

A Bibliometric Analysis of Social Media's Impact on Young Adults' Mental Health and Well-Being

Noraini Saro¹, Nur'Izzatty Muhiddin², Siti Aisyah Yahya³

^{1,2}Faculty of Education and Humanities (FEH), UNITAR International University Tierra Crest, Jalan SS 6/3, Ss 6, 47301 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, ³Center for Preaching & Leadership Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)

Email: sitiaishah85@ukm.edu.my, izzatty.muhiddin@unitar.my

DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v14-i4/26859>

Published Online: 05 December 2025

Abstract

This study uses bibliometric analysis to examine research trends about the influence of social media on the mental health and well-being of young adults from 2019 to 2025. The study used bibliometric techniques, specifically VOSviewer, to delineate key themes including anxiety, self-esteem, depression, and social media usage within the framework of major worldwide events, notably the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis identifies clusters of research pertaining to psychological distress, body image issues, and the impact of online learning during pandemic lockdowns. It underscores the role of social media platforms in exacerbating mental health issues via social comparison and heightened exposure to idealized representations. The research highlights the socio-political backdrop, indicating that concepts associated with democracy and political discourse affect youth well-being. Gender and socio-economic inequities are significant contributors, with women and low-income populations facing elevated mental health risks. Policy implications necessitate the integration of mental health support within educational environments and the implementation of digital literacy initiatives. This bibliometric analysis offers a comprehensive picture of emerging research trends, enabling evidence-based interventions to enhance the psychological well-being of young adults in a swiftly transforming digital and pandemic environment.

Keywords: Bibliometric Analysis, Social Media, Mental Health, Young Adults, Covid-19 Pandemic

Introduction

The phrase "social media" refers to a group of technologies that allow for the distribution of enormous volumes of information to a large audience, particularly in the domains of education and entertainment. The purpose of mass communication is to generate widespread attention. Since the introduction of social media, the availability of legitimate educational content, news, and information on socioeconomic and cultural issues has had a tremendous impact on interpersonal and cultural ties. Social media platforms not only serve as a route for "producers" and "consumers" to engage with one another, but they also considerably facilitate the transmission of information about product development.

Effective communication can help to transform a society's views and actions toward local, national, and global development (Manjula, 2023).

The widespread utilization of social media has become a fundamental component of young people's everyday existence, significantly influencing their social interactions, identity development, and information access (Nagata, 2025). The digital landscape is dominated by platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, which provide both opportunities for social connection and sources of psychological tension. Although social media can cultivate community and a sense of belonging, it simultaneously subjects young individuals to risks such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and detrimental content that may adversely affect mental health (Pew Research Center, 2025; Cureus, 2023). The dual nature of social media poses a significant difficulty, especially for young adults undergoing crucial developmental phases.

Social media use is one of the important elements in development of youth as adult youth could interact and communicate with other people (Bartsch and Subrahmanyam, 2015). According to Ahmed et al (2019), social media refer to the web or mobile platforms that allow people to communicate and interact with others within the online platform, in which it enables its users to create content, exchange various formats of digital content, share and collaborate and many activities exist in the social media platforms. Gustavson (2017) mentions that social media is a digital environment that allows the user to mix personal and professional information as well as allow the business to communicate with customers in the new channel. This advancement of technology makes the user not only the consumer of the media but also the producer to the viewer. The user could produce an interesting video and post in the social networks to promote the product or self-marketing.

According to Zulkifli & Abidin (2023) state that social media usage among Malaysian university student increase and continue grow. The increased number of social media usage in Malaysia will lead towards the mental health issues such as depression, anxiety as well as stress, which indirectly could lead towards self-harm. Previous study shows that social media addiction among young generation will lead towards realm of depression (Xiao et al, 2022). This situation is because the individual who spend more time in using social media and decline any real-life communication with the family's members and friends will lead towards the depression and anxiety.

