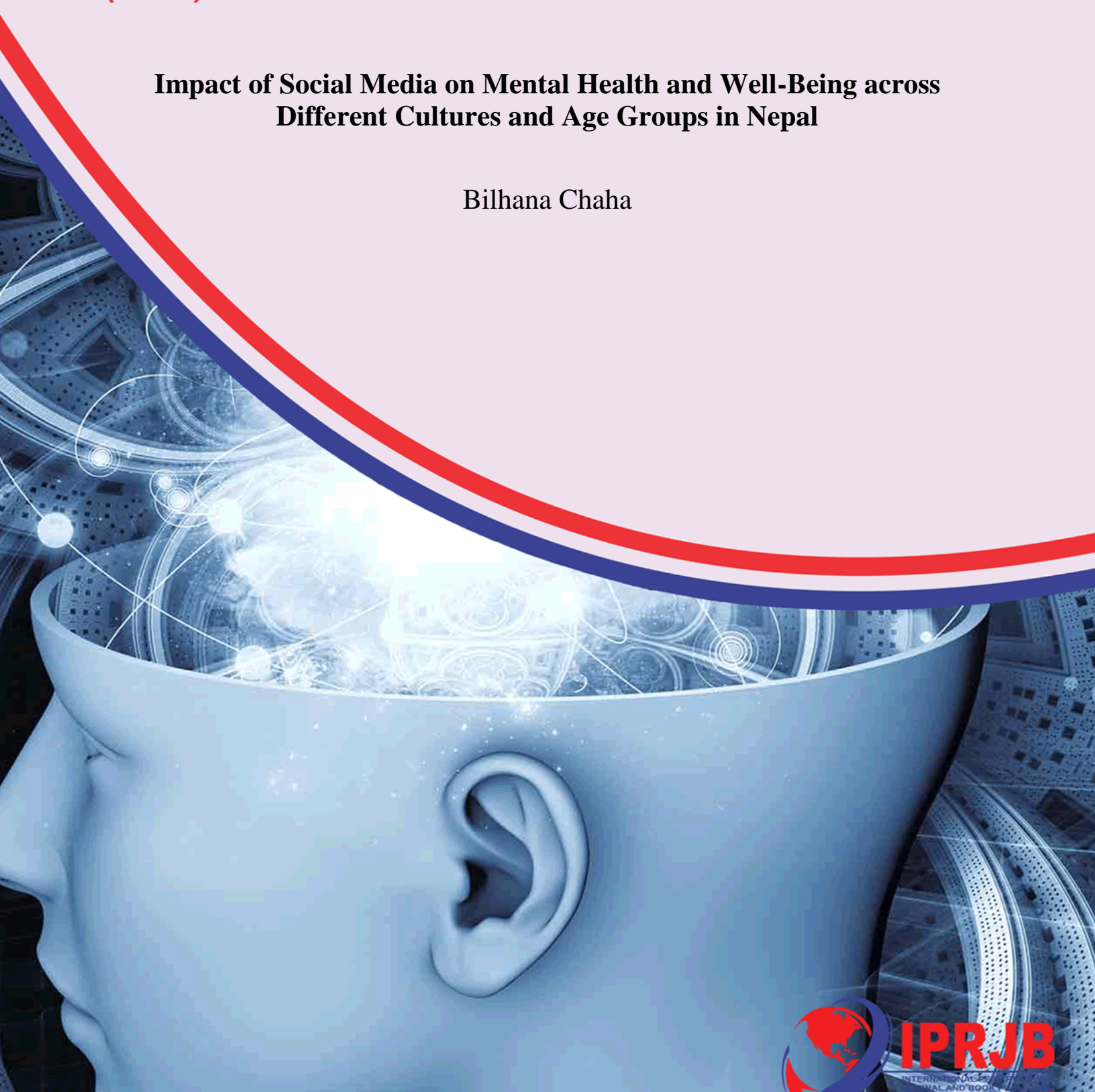


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**Impact of Social Media on Mental Health and Well-Being across
Different Cultures and Age Groups in Nepal**

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to investigate impact of social media on mental health and well-being across different cultures and age groups

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Social media's impact on mental health and well-being varies across cultures and age groups. While it can foster social connection, information sharing, and creativity, it also contributes to negative outcomes such as social comparison, cyberbullying, and sleep disruption. Cultural norms influence how individuals engage with social media, and age-related factors shape susceptibility to its effects, highlighting the need for nuanced approaches to promoting digital well-being.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social comparison theory, cultural learning theory & uses and gratifications theory may be used to anchor future studies on impact of social media on mental health and well-being across different cultures and age groups. Develop culturally sensitive interventions and digital literacy programs that equip individuals with the skills to navigate social media platforms in ways that promote mental well-being. Advocate for evidence-based policies that protect vulnerable populations from the harmful effects of social media while promoting digital inclusion and empowerment.

