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**Association between Social Media Usage and Depression among  
Teenagers in Unites States of America**

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Depression among Teenagers in Unites States of  
America**



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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** The study sought to investigate association between social media usage and depression among teenagers in Unites States of America.

**Materials and Methods:** The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

**Results:** The study found that there has been a rapid growth in social media among teenagers in the states. University students are the highest users of internet in the country. Consuming social media at a higher rate was found to bring about negative consequences on the individuals. These include problematic social relationships, poor academic performance and psychological disturbance. Based on the findings, it was concluded that there was need to identify and help the affected teenagers exercise moderation and self-control when using social media platform in order for them to achieve their lifetime goals.

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and The Albert Ellis' Cognitive Theory of Depression may be used to anchor future studies. There is need to organize seminars and conferences in the colleges with students to highlight the possible dangers of excessive social media usage and the measures that can be taken to mitigate the problem. There is need to regulate the nonacademic content that can be accessed through college computer labs like pornography and other non-educational material.

**Keywords:** *Association, Social Media Usage, Depression Teenagers, Unites States, America*

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## INTRODUCTION

Social media is ever-present in modern society and has changed the way people communicate with those around them. Over the last two decades, social media has expanded exponentially, now comprising a variety of websites and applications used by people of all ages around the world. Social media has been defined as web-based communication platforms with three distinct features, in which the platform allows users to create unique profiles and content to share with other users, creates a visible network connection between users that can be navigated by other users, and provides users with a space to broadcast content, consume information, and interact with others in a continuous stream of information (Dobrea, 2016). Several applications for example Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat satisfy these criteria.

Social media is used frequently by individuals of all ages; as of March 2018, 68% of adults in the United States had a Facebook account, 75% of whom reported using Facebook daily (Smith & Anderson, 2018). As one of the original social media sites, Facebook has received the most attention in the research literature and continues to be the most widely used social media platform internationally (Smith & Anderson, 2018); however, other social media sites, such as Instagram and Snapchat, have become increasingly popular, especially among younger generations. Seventy-eight percent of young adults (ages 18–24) report using Snapchat and 71% report using Instagram, most of whom use the sites daily or several times per day (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Social media can be used for a variety of reasons, including to keep in touch with friends, to connect with others with shared hobbies or interests, to follow celebrities, to find romantic partners, to seek out new information, to express one's thoughts, feelings, and identity, and to share good and bad news (UHLS, 2017).

Young adults are the generation that most frequently uses social media; 88% of 18-to-29-year-olds indicate that they use social media in some capacity (Smith, 2015; Smith & Anderson, 2018). Younger generations use multiple social media platforms several times a day, spending a large portion of their time online. Thus, it is critical to explore *how* and *why* people use social media, especially young adults who use the sites most frequently. An important question is whether this shift to communication through social media has negatively affected the subjective well-being of younger generations (Verduyn, Ybarra, Resibois, Jonides, & Kross, 2022).

Social media is described as electronic communication like the websites used to social network and microblog via which individuals establish virtual communities to pass information, ideas and personal messages among other things (Smith & Anderson 2018). Social media is used globally, which makes the world a small village. The global digital overview as of January 31, 2019, indicates that individuals using social media globally had reached 3.5 billion at the start of the year 2019. The review further established that the number of new social media users grew with 288 million people in the last 12 months, making the worldwide social media use access rise to 45% (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2019). Statistics indicate that in the United States (U.S.) digital consumers spend about 2.5 hours socializing online and chatting every day, with 69% of the adult population using more than one social media site.

Social media networking sites usage (SMNSU) has substantially increased since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ostic et al., 2021). SMNSU facilitates interaction between users through its various platforms by allowing individuals to share opinions, images, information, and content

(Doganer & Akoglu, 2020). Similarly, SMNSU creates other opportunities such as communication, searching for information, and entertainment. Undergraduate students, in particular, spend considerable time on social media networking sites (Twenge & Campbell, 2019). However, some studies suggest that SMNSU has led to increases in emotional issues such as loneliness, social anxiety, and depression (Escobar-Viera et al., 2018). As such, various scholars have raised concerns about the possible undesirable influence of SMNSU on mental health (Kircaburun et al., 2020; Ostic et al., 2021).

