Review

The Effective Use of Social Media to Promote Positive Mental Health

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Abstract: It is understood that social media platforms are progressively developing as a rich source of mass communication. According to Gottfried [1], the PEW Research Center reported that in Americans' social media use, YouTube and Facebook are by far the most used online platforms among U.S. adults; TikTok's user base has grown since 2021. Adults under 30 are far more likely than their older counterparts to use online platforms. There are also demographic differences in social media use which allows for segmentation of audiences for mental health awareness, mental health literacy, and resources. Even though a growing body of research has demonstrated that social media use is negatively associated with mental health and well-being, particularly among young people, there are benefits to moderated social media use that vary across demographic, socioeconomic, and racial population sub-groups. Results indicate that social media can be effective in promoting positive mental health through feelings of connectedness, social support, and early detection of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

Keywords: review**;** social media; mental health; Facebook; Twitter; Instagram

1. Introduction

Mental health is important in every phase of life, from childhood to adulthood. According to Latha et al., mental health is the fifth greatest contributor to the global burden of disease [2]. Mental Health America released the State of Mental Health in America report in 2024. The report is based on federal data available for every state from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Education. To develop these rankings, MHA evaluated states on criteria such as the prevalence of mental health and substance use conditions, suicidal ideation, access to care, provider availability, and other metrics [3]. The report confirms that the United States is in a mental health crisis with nearly 60 million adults experiencing a mental health crisis in the past year. The nation's youth continue to present cause for concern. One in five young people from ages 12-17 experienced at least one major depressive episode in the past year, yet more than half of them (56.1%) did not receive any mental health treatment. More than 3.4 million youth (13.16%) had serious thoughts of suicide [3].

From a global perspective, statistics from the World Health Organization show similar statistics as the United States. In 2019, 1 in every 8 people, or 970 million people around the world were living with a mental disorder, with anxiety and depressive disorders the most common. Even though anxiety and depression are most common, other mental health disorders should be considered such as bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), schizophrenia, and eating disorders [4]. Unfortunately, more than 80% of people with mental illness have not received treatment despite the presence of mental illness for more than 12 months [2]. The stigma surrounding mental illness creates a barrier to treatment with many individuals afraid to reach out for treatment due to embarrassment, shame, and feelings of inadequacy. The individual may not have insurance, or may be underinsured, so access to mental health services and treatment is also a barrier [4]. An important thing to remember is that a mental health crisis, or a mental health disorder, can happen to anyone and is very common.

Their etiology ranges from biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry, to life experiences, such as trauma, toxic stress, or history of abuse [5]. Although most people are resilient, people who are exposed to adverse circumstances – including poverty, violence, disability, and inequality – are at higher risk [4].

Mesfin Bekalu, a research scientist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, conducted a study to evaluate the association of two dimensions of social media use – how much it is routinely used and how emotionally connected users are to the platforms – with three health-related outcomes: social well-being, positive mental health, and self-rated health [6]. Previous studies have simply looked at social media use as a dose-response relationship looking at the amount of time an individual spends on social media and the number of interactions with other users. Few studies have considered the emotional connections to social media that users have. Data for their study came from a nationally representative sample of 1,027 American adults surveyed between June and July 2018 [6]. The measures included social media use, social well-being, positive mental health, and self-rated health. The findings showed that routine social media use, as part of everyday routine and responding to content that others share, was positively associated will all three health-related outcomes. The second dimension of social media use, emotional connection, such as the fear of missing out when not logged into social media, was negatively associated with those same three health-related outcomes [6]. In the measure of positive mental health, specifically, regression analysis showed that age, education, household income, and race/ethnicity were significant predictors of positive mental health. Individuals in the oldest age group (60+), those with some college education and a bachelor's degree or higher, and those in the lowest income group (<10,000) reported better positive mental health. Positive mental health is an indicator of well-being and is shaped by sociodemographic variables and social media use [6].

According to Gottfried [1], the PEW Research Center reported that in Americans' social media use, YouTube and Facebook are by far the most used online platforms among U.S. adults; TikTok's user base has grown since 2021. Adults under 30 are far more likely than their older counterparts to use many of the online platforms. Due to the high use of social media, social media platforms provide an effective way to raise awareness of mental health and promote positive mental health. It is important to consider the users of social media and their routine use in further exploring the associations between social media use and mental health. The purpose of this review is to identify several ways in which social media has been used to promote positive mental health and well-being through a variety of methods.

