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School Interventions Supporting the Challenges Faced by Adolescents Using Social Media

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Abstract

This study investigates the complex relationship between social media engagement and student well-being, particularly focusing on cyberbullying and its broader implications for mental health in adolescents. Schools play a critical role in establishing effective practices to monitor and address instances of cyberbullying, yet there is a gap in understanding the efficacy of current policies tailored to alleviate the adverse effects associated with social media. By exploring how schools implement these good practices in the United Kingdom (UK), the research aims to identify potential strengths and weaknesses in existing frameworks, assessing their impact on student well-being. Additionally, the study evaluates the dual nature of social media's impact on academic performance, weighing its benefits against possible disadvantages. By considering the perspectives of educators, students, and parents, this research seeks to provide actionable insights and recommendations for enhancing student support systems. The findings aim to contribute to meaningful dialogue around improving educational strategies to encourage safer online environments while promoting positive mental health among adolescents in the digital age. Ultimately, this research underscores the necessity for adaptive policies that can evolve in response to the rapidly changing social media.

Key words: adolescents, social media, cyberbullying, mental health, school intervention, academic performance.



Introduction

Adolescents now rely heavily on social media for social contact and communication in their daily lives (Chen and Xiao, 2022). A significant multinational study indicates a dramatic increase in what it terms problematic social media engagement among youth after the epidemic (Hjetland *et al.*, 2021; Singleton, 2024). Given that social media can be utilised for effective and efficient learning, it is undeniable that educational interactions with it might be among the most advantageous resources for many pupils (Sala *et al.*, 2024). However, adolescents often struggle with identity formation on social media and may become victims of cyberbullying, which can negatively impact their mental health. As a result, academic performance and self-esteem may suffer (Adam, 2021). According to the Department for Education (DfE) (2014), bullying in any form, including cyberbullying, ought to be addressed as a school-wide community issue. It is critical that schools take action to stop and address bullying among students. According to Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model, bullying or peer rejection can lead to the disintegration of a child's microsystem. This may result in several adverse consequences, including diminished academic performance, social exclusion, and mental health issues (Antony, 2022).

Therefore, to prevent cyberbullying, teachers must be able to respond appropriately and support parents and schools in sharing information (Phillips, 2022). However, there is a lack of studies on teachers' knowledge and skills to stop cyberbullying in schools. Structure or rules are needed to identify, control, and prevent this complicated problem (Redmond *et al.*, 2020). By identifying and addressing these issues early, schools can promote both academic and individual well-being. Consequently, the research leads to informed policies, comprehensive support, and awareness among parents, educators, and legislators to create a supportive environment for students struggling with stress due to social media. Therefore, we need to adapt as quickly as social media changes, and research helps us to stay one step ahead. Overall, the aim of my research topic is to examine the role of schools in implementing and improving interventions that are aimed at addressing student well-being issues triggered by social media. Therefore, my research questions are:

1. How do schools implement good practices to monitor and address cyberbullying?
2. How effective are current school policies in mitigating the detrimental effects of social media on adolescents' mental health?
3. What are the benefits and potential disadvantages for adolescents in terms of the impact on academic performance?

Method of literature review

A literature review is a comprehensive discussion of published material in a specific subject area, not merely a series of short commentaries, as it is more like a book catalogue or annotated bibliography (O'Hara, 2018). Incorporating works from various researchers it enables readers to comprehend the topic within a broader perspective (O'Hara, 2018; Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019; Cottrell, 2024). Thus, the literature review analyses researchers' academic sources and thoughts and their contributions to the field of study, integrating them cohesively (Thomas, 2017; Mukherji and Albon, 2018). Therefore, this non-empirical dissertation aims to synthesise critically analysed material pertaining to school-based initiatives that help to address the difficulties that adolescents encounter when using social media. Consequently, analysing contemporary data regarding the highly sensitive issue of cyberbullying and adolescents' mental health, in conjunction with school intervention, is the most appropriate approach in this instance. Furthermore, the impact of social media on student mental health and school interventions research can address knowledge gaps, provide evidence-based policies, assist in resource development, increase awareness, provide a foundation for future research (Gupta, Jogdand, and Kumar, 2022), and promote a comprehensive approach to well-being for the student.

