

A Conceptual Study on The Impact of Social Media Usage on Anxiety and Depression in College Students

Mrs. Manisha Sharma

Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, India

Author Email: manisha22244sharma@gmail.com

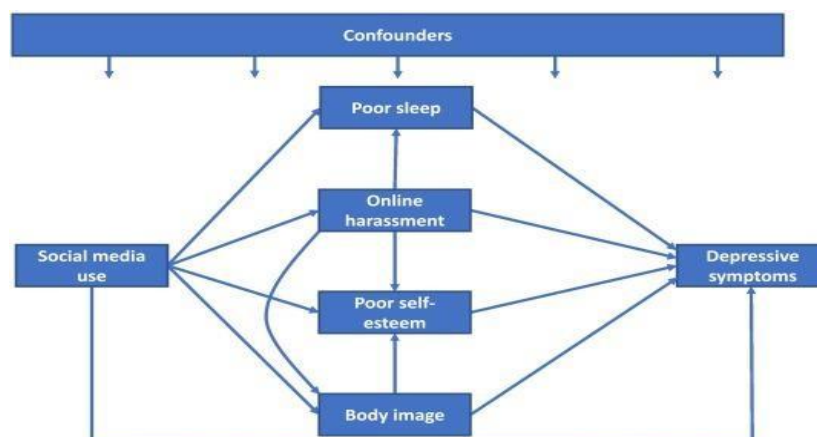
Abstract— Social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of college-aged individuals, providing platforms for communication, self-expression, and connection. It has transformed how young adult interact with the world, offering unique opportunities for personal growth, relationship building, and access to global communities. While social media enables connection and expression, it also expose challenges such as social comparison, cyber bullying, and the pressure to maintain curate online personas, all of which can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and emotional distress. This study explores the intricate relationship between social platform usage and mental health challenges among college-aged individuals, shedding light on how these platforms can amplify psychological vulnerabilities. Mechanisms such as disrupted sleep patterns, compulsive engagement, and exposure to idealized content further exacerbate these negative effects, creating a complex interplay between online behaviors and emotional well-being. The findings highlight the critical need for interventions aimed at promoting digital literacy, encouraging balanced social media use, and implementing platform-specific strategies to reduce the harmful impact of these platforms. By addressing these challenges, stakeholders can help foster healthier digital habits, support emotional resilience, and enhance the mental well-being of young adults navigating the digital landscape.

Keywords: Social Media Usage, Mental Health, Anxiety and Depression, College Students, Cyberbullying and Stress

I. INTRODUCTION

SM has permeated the life of college students, influencing how they communicate, learn, and view the world. Although it provides many advantages—such as connectivity, information access, and self-expression—it has also caused worries regarding its psychological effects because of its extensive use. Evidence indicates that extreme or pathological use of SM can lead to increased anxiety and depression, especially among emerging adults who are already undergoing crucial academic, social, and personal changes.

Kuss and Griffiths (2017) point out that although social networking sites are intended to promote connection, they can also promote addictive behaviors that have a worst impact on mental health. The need to present an idealized online image, fear of missing out (FOMO), and being exposed to cyberbullying can enhance feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and emotional distress. In the same vein, Twenge et al. (2018) determined that the escalation of smartphone and social media consumption is



associated with increased depressive symptoms and suicide outcomes, highlighting the far-reaching impact of online sites on mental health. Vannucci, Flannery, and McCauley Ohannessian (2017) also highlight the association between anxiety and social media consumption, specifically among young adults who are finding it difficult to separate virtual from real-life encounters.

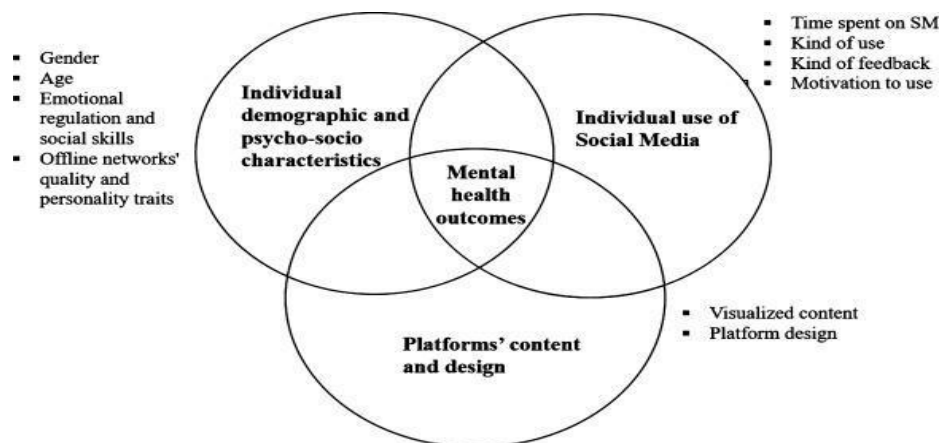
These studies underscore the imperative to know more about the intricate dynamic between mental health and social media, especially among young's in college. To overcome these challenges means coming up with effective measures to counteract undesirable impacts and foster more virtuous digital behavior.