2. Methods

A literature search was conducted to locate research studies using social media platforms to promote positive mental health. Multiple databases were used and studies from the last five years were selected due to the recent surge in the use of social media associated with COVID-19. Articles from PubMed, Google Scholar, MEDLINE, and ProQuest were selected to represent a wide range of disciplines. Search terms were chosen to broadly capture the various applications of social media used in promoting positive mental health in the existing literature. Search terms consisted of "social media"; "mental health" "Facebook"; "Instagram", and "TikTok". Twitter was not included since usage is lower. Inclusion criteria was peer-reviewed articles, full text online, and publication dates from 2019-2025. See Box 1 for a summary of the search strategy and selection process for the review.

Box 1. Literature search related to social media and positive mental health.

- Publication date: 2019 to 2025
- Sources: PubMed, Google Scholar, MEDLINE, JSTOR, and PsycInfo
- Search terms: "mental health" AND "social media" AND "Facebook" OR "Instagram" OR "TikTok"
- Articles found = 21; Articles included = 16
- All age groups, all sex and genders, all countries and origins

After retrieving the results, the articles were divided into subgroups based on general applications of social media use and mental health and specific applications using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Reddit.

3. Results

The literature search produced an abundance of information related to the use of social media on both positive mental health and negative mental health. Twelve articles were selected that specifically mentioned positive mental health, but for due diligence, two articles included information on the associations between social media and negative mental health. It is important to recognize that the negative impact to mental health articles retrieved outnumbered the articles demonstrating the positive impact to mental health — especially involving adolescents. Results from those studies indicate that while social media can create a sense community for the user, excessive and increased use of social media, particularly among those that are vulnerable, is correlated with depression and other mental health disorders [5]. There is a bidirectional relationship between social media and mental health, and it is important to remember that users who are emotionally connected to social media use might as well be those who have already experienced or diagnosed with a mental health disorder [7].

The studies in the review employed various analysis methodologies including systematic reviews, qualitative methodology using focus groups and semi-structured interviews, and social media content analysis. The variables studied included depressive episodes, manic episodes, suicidal ideation, anxiety crises, social media use, online resources to support mental health, medical conditions, social well-being, positive mental health, and analyses of social media language. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter were mentioned most often as the preferred social media platforms of the participants.

3.1. General Social Media Applications

Mental health literacy is the knowledge and understanding concerning mental health disorders, which helps individuals to recognize and manage symptoms and engage in prevention methods [2]. Due to the attachment of stigma associated with mental health, people have confusion about mental health information and where to find credible resources. Many individuals who are exhibiting mental health symptoms are hesitant and ashamed to reach out for help. Health promotion programs in mental health awareness encourages help-seeking behaviors and provides supportive interactions with people. A likely place for those interactions to occur is through social media. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp facilitate millions of one-to-many communications daily which provides a practical avenue to raise awareness of mental health. Since social media platforms do not charge a registration fee, the avenue is also cost-effective compared to an in-person, comprehensive program. Social media platforms are also available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week which gives individuals the flexibility to log-in when convenient and search the platforms in private [2]. Latha and colleagues performed a qualitative study to evaluate the effectiveness of social media platforms

in hosting three health promotion campaigns in the field of mental health. These programs were observed over a five-month period from May to September 2019. The three campaigns were titled 1) The Buddies for Suicide Prevention, and online campaign to create awareness for suicide prevention; 2) The #Iquitobacco campaign which lasted for 21 days with the intent of tobacco cessation; and 3) #Migrainethepainfultruth campaign conducted among social media users interested in participating [2]. For this review, the first campaign, The Buddies for Suicide Prevention, will be explored in detail.

