

Benefits and Drawbacks of Social Media on Adolescents and Young Adults

A Senior Honors Thesis

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**Table of Contents**

Preface: Abstract.....p.3

Chapter 1: Introduction.....p.4

Chapter 2: Background.....p. 10

Chapter 3: Methodology.....p. 19

Chapter 4: Results.....p. 21

Chapter 5: Discussion.....p. 30

Chapter 6: Next Steps.....p. 32

References: .....p. 36

### **Abstract**

Social media has been growing rapidly as are the effects on those who use it. A literature review was conducted that examined 19 peer reviewed articles that focused on social media use. The purpose was to determine the strengths and weaknesses social media has on the health of adolescents and young adults. A variety of sample sizes were used between the years of 2015 to 2022. The journal articles were found through Brockport library's database along with Google search engine. Social media platforms included in the study were MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Google+, Musically and TikTok. The research question was, "How does social media impact adolescents and young adults both negatively and positively?" Results of the review suggest there are a great amount of negative effects of social media such as anxiety, depression, body dysmorphia, bullying, suicide, and procrastination. However, there are also a great amount of positive effects of social media including remote employment, support through internet friends, fast communication, and quick information. The next step of this research is to ensure more protections are in place to protect this vulnerable age group from the negative effects of social media. Future research should continue to examine the positive benefits social media does have in the population.

### **Introduction**

Since social media has been greatly ingrained into all aspects of modern society, it is quite odd to find an individual who has not used some type of social media. In 1997, the first social media site, SixDegrees.com, was launched (ProCon.org, 2022). This site was developed to be able to allow linking of friends online. Then, Friendster appeared in 2002, which paved the way for bigger platforms such as “MySpace (2003), Facebook (2004), Twitter (2006), Pinterest (2009), and Google+ (2012)” (ProCon.org 2022). Facebook actually was initially created solely for college students and you couldn’t access facebook if you didn’t have an “.edu” email. In 2006, Facebook allowed access to everyone which caused more people to make accounts. In 2012, approximately one in seven people had a Facebook account. This amounts to a great number of people considering there were 7,125,828,059 individuals on the planet in 2012 (Worldometer, n.d.). Social media has grown rapidly over the years as more people have created accounts within these platforms. People easily became infatuated with social media due to “one in five admitted to having logged into social media while in the bathroom” in 2014 (ProCon.org, 2022). Little did the world know at that time, the magnitude of effects social media would bring to people during the next decade.

Although people of all different ages use social media, the vast majority of consumers are adolescents and young adults. As new trends on different social media platforms come up, adolescents and young adults are quick to try it out. For example, YouTube was popular in 2005, then Musically became the popular app of 2015. Eventually, Tik Tok was created in September 2016, but did not initially become popular until 2019 (Iqbal, 2023). There is a constant influx and progression of social media which causes adolescents and young adults to have a consistent flow of new content and ideas. Social media has greatly changed the way that people acquire

information, both factual and less than factual. This fast access to any and all information impacted many aspects of society, including education, social, employment and recreation. In 2021, there were 14.4% of users of ages 13-17 years old who use TikTok and 34.9% ages 18-24 (Iqbal, 2023). Although it is quite possible that this dramatic increase in TikTok usage (49.3%) might have been associated with the COVID-19 pandemic due to increased free time within this population as a result of isolation from closures of schools, businesses and social events.

### **Impact of the Pandemic on Social Media**

In 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic changed the way social media was being used. Due to this rapidly spreading pandemic, it was advised to stay indoors or away from others, social distancing, and masks were mandated. Most schools changed to teaching in an online format and most sports and social activities were canceled. Due to this, adolescents in particular had more free time to be online and it became a main source of human interaction. A major form of social media also soared during this time and is called TikTok. Tiktok “went from 343 million downloads in the first half of 2019 to 615 million downloads in the first half of 2020” (Power Digital, 2020). People were spending more time on their phones not only through TikTok, but on other social media platforms as well. Engagement was at an all time high on other social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Power Digital, 2020). According to AdWeek, before the pandemic, it was estimated that there would be an increase in social media by six seconds in 2020. An update from AdWeek in May 2022 reported the increase in social media usage would now increase to seven minutes. (Power Digital, 2020).

### **Population**

Social media has become a major part of life among adolescents and young adults, which is the population of focus of this thesis. In 2021, “approximately 21.56 million young people

between the ages of 15 to 19 years old lived in the United States.” (Statista Research Department, 2023). In 2021, there were 21.52 million people in the United States who were between the ages of 20-24. Adolescents make up about 13% of the population in the United States. Adolescents and young adults are in the phase of life where they are trying to discover who they are and forming their own identity and social networks. It can be a difficult age as they try to navigate their way through school, family life, planning for their future, etc. The addition of social media in the lives of adolescents and young adults has had profound impacts in many areas. This can include both positive and negative effects.

### **Positive Effects of Social Media**

For some, social media provides a sense of belonging within online social networks. For young adults who may have lacked face to face interactions with people, social media greatly grew their social network. It allowed them to interact with people all over the world. Some of these interactions developed into long lasting friendships, which is a positive thing. Social media has also enabled this population to find remote employment as content creators on platforms, such as YouTube and TikTok. Popular creators and influencers were able to make money through brand deals for various products. Informal support systems through internet friends is also a positive benefit resulting from social media. Fast communication and being able to access quick information are also positive aspects. Lastly, for many, social media is an outlet that can help adolescents relax and have fun.