II. SOCIAL MEDIA'S ROLE IN INTENSIFYING FEELINGS OF ANXIETY

Online Social platform has been identified as a key factor in contributing to anxiety in college-aged populations. Various mechanisms by which social networking sites exacerbate emotional distress and anxiety have been presented in research.

Primack et al. (2017) concluded that regular use of networking web is associated with more emotional distress in young adults. The research implies that repeated exposure to peer comparison, pressures of online validation, and emotionally evocative material lead to feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and anxiety.

Sampasa-Kanyinga and Lewis (2015) also highlight that overuse of social platforms is linked with negative mental health



results, especially anxiety. Compulsive checking and the urge to remain constantly informed are sources of stress, and FOMO enhances feelings of exclusion and pressure.

Frison and Eggermont (2015) propose the phenomenon of "Facebook rumination," in which individuals continuously scroll through their news feeds or return to negative interactions, perpetuating stress and anxiety loops. This ruminative process forms a cycle of negative feelings, lowering emotional resilience and raising susceptibility to anxiety.

Social media fuels anxiety through pathways like FOMO, compulsive use, and emotional brooding. These results highlight the significance of recognizing the intricate association between social media use and anxiety, especially in undergraduates experiencing important developmental and social transitions.

III. DEPRESSION AMONG COLLEGE-AGED SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

Science more and more associates social media utilization in college-aged persons with depressive symptoms. Some studies point to important mechanisms by which social network sites facilitate depressive moods in adolescent users.

Marino et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review that revealed a significant link between the use of social networking platforms and an increased risk of depression. Their findings indicate that excessive engagement with these platforms can result in feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and diminished self-worth. The curated and idealized content often shared online encourages unhealthy comparisons, leading users to perceive their own lives as less fulfilling or successful, thereby intensifying depressive symptoms.

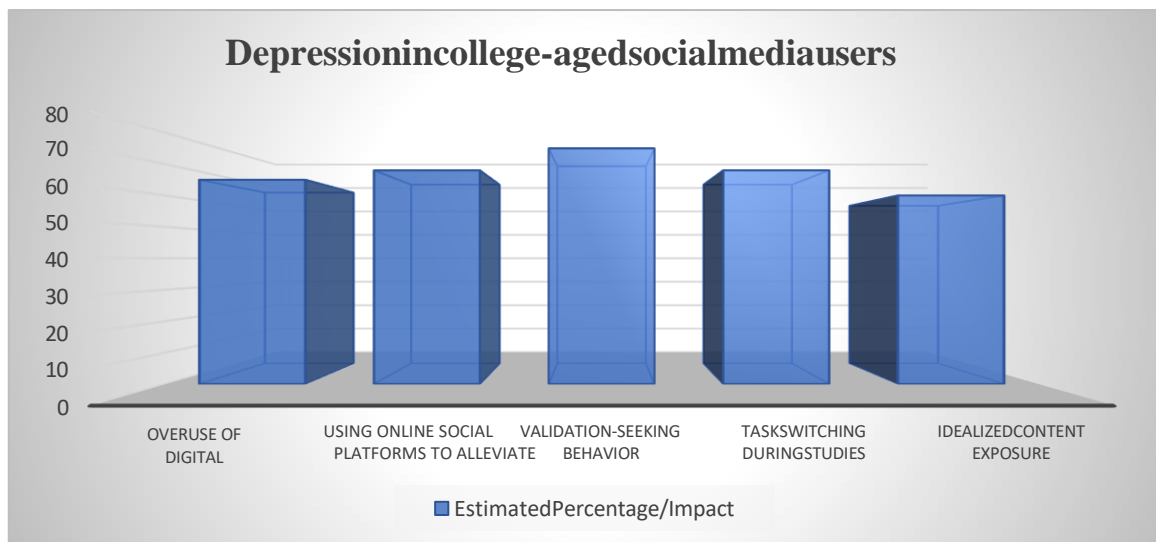
Beyens, Frison, and Eggermont (2016) explored the impact of daily stress and Facebook usage on adolescent mood, with relevance to college students. The research concluded that although students frequently use social media as a means of coping, this dependency has the potential to create a feedback loop that amplifies depressive emotions. The inclination to ruminate on negative exchanges—commonly referred to as "Facebook rumination", increases emotional distress and maintains low mood.

