Hudimova et al., 2021). Instead of participating in offline activities and spending time with peers and family, students may find themselves glued to their screens, scrolling through social feeds. This decline in real-life social interactions can cause feelings of loneliness, isolation, and an absence of authentic connection, which are adverse to mental well-being (Della Longa et al., 2022).

In summary, social media dependency among students can create far-reaching negative consequences, affecting diverse aspects of

their mental health, such as FOMO, anxiety, depression, self-esteem, body image issues, and real-life social interactions. Recognizing these impacts is significant in developing healthier usage habits and prioritizing mental well-being in the digital age.

Information overload and distraction

Social media can cause information overload and distraction among students in different ways. The first way is that constantly changing among social media platforms, notifications, and educational assignments can overwhelm the brain, causing cognitive overload. Multitasking decreases efficiency and can harm cognitive functions, making it difficult for students to retain information and complete assignments efficiently (Samaranayake, 2020).

In the second way, social media's continuous stream of notifications, updates, and engaging matters can distract students and decrease their ability to focus on educational assignments. Social media distractions reduce student engagement inside the classroom. Research has shown that frequent interruptions from notifications impair cognitive performance, making it harder for students to concentrate on tasks and leading to reduced engagement with learning materials (Chen & Yan, 2016). Such distractions can notably reduce student engagement inside the classroom, as students may be tempted to check their devices rather than focus on the lesson, ultimately impacting their academic performance (Junco, 2012). This can also cause decreased attention spans and reduced concentration, making it challenging for students to engage deeply with their learning and retain information (Nema et al., 2023).

The other way is impediment to deep learning. Deep learning entails continuous focus, critical thinking, and reflection (Coyle & Meyer, 2021). Nevertheless, social media stimulates shallow engagement and fast consumption of information, which can prevent students' ability to engage deeply with course books (Călinescu, 2024). Continuous exposure to short, bite-sized content on social media may decrease students' motivation and ability to engage in deep learning activities (Lăpădat, 2023).

Finally, while social media platforms present opportunities for self-expression and creativity, too much use can prevent creativity by increasing comparison, self-censorship, and superficial engagement (Kperogi, 2022). Students may concentrate more on curating their online personas and looking for validation by likes and comments, rather than seeking their creative potential through meaningful, in-depth exploration of notions and concepts.

To sum up, social media's information overload and distractions can negatively affect students' mental health by causing cognitive overload, decreasing attention spans and concentration, hindering deep learning, and weakening creativity. Balancing social media use with strategies for handling distractions and developing deep engagement with educational assignments is critical for maintaining student well-being and educational achievement.

Discussion

Previous analyses

Previous studies have highlighted significant mental health challenges associated with social media use among students, emphasizing issues such as cyberbullying, dependency, and information overload. For example, cyberbullying and online harassment have emerged as prominent risks, with researchers noting the shift from traditional bullying to online forms, which exposes students to negative interactions that can cause anxiety, stress, and even depression (Abaido, 2019; Li, 2007). Trolling and other aggressive online behaviors further exacerbate these psychological effects, contributing to low self-esteem and a pervasive sense of powerlessness (Dennehy et al., 2020; Mao et al., 2023). Moreover, privacy issues within social media platforms increase vulnerability to these behaviors, as the blurred boundaries between public and private spaces make it easier for cyberbullies to target students without consequence (Aliyu et al., 2023; Forssell, 2020).

Social media dependency, meanwhile, has been linked to mental health concerns such as FOMO and anxiety. The highly curated content on social platforms often fosters unrealistic comparisons, leading to decreased self-esteem and body image issues (Koller, 2021; Romero Saletti et al., 2022;). Information overload and distraction also significantly impact cognitive health, where the constant stream of notifications reduces students' focus, attention span, and deep learning capacity (Nema et al., 2023; Samaranayake, 2020).

Coping mechanisms and mitigation strategies

In the final part of this article, coping mechanisms and mitigation strategies are proposed by focusing on the role of educational institutions, personal strategies for the students, and future perspectives on mental health and digital usage.

Role of educational institutions

Educational institutions such as schools and universities have a crucial role in dealing with the impact of the internet and social media on students' mental well-being by implementing ways to manage stress and minimize harm. Many educational institutions struggle with a lack of understanding and instruction on the harmful effects of too much internet and social media use on students' mental health (Leal Filho et al., 2021). Without true understanding and acknowledgment of these matters, institutions may not be able to prioritize mental health education or provide suitable resources to support students.

Furthermore, the lack of adequate support systems in educational settings presents a major hurdle. The counseling resources and mental well-being assistance provided may not be enough to cater to students facing mental health struggles, which are often heightened by their online interactions. The stress of meeting academic standards, combined with the continuous comparisons and competitiveness fueled by social networking platforms, adds to the anxiety and pressure ex-

perienced by students (Elmer et al., 2020). Educational institutions unknowingly add to this burden by setting unattainable standards for students and neglecting the potential mental health impacts of these expectations.