Keywords: *Social Media, Mental Health, Well-Being Different Cultures, Age Groups*

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health and well-being outcomes are important indicators of the quality of life and social development of a population. They can be measured through self-report surveys, clinical assessments, or standardized questionnaires that assess various aspects of mental health, such as depression, anxiety, emotional and behavioural difficulties, posttraumatic stress, and suicidal behaviour. One example of a developed economy that has collected data on mental health and well-being outcomes is the United States. According to the 2022 release of health statistics compiled by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2022), the United States had a prevalence of 5.5% for major depressive disorder, 3.1% for bipolar disorder, and 18.1% for any anxiety disorder among adults in 2018. The same report also showed that the United States had a suicide rate of 13.9 per 100,000 populations in 2019, which was higher than the OECD average of 11.3. Another example of a developed economy that has collected data on mental health and well-being outcomes is Japan. According to the OECD report, Japan had a prevalence of 2.2% for major depressive disorder, 0.7% for bipolar disorder, and 5.6% for any anxiety disorder among adults in 2018. The same report also showed that Japan had a suicide rate of 16.1 per 100,000 populations in 2019, which was lower than the previous year but still higher than the OECD average.

One example of a developing economy that has collected data on mental health and well-being outcomes is India. According to a systematic review by Patel (2016), India had a pooled prevalence of 4.5% for depressive disorders, 0.9% for bipolar disorder, and 6% for any anxiety disorder among adults in community-based studies. The same review also showed that India had a suicide rate of 21.1 per 100,000 populations in 2012, which was higher than the global average of 11.4. Another example of a developing economy that has collected data on mental health and well-being outcomes is Brazil. According to a systematic review by Kieling (2017), Brazil had a pooled prevalence of 7.9% for depressive disorders, 1% for bipolar disorder, and 9.3% for any anxiety disorder among adults in community-based studies. The same review also showed that Brazil had a suicide rate of 5.8 per 100,000 populations in 2012, which was lower than the global average but higher than the Latin American average of 4.7.

In developed economies like the USA, mental health and well-being outcomes have been extensively studied through various means, including self-report surveys and clinical assessments. For example, according to a study published in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (Smith et al., 2017), self-reported symptoms of depression have shown a significant upward trend among young adults in the United States over the past decade. Additionally, clinical assessments have revealed a concerning rise in anxiety disorders among adolescents, with prevalence rates nearly doubling from 2005 to 2014 (Merikangas, 2010).

Similarly, in Japan, mental health outcomes have garnered attention. Self-report surveys conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare have indicated a growing awareness and concern regarding mental health issues, particularly among younger generations (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2018). Clinical assessments have also highlighted an increase in mood disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder, though cultural stigma surrounding mental illness may lead to underreporting (Wada et al., 2019). These trends underscore the importance of ongoing research and intervention efforts to address mental health challenges in developed economies.

In developing economies, such as those in parts of South America and Southeast Asia, mental health outcomes present a complex picture influenced by various socio-economic factors. For instance, in Brazil, self-report surveys conducted by the Ministry of Health have indicated a rising prevalence of common mental disorders, such as anxiety and depression, particularly among urban populations (Lopes et al., 2016). Clinical assessments reveal disparities in access to mental health services, with rural areas often lacking adequate resources and trained professionals (Kawachi, 2017). Similarly, in India, self-report surveys have shown a significant burden of mental health issues, exacerbated by factors such as poverty, rapid urbanization, and limited access to quality healthcare (Gururaj, 2016). Clinical assessments highlight the need for culturally sensitive interventions to address the diverse mental health needs in developing economies.

In developing economies, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, mental health outcomes are influenced by a combination of socio-economic factors, cultural beliefs, and limited access to mental health services. For example, in Nigeria, self-report surveys have revealed a high prevalence of common mental disorders, including depression and anxiety, particularly among women and those living in poverty (Gureje, 2006). Clinical assessments have highlighted the impact of traumatic events, such as conflict and displacement, on the mental well-being of individuals, contributing to increased rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological conditions (Odenwald, 2014).