Social media usage can sometimes amuse individuals by providing social interaction and relationships with others. However, several studies have indicated that excessive of social media might lead to social media addiction, in part through creating a fear of missing out of something for example text messages, friend's updates, and social events on social networking sites (Leong et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020). It has been discussed that extreme use of social media is linked with social isolation, anxiety, loneliness, and depression (Reer et al., 2019; Van den Eijnden et al., 2016). In addition, excessive SMNSU distracts the attention of individuals even during face-to-face communication processes (Choi & Noh, 2020).

Correspondingly, loneliness and social anxiety are the main associated factors of depression among students during this critical time, with both contributing to an increase in the threat of depression (Loades et al., 2020). The painful emotional state of loneliness is created through a lack of social interaction (Lisitsa et al., 2020) and it has been recently suggested that changes in society resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and anxiety may increase rates of depression (Racine et al., 2020; Sequeira et al., 2021). However, it has been suggested that social engagement among individuals, even virtually, can be a critical factor in reducing depression arising from isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sequeira et al., 2021).

These contradictory perspectives require exploration and therefore, in the present study, we studied how loneliness and social anxiety may influence depression. SMNSU may contribute to creating a sense of belonging with other related people and this may help in reducing feelings of loneliness (Twenge & Campbell, 2019). Similarly, SMNSU may further help by allowing individuals to interact with relatives, friends, and family, as well as distant or formal acquaintances such as colleagues and coworkers, and even strangers (Ostic et al., 2021). Social media networking sites are also considered important for people of all ages in exploiting their sense of connectedness in various social settings (Chen & Li, 2017). However, fears remain about the possible undesirable influences of SMNSU, including increased loneliness, social anxiety, and depression. A number of studies have determined a positive role of social media in our daily routine life (Chen & Li, 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2019), with beneficial impacts on the development of our reputation, identity, and (Barbosa et al., 2020; Ostic et al., 2021). Furthermore, social media is also helpful in sharing ideas, building and maintaining relationships, social interaction, and social support (Carlson et al., 2016). Many other studies have suggested that social media device usage effects on emotional well-being depend on screen time, the type of networking sites, and the nature of activities engaged in by users (Barbosa et al., 2020; David et al., 2018).

The data show that an average American internet user owns 7.1 social media accounts. Additionally, 88% of the American social media users are young people 18 to 29 years, while 51% of the youth aged 18 to 24 years stated that it is tough for them to survive minus the utilization social media. These data indicate that there is rampant use of social media amongst youngsters



and especially those in the universities and colleges according to the age brackets. Hussain (2012), in his study involving Islamia University students in Pakistan, established that out of the 600 students who took part in the investigation, 90% of them utilized social media diversely. Exchanging academic materials and connecting with friends topped the list for the uses. Dahlstrom, Grunwald, de Boor, and Vockley (2011), argued that Facebook was the social media site majorly utilized by undergraduates. The research engaged three thousand undergraduates and discovered that 90% of the respondents used Facebook. Facebook recognition among the undergraduates was additionally established in a 2015 survey in the U.K which revealed that 85% of undergraduates utilized the social media apps (Parr, 2015).

Physical negative effects are rooted in excessive smartphone use (Chu, 2019). However, addictive smartphone behavior may resemble addiction as regards immoderate use (Nyagah, 2019), impulse control issues, and adverse effects, without being a disorder with serious consequences on physical and psychological health (Sutherland, 2018). For example, smartphone texting is associated with a more immobile and tensor spinal position in contrast to desktop computer typing. Persistent neck flexion throughout smartphone represents a determinant of neck discomfort and modification of neck muscle performance. Shoulder taping diminishes neck pain without impacting neck muscle performance and tiredness during smartphone texting (Chawinga, 2017).

Excessive smartphone use also generates poor mental health outcomes, e.g. depressive symptoms and sleep issues (Sampaio, 2021). Concerning smartphone and social platform adoption, positive results are associated with social capital and involvement, while detrimental consequences develop out of excessive use, negative correlations, and the anxiety of being perpetually active. As an illustration, not employing smartphones in the bedroom boosts the standard of living, and risk of smartphone overuse diminishes when such devices are kept outside the bedroom. Sleeping without smartphones enhances sleep quality, relationships, motivation, and good physical condition (Barnajee, 2021) PSU can bring about mobility issues in the wrists, fingers and neck, in addition to intrusion into sleep habits. For teenagers, the quality of sleep impacts growth, emotional constancy, and learning abilities, and thus the handling of PSU is decisive for adequate sleeping habits.

