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## **The influence of social media among adolescents**

## Abstract

Social media platforms are part of everyone's life. Teenagers share these spaces with adults, which exposes them to a variety of content that can threaten their mental health. Therefore, this study explores whether social media is the main reason for depression in teenagers. The research uses a descriptive approach to explore the psychiatric and psychological problems teenagers face. The methodology used in this research was influenced by four domains: philosophical stances and assumptions, sociopolitical commitments, research practice guidelines, and inquiry logic. Key variables in the study include the teenager's personality, age, and sex. The study finds that social media (passive and active users) is the primary cause of depression in teenagers. The discussion is centered on depression and social comparison, nomophobia, and fear of missing out, confounding factors, and cyberbullying. This is achieved by combining data derived from different literature sources through a systematic review.

**Keywords:** social media, teenagers, addiction, depression, and anxiety.

## Innholdsfortegnelse

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
1.1. <i>Background</i> .....	5
1.2. <i>Objectives</i> .....	6
1.3. <i>Research question</i> .....	7
<b>2. Literature review</b> .....	<b>8</b>
2.1. <i>Social media and depression in adolescents</i> .....	8
2.2. <i>Person specific effects</i> .....	11
2.3. <i>Social media and effective well being</i> .....	12
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	<b>14</b>
3.1. <i>Research approach</i> .....	14
3.2. <i>Sampling and data collection</i> .....	14
3.3. <i>Search approach</i> .....	16
3.4. <i>Rationale</i> .....	19
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>4. Results</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>5. Discussion</b> .....	<b>24</b>
5.1. <i>Depression and social comparison</i> .....	25
5.2. <i>Nomophobia and fear of missing out</i> .....	26
5.3. <i>Confounding factors</i> .....	27
5.4. <i>Cyberbullying</i> .....	27
<b>6. Limitation and conclusion</b> .....	<b>28</b>
6.1. <i>Limitations</i> .....	28
6.2. <i>Conclusion</i> .....	28
<b>SOURCES</b> .....	<b>30</b>

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1. Introduction

Adolescence is considered the most important phase of life as it offers an opportunity for identity and personality development. During this time, the social relations and communication play a main role. Social media has been a significant influence, especially among teenagers. Nevertheless, social media has been marred by various ills, including addiction, bullying, discrimination, et cetera. This has caused a bad reputation, attracting interest from researchers, and hence the motivation behind this research. In the last decades the numbers of mental problems have increased among young people simultaneously with the use of social media. This study acknowledges that the increase in social media interaction has significantly blurred the boundary between real and virtual life. Problematic use of social media has exposed teenagers to addiction, drug and substance abuse, procrastination, poor time management, distractions, et cetera (Seabrook et al., 2016). This study holds that the advancement of social media and the internet has engulfed all spheres of society, creating a window into the teenager's world of peer culture, where social comparison and the fear of missing out have contributed to depression in teenagers (Seabrook et al., 2016)

This study evaluates whether social media is the main reason for depression among teenagers. Increasing evidence by international organizations including The World Health Organization (2017) report illustrated that 10-20% of adolescents and children experience considerable levels of mental health problems, including depression. Most mental health problems in adolescents are observed at 14 years. The Mental Health Foundation (2018) identifies depression and anxiety as the most prevalent mental health challenges facing adolescents. Depression has massive impacts on the development of adolescents, including increased dropouts, low educational achievement, impaired social relationships, mental health challenges, increased susceptibility to drug and substance abuse, and a high risk of suicide (Stanfield et al. 2016). The increased use of social media platforms has been attributed to the increased mental health challenges. Besides, social media use has become a routine for

adolescents. Additionally, their limited self-regulation measures have been identified as a high-risk factor for adolescents accessing explicit content.

The research finds that some frequent online expressions such as sexual experimentations, clique forming, and bullying have introduced various problems such as sexting, concurrent sleep deprivation, privacy issues, internet addiction, and cyberbullying. Therefore, most kinds of literature attribute the above factors to the increased levels of mental health problems among adolescents. Therefore, this study explores the nature of interactions on these social media platforms and the corresponding behaviors and habits such as a social media addiction, privacy issues, explicit content, cyberbullying, et cetera. Hence, this would use a systematic review and a descriptive approach to identify measures to improve social media platforms as reliable learning and communication tools.

Social media is defined as any internet-based network where users meet virtually and interact. The Pew Research Center (2015) established that at least 92% of adolescents are enrolled in various social media platforms. According to the research, adolescents aged 13-17 are the heaviest social media users in the United States. At least 58% of teenagers have unrestricted access to computers and a considerable 58% to mobile gadgets (Primack et al. 2022). At least three quarters of adolescents use a smartphone. All problematic behaviors related to the use of social media platforms will be referred to as addiction in this project. However, this research found that some activities by teenagers may be misconstrued as abnormal. For instance, this research found that teenagers who post images to their social media platforms (selfies) are often considered narcissistic. However, this study identifies such behavior as a norm. nevertheless, this study explores various kinds of literature to establish whether some of such behaviors are related to their social and personal development. However, this research interprets social media as a double-edged sword whose benefits and consequences are experienced in equal measure.

### 1.1. Background

This project discursively explores the impact of social media on teenagers. In particular, the study investigates the language and theme of the content shared in social media platforms and the corresponding behavioral influences caused by social media interactions. The research hypothesizes that the content shared in social media venues portrays human frailties. To add-in, the prevailing slang draws the contextual language the teenagers use in these social media

platforms. The “influence” is critically studied based on internet addiction, academic endeavor, language acquisition, communication preference, sleeping patterns, need for immediacy, and task performance. The research holds that social media and internet-related interactions influence teenager's behaviors. Nevertheless, the study advocates social media as a reliable learning and communication tool if the right interventions are employed in the contemporary trends.