### **Negative Effects of Social Media**

Along with the positive aspects of global connectedness, social media use does not come without some negatives. With the influx of various images of people of all ages, social media has influenced the way that some people portray themselves. Many apps have various filters that can

distort one's appearance to make oneself more attractive. This includes filters that can slim down various parts of the body. Adolescents and young adults are flooded with these images and have placed greater value on appearance because of all of the images they see on a daily basis. This can have profound effects on their formation of identity, body image, and self-esteem. One of the negative outcomes of this is the development of eating disorders. The incidence of eating disorders has risen among the adolescent and young adult population. This includes anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, avoidant restrictive food intake disorder, and binge eating. These disorders are considered mental health illnesses (Hopkins Children, 2022). It is found that "30 million people in the U.S. have an eating disorder" and "95 percent of people with eating disorders are between the ages of 12 and 25" (Hopkins Children, 2023).

Bullying, or cyberbullying, is also a negative consequence that comes into play with social media. Cyberbullying is defined as bullying through technology (Dalomba, 2022). Although "up to 43 percent (of teenagers) have been bullied online," there is rarely intervention as seen by "85 percent of all cases of bullying are not addressed" (Dalomba, 2022). Cyberbullying is considered to be a negative outcome of social media use and has unfortunately resulted in violence, and suicide attempts (Arnon, Brunstein-Klomek, Visoki, Moore, Argabright, DiDomenico, Benton & Barzilay, 2022).

The incidence of people with mental illnesses are increasing, especially in the adolescent and young adult population. In addition to the increases seen in various mental illnesses, there is a greater focus on mental health in all arenas including clinical practice, education, research and policy initiatives. For example, a systematic review article examined current research studies to evaluate how many adolescents were affected by common mental disorders (Silva et al., 2020). Common mental disorders are most often considered to be depressive or anxiety disorders (Silva

et al., 2020). It was found that “up to 20% of children and adolescents suffer from a disabling mental illness” (Silva et al., 2020, p.19).

Anxiety disorder and depression are the two most common types of mental health illnesses today. Anxiety is a mental illness that causes individuals to have excessive stress and worry. “It is estimated that 3.6% of 10-14 year-olds and 4.6% of 15-19 year-olds experience an anxiety disorder” (World Health Organization, 2021), which shows the prevalence of mental illness globally. Adding these percentages together, 8.2% of adolescents equate to about 662 million people. This is a great number of people who are dealing with anxiety. Depression is also a common mental illness among adolescents which is “estimated to occur among 1.1% of adolescents aged 10-14 years, and 2.8% of 15-19-year-olds” (WHO, 2021). Signs of depression can include having a loss of interest in activities, depressed mood, and guilt. Depression is also a major risk factor for suicide. Suicide is considered direct harm to oneself “with intent to die as a result of the behavior” (NIH, 2023).

Suicide rates have dramatically risen over the years. Suicide is the 12th leading cause of death in the United States which lead to death of 45,900 people (NIH, 2023). Suicide was the second leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 10-14 and 25-34 , the third leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 15-24, and the fourth leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 35 and 44 (NIH, 2023). Suicide may not have occurred, but it doesn't mean one does not have a plan. Americans in 2018-2019 had 18.8% of 12-17-year olds seriously consider attempting suicide (CDC Data and Statistics on Children's Mental Health, 2023), with approximately 15.7% of 12-17 year old Americans that made a suicide plan.

### **Significance to Nursing**

Understanding the impact, both positive and negative, will be significant in the nursing field. All nurses should know day to day problems that their patients may be going through in order to better connect with them. For example, pediatric nurses may find the information found thought-provoking and can use what is found to better understand their clientele. Pediatric psychiatric nurses may especially view the following information as helpful because “nearly 1 in 5 adolescents reported checking their phones constantly” (Hamilton and Lee, 2021). Phones are a major part of adolescents' lives. Going on social media may cause varying effects that may improve or decline one's mental health. That is why pediatric psychiatric nurses must take this into account to better understand the patient. Health center nurses at college may also find the information of importance because “In the United States, over 80% of 14- to 22-year-olds are currently active, daily users of social media” (Lee et al., 2020). Pediatric psychiatric nurses and health center nurses at college may view the impacts of social media through some of their patients but may not know it as such at first. Nurses should not only know this information to better understand and treat the client, but they should also know this information to inform their patients. Nurses have a responsibility to educate their patients. Patients will also be more trusting of the nurses if more time is spent with them and a rapport was created. Adolescents and young adults need to know how they may be affected by social media in order to make better decisions when using it. Adolescents and young adults also shouldn't be talked down upon or lectured by nurses. Instead, inform them in a way showing that you care and want what's best for them. The first steps to fixing the problem is educating oneself before educating others, and recognizing that there is a problem. Suicide is the second most common cause of death in 15-29 year olds (Scott et al., 2020). Thus, if there is even a slight change that nurses can make in a patient's life by informing, that is a significant opportunity to get behind.

**Focus of Thesis**

Social media use within adolescents and young adults is widespread and can have both positive and negative aspects. These implications have been identified in many news stories and television outlets, however, these sources are less than scientific and can be biased. We do not fully understand the magnitude of these relationships. The purpose of this thesis was to conduct a review of the literature that examined the relationships between social media use and the various positive and negative outcomes as reported by the media. Published scientific peer reviewed articles that have studied these variables in depth within the adolescent and young adult population will be included in the review.

**Background**

In 2005, it was reported that 5% of adults in America used at least one form of social media (Tanap, 2017). In 2017, “70% of the public uses social media, with many people using more than one platform” (Tanap, 2017). Social media is defined as “the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks” (Tufts University). Social media began in 1997 when SixDegrees.com, was launched (ProCon.org, 2022). Currently there are numerous social media applications that are highly accessible if there is a smart device at your disposal. People may use tablets, smart phones, and laptops to access social media platforms. Some of the most common social media platforms that are available include: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube, and Pinterest.