The advantages of a literature review include the depth of reliable material that has already been covered on the subject from a wider range of data from many perspectives, agreements, and variations in culture in a more comprehensive context (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018; Largan and Morris, 2019). For instance, through a critical analysis of current research, a literature review can identify knowledge gaps that can lead to new research avenues. Additionally, a researcher might avoid conducting the same research twice by looking over earlier Studies. Nevertheless, there are drawbacks to this approach. Non-empirical researchers do not have access to first-hand participant data, which is crucial for gathering the most relevant information for the specific issue (Bennett, 2020). Secondly, the study faces limitations due to its cross-sectional nature and dependence on self-reported data, which presents social desirability bias and restricts the direct causal connotation among social media engagement, cyberbullying, and diminished well-being (Zhang, Tang, and Liu, 2023). Moreover, additional longitudinal or experimental analyses are required, and different approaches such as self-reporting or behavioural assessments could enhance the methodological integrity of the research (Levitt *et al.*, 2021).

Primarily, it was daunting to choose a topic of interest and locate materials that I wished to explore. However, Mukherji and Albon (2018) suggest that developing a mind map facilitates the exploration of various facets and the generation of concepts and keywords for accessing pertinent literature. Therefore, developing research questions becomes more manageable if parameters are established and keywords are identified (Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019). Databases and search engines such as EBSCO, Google Scholar, Sage, Scopus, Keenious, Taylor and Francis, and the university's virtual library offered essential options for obtaining relevant, up-to-date, and peer-reviewed journals for the keywords such as adolescents, mental health, academic performance, social media, school policies in the UK, school intervention, and cyberbullying in search engines. Additionally, more data were collected on social media engagement, cyberbullying, and mental health issues among adolescents and school policies through official documents, national statistics, and policies to address enquiries.

Subsequently, relevant materials were collected, arranged, and saved in a Word document in a different folder for every research question on the laptop. After that, each journal was read, and immediately relevant information was entered into a spreadsheet matrix. A spreadsheet matrix is a grid format that arranges data into rows and columns, facilitating analysis and manipulation according to themes that were pertinent to the research questions (Microsoft Support, 2021). This is a very helpful application for qualitative research, as it helps to assess if it is aligned with the study hypothesis (Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019; Cottrell, 2024). Therefore, when the content was arranged according to themes, it became clear that there was a lot to learn about cyberbullying, school intervention, mental health issues, and academic performance.

Moreover, Bronfenbrenner's social-ecological model serves as an appropriate theoretical framework for investigating the interplay between social media, cyberbullying, and mental health challenges among secondary school students, analysing the intricate relationships of individual, peer, family, school, and community elements (Guo, Liu, and Wang, 2021; Patel and Quan-Haase, 2022). The theoretical positioning in research refers to the stance a researcher assumes when conducting research and how this stance is influenced by their identity (Holmes, 2020; Rowe, Kanita, and Walsh, 2023). The wide range of academic literature and the data analysis involved people from varied backgrounds, ensuring the inclusion of all perspectives to cultivate a critical outlook. Hence, being reflexive in my research is contingent upon my perspective, values, and social experiences. Therefore, the concept of positionality is crucial for ensuring the validity of my research, as subjectivity significantly influences the interpretation of human behaviour in the social realm (Holmes, 2020; Bayeck, 2022). Impartiality will be maintained throughout this research; nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge my role as a prospective educator and a mother of four who possesses a strong interest in the subjects of adolescent social media engagement, cyberbullying, and mental health issues.

Furthermore, reflexivity is a crucial component of research, as it illustrates how our decisions in seeking information might influence the data obtained (Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019; Barrett, Kajamaa, and Johnston, 2020). Therefore, as I conducted my literature review, I developed experience in choosing data based on my research topic and using prior knowledge to interpret the results (Largan and Morris, 2019). Simultaneously, utilised critical thinking and critical analysis to synthesise data from various sources and effectively communicate the research results. In addition, a time management strategy was acted on and adhered to the research time bar (Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019). For example, put certain days and times aside to carry out the research and analyse the findings. The implementation of this study will provide a deeper understanding of the school's cyberbullying policy and intervention strategies to support the students at the secondary school.