Extant research has explored the relationship between social media platforms and users' mental health problems such as self-esteem, depression, loneliness, and stress. However, there is inadequate literature on the relationship between social media platforms and depression in teenagers. Therefore, this study considers social media an increasing phenomenon in contemporary society. The study establishes that the current literature does not establish a conclusive and definite cause for the increasing psychological morbidity in teenagers. The diagnostic efforts have been hampered by various educational initiatives to raise awareness of mental problems. Hence, the influence of a particular aspect in depression among teenagers has not been established. While educational efforts to address depression among the youth is a good approach, the primary cause of such problem remains unaddressed. This study solely focuses on teenagers. Nevertheless, extant kinds of literature (Seabrook et al., 2016; Marino et al., 2018; Baker & Algorta, 2016) have focused their investigations on heterogenous populations such as adults, adolescents, and children.

## 1.2. Objectives

- 1.To explore the influences of social media on teenagers. Specifically, the study will focus on the shared messages behavioral influence and content analysis.
- 2.To establish the relationship between social media and depression in teenagers.

### 1.3. Research question

The research finds to respond to the following questions.

1. What is the relationship between social media use and increased depression among adolescents?
2. What is the behavioral influence of social media use among teenagers in the last decade?

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2. Literature review

This part reviews the literature of the study. Therefore, it is organized into the key themes studied by the research. The part will also explore empirical studies on this subject. Most of the data have been obtained from electronic databases, including articles, online magazines, books, and journals. Furthermore, the literature review will include an overview of key terminologies related to teenager's use of social platforms and the prevalence of depression.

#### 2.1. Social media and depression in adolescents

Hoare et al. (2016) acknowledge that the relationship between social media and mental health problems such as depression is not straightforward. This implies that there are various contributory factors to the current problem. Royal Society for Public Health & Young Health Movement (2017) establishes that the use of social media platforms is a sedentary behavior. Therefore, it contributes to an increased risk for health problems. Sleep deprivation is identified as an important factor (Royal Society for Public Health & Young health Movement, 2017). A meta-analysis by Lenhart et al. (2015) reveals that sedentary behaviors can be attributed to a deleterious impact on teenagers' mental health. However, the authors acknowledge that the relationship between the two elements is still unclear. Individuals experiencing mental health problems are likely to be physically unproductive. Another factor identified by the Royal Society for Public Health & Young Health Movement (2017) includes multi-tasking. As defined by the organization, multi-tasking includes the use of multiple social media platforms. Therefore, the organization establishes that online multi-tasking may contribute to mental fatigue and depression. A study by Primack & Escobar Viera (2017) established that most social media interactions contribute to increased anxiety and stress levels, ultimately contributing to depression.

Dos Santos et al. (2018) hold that social media is indispensable for sharing information and learning. However, the wrong usage by teenagers has contributed to damaging effects. The researchers also acknowledge that the variety of content shared on social media is



professionally damaging to teenagers. There are extensive kinds of literature on social media. Other types of literature that this project will utilize include Orben (2020), Beyens et al. (2020). Lawrence & Melinda (2021). Orben et al. (2019), and Uttkarsha Bhosale (2021). These researchers explore various issues, including cyberbullying, anxiety, chronic stress, depression, root causes, and treatment.

Another factor identified includes social support (Keles et al., 2019). Keles et al. establish that teenagers can grow their social networks on social media platforms and create numerous avenues for interaction. Therefore, they are more likely to develop new friendships and trust. Therefore, teenagers who are unable to develop meaningful online relationships are likely to experience loneliness and feelings of social isolation. Therefore, Keles et al. (2019) suggest that online platforms can be helpful tools for teenagers who know how to utilize them. However, their study also suggests that teenagers who are not competent in developing social media friends can develop psychological distress, anxiety, and depression. Seabrook et al. (2016) establish an inverse correlation between depression in teenagers and positive social support on online platforms. Nevertheless, Keles et al. suggest that the quality of social media relationships and/or support is more significant to mental health outcomes as compared to quantity.

Keles et al. (2019) use the social comparison theory to explain the development of anxiety and depression in teenagers. As an illustration in their research, people tend to compare their achievements to their colleagues. Therefore, Keles et al. (19) establish that teenagers are affected by their friends or followers' opinions, viewpoints, and comments on social media platforms. Interestingly, the authors establish that negative comments and viewpoints on social media platforms are largely common among teenagers. Furthermore, teenagers with low levels of interaction on social media platforms such as Facebook were found by Keles et al. (2019) as having high susceptibility to developing negative emotions. Hence, downward social comparison among teenagers was identified as a key factor in depression. Additionally, Keles et al (2019) identified a correlation between depression and negative online interactions.

Similarly, Appel et al. (2016) demonstrated that most passive social media users (particularly Facebook in this case) developed envy due to social comparisons, contributing to depression. As described in Keles et al, (2019), adolescence is a critical developmental phase in an individual where one develops a social and personal identity. The authors demonstrate that

the development of teenagers in the current era is largely dependent on social media. Teenagers are therefore more than ever susceptible to peer pressure. The potential to avoid or evade the adverse impacts of social media is almost negligible. Therefore, teenagers represent the highest population at risk of developing mental health disorders.