To enhance this comprehension, bibliometric analysis provides a beneficial approach to comprehensively chart the developing literature on the influence of social media on the mental health of young adults from 2019 to 2025. This strategy identifies major research trends, topic clusters, and influential studies to drive interventions and policy creation aimed at minimizing adverse consequences and increasing digital well-being. This study seeks to consolidate existing evidence, emphasizing the relationship between social media, mental health, and the developmental experiences of young adults amid the extraordinary circumstances of global health crises.

Literature Review

Social media is a way for people to communicate socially. It needs TV, radio, and newspapers or magazines. However, it is considered a specific communication medium based

on internet networks, making it easy to comment, share news, and raise issues. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Zoom. Social media makes modern human communication easier in many ways. From messaging to sharing da'wah knowledge and methodologies. Due to social media, ugliness and crime are spreading swiftly. Starting with gossiping, bullying, and fraud to prostitution. Thus, social media has good and bad eyes (Saro, N. et al. (2024).

Recent research indicates a persistent association between extensive social media usage and symptoms of anxiety, depression, and diminished psychological well-being in teenagers (Draženović et al., 2023). Longitudinal and cross-sectional research indicate that heightened interaction with platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat correlates with an escalation in mental health symptoms, including self-harming behaviors and suicidality (Draženović et al., 2023; Rutledge, 2025). A minority of research indicate that good online interactions, such as reciprocal peer support during isolation, might alleviate loneliness and stress, especially when offline support systems are compromised (Rutledge, 2025; Popat & Tarrant, 2022). According to (Taha et al., 2023), the level of social media addiction among university students, revealing a moderately high level of addiction. A total of 230 undergraduate students were observed in this investigation, and the findings indicated a moderately high level of social media addiction, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.6694 (Table 1). Notably, numerous studies have explored the level of social media addiction among university students, consistently reporting a significant prevalence of social media addiction in this population.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified the relationship between social media use and youth mental health. Increased screen time during lockdowns, coupled with the disruption of normal social and educational routines, elevated risks for mental health problems while amplifying the importance of digital platforms for maintaining social ties (Draženović et al., 2023; Mayo Clinic, 2024). Adolescents reported greater dependency on social media for communication, but concerns emerged regarding the addictive nature of these platforms and exposure to harmful content, including cyberbullying and idealized images that reinforce unattainable beauty standards (Mayo Clinic, 2024; Rutledge, 2025). The pandemic context highlighted both the potential for online environments to provide social buffering and the danger of exacerbating vulnerabilities among youth (Draženović et al., 2023).

Qualitative research enriches the understanding of adolescents' perspectives on social media's dual impact. It reveals that youth often seek validation, engage in appearance-based comparison, and experience pressure to maintain curated, idealized profiles, contributing to emotional distress and lowered self-esteem (Popat & Tarrant, 2022). At the same time, many adolescents report benefits from online support forums and connections with peers who share similar experiences or challenges (Popat & Tarrant, 2022). Notably, online peer engagement and positive humor can promote resilience and mitigate some of the negative effects of digital exposure (Mayo Clinic, 2024).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology and a bibliometric analysis approach to examine the influence of social media on the well-being of young adults from 2019 to 2025. Publications that investigate topics such as anxiety, mental health, self-esteem, and social

media utilization during significant global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, are investigated in the analysis. The study will illustrate the impact of social media discourse on the psychological health and overall well-being of young adults by examining citation patterns and the co-occurrence of key terms. The research will generate visual representations to identify prominent authors, research trends, and thematic clusters in literature using tools such as VOSviewer. This bibliometric approach enables a comprehensive analysis of the changing relationship between the well-being of young adults, mental health, and social media, while also offering essential insights for future interventions and policies.

Result

Table 1

Number of Documents, main sources, type

Year	Number of Documents	Main Source Trend (per graph)	Main Source Types
2020	1,293	Moderate output, few active sources	Articles, Book Chapters, Books
2021	1,511	Growth in multiple sources	Articles, Book Chapters, Books
2022	1,585	Peak in some sources, steady expansion	Articles, Book Chapters, Books
2023	1,766	Gradual increase across key journals	Articles, Book Chapters, Books
2024	1,896	Highest output in main source (purple line >100 docs)	Articles, Book Chapters, Books
2025	1,570	Slight decline across most sources	Articles, Book Chapters, Books

Table 1 shows that Scopus statistics reveal social media and well-being research production increased between 2020 and 2024, but declined in 2025. Documents increased steadily, peaking at 1,896 in 2024. Scholars are increasingly interested in how digital participation affects mental and emotional health, especially after the pandemic when social media usage habits changed.