Literature review

Who are adolescents?

An adolescent is an individual undergoing the developmental phase of adolescence, generally between the ages of 10 and 19, while this range may fluctuate due to cultural or biological influences [World Health Organisation (WHO), 2025].

What is social media?

Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that facilitate the formation and distribution of user-generated content, building on the technological and conceptual foundations of Web 2.0 (Kaplan, 2018). Social media offers a wide array of entertainment options, including videos, images, games, and live broadcasts (Printz, 2024). LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Twitter are a few examples of social media.

What is mental health?

Mental health, as defined by the WHO (2019), is a psychological state that aids individuals in coping with life's challenges, recognising their skills, participating in learning and employment, and contributing to their community. National Health Service (NHS) England data indicate that 20.3% of UK children aged 8-16 exhibit probable mental illnesses, rising to 23.3% among those aged 17-19, which means one in five young people tends to have mental health issues, with the highest prevalence observed in the older adolescent cohort (NHS, 2023).

What is school intervention?

School intervention signifies a temporary, targeted teaching initiative aimed at resolving learning deficiencies or requirements for individual students or small groups. This approach offers additional assistance beyond the standard classroom lessons (Twinkl, 2022).

What is academic performance?

Academic performance refers to the ability of students to complete educational assignments, which is measured through objective indicators like final grades and grade point averages (Anthonysamy, Koo, and Hew, 2020). Studies indicate that students who excel academically are more likely to make a seamless transition into adulthood, attaining higher levels of professional and financial success (Melendro *et al.*, 2020).

What is cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying is a type of bullying in which victims are targeted, harassed, or humiliated through the internet, social media, or mobile devices, and some adolescents may regard it as less severe (GOV.UK, 2011; NSPCC, 2016; lawstuff.org.uk, 2023). This includes behaviours such as transmitting menacing communications, spreading falsehoods online, divulging an individual's private information without permission, or intentionally ostracising someone from a digital community.

What constitutes cyberbullying?

Cyberbullying encompasses a variety of behaviours such as online harassment, doxxing, trolling, baiting, cyberstalking, spamming, and flaming. This form of aggression may manifest through intimidation, threats, harassment, defamation, social exclusion, impersonation, unauthorised sharing of personal information, and emotional manipulation (NSPCC, 2016; National Bullying Helpline, 2022; lawstuff.org.uk, 2023). The long-term effects can be devastating, leading to anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of self-worth.

Distinctions between cyberbullying and traditional bullying

Cyberbullying and traditional bullying are differentiated by their medium, anonymity, visibility, audience, oversight, and psychological effects (Sticca and Perren, 2013). Cyberbullying transpires via online platforms, enabling offenders to target victims without physical presence (Aisya, 2024), whereas traditional bullying occurs face-to-face, frequently inside educational settings (Moore *et al.*, 2013). Social ecological theory provides insights into traditional bullying by highlighting that health risks arise from intricate interactions among individuals and their environments (Cross *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, it poses greater challenges for parents, teachers, and authorities to identify and address, whereas traditional bullying is more readily observable by teachers and peers (Nappa *et al.*, 2020).

Nonetheless, both forms are associated with mental health complications, but cyberbullying may lead to more severe consequences. The interplay between traditional and cyberbullying is intricate, with some researchers positing that they are extensions of traditional bullying, while others contend that the characteristics of the digital environment promote unique patterns (Khong *et al.*, 2019). According to the recent Ofcom (2023) study, 39% of UK children aged 8-17 have experienced bullying, with 84% of incidents occurring on a device. The most common method of bullying is through text or messaging apps, followed by social media and online games (Anti-Bullying Alliance, 2020). In tackling cyberbullying, a social-ecological approach should focus on cognitive, psychosocial, and ecological risk factors at various levels, including those of the individual, family, peers, online interactions, and the wider community, all the while acknowledging the interconnected nature of online and offline social environments (Cross *et al.*, 2015).