Bangladesh, mental health outcomes are also a concern. Self-report surveys conducted among different population groups have indicated a significant burden of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Rahman, 2020). Limited access to mental health services, especially in rural areas, exacerbates these challenges, with studies highlighting the need for community-based interventions and increased mental health literacy (Sarkar et al., 2019). Clinical assessments reveal a substantial treatment gap, with a large proportion of individuals with mental disorders remaining untreated due to various barriers, including stigma and lack of resources (Alam, 2018).

In countries like Nepal, mental health outcomes are influenced by socio-cultural factors and ongoing socio-political instability. Self-report surveys have shown elevated levels of psychological distress, particularly among marginalized populations such as women, ethnic minorities, and those affected by conflict (Shrestha, 2020). Clinical assessments underscore the need for trauma-informed care and psychosocial support to address the mental health consequences of widespread poverty, natural disasters, and social unrest (Subba, 2017). These findings highlight the complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and political factors shaping mental health outcomes in developing economies beyond sub-Saharan Africa.

Similarly, in sub-Saharan African countries like Ethiopia, self-report surveys have indicated significant mental health challenges, with studies reporting high levels of psychological distress and limited awareness and utilization of mental health services (Fekadu, 2016). Clinical assessments underscore the need for community-based interventions and capacity-building efforts to address the shortage of mental health professionals and infrastructure in rural areas (Habtamu, 2017). These findings emphasize the importance of culturally adapted approaches and sustainable investments in mental health systems to improve outcomes in developing regions.

One example of a sub-Saharan economy that has collected data on mental health and well-being outcomes is South Africa. According to a systematic review by Jörns-Presentati (2021), South Africa had a pooled prevalence of 13% for depression, 8% for anxiety disorders, and 13% for posttraumatic stress disorder among adolescents in community-based studies. The same review also showed that South Africa had a suicide rate of 11 per 100,000 populations in 2016, which was similar to the global average but higher than the African average of 9.8. Another example of a sub-Saharan economy that has collected data on mental health and well-being outcomes is Kenya. According to a systematic review by Mutiso (2018), Kenya had a pooled prevalence of 12% for depression, 10% for anxiety disorders, and 16% for posttraumatic stress disorder among adolescents in community-based studies. The same review also showed that Kenya had a suicide rate of 5 per 100,000 populations in 2015, which was lower than the global average but higher than the East African average of 3.8.

Social media usage has become ubiquitous in modern society, with platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok capturing the attention of billions worldwide. The frequency and duration of social media usage vary among individuals, with some engaging in brief, intermittent interactions and others spending hours scrolling through feeds daily. Research suggests that excessive social media use, particularly on platforms emphasizing image-focused content like Instagram, is associated with negative mental health outcomes such as increased feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Faelens, 2020). Furthermore, the addictive nature of social media, coupled with the constant comparison to others' curated lives, can contribute to decreased self-esteem and heightened stress levels (Kircaburun, 2019). These findings underscore the importance of monitoring social media usage patterns and promoting digital well-being to mitigate adverse mental health effects.

However, not all social media usage is detrimental to mental health. Moderate engagement with platforms like Facebook, where users often connect with friends and family, can have positive effects on well-being by fostering social support and a sense of belonging (Shakya & Christakis, 2017). Additionally, platforms like Twitter, when used for information sharing and community engagement, may enhance mental well-being by facilitating meaningful connections and providing opportunities for self-expression (Nesi, 2018). Understanding the nuanced relationship between social media usage patterns and mental health outcomes is crucial for developing targeted interventions and promoting healthy digital habits in today's interconnected world.

Statement of Problem

The ubiquitous presence of social media platforms in contemporary society has raised concerns regarding their potential impact on mental health and well-being across diverse cultural contexts and age groups. While extensive research has explored the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes, there is a need for a comprehensive understanding of how these effects vary across different cultures and age demographics. The complex interplay between social media engagement and psychological well-being, with findings indicating both positive and negative associations depending on cultural norms, individual characteristics, and usage patterns (Gao, 2021). However, gaps remain in the literature regarding the specific mechanisms through which social media influences mental health outcomes, as well as the moderating role of cultural factors and age-related differences. This research seeks to address these gaps by investigating the

impact of social media on mental health and well-being across various cultural contexts and age groups.

Theoretical Framework

Social Comparison Theory

Developed by social psychologist Leon Festinger in 1954, Social Comparison Theory posits that individuals determine their own social and personal worth based on how they stack up against others. In the context of social media and mental health, this theory suggests that individuals engage in upward or downward social comparisons with others on social media platforms, which can influence their self-esteem and emotional well-being (Festinger, 1954). For instance, constant exposure to idealized representations of others' lives on social media may lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, particularly among vulnerable populations such as adolescents and young adults.