Rosen, Carrier, and Cheever (2013) examined the effects of multitasking behavior using social media and texting while conducting academic tasks. The authors discovered that increased occurrences of social media distraction cause task-switching, degrading academic performance and heightening the level of stress. With time, this compounded stress can lead to symptoms of depression as students fight to keep up with both online and offline obligations.

In short, college social media users' depression is fueled by social comparison, rumination, and usage patterns associated with stress. Though social media may offer affiliation and distraction, maladaptive or excessive use tends to intensify feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and emotional pain. The implications of these findings are that efforts to encourage mindful social media use and interventions to enhance mental health need to be pursued in this at-risk population.

Table: Depression in college-aged social media users

Aspect of Social Media Use	Observation	Estimated Percentage/Impact	Source
Overuse of digital networking channels	Frequent use associated with depressive symptoms due to social comparison.	~60-70% of users report feelings of inadequacy.	Marino et al.(2018)
Using Online Social Platforms to Alleviate Stress	Students using Facebook to cope with stress.	~68% experience amplified depressive symptoms.	Beyens, Frison, & Eggermont (2016)
Validation-Seeking Behavior	Users frequently check for likes, comments, or Approval on posts.	~75% of users engage in this behavior daily.	Marino et al.(2018)
Task Switching During Studies	Frequent interruptions for social media while studying.	65-70% of students report stress-related impacts.	Rosen, Carrier, & Cheever (2013)
Idealized Content Exposure	Regular exposure to curated, idealized Social media posts.	~60% feel their lives are less successful than peers.	Marino et al.(2018)



This emphasizes critical dimensions of social media usage and how they influence depression among university-age users. Excessive usage of social media, as stated by 60-70% of users, contributes to inadequacy from the process of comparing oneself with others. Also, approximately 68% of students use platforms such as Facebook as a source of stress relief, although the practice tends to exaggerate symptoms of depression. Validation-seeking behavior, where around 75% of users check their likes and comments every day, contributes further to emotional dependence and distress. Switching tasks every so often during study sessions, indicated by 65-70% of the students, destroys concentration and is a contributor to stress-related mental

disorders. Further, viewing idealized online information makes about 60% of the users feel their lives less successful more than their peers, fostering feelings of depression and inadequacy. The results highlight the intricate nature of social media consumption and mental illness, calling for careful engagement and intervention approaches.

IV. THE LINK BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AND DEPRESSION

Rising social media consumption among students has been implicated in severe mental health issues, including depression. Pantic (2014) points to high levels of correspondence between over-usage of social networking online and depressive symptoms. Social media platforms frequently expose users to idealized representations of other people's lives, resulting in feelings of inadequacy, poor self-esteem, and dissatisfaction with one's own circumstances. This constant comparison can intensify pre-existing vulnerabilities to depression, especially among young adults dealing with decisive phases of identity formation and academic stress.