Legislation addressing cyberbullying and online safety

In the UK, schools must legally safeguard students against various forms of bullying, including cyberbullying, which broadens the duties of teachers beyond the confines of the classroom (DfE, 2017). While there are multiple legislations that can be invoked to tackle cyberbullying, discussions about their relevance often arise due to the ambiguous nature of what constitutes bullying. Threatening behaviour conducted through digital platforms, including cyberbullying, falls under specific legal frameworks. Such as:

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 mandates that schools establish a behaviour policy designed to address and prevent various types of bullying, such as cyberbullying. It is essential that this policy be shared with all staff members, students, and parents (GOV.UK, 2011; DfE, 2017; NSPCC, 2022).

Under the Equality Act 2010, schools are required to abolish discrimination, harassment, and victimisation in their settings. This obligation extends to preventing cyberbullying that targets individuals based on attributes like disability, race, religion, gender identity, or sexual orientation (GOV.UK, 2011; DfE, 2017).

The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 mandate that those in charge of an academy or independent school must avoid bullying to the greatest extent that is reasonably feasible through the formulation and execution of an effective anti-bullying policy (DfE, 2017).

Consequently, schools are required to implement appropriate measures to both prevent and respond to instances of online harassment. Bullying events must be treated as a child protection issue under the Children Act 1989 when there is reasonable suspicion that a child is experiencing or is at risk of substantial harm. Thus, school staff must confer with the authorised safeguarding lead and report concerns to the local authority's children's social care services. External assistance may be offered to students, irrespective of whether safeguarding is deemed a concern. Schools may require external services to assist the impacted student or to tackle the root causes that contribute to bullying (DfE, 2017).

Nonetheless, bullying is not classified as a distinct criminal offence in the UK, but certain harassing or threatening behaviours or messages may be prosecutable. Therefore, the legislation covers the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, the Malicious Communications Act 1988, the Communications Act 2003, and the Public Order Act 1986. School personnel should request police intervention if they suspect a crime. The Communications Act 2003 outlaws highly offensive, indecent, obscene, or menacing communications, including cyberbullying (DfE, 2017). Subsequently, the Serious Crime Act 2015 outlines penalties for actions that severely impact an individual's mental or physical well-being, including cyberbullying. Additionally, schools are required to safeguard students from various forms of harm, including that resulting from cyberbullying, thereby necessitating proactive measures to mitigate such issues (Angwaomaodoko, 2024).

School policies to monitor and address cyberbullying

Schools in the UK adopt various effective measures to track and combat cyberbullying. One significant approach is the establishment of a thorough anti-bullying policy that outlines actions against cyberbullying. This policy is routinely evaluated and shared with all members of the school community, including staff, students, and parents (NEU, 2025). Secondly, schools hold frequent workshops aimed at informing students about the risks associated with cyberbullying and highlighting the significance of maintaining safety online. These sessions focus on instructing students on the responsible and respectful use of technology (DfE, 2017). Additionally, schools create straightforward procedures for students, staff, and parents to report cyberbullying incidents, which may include anonymous options to promote more students feeling comfortable speaking up. Schools also offer assistance for those affected by cyberbullying, featuring counselling and peer support initiatives (NSPCC, 2022). Additionally, schools provide resources for parents to help their children cope with these challenges. Staff members are trained to recognise and address incidents of cyberbullying, which encompass awareness of legal responsibilities and the authority schools possess to combat such behaviour. Schools frequently partner with outside organisations like the NEU and NSPCC to obtain extra resources and assistance in combating cyberbullying. They impose disciplinary measures on those who engage in cyberbullying, demonstrating that this behaviour is treated with the utmost seriousness and addressed swiftly (Katz, 2016). Through these strategies, schools strive to promote a secure and nurturing atmosphere that allows students to learn and flourish free from the threat of cyberbullying.

However, the National Bullying Helpline (2022) argues that these measures may not be enough, as schools currently exhibit insufficient authority in effectively tackling instances of cyberbullying. Therefore, a standard inspection by Ofsted could incorporate an evaluation of bullying data from all schools across the UK to monitor bullying complaints, outcomes, and remedial actions. Additionally, clear guide-

lines and a Safeguarding Officer should be established in schools to ensure parents' concerns are heard, freeing up teachers to handle distressed parents. Schools that fail to adopt such codes of practice should face consequences. Furthermore, collaboration among anti-bullying charities and organisations is essential to develop a comprehensive and obligatory framework for implementation throughout UK schools. By addressing underlying issues, schools can generate a more supportive atmosphere that ultimately lessens the likelihood of cyberbullying occurrences (O'Higgins Norman *et al.*, 2022).

