

Social Media Use, Depression and Quality of Life: A Brief Review

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Abstract

The internet use has been increasing from 87.4% in 2018 to 92.7% in 2022 and a large number of internet users in Malaysia utilize it for social networking purposes. The Covid-19 pandemic also plays a role in this increment. The use of excessive social media use has shown to affect social and occupational functioning, as well as psychological health. However, a positive association between social media use with positive mental health has been reported as well. Previous studies on the matters have been emphasizing on students rather than adults population in general. Nevertheless, given the large prevalence of depression in adults over the age of 18, and the fact that it is far more common among unemployed compared to students, it is essential that future research to focus on the adult population rather than just students. Therefore, this paper shows a brief review on the social media use with depression and quality of life, looking at the positive and negative sides of social media use. In addition, this paper also lays out the recommendations for the future study.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Network, Mental Health, Depression, Quality Of Life.

Introduction

Social media is an application that facilitates user interaction and communication. It is simply online spaces utilized for sharing and communicating with other people for a variety of purposes (A'mir et al., 2024). The use of internet has been increasing from 87.4% in 2018 to 92.7% in 2022 and a large proportion of internet users in Malaysia utilize it for social networking purposes (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2022). The frequency of social media use has been increasing since the Covid-19 pandemic (Meri et al., 2022) and the highest percentage of age population with the highest usage of social media is among age 25 to 29, followed by age 20 to 24 (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2022). Social media or also known as social networking applications include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook Messenger. Figure 1 and Figure 2 below shows the percentage of social networking applications most commonly used in Malaysia up to 2022. Although TikTok is a new social media platform, it is reported to have an astounding increase in popularity in 2022. The majority of TikTok users are aged 18

to 34, similar with Facebook and Twitter (now known as X). This data show that social media platform has caught the attention of young adults and this numbers are expected to be increasing.

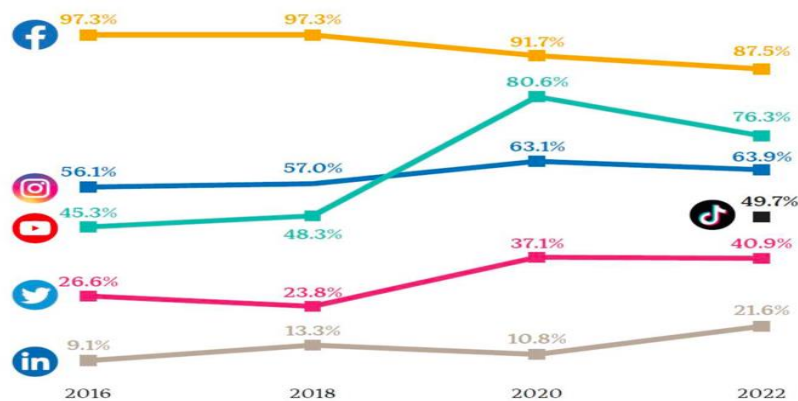


Figure 1: Social Networking Applications

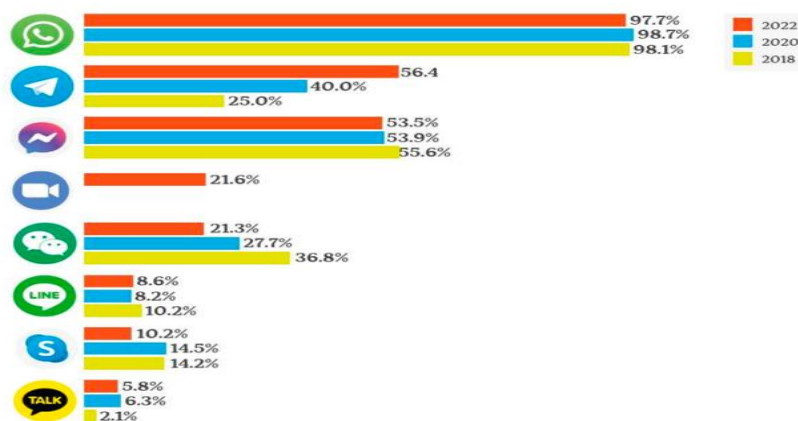


Figure 2: Social Networking Applications

The widespread use of social media has resulted in positive as well as negative impacts. The advantages range from self-expression and information accessibility to social connections with friends and family. On the other hand, the drawbacks include bullying and irrational social comparisons, as well as poor mental health (Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). More concerning issues are shown in previous studies where there is a positive correlation between social media addiction with depression among students even before Covid-19 hits (Gong et al., 2021; Haand & Shuwang, 2020). With the increasing social media use as reported by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (2022), it is not surprising to see the rise in depression or other mental health issues following Covid-19 pandemic. However, it is also crucial for us to extend the study beyond the students population.

Social Media And Pandemic

The world was taken aback in December 2019 by the Covid-19 pandemic that is caused by SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus which has a high infectious rate (Zhu et al., 2020). Following that, Covid-19 was discovered in Malaysia among visitors who had returned to the country after visiting previously infected countries (World Health Organization, 2020). On March 18 2020, the government of Malaysia imposed the Movement Control Order (MCO) due to the fast

rising infection rate as well as to break the infection chain (Kaur, 2020). Due to the MCO all over the country, the use of social network increases from 85.6% in 2018 to 93.3% in 2020, and again increases to 94.1% in 2022 (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2022). This demonstrates that social media usage has significantly increased among Malaysian during and after the pandemic.