El-Badawy & Hashem (2015) explore the effect of social media based on procrastination and performance in school. The study establishes that social media contributes to a distracting nature. Therefore, teenagers addicted to social media would take more time to complete a task than social media non-users. Hashem (2015) further holds that social media contributes to negative behavior toward schoolwork. In the study of the effect of social media platforms on teenagers, Orben (2020) states that the use of social media platforms is increasingly becoming intensive and pervasive. The author focuses on the trends in screen time, teenagers time on the internet and social media. Orben (2020) states that the amount of time on watching TV has drastically fallen, with digital devices such as tablets and smartphones increasingly becoming the mainstay of communication and interaction tools. Orben (2020) also suggests that the collision between screen time and study time has contributed to depression when teenagers record poor school performance. The systematic review identifies the trend as the main cause of increased exposure of teenagers to cyberbullying, risk-taking, and mental health problems that build up to depression.

El-Badawy & Hashem (2015) suggest that social media has both advantages and disadvantages as a tool for interaction and communication. As demonstrated in their research, schools are striving to establish measures that would help manage students' usage of social media platforms. The primary concern for the schools includes the social media platforms that enable the students to have clear identity and a network of friends. According to El-Badawy & Hashem (2015), identity the network of friends has been the main cause of mental health challenges for most students. Nevertheless, the authors suggest that the entertainment media part of social media can be instrumental in helping the youth counter depression. Furthermore, El Badawy & Hashem (2015) suggests that students can access social media platforms to improve their math skills (probability 46%), science skills (51%), writing skills (39%), and reading skills (46%). From the statistics presented by El-Badawy & Hashem (2015), it is clear that the probability of teenagers academically benefitting from social media platforms is below 50%. Hence, teenagers are more susceptible to detrimental effects of social media, including depression, as compared to its benefits. Only 34% of the students surveyed by El-Badawy & Hashem (2015) reported effective multitasking. This includes the

ability to commit to both social media interactions while maintaining one's academic performance levels. The researcher identifies procrastination as the beginning of all mental health challenges that befall students (Primack et al., 2022). When students cannot fulfill their daily chores or attend to their schoolwork, they are more likely to develop stress and depression.

Nonetheless, Siddiqui & Singh (2016) contend that social media has many advantages- However, they also argue that the level of exposure determines the degree of influence on a teenager. The researchers conclude that teenagers embrace certain behaviors and attitudes derived from their best characters in online videos.

## 2.2. Person specific effects

Orben et al. (2020) investigated the within-person relationship with social media platforms by utilizing indicators, including depression and life satisfaction. Beyens et al. (2020) identify that the results for most studies on the person-specific effects in relation to social media use are mixed. Orben et al. report a negative correlation between life satisfaction and social media use. Therefore, most teenagers are likely to develop negative emotions when using social media platforms. Boers et al. (2019) report that the use of social media is likely to cause depressive symptoms. Therefore, the within-person association with social media platforms and the internet is likely to contribute to the development of negative emotions and feelings. However, some researchers, such as Jensen et al. (2019) and Coyne et al. (2020). Do not find any significant relationship between the use of social media platforms and the development of depressive symptoms. Most of these studies reviewed utilized well-being indicators to evaluate the likelihood of developing depressive symptoms. However, the differences in the findings of these studies may have been caused by the heterogeneity in the effect of social media use from teenager to teenager. Therefore, social media can have highly negative effects on some teenagers or highly positive effects on others. The differential susceptibility of teenagers to different impacts of social media use has not been well studied (McCrae, Gettings, & Purssell, 2017).

Beyens et al. (2020) try to establish the importance of studying the relationship between social media use and the development of depressive symptoms between various subgroups. For example, comparing the impact of Facebook on girls versus boys. Therefore, such studies

would need to identify the more susceptible groups. For instance, considering age groups, gender, locations, et cetera. This would help achieve a more fine-grained finding on the relationship between social media use and the development of depressive symptoms.

However, the current findings cannot be invalidated based on heterogeneity claims (Li et al. 2017). In proposition to various media effect theories, this study acknowledges that teenagers have unique susceptibility to depression due to usage of social media platforms (Marino et al. 2018). For example, a teenager from a middle- or low-class family would have different exposure and susceptibility to depression when using social media platforms as compared to a teenager from a high-class family (Hoare et al. 2016). Furthermore, other factors contribute to the heterogeneity in social media impacts on teenagers, such as parental guidance and availability of social media educational awareness.

### 2.3. Social media and effective well being

In studying social media and effective well-being, Boers et al (2019) explore the relationship between teenagers' life satisfaction (cognitive well-being) and social media use. This includes studying how teenagers are satisfied with their lives after using social media platforms. Therefore, the studies effectively assess teenagers' emotions and moods. however, Beyens et al (2019) explore traits like the conceptualization of an individual to establish the average well-being of teenagers during various periods of social media use. As demonstrated by various kinds of literature, affective well-being includes the degree of intensity and frequency in which individuals (teenagers in this case) experience negative effects or positive affect. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the development of depressive symptoms in teenagers. Beyens et al (2019) identify as momentary affective well-being as a crucial element in understanding current emotions and feelings in teenagers. The authors establish that 14-15 years old teenagers are the most susceptible to fluctuations in emotions and feelings (Edition, 2015). Middle adolescents are very sensitive to responses or reactions from their peer on their social media posts compared to early and late teenagers (Bayens et al., 2019). Beyens et al. attribute this tendency to the complementary use of social media platforms by middle teenagers. Therefore, middle teenagers tend to compare themselves to their peers on these social media platforms (Banjanin et al.,2015). The most common social media platforms include Instagram, WhatsApp, facebook, Snapchat, and YouTube. The chat function of games was also identified by most social media platforms.