The Buddies for Suicide Prevention, an online contest, was conducted for four months from June to September 2019. The theme of the contest was "Action for suicide prevention" and was promoted through Facebook and Instagram. Users could compete in four different categories which included creating posters, slogans, scripts, and short films. The purpose of the contest was to engage the public in collaborative efforts toward suicide prevention [4]. As a result, the post earned 32 likes and 9 people shared the same and reached 2058 people. In the world of social media use, a reach of 2058 people may seem like a small number, but any engagement raising awareness for mental health and suicide prevention is beneficial. The viewers were encouraged to post questions, "like" the page, and "share" the page with others. The reach of this campaign, and the other two campaigns, increased each year. The results of this study show that social media platforms promote social engagement and support [4]. Other advantages include low cost, high scalability, self-tracking, and tailored feedback functionalities. Social media is also able to connect people from long distances reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation. It goes without saying that social media cannot be the only mode of delivery for health promotion programs since all individuals may not have social media accounts, but it does provide an opportunity to reach individuals, especially young adults and adolescents, who have a higher risk of mental health issues and suicidal ideation. A limitation from this study was that the authors did not collect any type of feedback from users regarding the effectiveness of the campaigns so unable to draw conclusive associations between the content and behavioral change [4].

Another qualitative study by Vaingankar et al. explored the lived experiences of youth to gain an understanding of how social media use can contribute to positive mental health [8]. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with male and female youth (15-24 years of age) of different ethnicities residing in Singapore. There were a total of 95 participants in the study — 51 females and 44 males. All the participants had access to smartphones to access various social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, LinkedIn, Facebook, and others. Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp were the three being most used by the participants. Five common themes emerged from the interviews and focus groups [8]. The first theme centered around the use of social media to build positive relationships and social capital. Participants discussed how they were able to connect with friends and family which resulted in the development of close relationships with mutual trust, recognition, and a sense of belonging. The youth also offered support and empathy to others who needed help. As mentioned in other research studies, the fact that social media is accessible 24/7 was important.

The second theme that emerged was a deepening self-concept through social media. The participants expressed that by being able to be transparent and be their true selves allowed them to gain insight into themselves and increased their self-acceptance and self-esteem. The aspect of self-esteem was reinforced when participants would share an accomplishment or achievement on social media which was celebrated by their peers. The posts were met by words of appreciation, encouragement, and inspirational emojis. An interesting finding was that participants also enjoyed looking at previous posts or pictures in their feeds that brought up happy memories [8]. Facebook inserts memories in users' feeds and creates photo albums of special events. Participants also searched for content related to their personal interests, such as sports and hobbies, which distracted them from negative content. The participants viewed social media as a safe space that allowed for them to openly express themselves promoting positive mental health. The relevance of positive mental health to social capital has been established [8]. Social capital is a social determinant that influences both mental and physical health. The benefits derived from relationships on social media may also help youth who have been exposed to diversity throughout their lives become more resilient

[9]. The study concluded that social media plays a significant role in the lives of today's youth and can provide opportunities for positive influence, personal expression, and social support.

From a global perspective, Ulvi and colleagues performed a systematic review focusing on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Articles were collected from January 2010 to June 2020 to identify studies looking at relationships between social media and mental health [5]. As with other systematic reviews contained within this article, a variety of methodologies were used in the research studies. Of the three social media platforms that were studied, Facebook emerged as one of the main social media sites. Seven out of the 14 studies provided support for a positive relationship between social media use and mental health. Three of the articles included in the analysis found a negative relationship between social media use and mental health. In one study, when addressing mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD, Facebook use among adults aged 25-54 had a positive impact on mental health and quality of life following a community disaster [5]. The association between Instagram use and social media had limited findings with only one study that found that consistent Instagram use was associated with negative body image and self-harm [5]. Twitter was used often to raise awareness about many different mental health issues and to help individuals connect and reduce loneliness. Twitter data have also been found to be useful in providing insight for mental health surveillance before and after traumatic events, such as natural disasters [5]. Early detection of mental health crises is explored in greater depth in the following section.

3.2. Early Detection of Mental Health Crises

Monitoring social use activity has alerted public health officials to potential outbreaks based on the words contained in narrative posts and videos. This same process may be used to identify early detection of a mental health crisis. Early detection and intervention are critical in lessening the severity and the duration of these crises, yet traditional identification methods often fall short in providing timely support. In the United States, specifically, there is a shortage of mental health providers which further delays identification and treatment. Based on the 2024 report by Mental Health America, the United States is indeed in a mental health crisis. Nearly 60 million adults (almost 23% of the total population) experienced a mental health crisis in the past year. The nation's youth continue to present cause for concern. One in five young people from ages 12-17 experienced at least one major depressive episode in the past year, yet more than half of them (56.1%) did not receive any mental health treatment. Barriers to treatment include lack of insurance, cost, and lack of qualified mental health providers [3].