Higher sensation seeking persons may be particularly at risk of PSU. Smartphones may enable individuals to be involved in a range of undertakings (Brown, 2021) and assist them in alleviating leisure boredom. More significant levels of leisure boredom and sensation seeking (Lv,2022) have a positive link with a higher degree of smartphone overuse. Smartphones may be addictive, and their users aiming to attain various purposes can become extremely dependent on them. Individuals having stronger and more straightforward grounds to attempt to accomplish objectives on their smartphones (Gultom,2022) are more predisposed to have a more significant level of smartphone overuse (Pineda,2022).Excessive smartphone use may lead to addictive smartphone behavior that may result in physical and psychological negative effects, impacting, among others, neck muscle performance and sleep quality.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Statistics indicate that up to 3.5 billion persons globally engage in online networking (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2019). Majority of this number of people using social media are young people. Literature revealed that particularly, young people in the universities have high levels of social

media use (Hussain, 2012; Dahlstrom et al., 2011; Parr, 2015; Matara, 2017). Additionally, literature review discovered moderate to high levels of depression among university students across the globe (Wahed & Hassan, 2017; Kulsoom & Afsar, 2015; Peltzer et al., 2013; Othieno et al., 2014). The investigator intended to measure if the high levels of social media utilization was related to high levels of depression in the United States and therefore reviewed literature in this regard.

Literature showed that researchers have greatly investigated the social networks consumption against many variables. Studies reviewed illustrated that several surveys have been conducted on the connection between social networks utilization and depression among university students and the studies found a significant relationship (Jelenchick et al., 2013; Woods & Scott, 2016; Lin et al., 2016). The review of literature additionally showed that though the aspect of social media use among young people has greatly been investigated in the African region, Kenya included, it has been investigated against other variables and not depression. The studies found in African region investigated the social network usage among college learners against variable like; sexuality and alcohol use (Kaufman et al., 2014), time wastage and productivity (Njoroge, 2013) and impacts in study (Chris 2015), among other factors. However the study did not focus on United States of America presenting a geographical gap that our study intends to fill.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

Our study will benefit from the theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) established by Icek Ajzen (1985) and the Albert Ellis' Cognitive Theory of Depression (1950).

### **Theory of Planned Behavior**

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) This model was established by Icek Ajzen (1985) as a basic approach to envisage and describe behaviors in diverse ways. TPB is used to figure out persons' intent to act in a particular manner. The approach was meant to illustrate all deeds over which individuals have the capability to exercise self-control (Ajzen, 1985). The primary construct of this approach is behavioral intent; which are determined by the perception about the possibility that an act produces a wanted outcome and the subjective valuation of the dangers and benefits of the behavior outcome. The TPB has been utilized effectively to determine and describe diverse range of health actions and intents such as smoking, drinking, acquiring healthcare, breastfeeding, and drug abuse, among others. The TPB argues that to successfully achieve an action, both intentions and ability to execute the behavior are necessary. The TPB is comprised of six 14 components; attitudes, behavioral intention, subjective norms, Perceived behavioral control, Perceived power, and social norms (Ajzen, 1991).

Attitudes refer to an extent at which an individual has a positive or negative appraisal of the behavior desired. Behavioral intent is the inspiration that fuels the desired action. The subjective norms question whether other people or society approve or disagree with one's conduct. Social norms refer to the accustomed ways of conduct in a sect of persons or in the bigger society (Ajzen, 1991). Perceived power is the expected existence of aspects that can may enable or hinder an action. And lastly, the perceived behavioral control is person's notion of the easiness or strain in acting a desired behavior. This model is suitable for the current investigation because it majors on three main factors for a behavior to happen, the intention, the motivation and the expected outcome. Social networking among university students is an intentional. The student's intent to

sue the social media is motivated by the desire among the student to get connected with their peers while staying informed of the latest happenings. Further, the use of social media by students in universities is also fueled by the desired or expected outcome. This theory forms the basis for understanding why many students are currently using social media platforms. The expected outcome to influence behavior can explain why social media use might leave teenagers depressed. This theory states that individuals act in a certain way because they expect good outcome. If the desired outcome is not achieved one might be depressed. For instance, if a student posits a photo online and does not receive the desired comments or likes, the might begin to question their looks and if this happens repeatedly, it can cause depression.