Verduyn et al. (2017) state that the impact of social media use is determined by passive social media use and active social media use. Passive social media use has been defined by Beyens et al. (2019) as the direct consumption of information from social media platforms without engaging in direct exchanges or communicating. Direct social media use includes indulgence in all social media activities that result in direct exchanges with peers or strangers. Adults were identified as passive social media users, interested in soliciting data or information on politics, economics, education, social life, lifestyles, et cetera. Youths were identified as moderate social media users (both active and passive social media users). However, teenagers (especially middle teenagers are identified as active social media users (Frison & Eggermont, 2016). Active social media usage was therefore identified as a major cause of depression. George (2019) uses the Co-construction theory in understanding how social media posts by teenagers (adolescents) reflect their life statuses. Therefore, teenagers who associate with self-harm materials are at a higher risk of participating in such behaviors offline.

Summer et al. (2019) states that teenagers who promote drug and substance abuse are highly susceptible to consuming drugs. However, George (2019) states that individuals (teenagers in this case) are not equally susceptible to the effects of social media use. However, the most vulnerable teenagers include those suffering from depression. George (2019) states that such teenagers would have stronger reactions to posts by their peers. If the posts by their peers promote suicidal or self-harm behaviors, then depressed teenagers are likely to embrace suicidal thoughts. Summer et al. (2019) provides a grounded descriptive study that explores the spread and prevalence of social media content that puts depressed teenagers at risk. The social cognitive theory suggests that the content consumed by teenagers from social media platforms is likely to affect their feelings and thoughts regarding various elements of life (Choukas – Bradley et a. 2019; Lee, Doody, & Hennessy, 2021).

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research approach

The central aim of this study is to identify the influence of social media among teenagers. Therefore, this research employs a descriptive approach and employs an integrative synthesis method. The study would attempt to analyze and summarize the findings of multiple kinds of literature. Uttkarsha Bhosale (2021) mentioned that this approach limits the reviewer's interpretation, reducing the likelihood of bias. The unit of analysis for this research includes peer-reviewed journals where social media is identified as a critical factor in influencing the livelihood of adolescents in society.

Nevertheless, the research scope was limited to studies conducted between 2015 and 2022 with the exception of the findings by American Psychiatric Association (2013). The assumption behind this cutoff is that research before 2015 was relatively scant, and social media platforms are under significant technological advancements. Hence, the nature and influence of social media remain relatively new to literature with the constant technological advancements. Most social media platforms were invented between 2004 and 2015, including Twitter (2006), YouTube (2005), Facebook (2004), Instagram (2010), facetime (2010), et cetera. Publications on social media began appearing in 2006. However, significant research was observed from 2012 onwards. Publications on the influence of social media platforms became common from 2015 onwards. As demonstrated, this study employs a systematic selection process and analyses peer-reviewed journals.

#### 3.2. Sampling and data collection

This research embraces a non-probability sampling approach. Since the qualitative approach for this study is descriptive, the sampling of the articles is generally purposive. The purposive sampling technique helped the research to find articles corresponding to the research objectives and aims. Furthermore, the sampling approach ensured that the sources identified

had adequate knowledge of the respective phenomena under scrutiny (The influence of social media among Teenagers). Purposive sampling helped the research narrow the study population. The sample size was not considered. Hence, the study settled on the number of findings deemed suitable for the research. Besides, predetermining the sample size could stifle the analytic process. Data saturation was attained after the sources were subjected to an inclusion criterion that followed various aspects, as demonstrated below. Only 90 sources were considered for the research.

The data collection process aimed at responding to the “who, what, why, and where” components of the research. Therefore, the research reviewed extensive kinds of literature to collect various forms of data. Two hundred fifty research sources were obtained involving the keywords such as social media, adolescents, and depression. The inclusion criteria followed the primary and secondary study objectives. The sources were required to be sufficiently specific. After data extraction and duplicate study selection, 30 sources were eliminated. After eliminating studies that were not aligned with the study objective, 147 sources remained. Twelve studies did not have clear link between their supporting evidence and recommendations, hence excluded. Conflicts of interest were also observed. The selection and review of the journals also included analyzing the authors credibility and the date of publication, the emphasis of the review, the field (subject) of study, and the papers or articles reviewed. After considering the above elements, only 90 sources were included in the study. Nevertheless, only 64 sources were finally included in the study after removing similar studies.

After data collection, the research primarily focused on thematic and content analysis. Some of the common characteristics of this research include sorting and transcribing the data finding; coding the data; adding reflections and comments on the findings, trying to identify similar themes, patterns, sequences, relationships, and phrases; using the themes and patterns in data collection; elaborating the data generalizations, and lastly linking these generalizations. This approach helped the research construct relevant theories on the relationship between social media and depression among adolescents.

### 3.3. Search approach

The study primarily derived most peers reviewed sources from Scopus. Test searches with defined candidate Key terms, filters, and words were narrowed to the most relevant results. Other approaches employed include selecting the name of the source titles or authors to appear in the results. Scopus allowed to add multiple search fields relevant to the research. The database also allowed the study to apply the preferred date range.

Additionally, the database has advanced options that enable to identify suggested codes and attain relevant examples required for the research. The study has integrated both general search and platform-specific search phrases. An example of a general search phrase includes “The influence of social media” whereas a platform-specific phrase can include “the influence of Facebook”. This has helped the research to explore variety of social media research. The keywords used in the research included social media, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Facetime. Every search phrase used in this study has been in at least more than five extant reviews.