Social media and mental health crisis

Recognising the influence of social media on the mental wellness of adolescents has emerged as a significant concern, particularly considering the rising incidents of mental health issues (Kim, 2017). Behaviours associated with excessive internet use are frequently characterised using psychiatric language, including the notion of addiction. However, engagement in certain behaviours by adolescents might be perceived as unusual (Keles, McCrae and Grealish, 2020). For instance, the tendency to share numerous selfies could be interpreted as narcissism; however, this practice has become a common aspect of social media culture among adolescents (McCrae, 2019). Consequently, the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) (2017) report a 70% rise in anxiety and depression among young individuals over the last 25 years. A survey by NHS England (2023) revealed that 20.3% of 8 to 16-year-olds in England had a possible mental disorder, and a recent study indicated a 65% increase in mental health admissions for youth in England over the last decade, with the most significant spike observed among girls aged 11-15 (UCL, 2025). Therefore, the substantial escalation in adolescent mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, and social difficulties, has been increasingly linked to social media engagement, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive research and intervention strategies to address this growing public health concern within educational contexts.

Anxiety

According to WHO (2023), anxiety disorders are prevalent mental health diseases marked by excessive concern and fear, which can profoundly affect daily functioning. Anxiety is a typical human reaction to stress or danger, impacting individuals irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, culture, or religion (Cybulski *et al.*, 2022; YoungMinds, 2023). Subsequently, various factors such as tests, competitions, social events, or dates can trigger it. Symptoms may include difficulties concentrating, impatience, nausea, abdominal discomfort, heart palpitations, diaphoresis, tremors, insomnia, and a pervasive sensation of imminent danger or doom (WHO, 2023). However, anxiety disorders are not normal and can persist for extended periods (Printz, 2024). It is crucial to receive help if anxiety triggers suffering or hinders capacity to perform tasks well. Usually, it goes away after the issue is resolved (YoungMinds, 2023).

Research indicates a correlation between prolonged social media consumption and heightened anxiety symptoms, as well as an elevated likelihood of eventually acquiring an anxiety disorder (Gregory, 2024). The findings revealed that there is a direct relationship between the number of social media platforms utilised and the experienced anxiety (Zubair, Khan and Albashari, 2023). However, to alleviate this anxiety, adolescents should minimise their social media engagement and screen time, practise mindfulness, and build relationships outside the digital realm. It is also beneficial to cultivate gratitude for life and for one's body. Therefore, implementing these strategies can effectively help mitigate the stress and anxiety linked to social media use (Printz, 2024).

Depression

Depression is a prevalent mental health illness marked by enduring poor mood, diminished interest, and disruptions in sleep, appetite, self-esteem, hopelessness, exhaustion, and attention (NHS, 2023;

WHO, 2024). Many individuals may encounter times when they feel low; however, true depression is characterised by prolonged periods of deep sadness that can last for weeks or even months, rather than just a short duration (Printz, 2024). Moreover, depression impacts 2% of children and adolescents, affecting all ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses, with a notable prevalence among older adolescents, particularly teenage girls (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2022).

Subsequently, Woods and Scott (2016) discovered that individuals who engaged with social media most frequently, especially during the night, tended to report elevated levels of depression, particularly among those who were deeply emotionally involved. A study conducted by Azem *et al.* (2023) revealed a link between adolescents' use of social media and the prevalence of depression. The findings indicated that higher engagement with social media correlated with increased depressive symptoms, and those experiencing depression exhibited elevated cortisol levels in their saliva compared to their non-depressed counterparts (Scott and Woods, 2019; Sowmya *et al.*, 2023). However, the research highlights the need for educating adolescents on responsible social media consumption and the necessity of establishing boundaries regarding the time they spend online. Rather than eliminating social media from their lives, it is vital to convey its potential risks (Azem *et al.*, 2023). Findings indicate that greater engagement with social media correlates with heightened levels of depression, making it essential to tackle this concern to mitigate its escalation (Printz, 2024).