**Adolescent Population*****Identity vs. Role Confusion Stage of Development***

The adolescent population is the focus of this literature review. This population is still growing, physically, emotionally and developmentally. Adolescents are not considered children, but are not at a complete adult stage according to Erikson's Stages of Development (McLeod, 2023). Erikson created the stages of development because he believed that there are various experiences and challenges people go through during the aging process. According to Erikson's stages of development, the ages of 12 to 18 are characterized by the stage of identity vs. role confusion. In this stage, "adolescents search for a sense of self and personal identity, through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs and goals" (McLeod, 2023). This stage is seen as the transition to adulthood. Adolescents are becoming more independent and trying to figure out their likes and dislikes, as they are slowly discovering who they are. This stage also encapsulates the idea of fitting into society and finding their place in society. If they are unable to find their place in society or their identity, this can lead to role confusion. Role confusion of the adolescent means "not being sure about themselves or their place in society" (McLeod, 2023). Which is why as an adolescent, it is important to try new things and see what may spark an interest.

### ***Determinants of Health***

In the identity vs. role confusion stage, the body is also changing through puberty which may be a difficult time as it is something children have not yet experienced. "Erikson claims that the adolescent may feel uncomfortable about their body for a while until they can adapt and 'grow into' the changes" (McLeod, 2023). Puberty may also feel isolating if physical and mental changes aren't discussed in schools to show students they are not the only ones going through this change and that these are all very normal events. These changes are part of the biological determinants of health. The normal ages for puberty are 8 to 13 for girls and 9 to 14 for boys (NIH, 2021). Puberty for biological girls may include hormone changes, breast development,

hair growth, and the start of menstruation. Puberty for biological boys also included hormone changes, hair growth, growth spurts, voice changes, and other body changes. Acne, body odor, and weight gain are also common occurrences of puberty. These developmental changes may also cause heightened emotions. This may include a focus on what others may perceive of them. During puberty, there may also be an increase in the desire for privacy and an increase in peer pressure.

Determinants of health also include behavior, social and physical environment that can also impact the population during the identity vs. role confusion stage. During the time of puberty, there is an increase in the amount of time spent with friends versus family. People in this stage are still figuring life out and trying to figure out who they are. Due to the desire for belonging, adolescents may engage in some risk taking behaviors due to peer pressure. This could lead them into making poor decisions if they cave to the pressures and are on the correct path. Some of these risky behaviors may lead to negative consequences including: substance abuse, pregnancy, self harm, and even death. The social environment is strongly associated with whether the adolescent has friends. If the individual has friends, their social environment will mainly consist of friends in comparison to family. If these friends have a positive influence, there may be less of a chance for risk taking behaviors to cause negative outcomes. If the individual does not feel supported by their friends or family, they may have an increased chance of acting in risk taking behaviors (Tomé et al., 2012). The physical environment may also change due to who they live with and how they are living. This could cause a negative school situation and a difficult time making friends because they are focused on working to support their family. There is no telling where a person may be both psychologically or financially. This difference may

affect the actions and behaviors of the individual and how social media may be a positive or negative factor.

### ***Examples of Social Media Use***

A majority of adolescents may be attracted to social media for the feeling of belonging. To make up a scenario as to why someone may be on social media could be seen through Mabel: *Mabel may feel the need to go onto social media due to her friends also being on social media. Mabel hears her friends talking about the latest gossip and if their captions are sufficient to post. Mabel does not have a phone but begs her parents because she wants to have the sense of belonging. She wants to fit in with her friends so she can also gossip, post, and feel “cool.”*

Another example could be seen through Sebastian: *Sebastian has been going through a period of sadness and does not find happiness in his daily life. Sebastian wants to escape his reality and has heard of various social media outlets. Sebastian wishes to seek out joy and thus downloads Instagram, Youtube, and Discord. He has the best luck in Discord and is able to connect with others through gaming. In time, Sebastian makes multiple virtual friends and finds his joy.*

### **Young Adult Population**

#### ***Intimacy vs Isolation Stage of Development***

The young adult population is also studied which is included in Erikson's stages of development through the intimacy vs. isolation stage. This stage includes the ages between 18 and 40. For the current thesis, ages 18-25 will be looked at. Social media may impact the individual positively or negatively which may be dependent on the social environment, physical environment, behavior, biology, and behavior. Social media may be looked at in order to avoid isolation and connect with others because this is the stage where people are forming romantic

relationships. These romantic relationships are also known to be intimate and long-term relationships with someone other than a family member is explored (McLeod, 2023). This stage is successfully completed when one is in a happy relationship involving commitment, safety, and care (McLeod, 2023). If intimacy is avoided, and relationships are feared, this may lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

### ***Determinants of Health***

The determinants of health that affect young adults are multifaceted and include social, economic, and environmental factors. Encapsulated in these factors include access to education, employment opportunities, economic stability, social support systems, and the physical environment they live in (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). There may also be lifestyle choices made by a young adult that can impact young adult health. Access to education and employment opportunities are significant for young adults which may eventually lead to economic stability. It has been found that young adults with access to higher education and employment opportunities are more likely to have better health outcomes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023) because it allows for financial stability. With financial stability, there is better access available to healthcare and living conditions. These opportunities also allow young adults to have an increased confidence in themselves and self worth, causing better mental health. A study by Ryu and Fan (2022) was done that found a major positive association between financial worry and psychological distress in adults in the United States. Being a young adult is around when people are moving out of their guardian's house and living independently. This can be difficult if one is not economically stable.