Mansoor and Ansari explored the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in analyzing social media data to identify early signs of a mental health crisis. The authors developed a multimodal deep learning approach integrating natural language processing and temporal analysis techniques [10]. The model was subsequently trained on a dataset of 996,452 social media posts in three other languages besides English: Spanish, Mandarin, and Arabic. The social media posts were collected from Twitter, Reddit, and Facebook for a duration of 12 months. For the study, the authors defined a mental health crisis as "a situation in which an individual experiences an acute exacerbation of symptoms related to mental health disorders, potentially leading to impaired functioning, self-harm, or harm to others." [10] (p. 2). The study was conducted in three phases: data collection, model development, and validation. A total of 1.5 million posts were initially collected, but after applying the inclusion criteria and removing duplicates, the final dataset consisted of 996,452 posts. Only public posts were collected, excluding any private or restricted content [10].

The results of the study were fascinating with the multimodal approach demonstrating a strong performance in detecting early signs of a mental health crisis – both across various languages and across social media platforms. The model itself achieved an overall accuracy of 89.3%, a precision of 86.7%, a recall of 84.5%, and an F1 score of 0.856 [10] (p. 5). Since the model's performance remained consistent across different languages, the global potential for identification of mental health crisis is evident. Even though the model was used on three different platforms, it tended to perform better

analysis on Twitter data, followed by Reddit and Facebook [10]. With the continued use of AI applications, this study demonstrated the potential of AI-powered social media analysis for the early detection of mental health crises. The crises may be resulting from political unrest, prolonged pandemics, or a reaction to adverse community events. Early data collection leads to early recognition and the need to ramp up resources, such as the organization of mental health professionals and support systems. In addition, by identifying individuals at risk of mental health crises days before traditional methods, the use of this model could enable more timely interventions, potentially reducing the severity and duration of the crises [10]. This research was corroborated by the study from Saha et al. who used a similar approach in identifying early signs of mental illness in college students.

Reddit is another social media platform that does not receive as much attention as Instagram or TikTok but is worth mentioning. Individuals can engage in the Reddit community by posting stories, images, links, and videos. According to their website, Reddit has over 100,000 active communities and over 16 billion posts as of September 2024 [11]. Saha and colleagues used the Reddit platform to study how assessing the mental health of college students using social media data corresponded with ground-truth data of on-campus mental health consultations [12]. This construct of validity of data has not been explored in detail. We understand the social isolation from COVID-19 exacerbated mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation [12]. According to the National College Health Assessment conducted in Spring 2024, 35.2% of students reported having received psychological or mental health services in the last 12 months; high rates of psychological distress; high number of students reporting high stress, and high rates of loneliness [13]. For the study, Saha et al. collected ground-truth data of on-campus mental health consultations between 2011-2016 and compared those data to 66,000 collected posts from the university's Reddit community [12].

After complex data analyses, the study showed that social media interactions of college students can help predict ground-truth data of on-campus mental health consultations. Together, social media enhances the ability to capture the language and social interaction of college students in "real time", and therefore can function as a "verbal sensor" in proactively assessing the mental health needs of college students [12]. An additional application that evolved from the study centered around facilitating improved preparedness in campus in case of an emergency or crisis. This application has proven successful in cases of infectious disease outbreaks by monitoring social media for a significant increase in posts related to the incident. Seeing that uptick in social media activity may serve as a marker to ramp up resources. In the event of a mental health crisis, student wellness centers may need to increase the number of clinicians and therapists, amplify avenues for seeking alternative sources of mental health help, such as peer counseling, or possibly organizing awareness and educational campaigns [12].