School policies in tackling mental health issues

In the UK, schools have no obligation to have a separate mental health policy; such policies should align with the obligations set forth by the Equality Act 2010. This Act acknowledges that a mental health condition that negatively impacts behaviour constitutes a disability (Freud, 2024). However, according to DfE (2025), schools are advised to implement a whole-school approach for mental health and wellbeing. The whole-school approach integrates all aspects of school lives and has been demonstrated to be more effective in enhancing social and emotional well-being than concentrating on a limited number of elements (Weare, 2015). This approach includes creating a supportive atmosphere, assisting teachers, and embedding mental health awareness within the coursework. Important aspects include promoting respect, valuing diversity, and emphasising emotional well-being. However, staff training, inclusion in the curriculum, consideration of student perspectives, early intervention, cooperation with parents and guardians, and the establishment of a dedicated mental health policy are vital components (DfE, 2025).

Consequently, the Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) curriculum highlights the importance of mental health and wellbeing by teaching students to identify signs of mental health difficulties and encouraging them to seek support (media officer, 2023). Schools should be adept at recognising the correlation between mental health and behaviour, detecting possible issues, and offering suitable assistance (DfE, 2018). Some schools create mental health action plans, introduce early intervention initiatives, and engage with mental health support teams (MHST) (Noble, 2022). Ofsted inspectors evaluate and report on the mental health and wellbeing of students as part of their assessment of personal development, which encompasses resilience, confidence, independence, and strategies for maintaining mental health (Freud, 2024). Additionally, the government has offered training for senior mental health leaders. Counsellors within schools play a vital role in enhancing students' mental wellbeing (Scott, 2024). Moreover, there should be an expansion of MHSTs to assist schools in addressing prevalent mental health concerns. MHSTs consist of newly introduced educational mental health practitioners who collaborate with experienced clinicians and various other specialists. They work in conjunction with the current mental health resources available in schools and colleges, which include counsellors, psychologists, nurses, pastoral care staff, welfare officers, and organisations from the voluntary sector (DfE, 2025).

Nonetheless, schools frequently resort to disciplinary actions to tackle mental health challenges, an approach that can aggravate the situation (Hayes, 2023). Numerous adolescents perceive these approaches as inadequate, while policymakers tend to concentrate on diagnosing problems instead of prioritising preventative measures. The collaboration between MHST and children's social care remains inadequate, with budgetary limitations hindering local authorities' efforts (OFSTED, 2024). Therefore, this can create a vicious cycle of unaddressed needs and deteriorating behaviour, intensifying the strain on schools and educators.

Collaboration between school and parents

Collaborating with parents and families can greatly improve the success of school interventions and enhance parenting skills to tackle mental health issues among adolescents. This partnership strengthens the communication of school messages and enhances the skills of parents (Adi *et al.*, 2007; Bachman, Cunningham & Boone, 2024). A study found that strong parent-school partnerships improved outcomes for at-risk adolescents, leading to sustained improvements in coping skills and emotional regulation (Epstein and Sheldon, 2019). Consequently, communication can occur in a casual manner through discussions, talks, written materials, parenting workshops, and assigned family liaison officers. Parents might require assistance in managing their emotional reactions to their children's actions, dedicating meaningful time to them, emphasising positive attributes, and hearing their children's concerns (Weare, 2015). Research indicates that when interventions within schools are reinforced, there are positive effects on both familial and educational experiences (Shucksmith *et al.*, 2007; Macalisang and Bonghawan, 2024). However, the involvement between schools and families is a delicate matter, particularly for children and adolescents facing challenges. It is important that parents and carers do not feel demeaned or held responsible for their children's issues. Schools should recognise the strengths within families and nurture them, promoting a sense of acceptance and self-assurance (Weare, 2015). The involvement of parents is vital for the early detection of students who may be struggling. They ought to be kept in the loop, involved in decision-making processes, and given the necessary information and support (Sujarwo *et al.*, 2021).