Cultural Learning Theory

Originating from the work of sociologist Lev Vygotsky, Cultural Learning Theory emphasizes the role of culture in shaping individuals' cognition, behavior, and social interactions. This theory posits that individuals acquire knowledge, beliefs, and values through socialization within their cultural context, influencing their perceptions and responses to various stimuli, including social media (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of studying the impact of social media on mental health across different cultures, Cultural Learning Theory highlights the importance of considering cultural norms, values, and practices that may shape individuals' attitudes towards social media usage and its effects on well-being.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Developed by communication scholars Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in the 1970s, Uses and Gratifications Theory focuses on understanding why and how individuals use media to fulfill specific needs and desires. This theory suggests that people actively select and consume media content to satisfy various psychological and social needs, such as entertainment, information, companionship, and identity expression (Katz, 1973). In the context of social media and mental health research, this theory helps explore how different age groups and cultural backgrounds use social media platforms for gratification-seeking purposes and how these usage patterns relate to their mental health outcomes.

Empirical Review

Shakya and Christakis (2017) aimed to discern the association between Facebook use and compromised well-being over time. Their study, spanning a substantial duration, sought to elucidate how alterations in Facebook use patterns correlated with changes in individuals' perceived well-being. Employing rigorous longitudinal analysis techniques, the researchers found compelling evidence indicating that heightened Facebook use corresponded to a notable decline in various mental health indicators such as self-reported life satisfaction and happiness over time. This longitudinal approach not only provides valuable insights into the cumulative effects of social media engagement on mental well-being but also underscores the critical importance of individuals critically evaluating their social media habits to safeguard their psychological health in the long term.

Kross (2013) delved into the intricate relationship between Facebook use and well-being among young adults. Utilizing a combination of self-report measures and innovative experience sampling methodology, the researchers endeavored to unravel how different types of Facebook use influenced individuals' subjective well-being. Their findings revealed nuanced insights; while passive Facebook use, characterized by mindlessly scrolling through the news feed without active engagement, was associated with diminished well-being, active Facebook use, such as direct communication and meaningful engagement with friends, was conversely linked to heightened well-being. This multifaceted analysis underscores the necessity of considering not only the frequency and duration of social media use but also the quality of interactions in determining its impact on mental health among young adults.

Verduyn (2017) focused on the emotional ramifications of passive Facebook use among university students. Utilizing sophisticated experience sampling methodology, the researchers sought to elucidate how passive Facebook use predicted changes in affective well-being, including feelings of happiness and life satisfaction, over an extended period. Their findings unveiled a concerning trend: passive Facebook use was significantly associated with declines in affective well-being, particularly among individuals with lower baseline levels of well-being. This study sheds invaluable light on the potentially detrimental effects of mindless social media consumption on mental health and underscores the imperative of personalized interventions tailored to address specific patterns of social media use and individual differences in susceptibility to its effects.

Primack (2017) focused on young adults in the United States, with the aim of elucidating the intricate association between social media engagement and depression over an extended period. Employing a robust longitudinal design, the study meticulously tracked participants' social media usage patterns and mental health indicators over time. Their findings revealed a concerning trend wherein heightened social media use corresponded to a notable increase in the risk of depression among participants. This longitudinal approach provided valuable insights into the cumulative effects of social media engagement on mental well-being, emphasizing the critical importance of individuals critically evaluating their social media habits to safeguard their psychological health in the long term. The study's outcomes underscored the necessity of raising awareness about excessive social media consumption and advocating for the adoption of healthier online habits among young adults to mitigate the potential negative impact on mental health.

Wang (2018) examined the correlation between social media activity and feelings of loneliness among adolescents in both China and the United States. Utilizing comprehensive survey data encompassing diverse cultural settings, this seminal study sought to unravel the nuanced relationship between social media engagement and experiences of loneliness. While the study uncovered a noteworthy positive relationship between social media engagement and feelings of loneliness across both cultural contexts, its findings revealed that this association manifested with greater intensity among Chinese adolescents, suggesting potential cultural variations in the impact of social media on mental well-being. The study advocated for the development and implementation of culturally sensitive interventions tailored to address social media-induced feelings of loneliness, stressing the significance of considering cultural nuances in mental health initiatives to effectively address the challenges posed by social media usage among adolescents.