In addition to the early recognition of a mental health crisis, Merchant and colleagues evaluated the predictability of medical conditions from social media posts. Even though 21 broad categories were studied, this review will only focus on mental health conditions for the purpose of this article. The authors linked consenting patients' electronic medical records (EMR) with their social media data to produce two research questions: 1) Can we predict individuals' medical diagnosis from language posted on social media? And 2) Can we identify specific markers of disease from social media posts? [14] (p. 2). For the purpose of the study, participants were drawn from an ongoing Social Mediome study that began recruitment in 2014. Adult patients seeking care in an urban academic health system were asked to share their past social media activity and EMR data. The social media platform posts that were analyzed were from Facebook accounts from March 2009 through October 2015. In addition to demographic information, prior diagnoses (by International Classification of Diseases [ICD-9] codes were collected [14]. The categories related to mental health included depression, anxiety, and psychoses. Predictive modeling were used with each diagnoses. Out of the medical conditions for which Facebook statuses show the largest prediction accuracy gains over demographic variables included diabetes, pregnancy, and the mental health categories of anxiety (AUC = .66), psychoses (AUC = .58) and depression (AUC = .64). Prediction accuracy was evaluated

using the area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUC), which is a measure of discrimination in which a value of 0.5 is expected due to chance, 0.6 is considered moderate, and above 0.7 is considered a strong prediction from a behavior [14]. The medical condition of anxiety had the highest prediction accuracy of mental health conditions. Individual language markers used to identify depression described symptoms of depression such as "stomach hurts" and "head hurts" and emotional distress such as "pain" "crying", and "tears." These patterns of language can be associated with diagnoses to reveal similarities and differences between diagnoses [14]. Social media also has the advantage that it often has a built in communication channel back to patients. For example, Facebook now allows users to flag posts with their network that they think may suggest suicidal ideation. Facebook then anonymously provides resources for those individuals at risk. People's personality, mental state, and health behaviors are all reflected in their social media posts and have a tremendous impact on health. It is important to note that predictive associations of language vary across populations, however, this study provides another example of the potential of social media to personalize health care based on language markers in Facebook posts [14].

3.3. Screening for Depression

In addition to the detection of a mental health crisis, social media has proven to be a valid measure for depression screening. Major depressive disorder (MDD) is a debilitating condition that affects over 5% of the adult population globally. An estimated 3.8% of the population experience depression, including 5% of adults (4% among men and 6% among women), and 5.7% of adults older than 60 years. Approximately 280 million people in the world have depression [15]. Depression is a common condition that impacts daily living and can be crippling for some – especially those who do not receive treatment. Given the profound negative impact that depression has on people's lives, it is important to diagnose and treat depression early. One potential mechanism to more rapidly recognize depression is via social media. Kim et al. conducted a systematic review of the validity of screening for depression through social media posts found in Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Fifteen articles were collected for review that met the inclusion criteria, but no Snapchat studies were found. The purpose of the systematic review was whether social media markers can validly be used to screen for depression by cross-referencing with validated depressional screening tools, and if so, what those markers were [16].

The operational definition of "depressive social media marker" used in the study was a marker that was deemed to be indicative of depression because it positively correlates with depressive systems of the social media users who produced the marker. These users of social media were analyzed with a standardized scale of depression to verify the potential of social media as a screening tool for detecting depression. The examples of markers were the number and content of messages on Facebook, linguistic variability in tweets and word count on Twitter, and number of followers, frequency of Instagram use and the content of the messages on Instagram [14]. The authors discovered that having fewer Facebook friends and mutual friends, posting frequently, and using fewer location tags positively correlated with depressive symptoms. Facebook users that posted about explicit expression of depressive symptoms, use of personal pronouns, and words related to aggressive emotions, and rumination predicted depression [14]. For the chosen studies including Twitter usage, Twitter showed that the use of "past focus" words, negative emotions and anger words, and fewer words per Tweet positively correlated with depression. Therefore, screening social media profiles on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook may be a valid way to detect depression but different methodology was used in the articles that were collected which may question the validity of the findings. Some profile settings are also set to "private" which doesn't capture all users of social media platforms and their personal posts [14].