The “Documents per year by source” graphic shows that while multiple sources contributed consistently, one main journal or publication (the purple line) increased to over 100 papers in 2024. An academic concentration of digital well-being research has led to the rise of dominating publication outlets. Other sources showed minor increases, indicating publication venue diversity.

The statistics show that social media and well-being research is maturing in volume and source. The gradual climb from 2020 to 2024 matches global scholarly trends on mental health, online identity, and digital communication. A minor decline in 2025 may suggest a stabilizing period as the field shifts toward concentrated, high-quality research rather than volume.

Figure 4 shows co-occurrence network visualization. The word cloud image shows important concerns connected to social media, mental health, adolescence, and COVID-19, which influence modern well-being discussions. Terms like "culture," "politic," "democracy," and "discourse" (emphasis in red) indicate a connection to social issues and politics, showing how external factors affect mental health and social interactions. Conversely, phrases like "age," "participant," "anxiety," "self-esteem," "depression," and "symptom" (highlighted in green) are linked to psychological well-being, particularly emotional conditions, mental health difficulties, and their assessment. These expressions underline the importance of social and mental health in well-being, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The combination of "adolescent," "girl," "university," and "student" emphasizes young adults' intellectual and social struggles. The uncertainty about future educational and job prospects and social pressure from Instagram and TikTok increase youth psychological stress. During lockdowns, when online activity predominated, these platforms worsened teenagers' body image and mental health (Fardouly et al., 2020). Social comparison theory states that people compare themselves to others on social media, which increases inadequacy and anxiety and sadness (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014).

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Adolescent mental health and social media use are important research areas. Identity, self-perception, and emotions are affected by digital media. According to Fardouly et al. (2020), teenagers, particularly girls, who view more idealized pictures on social media have lower self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction. Adolescent mental health issues are linked to internet influences, as seen by the word cloud clustering "body image," "self-esteem," and "girl."

Political rhetoric around COVID-19, such as "democracy," "political," and "political party," shows social instability. Due to social restraints and economic deterioration, the epidemic has increased socioeconomic disparity, disproportionately affecting youth. Political discourse affects teenage views, especially in nations undergoing social change or government instability (Moffitt & Tingley, 2021). Young people are seeing how political changes affect their educational, social, and professional chances, increasing uncertainty and stress. The report recommends early intervention. Policies should address how social media, online education, and political instability affect youth mental health. Programs should teach students how to balance online and offline wellness, manage academic and social expectations, and promote mental health in both. Mental health and educational specialists must collaborate to develop a comprehensive plan to address these issues and give children the support and resources they need to succeed.

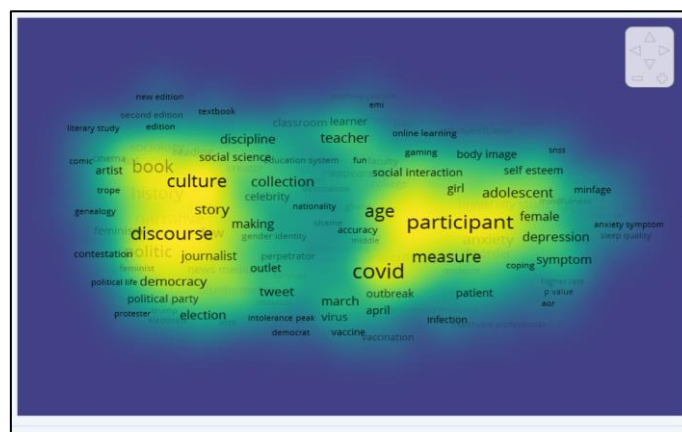


Figure 5 show the density visualization, the word cloud reflects the multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Malaysian youth, particularly concerning mental health, education, and socio-economic factors. Prominent terms such as "depression," "anxiety," "stress," and "self-esteem" underscore the psychological challenges faced by adolescents during and post-pandemic. Notably, females reported higher levels of depression and anxiety

compared to males, with those from low-income households exhibiting more severe symptoms. This disparity highlights the intersection of gender, socio-economic status, and mental health outcomes.