Social media has been a double-edged sword in terms of information dissemination during the pandemic. It has served as a vital tool for spreading public health information, updates, and guidelines from health authorities such as the WHO and CDC. For instance, a study highlighted how platforms like Twitter and Facebook were used to communicate essential health information rapidly and widely, contributing to public awareness and compliance with health measures (Nazari et al., 2023). However, the spread of misinformation and conspiracy theories has also been a significant issue. False information about the virus's origin, treatment, and prevention has proliferated, leading to public confusion and mistrust. Research indicates that misinformation on social media can lead to detrimental health behaviors and vaccine hesitancy, emphasizing the need for robust fact-checking mechanisms and public education (Naslund et al., 2020).

The pandemic has brought about widespread psychological stress, and social media has both alleviated and exacerbated these issues. Excessive social media use and exposure to negative news have been linked to increased anxiety, depression, and stress. The constant influx of information and the pressure to stay updated can lead to information overload and emotional fatigue (Palmer, 2023). On other hand, social media has provided a platform for social support and community building, which is crucial during times of isolation. Studies have shown that engaging in online communities can help reduce feelings of loneliness and provide emotional support (Naslund et al., 2020; Nazari et al., 2023).

Social Media and Depression

The majority of people find social media platforms appealing since they provide virtual places for identity building (Zhao et al., 2008), information searching, entertainment, and places to connect socially whenever and wherever possible (Gong et al., 2021). As beneficial as social media use is for people and society, there are drawbacks as well, like the issue of addiction. Social media addiction describes a condition in which people are strongly motivated to log into social media and spend so much time and energy on it until it interferes with their social and occupational functioning, as well as affecting their psychological health which may lead to depression (Andreassen, 2015).

Many studies have found a positive relationship between social media and depression (Dhir et al., 2018; Gong et al., 2021; Haand & Shuwang, 2020; Subramaniam et al., 2024). On top of that, a recent meta-analysis by Yigiter et al (2024), indicated that individuals who use social media excessively are more likely to report symptoms of depression. Individuals may often compare themselves to others on social media, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and depression. Research has demonstrated that exposure to idealized images and lifestyles can diminish self-esteem and increase depressive symptoms, particularly among adolescents and young adults (Azem et al., 2023).

While the popular perception is that social media addiction and depression are positively correlated, other researchers in the same field came up with different conclusions. Jelenchick et al (2013), did not discover any proof correlating the usage of social networking site to clinical depression. Another study by Ridout and Campbell (2018) reported that young people agreed that mental health intervention using social networking site are highly beneficial, engaging, and supportive, and able to reduce depressive symptoms. However, looking at the timeframe where both studies were conducted which was before the pandemic and only involving the young people, we could not have conclude that previous results could be generalized into the present time. Besides, prevalence of social network use in Malaysia has been increasing since 2018 until 2022, which warrants further study on the relationship between social media use and psychological health.

Social Media and Quality Of Life

Quality of life can be described as how people view their place in the world in light of their cultural and moral beliefs. According to WHOQOL Group (1995), quality of life consists of physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment. The use of social media among younger adults aged 19 to 56 has shown to increase happiness compared to the older generation aged 68 to 74 years old (Tammisalo et al., 2024). However, happiness should not be the only measurement used to evaluate the quality of life, since it is a multidimensional construct (WHOQOL Group, 1995). Tammisalo et al (2024), also recommends that social media may make it easier to participate in society and obtain information, which help to a broader concept of well-being. Study by Bekalu et al. (2019) also found positive association among social media use with social well-being, positive mental health, and self-rated health. In supporting the positive impacts of social media use on quality of life, Von Lieres and Cauvery (2022), reported that quality of life significantly increases with the increase in social media use frequency, but only for those using it for gaining knowledge/information. This finding may give us some idea that some concern about the adverse effects of social media towards health may not always be true. Nevertheless, we could not deny some negative effects of social media towards the quality of life.

Other assumptions about whether quality of life improves with the use social media for chatting and making video calls with family and friends are not confirmed and the results are non-significant (Von Lieres & Cauvery, 2022). Study by Liu et al (2022), revealed that excessive use of social media can lead to addiction, characterized by a compulsive need to stay online, which can reduce physical activity and disrupt daily routines, negatively impacting physical health and quality of life. Besides, the presence of cyberbullying and online harassment can severely impact an individual's quality of life. Victims of cyberbullying often experience heightened stress, anxiety, and depression, which will negatively effect their overall well-being (Naslund et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Previous studies have shown a strong positive relationship between social media uses and addiction with depression (Ahmad et al., 2018; Gong et al., 2021; Haand & Shuwang, 2020; Subramaniam et al., 2024). However, those studies were placing too much focus on higher education students rather than adults population in general. It is understood that students have high prevalence of depression in (Moy & Ng, 2021; Wong et al., 2023), partly because it is the time when common mental health issues are at a peak and the increasing awareness

on mental health. But taking into account the high prevalence of depression among adults aged 18 above, and it is significantly higher among non-working population compared to students (Institute for Public Health; 2020), it is crucial for future study to be conducted among adults population as opposed to only emphasizing on students.

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