Physical environment and social support are also important determinants of health that are affected in young adults. This is because if an individual lives near a hazardous waste site

there may be associated health concerns (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). For example, there was a study done that found adults living near coal-burning power plants in the United States were more likely to have respiratory, gum, and skin conditions compared to those who did not live near a power plant (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). Noise pollution, known as increased human-made noises such as traffic or construction are correlated with hearing loss and other health issues (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). Thus, the physical environment a young adult is living in can impact their health. Social support is also a major factor in young adult's lives because poor social support has been correlated to depression and loneliness (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). It has also been known to increase one's risk of alcohol use, cardiovascular disease, depression, and suicide (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). Beneficial social support has a positive impact on a young adult's overall health.

### ***Examples of Social Media Use***

There are some young adults that may be attracted to social media for the feeling of intimacy. To make up a scenario as to why someone may be on social media could be seen through Amelia: *Amerlia has been wanting to find her life-long partner for what to her feels like forever. She sees her friends on social media dating and others getting married. This is what she wants for herself. She decides to put herself out there and download multiple dating applications including Tinder, Bumble, and Hinge. She hopes to find her match as she believes so many people her age have already done so.*

### **Mental Health Issues in Adolescents and Young Adults**

Anxiety disorders are common when it comes to the studied population. Anxiety disorders are characterized by excessive worry. To be diagnosed with generalized anxiety

disorder, there are Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders fourth edition (DSM-IV) that must be had by the individual. Chronic anxiety disorder occurs when a person excessively worries and feels very anxious at least 50 percent of the time for six or more months (Videbeck, 2013). The individual also will have difficulty controlling the worry (Munir et al., 2022). The anxiety and worry is associated with at least one of the following: restlessness, easily fatigued/irritable/difficulty concentrating, muscle tension, and sleep disturbance (Munir et al., 2022). Hildegard Peplau described four levels of anxiety severity which include: mild, moderate, severe, and panic. There may be different causes for these anxieties which may include genetic, environmental, psychological, as well as developmental components (American Psychiatric Association, 2021).

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health disorder in the United States (NAMI, 2017). This is seen as there are more than 40 million adults with anxiety in the United States and 7% of children between 3 to 17 that experience issues with anxiety yearly (NAMI, 2021). Anxiety is a prevalent mental illness in society. There are various types of anxiety disorders including generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and phobias. Generalized anxiety disorder is the chronic excessive worry which can make it difficult to concentrate. The worry can cause headaches, tension, or even nausea (NAMI, 2021). Social anxiety disorder is when an individual has an intense fear when it comes to socially interacting, possibly due to a worry about humiliation (NAMI, 2021). People with social anxiety disorder have difficulty with conversations and may be isolated. If an interaction is forced or anticipated, they may have a panic attack (NAMI, 2021). Panic disorder is another anxiety disorder, which is indicated by panic attacks and unexpected feelings of terror (NAMI, 2017). The panic attacks last 10-15 minutes that include quick, increasing anxiety along with fear and discomfort

(Videbeck, 2013). One is diagnosed with panic disorder if there are recurring panic attacks along with at least one of worry about future attacks (Videbeck, 2013). A heart attack is portrayed by “chest pain, heart palpitations, dizziness, shortness of breath, and stomach upset” (NAMI, 2017). Phobias are also a part of anxiety disorders. Phobias are intense, irrational, or illogical fear of a situation or object (Videbeck, 2013). People tend to try and avoid their phobias. Anxiety disorders may also go hand in hand with other mental health conditions. These conditions may include depression, substance use, eating disorders, and trouble sleeping (NAMI, 2021). The outcomes of anxiety include a possible diagnosis and treatment. It is important for an individual to discuss with their provider or a trusted person who may be able to help them on the right path for treatment or coping mechanisms.

Major depressive disorder is a mood disorder that is another common mental health disorder in adolescents and young adults. To be diagnosed with depression, one must have two or more weeks of a sad mood or lack interest in daily activities. They must also have at least four of the following: anhedonia, weight changes, changes in sleep, energy, decision-making, concentration, self-esteem, and goals (Videbeck, 2013). With these signs, one may be diagnosed with depression. Depression may be caused by biochemistry, genetics, personality, or environmental factors (American Psychiatric Association, 2021). There may also be trauma that has occurred in their life. When an individual experiences trauma, it can cause changes in how the brain responds to fear and stress which can lead to depression (NAMI, 2021). There are about 21 million adults in the United States that have had at least one major depressive episode in 2020 (NAMI, 2021) and there are about 280 million people in the world who have depression (WHO, 2023). Depression is a major mental health disorder in the United States. If one has depression it is also important to monitor for suicide. This is because depression can lead to suicide and more

than 700,000 individuals die yearly to suicide (WHO, 2023). There are depressive episodes that can be considered as mild, moderate, or severe (WHO, 2023). There are also patterns to the depressive episodes. There can be a single episode of depressive disorder which means it is someone's first and only episode. There can also be recurrent depressive disorder which means there were at least two depressive episodes. Lastly, there can be depressive episodes in bipolar disorder. In this case, there is alternation between depressive episodes and manic symptoms. Manic symptoms can include "euphoria or irritability, increased activity or energy, and other symptoms such as increased talkativeness, racing thoughts, increased self-esteem, decreased need for sleep, distractibility, and impulsive reckless behavior" (WHO, 2023). There is a wide range of what one with depression or depressive episodes may go through. Therefore, The individual with depression may be taught self-help skills along with coping skills to better manage their depression.

### **Displaced Behavior Theory**

The displaced behavioral theory will guide this literature review. This theory entails that people who have more sedentary behaviors may have more of an affect on their mental health. Social media does not cause these effects but the increase in social media causes the decrease in other activities. (Strickland, 2014). An Ipsos Open Thinking Exchange study showed people ages 18-34 report being on social media 3.8 hours a day with 1 out of 5 people of the same age reported being on social media for 6 or more hours in a day (Strickland, 2014). This major social media use is causing less time to be used for activities that may be beneficial in deterring mental health disorders.