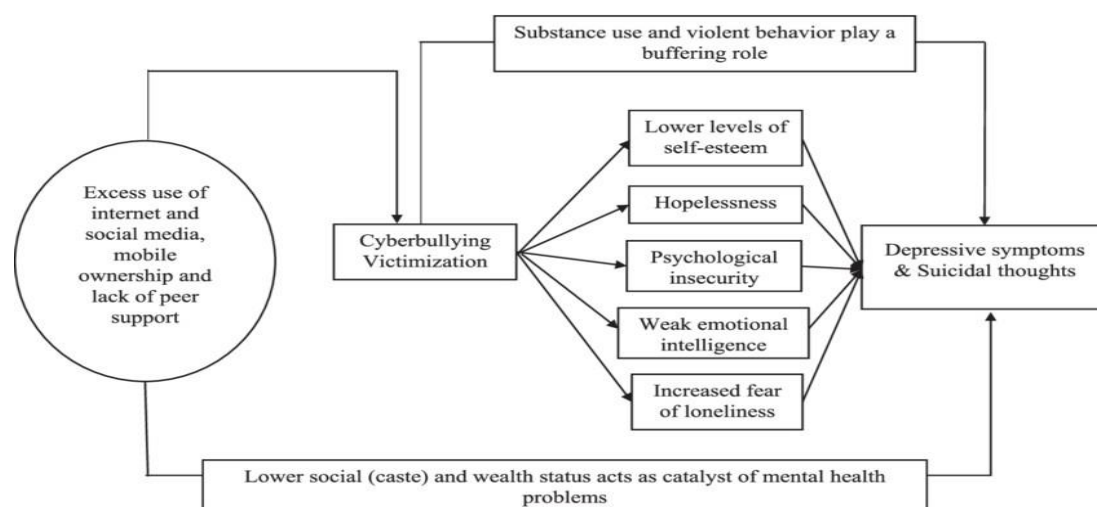
Fuchs and Sandoval (2014) highlight the importance of digital media in creating an "always-on" culture that breaks up traditional rest and reflection patterns. The need to stay active online and interact with social media constantly tends to cause mental exhaustion, reduced well-being, and feelings of loneliness. The authors contend that although social media provides opportunities for connection, its ubiquitous nature can lead to excessive exposure to emotionally demanding content, which also contributes to depressive symptoms.

Baker and Algorta (2016) present a systematic review illustrating that certain behaviors, including obtaining validation in the form of likes and comments or experiencing cyberbullying, significantly increase the risk of depression. The review emphasizes that the public and interactive aspect of social media enhances the emotional impact of unpleasant interactions. Continuous exposure to harmful content and not being able to log out of these sites frequently results in a cycle of distress, further worsening depressive symptoms.

Together, these researches demonstrate that although social media is a tool for communication and interaction, its negative impacts on mental health, especially depression, cannot be underestimated. In countering these, there is a need to advance digital literacy, encourage balanced patterns of use, and establish platform protections to address the psychological consequences of social media.

V. CYBERBULLYING: A COMMON TRIGGER FOR DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Cyberbullying has led to a major issue in the age of social media, especially among college students who are extremely active on social media sites. Verduyn et al. (2017) highlight that the anonymity and ubiquitous nature of social media increase the effect of cyberbullying, rendering it more intractable and impossible to flee. Unlike conventional bullying, cyberbullying penetrates intimate spaces, frequently tracking victims across platforms and perpetuating an incessant pattern of harassment. Such constant bombardment with offensive messages, degrading remarks, or public embarrassment generates anxiety and low self-esteem, leading to the formation of depressive symptoms.



Alden and McAuley (2019) also highlight the psychological impact of cyberbullying, citing its significant correlation with social anxiety and depressive consequences in young adults. Cyberbullying victims tend to exhibit increased fear of judgment

and rejection, resulting in withdrawal from online and offline relationships. The public nature of cyberbullying cases can heighten feelings of shame and helplessness, as victims tend to feel unsupported or alone. These experiences not only increase emotional distress but also reinforce vulnerability, and it becomes difficult for victims to overcome the psychological effects.

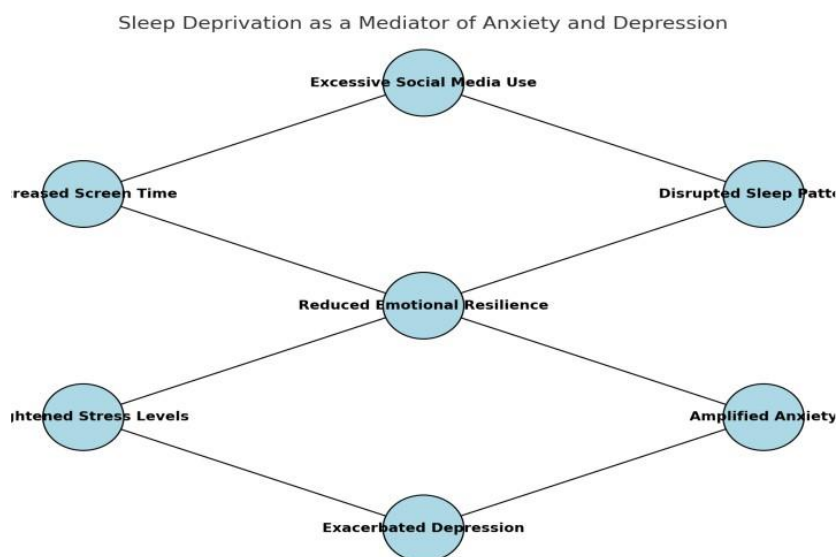
Both depression and anxiety are aggravated by the long-term impacts of cyberbullying, including sleep disturbance, increased stress, and trust issues in building relationships. Verduyn et al. (2017) point out that even bystanders to cyberbullying may suffer from emotional distress, thus developing a toxic digital environment for all the users. In order to alleviate these consequences, Alden and McAuley (2019) recommend interventions such as digital literacy training, strong reporting on social media, and community support systems to empower victims and decrease the incidence of cyberbullying.