Moreover, the widespread occurrence of online harassment and cyberbullying is a major worry for schools and colleges (Luo et al., 2023). In the absence of firm rules and procedures to tackle these issues, learners could experience significant emotional distress due to their online dealings. To address these challenges, educational institutions must make teaching digital literacy and media literacy a top priority. It is essential to provide students with the skills needed to navigate the online world safely and responsibly in order to minimize the harmful impacts of the internet and social media on mental well-being. Cooperation with mental health experts and organizations is also vital. Through collaborative efforts, educational institutions can create extensive mental health programs and offer easily accessible support services for students in distress.

In the end, it is crucial to establish welcoming and all-encompassing settings in educational establishments. Pupils need to feel at ease when reaching out for assistance and backing in regard to mental wellness issues linked to online activities and social networking. Educational establishments have a key part in cultivating such settings. By tackling these concerns and putting into practice efficient coping techniques and reduction strategies, educational institutions can offer improved assistance to students in dealing with the difficulties brought about by the internet and social media on their mental well-being.

Personal strategies for the students

In navigating the effect of internet and social media on their mental health, students meet different challenges and issues when using individual coping mechanisms. The first probable challenge is self-regulation and time management. Numerous pupils face challenges with self-management in regard to their utilization of the internet and so-

cial networking (Al-Nuwaier, 2020). Being constantly tempted by online material and socializing, pupils may encounter difficulties in managing their schedules efficiently, resulting in delays, diversion, and ultimately, increased tension and worry.

The second probable challenge is mindfulness and digital detox practices. Utilizing techniques to enhance awareness and disconnecting from technology can positively impact students in maintaining their mental health (Nassen et al., 2023). Yet, integrating these methods in a world dominated by the internet and social networking can pose challenges. It may be difficult for students to unplug from their gadgets and develop mindfulness, particularly when dealing with academic stress and societal standards propagated online.

The next probable challenge is seeking professional help when needed. Even though students may try their hardest to manage on their own, some may discover that they need expert assistance to tackle the mental health issues worsened by the internet and social media (Henderson et al., 2013). Nonetheless, asking for support may be viewed negatively or seen as a display of vulnerability, causing students to hesitate or put off contacting mental health experts.

Given these concerns, it is essential for students to receive guidance on developing self-control and time management skills from an early age to navigate their online pursuits responsibly.

Educators and parents can play a critical role by teaching students to establish healthy digital habits, prioritize their well-being, and set boundaries that help balance their online and offline lives. Additionally, introducing mindfulness practices such as meditation, deep breathing exercises, and mindful awareness of technology use can encourage students to cultivate a healthier relationship with the digital world (Miltenoff & Milne, 2020). By taking systematic breaks, engaging in offline activities, and being intentional about their online interactions, students can mitigate the negative impacts of internet and social media on their mental health.

In addition, students should feel enabled to seek professional help when required, without the scare of judgment or shame. Educational centers such as schools and colleges have an important role to play in promoting awareness about mental health and providing support

services for students who require help. By utilizing techniques like self-control, mindfulness, and seeking assistance from experts, when necessary, students can effectively manage the challenges of online platforms and social networking sites while safeguarding their emotional welfare (Chadha et al., 2024).

Future perspectives on mental health and digital usage

While taking coping mechanisms and mitigation strategies into account for the effect of internet and social media on students' mental health, it's critical to reflect on future perspectives. This includes finding adaptive techniques for mental health support, policy-making aimed at developing healthier digital contexts, and investigation directions for the intersection of technology and mental health.

Initially, as technology advances, there is a growing significance in utilizing flexible methods for aiding mental well-being. This involves creating new digital solutions, like apps and websites, designed specifically to cater to the individual mental health requirements of learners. These solutions could include aspects of cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness exercises, or connecting with peers in an accessible and interesting manner. Nonetheless, guaranteeing the efficiency, availability, and ethical standards of these digital solutions poses a continuous challenge that needs continuous focus.

Next, creating effective regulations is crucial for fostering healthier online spaces for students. Policymakers should collaborate with schools, tech companies, and mental health experts to develop rules that protect privacy, combat online harassment, and promote responsible digital behavior. Enforcing these policies will enhance online safety and support students' mental well-being.

Finally, upcoming research should prioritize examining the connection between technology and psychological well-being to develop interventions and strategies for prevention based on solid evidence. This involves investigating how new technologies like virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and wearable devices affect students' mental health results. It is important to conduct long-term studies to under-

stand the impact of digital habits on mental health and overall wellness and to pinpoint both factors that safeguard against and factors that contribute to risks linked to internet and social media use among students.

By taking these future perspectives into account and addressing the challenges created by the digital age, stakeholders can create a safer, healthier, and more supportive online environment for students. For instance, schools and policymakers can implement digital literacy programs that teach students about responsible internet use and the potential mental health effects of social media. Additionally, setting clear policies on cyberbullying and providing access to mental health resources, such as counseling and digital detox programs, can help mitigate negative impacts. By employing adaptive techniques for mental health support, evidence-based policy-making, and interdisciplinary research, we can better understand and reduce the effect of internet and social media on students' mental health in the years to come.

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