There have been studies showing how physical activity may reduce the risk of depression which may not be received through sedentary behaviors. In a classic article from 1992,

Thirlaway and Benton discovered that at least one hour of physical activity a week was associated with decreased depression in patients. Another study was done by Wise which showed one to seven hours of physical activity a week related to a decreased probability of depression (Strickland, 2014). Physical activity is related to decreasing depression because “exercise may activate endorphin secretion, (Paluska & Schwenk, 2000). There may also be a possibility that physical activity improves depressive symptoms such as general fatigue and disturbed sleep rather than depression itself (Strickland, 2014).

Face-to-face interactions are also found to reduce the risk of mental health problems and help mental health problems that are occurring (Strickland, 2014). The ‘social interaction’ hypothesis by Ransford shows there is an improvement in mental health after exercise partially because there is a supportive community and social interaction aspect when with a group doing physical activity. The sedentary behaviors through using social media may be done in place of physical exercise and face-to-face interactions to follow which, sequentially, increases the risk of depression (Strickland, 2014).

### **Purpose & Research Questions**

The purpose of this thesis was to conduct a literature review to examine the strengths and weaknesses of social media on the health of adolescents and young adults. The research questions that will guide this review are:

1. “How does social media impact adolescents and young adults both negatively and positively?”
2. “Do the negative effects of social media outweigh the positive effects?”
3. “Is there a better or safer way for adolescents and young adults to be on social media?”

### **Methodology**

A literature review was conducted to identify the benefits and drawbacks of social media in the adolescent and young adult population. Databases used included Brockport library database, EBSCO, and CINAHL. Primary, peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2022 were retrieved from the library databases for this literature review. Keywords were used in the databases to narrow down the search for articles that would help answer the research questions and these included: *nursing, mental health, adolescents, young adults, social media, anxiety, depression, relationships*.

Inclusion criteria for the articles included in the review were:

1. Articles must be primary peer reviewed journal articles.
2. Articles must be published in the English language.
3. Articles published between the years 2015 and 2022.
4. Articles that are primary research studies.
5. Articles must focus on the adolescent and young adult population.
6. Articles must relate to the topic of social media and its effects.

Exclusion criteria for the articles not included in the review were:

1. Articles that were not peer reviewed.
2. Articles that were in a language other than English.
3. Articles of a population other than adolescents or young adults.

The peer reviewed articles found through the databases were ensured of their relevance to the research questions by having met the inclusion criteria to be included in the literature review.

In order to determine relevance of the articles, the abstracts were initially read. If the article was applicable to the purpose of the literature review, it was downloaded and fully read. A total of 19 peer reviewed journal articles met the criteria and were included in the review.

## **Results**

### **Data Analysis**

The peer reviewed journal articles were found by searching databases for articles that would give perspectives of both benefits and drawbacks of social media on adolescents and young adults. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were also used to remove unnecessary articles that would not be purposeful in the literature review at hand. These articles were then put into categories based on whether they included the drawbacks or benefits of social media. Also, they were separated on what the drawback or benefit of social media was. This allowed for a more manageable way to analyze the data and retrieve data that would be useful. Each article was read thoroughly and key pieces of information were highlighted and put on a separate document. It was decided what information from the separate document would be of most use to add which would be necessary in the literature review.

Out of the nineteen articles, 3 articles were cross sectional studies (15.79%), 2 articles were meta analysis (10.5%), 2 articles were systematic reviews (10.5%), and 12 articles consisted of interviews or surveys (63.16%). Of the articles that were not reviewed, more than half of the articles used were quantitative articles while the rest were qualitative articles. There was also a variety in which ages were studied. 3 of the articles brought up cyberbullying (15.79%). There were 14 articles (73%) that studied the adolescent age group. There were then 2 articles (9.5%) that studied both adolescents and young adults. One of these articles studied ages

11-18-year olds and the second article studies 12-21 year olds. There were 2 articles (9.5%) that solely studied young adults and there was 1 article (5.3%) that did not study adolescents or young adults. Instead, one article studied social media posts. More than half of all of the articles discussed mental health whether it was regarding depression, suicide, attention hyperactivity, or well-being. 3 articles (15.79%) discussed social media and the correlation to physical health.

### **Journal Articles Included**

There were 19 peer reviewed journal articles found that met the inclusion criteria. The articles were published between 2015 and 2022. Articles were published in several countries as there was no exclusion criteria based on where the studies took place. Two articles were from Sweden, two articles study took place in China, and one article in the United Kingdom. 14 of the articles were conducted in the United States. These articles included various ways of answering their research question(s). The articles included how social media affects mental, emotional, and physical health.

The majority of studies found cyberbullying, mental health illnesses, and suicide to be a negative effect of social media use. Mental health illnesses found in the articles included anxiety and depression. Although there were various negative effects of social media found in the journal articles, there were also positive effects. Positives of social media included quick communication and information available, a way to build relationships, medical online services available for mental health, and a relaxation outlet.