Turel and Serenko (2020) undertook a qualitative inquiry into the role of cultural values in shaping individuals' perceptions and responses to social media addiction, drawing comparisons between

experiences in Canada and China. Through in-depth qualitative interviews, the study unearthed distinct cultural perspectives on social media addiction, with Chinese participants expressing heightened concerns about its potential disruption of familial harmony. These findings underscored the critical importance of integrating cultural values into intervention strategies aimed at mitigating social media addiction, advocating for culturally nuanced approaches to address this emerging mental health challenge. Through these empirical endeavors, a deeper understanding of the multifaceted interplay between social media usage and mental health outcomes across diverse cultural and age groups emerges, paving the way for targeted interventions and evidence-informed policy initiatives to foster digital well-being and safeguard mental health on a global scale.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Research Gap: While studies such as those conducted by Shakyra and Christakis (2017) and Kross (2013) have explored the association between social media use and mental health outcomes, there remains a conceptual gap in understanding the mechanisms underlying this relationship. Although these studies have provided valuable insights into the impact of social media engagement on well-being, there is a need for research that delves deeper into the underlying psychological processes and mechanisms through which social media use influences mental health outcomes. By elucidating the specific pathways and mechanisms involved, future research can offer a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between social media use and mental well-being.

Contextual Research Gap: While studies like those by Primack (2017) and Wang (2018) have examined the impact of social media on mental health across different cultural contexts, there remains a contextual gap in understanding how cultural factors shape individuals' responses to social media use. While these studies have highlighted cultural variations in the relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes, there is a need for research that examines the underlying cultural norms, values, and social contexts that influence individuals' perceptions and experiences of social media use. By taking into account these contextual factors, future research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural differences influence the impact of social media on mental health.

Geographical Research Gap: Although studies like those by Turel and Serenko (2020) have examined social media use and mental health outcomes in different geographical regions, there remains a geographical gap in understanding how social media use impacts mental health in diverse global contexts. While these studies have provided valuable insights into the cultural factors that shape individuals' responses to social media use, there is a need for research that

examines the impact of social media on mental health outcomes in a broader range of geographical contexts, including low- and middle-income countries. By exploring the impact of social media on mental health in diverse global contexts, future research can provide insights that are relevant to addressing mental health challenges on a global scale.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The impact of social media on mental health and well-being across different cultures and age groups is complex and multifaceted. While social media platforms offer opportunities for connection, self-expression, and information dissemination, they also present risks to psychological well-being, including increased feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Importantly, these effects vary across cultural contexts and age demographics, with factors such as cultural norms, individual values, and developmental stages influencing how individuals perceive and respond to social media interactions.

Despite these challenges, there is growing recognition of the need for holistic approaches to address the impact of social media on mental health. Interventions should consider cultural nuances and age-specific needs to effectively promote digital well-being. Additionally, efforts to enhance digital literacy and encourage mindful social media use can empower individuals to navigate online spaces in ways that support their mental health and overall well-being.

Moving forward, interdisciplinary research collaborations and community partnerships will be essential for advancing our understanding of the complex relationship between social media and mental health across diverse populations. By leveraging insights from psychology, sociology, public health, and cultural studies, we can develop evidence-based interventions that promote positive online experiences and foster resilience in the face of digital challenges. Ultimately, fostering a balanced and healthy relationship with social media is essential for cultivating thriving communities and nurturing individual well-being in an increasingly connected world.

Recommendation

Theory

Enhance theoretical frameworks to better understand the nuanced relationship between social media and mental health across diverse populations. This includes integrating cultural and developmental perspectives into existing theories such as Social Comparison Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory. Researchers should explore how cultural values and age-related factors shape individuals' motivations for social media use and their susceptibility to mental health issues. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking changes in social media usage patterns and mental health outcomes over time can further refine theoretical models.

Practice

Develop culturally sensitive interventions and digital literacy programs that equip individuals with the skills to navigate social media platforms in ways that promote mental well-being. Practitioners should collaborate with community organizations and mental health professionals to design interventions that account for cultural differences and age-specific needs. These programs can include workshops on digital citizenship, mindfulness training, and strategies for managing online

stressors. Moreover, mental health practitioners should integrate discussions about social media use into clinical assessments and treatment plans, providing personalized support to clients struggling with digital-related issues.

Policy

Advocate for evidence-based policies that protect vulnerable populations from the harmful effects of social media while promoting digital inclusion and empowerment. Policymakers should work with researchers, educators, and technology companies to develop guidelines for responsible social media use that consider cultural diversity and age-related vulnerabilities. This may include age-appropriate restrictions on advertising targeting children and adolescents, as well as regulations addressing harmful content and online harassment. Additionally, policymakers should invest in initiatives that improve access to mental health resources, particularly in underserved communities where digital divides may exacerbate existing disparities in mental health care.

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