Most of the peer-reviewed sources, such as Orben (2020) found in this study, have been grounded in a particular study field. Therefore, the research had four stages. The first stage includes the pre-research stage, where the researchers established and tested keywords in Scopus. The second stage included the search phase, where citations were imported into the search query. The third stage included data cleaning, where the researchers eliminated all duplicates. Also, articles without substantial content on the research subject were eliminated. For instance, the study selected articles exclusively focusing on the impact of social media on adolescent’s livelihood. As aforementioned, this project will employ a qualitative descriptive approach. This will enable the study to discover new points of view and conclusions from comparing already collected data. The study will draw statistics and articles from various government and official websites of international bodies such as the World Health Organization. The restrictions related to the Covid19 pandemic limit the research from direct interactions with the target respondents.

The key search phrase, including social media, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Facetime, were entered one at a time. Filters were used in every search to find a peer-reviewed journal where the respective research was available in the title of the journal. For example, the search for Twitter articles retrieved journals with the term “Twitter” in the title. Scopus was



preferred to other electronic databases because it could reach articles across a vast academic document indexed on the internet (Bell, 2019). However, the research also found a lot of articles unrelated to the purpose of the study.

Additionally, the study realized that Scopus also generated a sheer volume of results during the searches, prompting the researcher to take more time in selecting the relevant articles. As mentioned by Lee, Doody, & Hennessy (2021), identifying the articles that meet the inclusion criteria can be cumbersome. Due to the above limitation, the research embraced a modified approach to obtain a manageable volume of search results. This included the addition of more search words to restrict the results from Scopus. For example, including the terms “depression” and “adolescents” into the search key phrases helped limit the results volume. This approach helped yield a more targeted search. The restrictive search approach was preferred due its enhanced feasibility. However, it is not ideal as it significantly reduces the volume of articles available for the research (Lee, Doody, & Hennessy, 2021).

Eliminating duplicates was done after completing the searches and importing the citations. The research preferred a manual inspection of the search results. In identifying the duplicates, the researcher used the find tool in MS Word. The article title and the authors name were entered into the finding tool. The final articles selected for the research were then sorted in alphabetical order. The full texts and abstracts of the selected articles were then analyzed and reviewed to establish their eligibility for the research. Only articles meeting the criteria were selected for the research. The criteria include: the article used a defined research approach (a mixed approach, qualitative and quantitative approach), the study focused on the effect of social media on adolescents, the article is peer-reviewed, and the availability of a full-text English copy (Seixas, Smith, & Mitton, 2018).

The research employed a qualitative content analysis methodology. This methodology involves using qualitative data coding after establishing a coding frame. The research specifically used concept-driven coding to categorize the articles according to their research methodologies. Data-driven coding helped the research compare the data metrics to the rest of the derived data. A multiphase approach was essential in identifying, categorizing, and analyzing various articles contents and cross-checking the articles results for consistency. The following represents the projects content analysis of language and theme.

<b>Content</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Theme</b>
1. Trending videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Literal</li> <li>- Informative</li> <li>- Internet slang</li> <li>- Complete sentences</li> <li>- Foreign words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wuest for knowledge/wisdom</li> <li>- Fashion-forward fancy</li> </ul>
2. Pranks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Profanity</li> <li>- Literal</li> <li>- Descriptive</li> <li>- Internet slang</li> <li>- Complete or short sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implicit trust</li> <li>- Juvenile shenanigan</li> </ul>
3. Memes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internet slang</li> <li>- Figurative</li> <li>- Phrases or short words</li> <li>- Descriptive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chronic procrastination</li> <li>- Abstracted admiration</li> <li>- Physical imperfection</li> </ul>

From content analysis demonstrated above, there were categories for social media, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and FaceTime. A combination of the categories such as Facebook and YouTube were also included. The analysis also had category for “other social

media” for results related to other social media platforms not included in the key search phrases.

The above research approach exposes the research to several limitations. First, scope restrictions related to kinds of literature, media platforms, publications (example, specific date frame), language, and the application of restrictive search phrases influence the volume of search results. While restricting the volume of the findings can enhance the research feasibility, some useful kinds of literature are left out (Lee, Doody, & Hennessy, 2021). Hence, this potentially impacts the scope of coverage for this research.

### 3.4. Rationale

As mentioned by (Robinson & Smith 2021). The selection of a suitable approach in responding to a research question is one of the critical parts of research. The methodology used in this research was influenced by four domains: philosophical stances and assumptions, sociopolitical commitments, research practice guidelines, and inquiry logic. The domains were keenly observed to help the research establish a reliable methodology. The first domain, philosophical stances and assumptions refer to the research’s philosophical assumptions that fit the methodology. For example, this research demonstrates a defined theoretical justification for perceiving the research subject’s way of seeing, analyzing, and interpreting. Social and political commitments include the justification and delineation of this research in regard to its place in society. Demonstrably, this research is guided by value-based rationales. For example, this research acknowledges that social media has had a significant influence on adolescent members of society. Hence, the research selects documents featuring social science theories on social media in society. The third domain, research practice guidelines, helps this research answer the “how” part of the research (Robinson & Smith, 2021). This includes the sampling schemes employed in finding the most relevant articles. Hence, the study established a clear approach for data collection and design. Lastly, the inquiry logic guided this study in establishing its findings in a defensible approach.

The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach to help understand the relationship between social media and depression among adolescents in society. Notably, the research tries to respond to the question, “Is social media the main reason for depression among teenagers today?” therefore, the utilization of the descriptive qualitative approach accorded

this study inherent flexibility and simplicity in identifying and analyzing various contexts related to the research subject. Furthermore, the approach enabled the research to establish the key philosophical perspectives related to the subject of study. Most of the examples obtained in the research are real-world scenarios. Hence, the research descriptiveness helped researchers gain practical insights into the study subject.