### **Benefits of Social Media**

#### ***Medical Online Services***

As mental health disorders are on the rise, it is important to figure out how to diagnose and manage the effects in order to help the patient. First, the patient must recognize they need to

see someone. Many people turn online to have their quick answer. There were 30% of youth with psychotic spectrum disorders (PSD) and non-psychotic mood disorders that discussed their symptoms on social media. This was done to find information and quickly educate themselves. NPMD patients wanted to know how to stop the symptoms and PSD wanted to know what was the cause of their symptoms (Birnbaum et al., 2017). Of the participants in the study, 74.3% were intrigued at the idea of getting help from professionals through social media (Birnbaum et al., 2017). This could potentially transform healthcare. There may be people who are scared to discuss topics of their possible diagnosis or symptoms in person. Some may view the internet as less threatening. There are however 50% of mental health clinicians that do not use social media for business purposes (Birnbaum et al., 2017). Social media and the internet provide for quick information. When it comes to mental health, the earlier the intervention, the better. People may realize they must see a professional by matching their symptoms to others. The internet allows for interactions and sharing information to others which may be beneficial to receive advice for a possible mental health diagnosis. It may also allow one to feel less alone. In a study about mental health services by Zhaomeng Niu et al., it resulted in mental health posts by professional sources that were seen as credible with positive comments increasing one's trust (Zhaomeng Niu et al., 2020). Establishing trusts in posts led to a positive influence on mental health posts and mental health services.

### ***Peer Interactions***

A major part of social media is the ability to communicate with others. At the age of adolescents, there is a want to fit in and make friends similar in age. It was even found that there was an increase in wellbeing if time was spent with friends in adult-unsupervised activities outside of school (Hartas, 2021). It could also be seen that adolescents with depression may

enjoy social media due the ability for more socialization in a controlled setting that is not face to face. Strong peer relationships and social skills are important when it comes to preventing the onset of mental health conditions (O'Reilly, 2020). Isolation is reduced through social media with a whirlwind of communication opportunities. In a study done with interviewing adolescents, friendship was a notable part of adolescent life (O'Reilly, 2020). This was especially apparent for children who were looked after, such as foster care. Adolescents in this position stated their device prevented mental ill health (O'Reilly, 2020).

### ***Social Media Allowing for Expression of Identity***

Social media allows people to feel their authentic selves. Adolescents are under the Erikson stage of development, Identity vs. Role Confusion. Adolescents may have difficulty figuring out who they are. Social media can thus be used as a way to express oneself or try to find one's identity. The watchers of social media viewing one find their identity and express themselves thoroughly can cause a freeing and empowering feelings for the one trying to find themselves (Shankleman et al., 2021). When positive feedback is received, it may also cause one to feel good about themselves and increase their levels in confidence (Shankleman et al., 2021). Social media profiles allow one to be creative and independent in what they want to post.

### ***Relaxation Outlet***

Adolescents and young adults see social media as an outlet for relaxation. Children who are looked after said social media was their time to destress (O'Reilly, 2020). An adolescent said they enjoy going on platforms such as Youtube because it relaxes them and another stated "social media was an active strategy to reduce stress and as a distraction from those aspects of life they constructed as negative" (O'Reilly, 2020). These real accounts from adolescents display how social media has a positive impact in allowing a space for relaxation efforts.

### ***Depression and Well-being Are Not Affected***

Although there are studies that result in depression as being a cause for social media, there were also articles that did not have this outcome. In a study by Noah Kreski et al., the results showed daily social media use did not equate to high depressive symptoms. There was also a recent study done that found little evidence of social media and the correlation to well-being (Ivie, 2020). Also, a study done in Sweden suggested social media may be an indicator for a mental health illness rather than a risk factor (Beeres, 2020). This is because there was no longitudinal evidence to support that social media caused mental health problems.

### **Negatives of Social Media**

#### ***Comparison of Self Through Social Media***

Social media causes a great amount of comparison among adolescents and young adults, which may cause a decline in mental health. An example of comparison may be the comparison of likes one may get on their post. Likes are seen as a sign of validation, recognition, and acceptance (Tang, 2022). Some youth may even have an idea of how many likes they “should” be receiving on their post and who “should” be liking their post (Tang, 2022). Likes can be seen as the approval of one’s post. This is why people may base their self worth on how many likes are received. Teenagers even delete their post if they feel that it did not receive enough likes (Tang, 2022) due to the insufficient social validation (Lee et al., 2020). A study by Jack Lipei Tang showed that if they did not receive the expected amount of likes on their post, there was a report of lower mental health levels (Tang, 2022). There was more of an emphasis on how many likes were received rather than who liked the post as it related to mental health. Mental health is affected through an increase in social anxiety and depression (Tang, 2022). The constant comparison is taken into account on social media. In a study done by Lee et al., (2020),

participants who were assigned to receive fewer likes felt more rejected, and felt more negatively towards themselves even though there was no negative feedback given such as bullying. If the participant had prior peer victimization experience, there was a greater feeling of rejection (Lee et al., 2020). There were findings that correlated with depression risk factors. This may lead to a depression over 8 months time (Lee et al., 2020).

### ***Depression, Well-being, and Suicide***

Depression is major topic of discussion due to its correlation to suicide which is the the second most common cause of death in the ages of 15 to 29 (Scott et.al., 2020). Social media is a factor to be looked at because if one has low perceived emotional support, they may have increased depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders. This is interesting because a study done in China revealed media organizations and mental health institutions blamed individuals for their depression instead of societal factors such as depression (Zhang et al., 2021) which is why there is not a great effort to help those in a depressional state. There was a finding that showed women with more than 600 contacts on social media had worse mental health than women with less than 600 contacts (Scott et.al.,2020). Mental health was also poorer for women who spent time on social media almost hourly than those who did not (Scott et.al., 2020). Another article also showed a slight positive correlation between adolescent social media use and depressive symptoms (Ivie, 2020). Also, frequent Facebook use was related to signs of psychological distress such as anxiety and depression (Marino, 2017). People may use Facebook continuously in order to internalize their own problems such as mental health problems, addiction, and more.