3.4. Social Support

Social support is the extent to which an individual feels a sense of belonging to to a social network that is based on communication and reciprocity. People's relationships and interactions with family, friends, co-workers, and community members can have a major impact on their health and well-being [17]. If social media users are diagnosed with a mental illness or suffering from a stressful life change, social media has numerous support groups for users to make connections and seek help. A support group provides the opportunity for people to share personal experiences and feelings, or personal knowledge of available treatments and coping mechanisms. A support group may also serve as a bridge between medical and social needs. There are many benefits of support groups such as feeling less lonely, reducing distress, depression, and anxiety, and improving skills to cope with challenges [18]. Research in social support drawn from Facebook has found that it can have a positive effect on various outcomes such as depression, anxiety, well-being, physical health, and lonliness . We are well aware of the negative effects of social networking sites on mental health, but the body of evidence continues to grow for the postive effects related to social cohestion and social support. Gilmour and colleagues peformed a systematic review of the literature examining Facebook-based social support. Their research question was 'Does the current literature indicate that social support drawn from Facebook translate into positive phyiscal or mental health outcomes"? [19] (p. 329). As mentioned earlier, a limitation of conducting a systematic review results from collecting research studies that have similar research questions, but the methodology is not consistent.

Several databases were searched between 2007 to 2018 with various search terms to gather articles related to the research question. The year 2007 was chosen because Facebook became open to the general public in 2006. As part of the inclusion criteria, studies were required to measure social support, specifically in either the context of Facebook-based social support or online social support. Studies were also required to measure at least one of the following: mental health-related outcomes, general mental well-being, or general physical well-being. In total, 27 papers were included in the final review [19]. After determining the quality of the methodology, the findings demonstrated that Facebook-based social support had effects on three broad categories: general health, mental illness, and well-being. For the purpose of this review, the association between social support, mental health, and mental illness will be focused on. Studies comprising the general health category focused on the effects of Facebook-based social support in improving health included the mental health component. Studies that focused on the use of Facebook-based social support in the reduction of mental illness symptoms were included in the mental illness category and included depression, anxiety, online victimization, loneliness, and Facebook addiction [19] (p. 330).

To summarize the findings, it was found that Facebook-based social support was predictive of better mental health, as well as decreased levels of mental distress [19]. Emotional support stemming from Facebook was also found to reduce perceived stress, although greater physical and social attraction to Facebook friends was a factor that improved levels of support. Another study found that the number of Facebook friends was negatively associated with bonding social capital or the development of reciprocal relationships. This resulted in a negative indirect effect on health, including well-being and physical and mental health. In addition, the intent to self-disclose, and the amount of honesty of self-disclosure yielded greater acts of social support from Facebook friends. In the mental illness category, three of the studies that examined Facebook-based social support and depression found that social support drawn from Facebook was predictive of lower levels of depression, depressive mood, and symptomology. One study found that Facebook-based social support only predicted lower levels of depression in adolescent girls, not boys, which is an interesting finding [19].

In regard to the symptom of anxiety, in Facebook users that were categorized as high socially anxious, Facebook-based social support signficantly predicted grater psychological well-being, whereas face-to-face social support did not. Out of the articles collected for the purpose of the systematic review, the results generally demonstrated that higher levels of Facebook-based social support predicted greater postive mental and physical health outcomes. Higher levels of support also

predicted lower levels of a wide range of negative outcomes including depression and loneliness. According to Gilmour et al., although general Facebook use has been shown to negatively affect mental health, these results show that Facebook, when used to seek and provide social support, is beneficial across a number of mental health outcomes. Mental health workers should consider the use of Facebook and other social networking sites, such as Instagram, as additional ways to improve mental health outcomes [19].

While the majority of the research for this review focused on adults, Pretorious and Coyle examined on young people's use of digital tools to support their mental health during COVID-19 restrictions, particularly Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat [20]. The COVID-19 pandemic that began in late 2019 resulted in many countries around the world requiring households to stay at home and isolate to slow the spread of the virus. Employees worked from home and schools transitioned to virtual learning. Even before the pandemic began, the prevalence of mental illness in the younger population was staggering with a reported 25% of young people aged between 12 and 25 experiencing a mental illness [20]. Those lockdown procedures exacerbated the presentation of symptoms of mental illness, including acute stress, anxiety, and depression. The ability to seek help is a protective factor in young people's mental heath, and many have a preference for informal sources of support including friends, peers, and family. Without having direct contact with classmates, friends, and peers, many young people sought out online resources to support their mental health [20].