The descriptive qualitative approach helped the study to generate extensive data related to the “who, where, what, why” aspects of the research. Based on a philosophical perspective, the methodology is aligned with critical and constructionism theories that employ naturalistic and interpretative approaches. Such philosophical perspectives are instrumental in understanding how reality works within various dynamic contexts. For instance, the perspectives have been instrumental in understanding “depression” as a critical subject in social media use, as demonstrated by extant literature (Beyens et al., 2020; Seixas, Smith & Milton, 2018; Orben, Dienlin, & Przybylski, 2019). In the following qualitative descriptive method, the research primarily focused on exploring the human experiences in social media (which is a unique context in this case). However, the research approach was keen to mitigate the interpretation or transformation of the data findings beyond the presentation by the authors. The study has been pragmatic in navigating various aspects of the research subject. Therefore, the investigations were not limited to a particular view. Instead, the research explored various concepts to be studied for decision-making on the articles selected for the research (Siedlecki, 2020). Hence, the approaches used in various parts of the research ensure that the research question is adequately answered. Notably, the data collected remained close to the research subject for the entirety of investigation. The research strived for flexibility by embracing various elements from other qualitative approaches such as ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory to achieve this feat.

Therefore, the qualitative descriptive approach has been crucial in understanding the relationship between social media (phenomenon) and depression amongst adolescents (human nature). Hence, this approach has helped achieve a clear position in relation to the studied phenomenon. This is believed to have added credibility to the research findings. Despite social media's positive sides, like the ability to communicate with others worldwide, raise awareness of important issues, show your creativity to the world, et cetera (Robinson, 2021). The subject discussed in this project will include the negative sides of social media. To answer the research question, issues such as bullying, a negative body image, envy, and self-absorption will be discussed. The research will be qualitative. Therefore, it will be

phenomenological. Scopus has been utilized to acquire data. The researcher will explore how social media is represented in literature through thematic analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4. Results

The primary finding is that social media is the primary cause of depression in teenagers. While there are other causative agents such as harassment by colleagues in school, financial distress by their families, et cetera, social media plays a center stage in the information they consume every day. This research finds a positive correlation between social media use and depression among teenagers. In other terms, the higher the level of social media use, the higher the susceptibility of a teenager to the development of depressive symptoms. However, the study finds that most studies acknowledge that the susceptibility of teenagers to depression differs considerably based on various factors such as the level of exposure, availability of social media, education, parental guidance, class, et cetera.

Various variables are instrumental in investigating this subject, including the teenager's personality, age, and sex (Bada & Clayton, 2020). However, the kinds of literature explored provided very little evidence on the impact of such variables on teenagers' susceptibility to depression. Most literature works suggest using a group differential approach to explore the relationship between social media use and depression (Ownby & Routon, 2020). Having an insight into the differences in the susceptibility of various teenage groups to depression is crucial to understanding the impact of social media on teenagers. However, most kinds of the literature suggest that the impact of social media use on teenagers may mask subtle individual differences (Dupuis & Deonandan, 2018; Bell, 2019). This justifies why some studies have found little or no relationship between social media use and depression in teenagers.

As suggested by Appel et al. (2016) and Keles et al. (2019), this study explores the impact of passive and active social media use among teenagers. The study found that adults (passive users) have a low susceptibility to depression. Youths were found to have an average susceptibility to the development of depressive symptoms when compared to adults and teenagers. Such findings suggest that the frequency and intensity of social media use

significantly influences the development of depressive symptoms in teenagers. Most of the social media platforms identified in the review included Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp (Boeschoten et al., 2020; Siebers et al., 2021). The frequency and intensity of social media where also found to influence teenagers' affective well-being. The study specifically found that high use of social media platforms caused envy among teenagers. However, teenagers who used social media platforms mainly for entertainment were found to have a low susceptibility to depression. Nevertheless, this study establishes that teenagers mostly seek positive content from social media platforms, such as memes and humorous posts (Mcdade, 2019; Cain, 2018; McCosker, 2018; Balci & Baloglu, 2018). However, when they stumble on posts that promote negative emotions or feelings, they are likely to develop depressive symptoms.

Additionally, this study establishes that the differences in the findings in the sources reviewed suggest that every individual use of a particular social media platform results in a particular impact on the respective teenager. Therefore, the impact of social media platforms on teenagers is found to differ from one individual to another (Pouwels et al., 2021). The nature of social media platforms also influences the outcomes of different teenagers. For instance, WhatsApp was found to promote privacy more as compared to Facebook and Instagram. Therefore, most teenagers would have one-to-one interaction with their peers and private communications, which may contribute to depressive symptoms. Instagram is a public platform where celebrities and their followers post (mostly depicting their individual lives) (Wiederhold, 2018; Demir & Kutly, 2016Æ). Therefore, teenagers may acquire some mood-defining habits from social media (Primack et al., 2022). The differences in the nature of these social media platforms were found to influence the susceptibility of teenagers to depression. The diversity of the social media platforms contributed to varied findings on the literature sources on the relationship between their use and depression, such as inspiration and envy (American Psychiatric Association & American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Most literature reports that teenagers use one of their favorite social media platforms in either a passive or active way. WhatsApp and Instagram were the most commonly studied social media platforms in the literature reviewed. Active use of WhatsApp and Instagram was more common in most literary works than passive use among teenagers. Half of the literature sources reported. Positive correlation between the duration of social media use (passive or active) and the development of depressive symptoms in adolescents (Edition, 2015). The overall use of social media platforms was associated with the development of mild to high

depressive symptoms. The research found that most teenagers spent their time-sharing things, posting, or sending messages on either of these three social media platforms. The impact of using WhatsApp or Instagram depends on the privacy element (Appel, Gerlach, & Crusius, 2016; Malak et al., 2021). WhatsApp use was found to have more impact on teenagers than Instagram. Instagram was largely found to promote entertainment in teenagers as compared to WhatsApp. Therefore, the former contributed to the individual's well-being more than the latter. Envy and comparison to social figures were identified as the main traits for teenagers who develop depressive symptoms (American Psychiatric Association & American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The difference between passive and active use of WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook was not found in the kinds of literature reviews.