The presence of terms like "culture," "discourse," "political," and "democracy" suggests an exploration of how societal and political contexts influence youth mental well-being. The pandemic has intensified discussions around governance, societal norms, and their implications on mental health. Additionally, "COVID-19," "virus," "outbreak," and "vaccine" indicate a direct focus on the pandemic's effects, emphasizing its role as a significant stressor for youth.

The inclusion of "adolescent," "girl," "university student," and "participant" points to specific demographic groups under study. Research indicates that university students experienced heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression during the pandemic, with factors such as academic pressure and social isolation contributing to these mental health challenges. These findings suggest that interventions should be tailored to address the unique needs of these groups.

"Measure," "accuracy," and "p-value" imply a research-oriented approach, indicating that the data is derived from empirical studies assessing the prevalence and correlations of mental health issues among youth. Such studies are crucial for informing evidence-based interventions and policies aimed at mitigating the mental health crisis among Malaysian adolescents.

Discussion

Depression, anxiety, and stress have increased among Malaysian young because to the COVID-19 pandemic. Wong (2023) observed that low-income youth had more severe symptoms than their higher-income peers. This emphasizes the necessity for socioeconomically tailored mental health interventions. Mental health results also depend on gender. Females had more severe depression and anxiety than males, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive mental health care. Students are also stressed and anxious due to school closures and online learning due to the pandemic.

In response to these difficulties, Malaysia launched the National Strategic Plan for Mental Health 2020–2025 to lower adolescent depression rates from 18% to 10% by 2025. These activities are crucial to youth mental health and well-being. Additionally, mental health interventions using technology have proven promise. Online counseling services and digital platforms are making mental health support for youth easier. These digital initiatives must be inclusive and equitable for all young groups.

Conclusion

The analysis of the word cloud reveals the complex interplay between mental health, socio-economic factors, gender, and education among Malaysian youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that includes targeted interventions, gender-sensitive strategies, and the integration of technology in mental health care. Continued research and policy efforts are essential to mitigate the long-term impacts of the pandemic on youth mental well-being. Social media has become a defining feature of

adolescent life, offering both opportunities for support and significant mental health risks. Numerous studies from recent years indicate that regular exposure to social media is associated with heightened levels of anxiety, depression, sleep problems, and negative self-perception, especially among those who spend several hours a day online or engage in frequent comparison with others. This risk appears heightened for adolescent females and those already experiencing poor mental health, further complicated by exposure to cyberbullying, unrealistic body ideals, and harmful online content. Despite these risks, social media platforms also serve as valuable resources for some teens, enabling peer support and access to mental health information, highlighting the dual impact of digital environments.

In response to these challenges, experts and leading organizations recommend a multi-tiered approach to promote youth digital wellbeing. This includes implementing digital literacy education, stronger safety regulations, and parental monitoring of screen time and online interactions. Professional guidance for families and adolescents is advised, emphasizing the importance of healthy technological habits, critical thinking online, and resilience against negative digital influences. Governments, educators, and technology companies are called to collaboratively enhance protections for youth and ensure safe, supportive online spaces, integrating these efforts with mental health resources and evidence-based interventions tailored to young people's diverse needs.

Acknowledgement

The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support provided by UNITAR International University through the Internal Grant Scheme (IG2025/FEH/03) for the research project titled "A Holistic Intervention for Young Adults Facing Life Crises: Integrating Social Media Awareness and Spiritual Well-Being." The author also extends sincere appreciation to the Faculty of Education and Humanities for their continuous encouragement and assistance throughout the completion of this study.

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