### **Albert Ellis' Cognitive Theory of Depression**

Around the 1950's, a psychologist by the name Albert Ellis together with a psychiatrist called Aaron Beck, independently established two very close theories. The approaches led in a successful formation of cognitive therapy. According to cognitive theory, individual dysfunctional thinking can result in extreme emotions. These emotions hence result in maladaptive behaviors (Beck, 2018). Albert Ellis would then document the cognitive approach of depression. Dr. Albert Ellis stated that the unreasonable philosophies of persons with depression in most cases can occur like absolute statements. Ellis documented three core views distinctive for depressive thoughts; "I have to be totally perfect, or I am not worthy." "Other people should treat me right, or others are bad to me." "The universe should all the time make me happy, or I should not live." Due to those kind thoughts, individuals with depression become demanding on other people or persuade themselves that they contain irresistible demands that by all means should be fulfilled. Ellis called these tendencies to want absolutism in depressive thoughts as "Musterbation"(Ellis, 1957). Ellis additionally revealed the existence of information interpretation discrimination in the cognitions of these individuals.

Ellis stated that persons with depression are likely to disregard positivity in anything and give more attention to negativity in everything. Additionally, they involve a lot in overgeneralization. Overgeneralization comes in where individuals suppose that just because a single thing came out wrongly, that this definitely indicates that other things will be wrong (Ellis, 1987). For instance, persons with depression might not acknowledge that they at least have a few close people around them, or they did something good if even once in a lifetime (ignoring the positive). They can also exaggerate the pains they went through in the past. Another group of these individuals with depression might persuade themselves that no one cares or loves them and will all the time do things in the wrong way (Held & Pollack, 2019). This theory fits into the study because social media creates a flat form for individuals with depressive tendencies to keep looking at what others have done with their live. These individuals therefore, keep comparing themselves with others and feeling that they have not yet achieved anything with their lives. Social media additionally continues to remind people of how perfect live should look liken in terms of finances, education, dressing and family among others. Anyone who has not achieved what social media expects tends to feel less of a person. The inferiority feeling is dangerous for persons with depressive signs.

### **Empirical Review**

Solly (2022), conducted a study on social media influence on personal security among youth in Nairobi County. The target population were members of Professional Criminologists Association

of Kenya, PCAK. Purposive sampling was used to select 155 youth respondents from a population of 15000 youths and 145 law enforcement interviewees drawn from 2,000 law enforcement officers in PCAK in Nairobi County. Piloting of questionnaire were disseminated among 30 PCAK youths Nakuru chapter. The research instruments were verified by the supervisor for content validity. Statistical Packages for Social Sciences, SPSS software was used in data entry and descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis, coding, classification and text inferencing. Results of this research showed that forms of social media that youth mostly prefer is WhatsApp over other social media platforms. The most preferred social media platforms by both gender was found to be WhatsApp and Twitter. The findings of this research showed that about 84% of youth respondents in Nairobi City County had opinion that Facebook was most insecure. Further, about 52% of the youth respondents confirmed that they had been victims. Tracking offenders, lack of technological capacity and legal challenges.

Waithigo (2019), conducted a study on the relationship between the level of social media networking use and well-being of marital relationships, the relationship between stress and anxiety associated with social media networking use and well-being of marital relationship, and the role of psychotherapy, sociability and social skill development in promoting responsible social media use among couples.. The study utilized Correlational Research design, with 220 respondents selected through Purposive, Convenience and Snowball Sampling Method from a target population of 7,694 married people. The study found out that the wellbeing of marriages was enhanced by moderate use of social media, appropriate motive of social media use and use of social media in dispute resolution. The well-being of marriages was undermined by use of social media late in the night and use of social media in the presence of partner. Stress and anxiety that adversely affected the well-being of marriages were fear of exposure of social media conversations, feelings of under achievement and overreliance on social media friends in marital decisions. The findings of this study are important to married people, marriage counselors and scholars.