The study by Pretorious and Coyle examined ways in which young people, living in Ireland, used technology and Internet-based resources to support their mental health whilst in lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the purpose of the study, an online cross-sectional survey was distributed btween April 22 and May 22, 2020, when the number of COVID-19 cases were increasing and the Irish government issued level 5 lockdown restrictions to limit the spread of the virus. The inclusion criteria was 1) being a resident of Ireland, and 2) aged between 18 and 25. The survey contained demographic questions and open- and closed-response questions related to online resources currenlty being used to support mental health. When the survey closed, a total of 393 participants took part in the study, of which 81.7% identified as female, 12.5% as male, and 4.1% as non-binary [20] (p. 3). A little over half (51.4%) of the sample indicated that they were using social media to support their mental health [20]. There were distinct differences in the types of accounts and social media platforms that participants were using that varied from following influencers focusing on health and fitness to accounts providing inspirational quotes. Facebook use was characterized by the use of support groups; participants indicated accessing support groups focusing on specific issues such as eating disorders or ADHD. Of the overall sample, 26% indicated that they were using a health service or charity website to support their mental health. The most accessed resource was a charity organization called SpunOut. Nearly a third of the sample, 32.6%, indicated they were using a mental health app to support their mental health. The majority of participants indicated that they made use of Google search to locate online mental health resources. Messaging applications were also quite popular, such as Snapchat and WhatsApp. Less popular options to support mental health were discussion boards and professional services [20].

The results of this study provide evidence that young people used a variety of online resources to support their mental health during the COVID-19 lockdown. Of importance to note is that not just one resource was used in particular, but a variety of resources from messaging applications to Google searches for mental health resources. The lonliness stemming from the lockdown was felt across the globe and not strictly to the young people in Ireland. It is important that researchers and service providers understand how online resources can be used to best meet young people's needs to support their mental health. Many online resources are underutilized because of a lack of awareness or simply not knowing where to search. It appears that for some of the respondents, this was the first time they had the need to use online mental health supports and stated they would continue to use them even after the lockdown ended [20].

3.5. Peer to Peer Support

In addition to social support and support groups, Facebook groups are used for online peer to peer support. Prescott, Rathbone, and Brown conducted a systematic search of mental health related open Facebook groups to gain further understanding of how these groups are used and to compare U.S. groups to groups from the UK [21]. A Facebook search for open groups yielded a total of 154 groups using key words such as mental health, anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, stress, bipolar, and psychosis. The highest number of open Facebook groups were related to the topic of depression. After examining 20-525 pages of comments and posts from the respective groups, the data had six main themes: Sharing experiences, informational support, emotional support, direct requests for advice, how information is received, and benefits of social media [21] (p. 7). The authors found that overall use of the Facebook groups were positive in nature with posts that were friendly, support, and informal. Users shared their personal experiences with mental health with others that may not have occurred within their own social networks outside of Facebook. Users also made direct requests for information and advice not only for themselves, but for close family members or friends. They were appreciative of the advice and discussed their intended actions related to mental health and well-being. The authors also discovered that the use of Facebook for mental health support was similar across both the UK and the US, with both countries bringing to attention the same issues such as stigma, lack of awareness, and barriers to accessing services. These issues are consistent throughout the literature. The use of social media to promote positive mental health is not a replacement for clinical intervention but provides supplemental ways to provide support and resources [21].

4. Discussion

The results uncovered in this review show conflicting findings regarding the use social media platforms and mental health. Even though the evidence tends to lean toward negative associations, there were several studies that showed the promising use of social media to connect with others, reduce loneliness, provide mental health surveillance, and screen for depression based on the identification of key words. The variations in results were also dependent on the type of platform used, such as Facebook or Instagram, how many hours were spent per day using social media, and age.

In terms of general social media use, social media users tend to develop an emotional connection to the platforms they are using and have a fear of missing out when they are not able to access the platform. This connection was apparent at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when social media platforms became a lifeline for many who were isolated in their homes without in-person human interaction. Based on the results of this review, the fear of missing out was negatively associated with social well-being, positive mental health, and self-rated health. Routine social media use, such as everyday use and engaging in the content that other users are sharing, was positively associated with those same three dimensions [6]. Several articles in the review included information on social support and its association with positive mental health. Social media users tend to feel connected to others through social media which improves mental health and reduces mental distress.