Well-being is also associated with depression and mental health issues. It has also been found that “heavy users of social media were 83% more likely to say they were unhappy”

(Twenge and Campbell, 2019). Well-being in both the United Kingdom and the United States were tested in order to find if there was a difference in social media use and outcome. Results were the same for the United Kingdom and the United States in that people that spent a greater amount of time on social media had lower well-being (Twenge and Campbell, 2019). In the United States there was at least one suicide risk factor and people were more than twice as unhappy when they used their electronic device five or more hours in a day in comparison to less than an hour a day (Twenge and Campbell, 2019). Although there is high suicide rates there is still weariness in the extent to which suicide may be discussed (Santana da Rosa et al., 2018). Depression and poor well-being may be viewed as a precursor to suicide. Therefore, prevention and management is of high gravity.

### ***Cyberbullying***

Cyberbullying can have a major impact on an adolescent or young adult through social media. Bullying has recently turned into cyberbullying with social media. An adolescent in an interview found that “cyberbullying plays a huge part in everyday life and that comes mainly from social media” (O’Reilly, 2020, p. 203). Hearing that it is a part of everyday life shows the constant cyberbullying that happens on social media. Cyberbullying is detrimental to one’s mental health as it can lead to depression, self-harm, and even suicide. An adolescent in the study with O’Reilly said their friend was trolled and people told them to kill themselves and they felt that they had to (O’Reilly, 2020). Fourteen year old adolescents reported through a questionnaire, who were bullied once a month were 3.5 times more likely to report negative feelings and low self-concept. Also, these same people were 2.5 times more likely to report low life satisfaction than those who weren’t bullied (Hartas, 2021). This represents the effect bullying has on adolescents. Additionally, there was a 68% decrease in the likelihood of self-harm in 14-

year-olds when bullying decreased (Hartas, 2021). Adolescents take into account what people say about them. Another study found “Cyberbullying experiences remained associated with suicidality when included with offline peer aggression experiences and perpetration” (Arnon et al., 2022, p. 1). Cyberbullying is a way to say whatever you want behind a screen. Thus, it happens more often and can cause a detrimental impact on the one being cyberbullied.

### ***Hyperactivity and Attention Deficit***

A risk factor for people with hyperactivity and attention deficits is social media. Social media allows for stimulation. Young adolescents who are more sensation seeking may perform more dangerous risks online such as sexting (Beeres et al., 2020).

### ***Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)***

A major developmental display in adolescents is wanting to fit in which is why there is a substantial fear of missing out. Social media feels like a connection they can share with others. If this connection disappears, there is a disconnect from those around them (O’Reilly, 2020). Adolescents also felt that adults did not understand what they are going through and how high pressure social media can be (O’Reilly, 2020). “Fear of missing out” is such a popular term, there is an abbreviation used, which is “FOMO.”

### ***Decline in Sleep***

Sleep is a factor in one’s mental health which may be interrupted by social media. Daytime sleepiness occurs when an insufficient amount of sleep was had the previous night. The link between daytime sleepiness was revealed that “excessive daytime sleepiness predicted future suicidal thoughts and attempts among adolescents” (Hamilton and Lee, 2021, p. 2). As social media use increases, so does daytime sleepiness (Hamilton and Lee, 2021). Social media may be seen as stimulating, making it difficult for adolescents to fall asleep. Adolescents who do

not receive phone use rules before bedtime had higher daytime sleepiness, a higher social media importance, and use than compared to those who did have parental bedtime rules (Hamilton and Lee, 2021).

### *The Effects of Social Media on Gender*

A factor that was not taken into account when creating research questions was gender, a factor that came up multiple times in the peer reviewed journal articles. A study was done in which it examined a 14-year old's mental health and wellbeing corresponding to various factors. It was found that girls had more negative feelings, lower self-esteem, lower life satisfaction, and were more likely to self-harm than boys (Hartas, 2021). It was reported that about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of girls and  $\frac{1}{3}$  of boys said they were not satisfied with their life, girls were four times more likely to report low self-concept. Also, girls were three times more likely to self-harm than boys (Hartas, 2021). This was also found in a study by Amber Barthorpe et al., resulting in an increased risk of self-harm and depression in females who were found with an increased amount of time on social media (Barthorpe, 2020). Another study also reported common mental disorders affecting more adolescent girls than boys (Silva et al., 2020). Boys also reported a higher self-esteem level than females (Barthorpe, 2020). Girls were also three times more likely to spend 5-7 more hours on social media compared to boys (Hartas, 2021). However, boys and girls both reported lower self-concept.

Another comparison made among adolescents and young adults on social media is in regards to one's physical self. It is shown and viewed on social media the "narrow perspective of femininity reduced to 'thin sexy bodies and behavior' while the power of the patriarchy remains unchecked" (Hartas, 2021). There is a body image that is to be acquired by women in order to feel "beautiful." This may be a difficult fate in adolescents as their bodies are changing and they

may believe they are ugly if they do not look the same as the supermodel in the magazine does. This mentality may lead to poor mental health and even self harm which was increased by 68% in teenagers under 17 between 2011 and 2013 (Hartas, 2021). Photoshopped images can damage one's self-esteem (O'Reilly, 2020). However, if one does not say a picture is photoshopped, it may be difficult to spot, leading to a decrease in self-esteem.

### ***Parental Limitations on Social Media Use***

Parental limitations were another topic that was not originally accounted for. Parents who knew where their children were all of the time equated to their children being 49% less likely to have negative moods and feelings, 66% less likely to have low life satisfaction, and 51% less likely to report low self-concept (Hartas, 2021). Knowing where the children were allowed for the child to be more independent. When children felt more closely emotionally to their parents, there was a 33% decrease in self-harm (Hartas, 2021).