Therefore, this project develops four other domains crucial in understanding the relationship between social media use and depression, including addiction, investment, activity, and time spent. The four domains are pivotal in the exposure of a teenager to depressive symptoms. Vernon et al. (2017) established a positive correlation between the number of identity-related information by teenagers and the development of depressive symptoms. Therefore, the level of social media investment by a teenager influenced their level of susceptibility to depression. Vernon's (2017) longitudinal study found a positive correlation between investment in social media platforms and depressed mood. However, the study found sleep disruption as a mediating variable in this case. This study also found that both passive and active Facebook users were associated with high levels of depressed moods (Frison & Eggerton, 2016).

Furthermore, a review by Barry et al (2017) helped establish that teenagers social media activities, including frequency of checking social media posts, number of social media accounts, et cetera, influenced the development of depressive moods and anxieties. The number of selfies by a teenager was identified as a factor in studying depression in teenagers (Benjamin et al. 2015). The time spent on social media platforms directly impacts teenagers' mental health statuses. A review by Yan et al (2017) also found a positive relationship between the time spent on social media platforms and the development of depressive and anxiety symptoms. Therefore, this study finds that addiction, investment, time spent, and activity are key factors influencing depression in teenagers due to social media use (Forbush et al., 2019; Cataldo et al., 2021.)

This study also identifies some confounding factors pivotal in the relationship between depression in adolescents and social media use. Some of these confounding factors include

gender, age, and education levels of teenagers. Some of the literature sources used in the study of such confounding factors include Barry et al. (2017), Vernon et al. (2017), and Frison & Eggermont (2016). This study finds a positive correlation between social media use by teenagers and depression from the review.

Therefore, the finding is based on the multiple variables used by extant kinds of literature to examine the relationship between social media use and depression, including social connectedness, addiction, self-esteem, stress, anxiety, loneliness, sleep deprivation, and confounding factors such as age, sex, and education level (Benjamin et al. 2015; Barry et al 2017; Beyens et al 2019; Verduyn et al. 2017; George, 2019; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016; El Badawy & Hashem, 2015; Orben et al., 2020; Coyne et al., 2020; Jensen et al., 2019; Dos santos et al., 2018). In the content analysis of the social media platforms, including Whatsapp, Facebook, and Instagram, the findings are based on trending videos, pranks, and memes. Of the studies reviewed, only George (2019) promotes the benefits of social media in adolescents. A considerable volume of extant literature establishes a positive relationship between social media use and depression among teenagers.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5. Discussion

Social media provides its users with a variety of possible activities. Every user is characterized by a particular pattern of use. For example, scrolling through photos or videos and commenting, liking, or following trends. This study finds a positive correlation between



social media use and depression. The study also finds limited evidence on the benefits of social media. This discussion identifies the critical aspects of the research and their significance to the study and extant literature.

### 5.1. Depression and social comparison

Depression is a prevalent disorder. However, its prevalence amongst active social media users is considerably higher than among passive social media users. Social comparison is the mechanism that significantly influences the development of a teenager's identity.

Consequently, social comparison can contribute to both negative or positive self-appraisals, affecting how they perceive themselves and the interpretation of their quality of life. As demonstrated by Keles et al. (2019), social comparison can mediate the development of depressive symptoms such as feelings of worthlessness and inferiority. Social comparison is closely associated with an individual's self-esteem. However, more often than boys, girls may experience problems in their intrinsic features of identity development. Additionally, online parasocial relationships can contribute to a distorted perception of self (Baker & Algorta, 2016). Besides, most information on social media is selective and filtered by evaluating the users' profiles.

In the research investigating the relationship between social media use and the development of depressive symptoms in teenagers, there is increasing evidence linking depression in teenagers and social media use. Facebook, Instagram, and Whatsapp are commonly studied social media platforms (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Online peer victimization is a short-term consequence that has been found to contribute to the development of depressive symptoms. However, depressive symptoms due to the use of social media by teenagers can be established through various factors such as an increased tendency to compare with peers, worry about the inability to acquire fashion, et cetera (MPh, 2015). Interestingly, teenagers with higher depressive symptoms prefer to express their emotions and feelings through social media posts, interactions, or comments. Besides, depression in teenagers is manifested through social withdrawal. Therefore, social media platforms provide a window through which teenagers interact with peers with like mindsets or perceptions of their situation.

Anxiety symptoms often overlap with depressive symptoms. In environments such as social media platforms where the relational component is grater, teenagers can develop anxiety from online peer comparison. Targeted social media features such as seeking online support

and approval through comments and likes can elicit or promote non-adaptive behaviors such as excessive rumination and social comparisons. This contributes to the development of depressive-related traits, including socially prescribed perfectionism. Facebook is used to pass times time or avoid boredom. This suggests that depression and anxiety-related symptoms are secondary products of problematic or wrong use of social media platforms. Instagram is characterized by the presentation of visual content. Therefore, this can elicit physical comparison to personalities with huge social media followings (Hoare et al. 2016). Social anxiety can be defined as the enduring preoccupation (by a teenager, in this case) of being judged negatively by friends or “followers” due to social circumstances or social performance. The constant worrying about disapproval is stronger during the teenage. Interestingly, teenagers’ approach social media platforms with the desire to have their activities or images likes or recognized as interesting (Marino et al., 2018). The teenagers would also wish to avoid being ridiculed or judged negatively. The recognition of such mechanisms can contribute to anxiety-related or depressive symptoms.