Akunga (2018), conducted a study to determine the pattern of social media usage in secondary schools in Nyamira North, to describe how social media usage influenced the teaching learning process, to find out challenges encountered while using social media and suggested possible remedies. Social Information processing theory provided the theoretical framework on how social media usage influences the teaching and learning process in secondary schools. The target population comprised of 567 respondents. The respondents included principals, deputy principals, teachers and parents' representatives. The sample size was 131 (23.2%) respondents. The researcher used descriptive survey design while the data were collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. Validity was established by discarding ambiguities and re scaling difficult questions after carrying out a pilot test. Reliability was determined by splitting them into two. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. The findings were presented in tables and graphs showing frequency distributions, percentages and cross tabulation for the closed ended questions while the open ended questions were analyzed qualitatively in by first identifying themes and sub themes, then reporting in narratives. The study revealed a strong positive relationship between the use of social media in secondary schools and the teaching learning process in Nyamira North Sub County.

Maroma (2015), conducted a study on the relationship between depression and pathological internet use among university students in Kenya. The study was based on Davis's cognitive



behavioral model of pathological internet use. The study used correlational design to establish the relationship between the variables. The target population was all university students in Kenya. Random sampling was used to sample students from one public university and one private university in Kenya. A total of 400 respondents participated in the study. Young's Internet Addiction Test and Beck Depression Inventory were adapted in the questionnaire to measure pathological internet use and depression respectively. Percentages and measures of central tendency were used to describe the data. The findings revealed a prevalence of 16.8% of pathological internet use and a prevalence of 23.6% of depression. Independent samples T-test was used to test for differences in pathological internet use between male and female students. The findings revealed that female students were likely to be pathological internet users compared to male students. Pearson's product moment correlation was used to establish the relationship between depression and pathological internet use and it was found that a weak positive relationship existed between depression and pathological internet use.

### **Research Gaps**

A knowledge gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the issue discussed. For instance, Waithigo (2019), conducted a study on the relationship between the level of social media networking use and well-being of marital relationships, the relationship between stress and anxiety associated with social media networking use and well-being of marital relationship, and the role of psychotherapy, sociability and social skill development in promoting responsible social media use among couples. The study utilized Correlational Research design, with 220 respondents selected through Purposive, Convenience and Snowball Sampling Method from a target population of 7,694 married people. The study found out that the wellbeing of marriages was enhanced by moderate use of social media, appropriate motive of social media use and use of social media in dispute resolution. This study focused on marital relationships while our study will focus on social anxiety or Depression among teenagers in Unites States of America

Secondly, a methodological gap presents itself in this study, for example, the study conducted by Solly (2022), was on social media influence on personal security among youth in Nairobi the study used SPSS software in data entry and descriptive statistics to analyse the data. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis, coding, classification and text inferencing. Results of this research showed that forms of social media that youth mostly prefer is WhatsApp over other social media platforms. The most preferred social media platforms by both gender was found to be WhatsApp and Twitter. The findings of this research showed that about 84% of youth respondents in Nairobi City County had opinion that Facebook was most insecure. Further, about 52% of the youth respondents confirmed that they had been victims, our current study adopted a desk study literature review methodology.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a desktop literature review method (desk study). This involved an in-depth review of studies related to association between social media usage and social anxiety or depression among teenagers in Unites States of America. Three sorting stages were implemented on the subject under study in order to determine the viability of the subject for research. This is the first stage that comprised the initial identification of all articles that were based on association between social media usage and social anxiety or depression among teenagers in Unites States of

America. The search was done generally by searching the articles in the article title, abstract, keywords. A second search involved fully available publications on the subject on association between social media usage and social anxiety or depression among teenagers in Unites States of America. The third step involved the selection of fully accessible publications. Reduction of the literature to only fully accessible publications yielded specificity and allowed the researcher to focus on association between social media usage and social anxiety or depression among teenagers in Unites States of America which was split into top key words. After an in- depth search into the top key words (association, social media, usage, social anxiety, depression, teenagers, Unites States America), the researcher arrived at 4 articles that were suitable for analysis. The results are from analysis of research papers done by:

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## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

The study found that there has been a rapid growth in social media among teenagers in the states. University students are the highest users of internet in the country. Consuming social media at a higher rate was found to bring about negative consequences on the individuals. These include problematic social relationships, poor academic performance and psychological disturbance. Based on the findings, it was concluded that there was need to identify and help the affected teenagers exercise moderation and self-control when using social media platform in order for them to achieve their lifetime goals.

### **Recommendations**

There is need to organize seminars and conferences in the colleges with students to highlight the possible dangers of excessive social media usage and the measures that can be taken to mitigate the problem. There is need to regulate the nonacademic content that can be accessed through college computer labs like pornography and other non-educational material.

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