## **Discussion**

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were answered through the literature review process. There were varying negatives and positives of social media on adolescents and young adults. The negatives of social media include social media comparison through likes and physicality, depression, suicide, low self-esteem, cyberbullying, hyperactivity and attention deficit, fear of missing out, and a decline in sleep. Although there were numerous negatives of social media, there were also benefits. The positives found include medical online services and a better acceptance of mental health illnesses, peer interactions and communication, and is seen as a relaxation outlet. There

was also an opposing side of the negatives that depression and well-being are not affected by social media.

The negative effects of social media do not outweigh the positive effects. This is because as the negative effects of social media are frightening and there are more of them, for some adolescents and young adults, social media is what saved them and got them the help they needed. What is important is how to deal with the negative impacts of social media and how to improve the use of social media to affect adolescents and young adults in a more positive light.

### **Limitations**

When going through articles, the main focus was on the concept of social media. However, it was difficult to find articles that included both adolescents and young adults. The age population this literature review was intended for included years 12 to 25-year olds. However, there were some studies that included ages a bit below or a bit above the intended age range. Thus, it was difficult to discuss both adolescents and young adults when reviewing articles that either had adolescents or young adults in their population. For most of the articles, mainly adolescents were mentioned, not young adults. Also, since social media is still on the newer side which meant there was not an infinite number of articles to be used, instead there was more of a limited option of articles than expected. This is also because articles needed to be peer reviewed and primary research articles.

A limitation found in the journal articles was the sample size and retrieval of data. There could always be improvement in the sample size. The more people involved in the study, the more data, which equates to finer results. Also, many of the articles had a self-report questionnaire type assessment in order to gather information. This may allow for self-report bias

if one feels uncomfortable or not ready to share their true thoughts in social media may have affected them.

### **Next Steps**

#### **Future Research**

There are indeed better and safer ways for adolescents and young adults to be on social media. Something that was of interest was that there were topics not mentioned in the assortment of articles looked at. For example, attention deficit and hyperactivity was in one out of 19 articles but it was thought that this would be a more common topic. Future research should be done to look further into this connection. Also, in the set of articles, eating disorders were not mentioned. It was thought that eating disorders would be a major part of the articles but that was not found. This could be due to various reasons and unknown factors. More research should be done to see if social media is a cause of eating disorders and which ones. Something of interest when analyzing the articles was the talk of gender. It was found in multiple articles that self harm, low self-esteem, and depressive symptoms was higher in biological females versus biological males. It would be interesting for this to be expanded in future research with a greater sample size.

#### **Nursing Practice**

Healthcare professionals such as nurses are seen as educators for their patients. It is important to educate the youth about responsible social media use as they are using it daily. Resources should also be provided when addressing negative experiences online. For example, resources for addressing cyberbullying may be provided for patients. Promoting healthy habits around screen time and social media use may be useful for adolescents and young adults to receive this information from someone other than their guardian. Another thing for nurses to

keep in mind is to be engaging in open and honest conversations about social media because nurses can help them make more informed decisions about their social media behavior and promote positive mental health outcomes. Teaching social media habits will help social media applications be used in a more positive and empowering way for adolescents and young adults. .

### **Education**

To help adolescents and young adults, guardians should be taught how to prevent social media malicion. This may be done in a pediatric doctor's office or even in schools. It is important to keep guardians informed about social media since they may not be all understanding of it. Social media has not been around for the greatest amount of time but to adolescents and young adults, it has been around for their whole lives. This is why factors of this thesis are essential when educating guardians. Not all guardians will know what is behind the curtain of social media. Thus, it is important to give both the positives and negatives of social media. This may even be done through a brochure. Not only guardians but also teachers and nurses should know what can be done to improve an adolescent's use of social media. This could be done for teachers through a class training on social media so they can better teach their students.

Something that could be done is set limits on the time you can spend on social media applications. There is also a "I don't like this" button on Instagram and Tiktok that may be pressed if there is a post that might be triggering or may affect an individual negatively. Additionally, there is a block button that may be used if someone is commenting negatively on your page. These are self-directed ways to protect oneself through social media. For an adolescent, it may be easier for a guardian to change their limits on time. However, it may be different for young adults because they may be more independent. This is why it is necessary to also teach people on social media. Resources about social media should be readily available for

students. Parents may teach their children about social media after possibly attending a PTA meeting about the impact social media may have on their child. Also, a video about social media including its positives, negatives, and how to have a more positive time on social media should be watched by students yearly, with content that is updating. Teachers may also do an activity about social media that can be more interactive. Nurses may get involved by being educated on this topic and allowing for more of an open mind when having patients that may be going through difficulties from social media. Guardians, teachers, nurses, and anyone available to adolescents and young adults should make it known that it is okay to ask for help regarding social media.

### **Policy**

Policies enacted may help the drawbacks of social media decrease and the benefits increase for adolescents and young adults. One policy that may be done include a greater use of moderators. An example of a moderator is on Discord where they can ban or suspend people who violate the rule of the server. They can even delete messages. This would be helpful to have across all social media platforms. It could be a job opportunity for someone to watch over pages and posts. There could also be something done that causes certain words to trigger a moderator to enter this person's page and see if it was for bullying. More policies against cyberbullying should also be enacted. There is not enough done when it comes to bullying, which is a factor in which people take their lives. Lives have been lost over cyberbullying in the past so it should be looked at with more attention. Another policy may include more safeguards put in place to deter people who are up to no good. There are people in the world who go after adolescents because it is a vulnerable population. That is why it is important to include greater safeguards that keep

these people away. These various policies should be put into place to better help adolescents and young adults on social media.

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