## 5.2. Nomophobia and fear of missing out

The development of depressive and anxiety-related symptoms has been associated with the fear of missing out. Teenagers are identified as curious group and hence afraid of missing updates. However, various social needs can contribute to this phenomenon, such as the need for social affiliation, the desire to be popular, association with popular social figure such as a celebrity, et cetera. Perceiving social media as a source of gratification can contribute to developing depressive and anxiety-related symptoms in teenagers. Such attractive risk can lead to an onset of addiction, aggravating depressive symptoms (Kolbeck et al. 2019).

The combination of cognitive and behavioral patterns in teenagers due to social media use is largely mediated by nomophobia. This contributes to body dissatisfaction, eating and feeding disorders, and disoriented organizations like social comparison. Posting self-photos (selfies) is the most common habit in teenagers use of social media platforms. Hence, the discrepancy between the “socially approved self-image” and the own actual figure has been identified as a cause of depression, especially in females. Hence, teenagers develop a fear of missing out on “the recommended/trending/likable” outlook (McCrae, Gettings, & Pursell, 2017; Morgan et

al. 2017). Teenagers who develop a negative self-outlook can develop depressive and anxiety-related symptoms.

### 5.3. Confounding factors

Some confounding factors include abuse and addiction, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. Social media platforms are characterized by a higher prevalence of drug-related posts. Exposure to posts that glorify alcoholic habits can contribute to alcohol cravings in teenagers. Furthermore, exposure to celebrities or friends' pictures places a teenager at a higher risk of starting drinking or drug abuse. Parental control or inclusion in social interactions and posts without undermining the privacy and autonomy of the teenagers can be instrumental in mitigating substance abuse posts targeted toward teenagers. Amid the psychological problems facing teenagers related to social media use, self-harm has been identified as the greatest concern. Teenagers who develop depression and anxiety portray a continuum of behaviors lying between suicidal ideation and non-suicidal self-injury (Primack & Escobar-Viera, 2017)

### 5.4. Cyberbullying

Non-adaptive use of social media by others can also contribute to suicidal ideation and non-suicidal self-injury. As aforementioned, these are confounding factors for depression.

Cyberbullying includes the intentional use of social media platforms to promote hostile and deliberate behaviors against a person or group of individuals who cannot defend themselves. Cyberbullying is highly prevalent on Snapchat (31%), Facebook (37%), and Instagram (42%) (Primack et al 2022). Cyberbullying has been associated with various psychological consequences, including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and non-suicidal self-injury.

However, cyberbullying is observed alongside a set of adverse outcomes, including sleep deprivation. Besides, content shared on social media platforms spreads quickly.

Various social media companies have established safety measure to counter cyberbullying, including Twitter Trust and Safety Council (Twitter), Youtube Community Guidelines

(Youtube), Instagram Privacy and Safety Center (Instagram), and Facebook Safety Page (Facebook). While the efficacy has not been adequately studied, they represent good measures to counter the problem. However, social media platforms have established hotlines, websites, and information on any malpractices in social media platforms. The statistics from these social media platforms can further study the trends in problematic social media use.

## CHAPTER SIX

### 6. Limitation and conclusion

#### 6.1. Limitations

This study has employed a systematic review in investigating the effect of social media use by teenagers on depression. However, the heterogeneity of the research subject requires a more in-depth study of various variables, including gender, education, race, class, et cetera. This research finds that every teenager has a unique susceptibility to the impacts of passive or active social media use. Furthermore, social media platforms have unique features, hence having a differentiated effect on teenagers. A study of the effects of a particular social media platform such as Instagram can help develop more understanding of the relationship between social media use and depression. Besides, the study is limited to a qualitative approach, contributing to a lack of statistical representation. Hence, this research is perspective-based, thus highly susceptible to bias.

#### 6.2. Conclusion

Social media platforms have demonstrated their capacity to change livelihoods. The availability of leisure and unlimited interactions with families, friends, and strangers has

created a vast social environment characterized by social problems, just like the offline one. Problematic use of social media has exposed teenagers to addiction, drug and substance abuse, procrastination, poor time management, distractions, et cetera. Hence, the advancement of social media and the internet has engulfed all spheres of society, creating a window into the teenager's world of peer culture, where social comparison and the fear of missing out have contributed to depression in teenagers. Depression has massive impacts on the development of adolescents, including increased dropouts, low educational achievement, impaired social relationships, mental health challenges, increased susceptibility to drug and substance abuse, and a high risk of suicide. The research finds a positive correlation between social media use and depression among teenagers. Passive and active social media use among teenagers has been found to have a massive influence on the development of depressive symptoms. Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp were found to have the most significant impact on teenagers. Envy and comparison to social figures were identified as the main traits for teenagers who develop depressive symptoms.

The mental health community should identify depression as a distinct problem from other problematic online activities. This would be pivotal in finding reliable solutions. Patterns of social media use can be utilized in clinical analysis to provide more user-based interventions. Further research on psychological fields can also be instrumental in developing interventions for the various forms of interactions on social media platforms. Additionally, education and awareness creation in schools can be instrumental in helping teenagers navigate the challenges posed by social media use.

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