Generally, cyberbullying is a common stimulus for anxiety and depression with severe psychological impact on college-age individuals. Solving this problem demands a multi-faceted strategy that ensures safer online environments, enhances resilience, and encourages supportive networks to safeguard the mental health of young adults.

VI. SLEEP DEPRIVATION AS A MEDIATOR OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Sleep deprivation is an important mediator that connects social web platforms use to emotional distress in college-aged adults. Social media sites, especially ones like Instagram, are structured to promote extended use, which tends to interfere with normal sleep patterns. Lup, Trub, and Rosenthal (2015) point out that regular night-time social media use, fueled by notifications and fear of missing out (FOMO), pushes back sleep onset and diminishes sleep quality. The blue light that screens give off suppresses melatonin secretion, further worsening sleep disturbance. Gradually, such circadian disruptions lead to mental health issues, such as heightened anxiety levels and depressive symptoms. Sampasa-Kanyinga and Lewis (2013) point out that lack of sleep due to overuse of social media increases emotional susceptibility, with people being less able to manage stress. Lack of sleep interferes with the brain's capacity to control emotions, which tends to increase irritation, anxiety, and unhappiness. This sets up a cycle of stress influencing yet more social media use as a way of coping, with stress worsening sleep deprivation and aggravating mental illness.

The addictive quality of social media is also a factor to "hyperarousal" status, where the brain stays overstimulated even during relaxation periods. This state of perpetual mental arousal, Lup, Trub, and Rosenthal (2015) note, renders relaxation impossible, resulting in ongoing stress and lowered emotional recuperation abilities. For young adults, already facing academic and social stress, the interaction of sleep deprivation and use of social media greatly increases their risk of depression and anxiety. In conclusion, sleep deprivation is an effective mediator of depression and anxiety in young adults. Disruption of sleep brought about by social media usage not only reduces emotional resilience but also creates a vicious cycle of mental health issues. To tackle this problem, interventions that promote responsible social media use, especially in the evening, and campaigns to raise awareness of the role of sleep in mental health are needed.



VII. INTERVENTIONS FOR COPING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA-RELATED ANXIETY AND

DEPRESSION

Effective interventions are important in reducing the bad effects of social media on anxiety and depression among college students. Social media, although useful for networking and information, can pose serious mental health difficulties if used in excess or in maladaptive manners. Berryman, Ferguson, and Negy (2018) underscore the need to develop digital competency among young adults to provide them with the competencies required to critically appraise information online, control their screen time, and minimize their vulnerability to social comparison and negative social interactions. Cao, Sun, and Liu (2020) highlight the significance of organized behavioral interventions, including mindfulness exercises and cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), in counteracting the psychological impacts of social media consumption. Mindfulness strategies enable individuals to become more mindful of their social media use, allowing them to identify and curb compulsive scrolling habits. In the same vein, CBT targets the reframing of negative thinking patterns and building resilience to stressors in online interactions, including cyberbullying or exposure to carefully crafted content.

Healthy social media practices are also a good strategy. This involves imposing time limits on usage, especially in the evening, to avoid sleep disruptions that worsen anxiety and depression. Promoting frequent digital detoxes and participating in offline activities, like exercise or in-person social interaction, can also assist in regaining balance and minimizing dependence on social media as a main source of validation or coping. Platform-specific intervention is another promising method. Berryman et al. (2018) propose that social media platforms can take an active role by creating features that foster healthy engagement and minimize exposure to toxic content. Examples include the introduction of tools that monitor and restrict usage time, providing mental health resources within apps, and employing algorithms to decrease the visibility of possibly triggering content.