It is important to note that these associations may fluctuate based on amount of time spent on social media and the type of content that users are accessing. Adolescents are a vulnerable population whose time spent on social media and content viewed need to be monitored. Excessive social media use, especially in adolescents, is associated with depression and other mental health disorders [5]. Algorithms assist in moderating content by flagging inappropriate or harmful posts for review. This helps maintain a safe and respectful environment on the platform.

To address the experiences of youth, social media use, and positive mental health, youth tend to use Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp as their preferred social media platforms. Social media is an avenue to build positive relationships and social capital with others who share the same interest. In addition to building social capital, the connection with friends and family resulted in the

development of close relationships that were built on mutual trust, recognition, and a sense of belonging. If the user posted about a topic they were proud of, or if they needed help with a concern, their self-esteem would increase due to the outpouring of support and assistance [8]. Youth also feel that social media creates a safe space for them to openly express themselves contributing to positive mental health.

A promising result from the review shows that social media is an effective tool for health promotion outreach, early detection of mental health crises, and a screening mechanism for depression. Algorithms analyze user behavior, such as likes, shares, comments, and watch time, to recommend content that users are likely to engage with. This includes posts, videos, and articles that appear in feeds. Researchers and clinicians can analyze these data to identify an increase in posts related to feelings of depression, anxiety, worry, and requests for support. This information may be particularly useful after a catastrophic event such as a school shooting, loss of classmate, natural disaster, or adverse community event. Since there is a global lack of mental health providers, schools and workplaces can be proactive and ensure resources are available, such as counselors and other support systems.

5. Future Directions

Mental health professionals, primary care providers, educators, and public health practitioners can benefit from learning more about how social media can promote positive mental health. Statistics show that social media use is becoming increasingly popular and is projected to increase. Health promotion campaigns can bring awareness to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, suicide, and eating disorders. Resources may be shared and targeted toward specific groups that may be at higher risk – such as adolescents. Using certain hashtags could connect people who are suffering from similar issues and provide them with virtual support groups. Using social media is more cost-effective than a traditional health promotion program with a wider reach. It is often easier to be open when you are not sitting in a room face-to-face with others. Research related to Snapchat and TikTok was limited so further exploration of those platforms is warranted.

Health-related social media managers can create innovative content to involve users to engage in healthy content that contributes positively to their mental health. To reduce the negative impacts of social media, lawmakers should have the ability to flag or possibly deactivate accounts that promote negative mental health issues [22]. For adolescents, parents should speak to their children about the sites they are visiting on social media and monitor use. Parental controls should be in place and the child's social media accounts should be set to private.

There is an emerging field of research referred to as "digital phenotyping" aimed at capturing how individuals interact with their digital devices, including social media platforms [7] (p. 12). That information can be used to study patterns of illness and identify optimal time points for intervention. A more comprehensive digital phenotype may be necessary to predict relapse and identify high-risk health behaviors among individuals living with mental illness.

Based on the literature collected, many individuals are using social media to search for information and resources on mental health. It is possible they may want to ask their mental health provider if the information is reliable, factual, and trustworthy. Since there remains a stigma associated with discussing mental health, the clinician may want to initiate the conversation about social media and direct them to appropriate sites. The increased use of social media use also paves the way for reaching or offering support to patients. Within a learning health care environment where research and care are tightly intertwined and feedback between both is rapid, the integration of digital technologies into services may create new opportunities for advancing the use of social media platforms for positive mental health [7].

5. Conclusions

The review shows that the use of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, may be beneficial in promoting positive mental health. Social media platforms should continue to take advantage of high usage to offer resources and connect users to social support groups. The association between emotional support, social support, social capital, and positive mental health was mentioned frequently throughout the literature [23]. Health-related information is readily available to raise awareness for mental health and other conditions. Due to the convenience, cost-effectiveness, and flexibility of social media use, health promotion programs should be utilized more often. The most important finding from this review is the promising use of social media to detect early signs of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Additional research is needed to further examine ways in which social media can be leveraged as an accepted clinical tool and public health intervention to promote positive mental health.

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