Impact of social media on Academic Performance: the benefits and potential disadvantages analysis

The direct relationship between social media and academic performance is polarised, with certain studies suggesting a detrimental effect on academic performance (Karpinski *et al.*, 2013; Goet, 2022). Conversely, some studies indicate that social media can enhance student involvement and cultivate favourable academic outcomes (Junco, Heiberger & Loken, 2011). Similarly, there is conflicting evidence about the effects of social media on students' academic performance in the UK; some studies have found negative effects, while others have shown positive ones (UK Parliament, 2023). Sequentially, social media has greatly influenced the learning and experiences of adolescents, presenting both challenges and opportunities in the realms of health and education (Lu, Hao & Jing, 2016; Galetzka, 2017). Although research indicates a minor adverse effect of social media on academic performance, this may not be consistent across different cultures or universally applicable (Junco, Heiberger, and Loken, 2011; Greenhow and Lewin, 2016). For instance, online interaction on Facebook or Instagram can have both beneficial and detrimental impacts on the academic involvement of secondary school students, as research from the University of Cambridge (2019) indicates that online educational platforms can be advantageous for adolescents, enhancing engagement in mathematics among both students and parents. The positive impact of online education is further reinforced when schools and teachers actively endorse it, creating an environment that promotes both motivation and engagement among learners (BBC, 2024). With the endorsement of schools, students are more likely to approach online learning as a valuable tool rather

than a mere alternative, thereby enhancing their academic outcomes. This endorsement suggests that when traditional educational frameworks embrace digital tools, they can significantly enrich the learning experience, advancing a supportive environment that adapts to the needs of today's students.

However, Al-Menayes (2015) claims that social media consumption, engagement, and addiction have a negative impact on adolescents' grades, demonstrating a negative correlation between these factors. Therefore, I will investigate adolescents' behaviour both within and outside school concerning social media, as well as their impact on adolescents' mental health and cognitive functioning. It is also crucial to examine the areas of attention and competencies that significantly impact adolescents' academic performance.

Social media behaviour inside and outside school

The way adolescents use social media can be divided into behaviours occurring inside and outside school, which may affect their academic success. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the relationship between outside school social media behaviour (OSSMB), which focuses on leisure and entertainment, and inside school social media behaviour (ISSMB), which is oriented towards academic tasks and school-related activities (Lu, Hao, and Jing, 2016). Considering this, Lu *et al.* (2018) developed two separate measurement scales for adolescents to evaluate these behaviours. The scale for OSSMB includes four aspects: consuming, communicating, creating, and sharing, while the scale for ISSMB comprises three aspects: consuming, creating, and sharing. According to Luo, Liang, and Li (2020), social media provides a fundamental function, primarily used by adolescents for entertainment beyond the school environment and for academic purposes within it. The primary role of social media is to facilitate communication, allowing adolescents to interact with one another for various objectives. Nevertheless, research on the connection between OSSMB and ISSMB, including their impact on academic achievement, remains limited. Moreover, technology has infiltrated adolescents' daily lives in both academic and non-academic environments, making it essential to differentiate between adaptive and maladaptive social media use (Lu *et al.*, 2018; O'Reilly *et al.*, 2018).

Mental health and cognition issues

The mental well-being of children and adolescents has noticeably worsened in recent years, with NHS England (2022) data indicating that 18.0% of those aged 7 to 16 were likely suffering from a mental health disorder. This is a marked increase from 12.1% in 2017, 10.1% in 2004, and 9.7% in 1999 (NHS Digital, 2018). A report released in 2019 by the Chief Medical Officers of the UK identified a link between screen time and mental health issues, although it did not establish a causal connection (Smith *et al.*, 2024). There is a change in children's mental health attributed to increased time spent online and a decline in face-to-face interactions, which adversely affected their mental well-being (UK Parliament, 2023). Consequently, Singleton (2024) expresses significant apprehensions over the effects of digital technology on the mental health and well-being of European youth. Research indicates that individuals exhibiting problematic social media use often experience significant negative impacts on their daily lives (Chavda, 2023). A study conducted by the RSPH (2017) revealed that heavy use of social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram are linked to increased feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness.