Lastly, the development of supportive environments within schools can address the mental health issues correlated with the use of social media. Counseling sessions, peer support groups, and mental health and digital well-being workshops can equip students with the skills to cope with the digital world in a healthier way. In summary, coping with anxiety and depression caused by social media needs an interrelated strategy involving individual behavioral techniques, platform-specific interventions, and institutional support systems. These efforts all together enable young adults to have healthier relationships with social media and protect their mental health.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Research emphasizes the double-edged sword of social media, providing potential for connection while threatening mental health. Kross et al. (2013) point out how regular Facebook use is linked to decreases in relation to personal well-being, highlighting the emotional cost of social media use. The ongoing comparisons created by staged online personas result in dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem, especially among young adults struggling with identity formation.

Tiggemann and Slater (2013) echo this view, showing the wrong influence of social media on emotional well-being and body image among young women. Their results confirm that viewing idealized and unattainable representations online perpetuates negative self-assessment and worsens symptoms of depression. Collectively, these studies bring to the forefront the urgency for tackling the pervasive influence of social media via public education campaigns, policy shifts, and community aid.

By promoting an knowledge of the psychological dangers of social media and balanced use, stakeholders can assist in reducing its negative impacts. Developing resilience in college-age students and healthier online behaviors are key steps toward ensuring that social media continues to be a means of connection and not a cause of distress.

REFERENCES

1. Alden, L. E., & McAuley, T. L. (2019). Social anxiety, social media use, and the development of depressive symptoms among young adults. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 38*(1), 59–81.
2. Baker, D. A., & Algorta, G. P. (2016). The relationship between online social networking and depression: A systematic review of quantitative studies. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 19*(11), 670–677.
3. Berryman, C., Ferguson, C. J., & Negy, C. (2018). Social media use and depression in young adults. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 21*(3), 120–125.
4. Beyens, I., Frison, E., & Eggermont, S. (2016). The influence of daily stress and Facebook use on adolescents' depressed mood. *Social Media + Society, 2*(1), 1–12.

5. Cao, H., Sun, Y., & Liu, J. (2020). Social media use and adolescent mental health: A meta-analysis of cross-sectional studies. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 265, 30–39.
6. Frison, E., & Eggermont, S. (2015). The impact of daily stress on adolescents' depressed mood: The role of Facebook rumination. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 44, 249–257.
7. Fuchs, C., & Sandoval, M. (2014). The digital media: The impact on college students' well-being. In *Digital Communication and Media Impact* (pp. 45–67). Routledge.
8. Kross, E., Verduyn, P., Demiralp, E., Park, J., Lee, D. S., & Ybarra, O. (2013). Facebook use predicts declines in subjective well-being in young adults. *PLOS ONE*, 8(8), e69841.
9. Kuss, D. J., & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). Social networking sites and addiction: Ten lessons learned. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 14(3), 311.
10. Lup, K., Trub, L., & Rosenthal, L. (2015). Instagram use and young adult mental health: The role of social comparison. *Journal of Social Media in Society*, 4(2), 12–23.
11. Marino, C., Gini, G., Vieno, A., & Spada, M. M. (2018). Is social networking site use associated with increased risk of depression? A systematic review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 69, 246–258.
12. Pantic, I. (2014). Online social networking and mental health. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 17(10), 652–657.
13. Primack, B. A., Shensa, A., Sidani, J. L., Whaitte, E. O., Lin, L., Rosen, D., Colditz, J. B., Radovic, A., & Miller, E. (2017). Social media use and perceived emotional distress among U.S. young adults. *JAMA Dermatology*, 153(4), 247–253.
14. Rosen, L. D., Carrier, L. M., & Cheever, N. A. (2013). Facebook and texting made me do it: Media-induced task-switching while studying. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(3), 1227–1236.
15. Sampasa-Kanyinga, H., & Lewis, R. F. (2013). Social media use and physical health outcomes. *Journal of Health Communication*, 18(5), 419–436.
16. Sampasa-Kanyinga, H., & Lewis, R. F. (2015). Frequent use of social networking sites is associated with poor mental health in adolescents. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 18(7), 380–385.
17. Tiggemann, M., & Slater, A. (2013). Net Girls: The Internet, Facebook, and body image concern in adolescent girls. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 46(6), 630–643.
18. Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2018). Increases in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among U.S. adolescents after 2010 and links to the rise in smartphone use. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 6(1), 3–17.
19. Vannucci, A., Flannery, K. M., & McCauley Ohannessian, C. (2017). Social media use and anxiety in emerging adults. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 36(10), 804–828.
20. Verduyn, P., Ybarra, O., Resibois, M., John, O. P., & Kross, E. (2017). Do social network sites enhance or undermine subjective well-being? A critical review. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 11(1), 274–302.