Consequently, some studies have identified the side effects of social media use, specifically the mental effects on academic performance (Błachnio & Przepiorka, 2015; Fox & Moreland, 2015). Similarly, the indirect relationship between social media use and adolescents is correlated with various mental factors, including sleep disturbances, low self-esteem, and depression (Woods & Scott, 2016). These detrimental characteristics and concerns are frequently associated with substandard academic achievement. Recent

studies on media multitasking have provided further insights into the negative impacts of media consumption on education, mental health, and cognitive processes (Lu *et al.*, 2018; Chavda, 2023). A recent report from the WHO has emphasised the detrimental impact of social media on adolescents, calling for enhanced digital literacy education and prompt intervention from governments, health officials, educators, and parents to assist teenagers in cultivating healthy online behaviours. The results indicate that engaging with social media can contribute to issues such as depression, bullying, anxiety, and decreased academic achievement (Singleton, 2024).

Attention and competencies

Achieving academic success depends on the ability to concentrate and focus on tasks (Fleming and McMahon, 2012; Anastopoulos and King, 2015). A lack of sustained attention may result in hindered learning, challenges in organisation, and ineffective time management. Attention is characterised by the management of time and the study environment, which involves concentrating on the task at hand, minimising distractions, and reaching academic objectives (Kwon, Kim & Kwak, 2018). Therefore, Gkintoni *et al.* (2024) argue that by engaging with gaming and educational applications, adolescents develop a greater focus on the finer details necessary to complete various tasks. These activities can enhance students' capacity to observe and analyse relevant details, implement visual-spatial skills in non-gaming environments, and cultivate problem-solving abilities through detail identification (Ji *et al.*, 2022). Adolescents can acquire an understanding of the characteristics and functionalities of information and communication technology and utilise this knowledge in their educational environment (Kuhlemeier and Hemker, 2007). Flinsi (2018) states that educational programmes that utilise media assist children in gaining knowledge and enhancing their academic skills. Hence, cognitive abilities such as thinking, problem-solving, and communication is essential (Osae & Papadopoulos, 2024; Papadopoulos, 2020, 2021; Papadopoulos & Bisiri, 2020; Papadopoulos & Shin, 2021). Social media platforms offer opportunities for education, career development, and personal connections. Virtual classrooms and video games contribute to enhanced learning experiences, while media-assisted education and interactive gaming can boost intelligence quotients (Sasikala, 2021).

Nonetheless, research has also specified a connection between extensive use of social media and issues with attention, with frequent multimedia users struggling to eliminate distractions (Karpinski *et al.*, 2013). When students develop a dependency on gaming websites and social media platforms, they often try to juggle multiple tasks while studying. Students' academic performance and focus on assignments are hindered by this addiction to social media (Kokoç, 2021). A significant number of students are dedicating excessive time to social networking sites instead of finishing their homework, which may leave them unprepared for class. Rather than engaging in thorough study or analysis, they tend to skim through their work hastily (Van der Schuur *et al.*, 2019).

Overall, the affiliation between social media and academic performance is multifaceted and contested. Many adolescents gain advantages from smartphones, and research indicates that only a small group is at risk (Odgers, 2018). While some argue for safeguarding adolescents online due to concerns about their vulnerability to threats, others emphasise the importance of empowering them, as their digital competencies are frequently underestimated by adults (Livingston, Bober, & Helsper, 2005). Therefore, this topic requires further exploration (Doleck, Bazalais, & Lemay, 2017; Huang, 2018). However, after examining the advantages and disadvantages of adolescents' social media usage and its impact on their academic performance, I came to know that research recommends adopting an environment that supports studying while minimising the use of social media platforms (McCardle *et al.*, 2017), and that students who successfully organise their time and establish a distraction-free learning environment tend to achieve better grades (Kitsantas, Winsler and Huie, 2008; Samsudin *et al.*, 2023).

Ethical consideration

Ethics are guidelines for researchers to follow when conducting research, ensuring integrity and legitimacy (Bryman, 2016; Thomas, 2017; Clark, Foster, & Bryman, 2019). They are moral precepts designed to prevent harm to subjects, and moral behaviour is necessary to uphold ethical considerations in research involving both human and animal subjects (Mukherji and Albon, 2011). Consequently, conducting a non-empirical literature review on sensitive themes like cyberbullying and mental health difficulties in secondary school students requires ethical considerations, particularly ensuring reliability and truthfulness in interpreting and presenting existing research. This involves avoiding prejudice, appropriately citing sources, and acknowledging the limitations of the evaluated literature (Bryman, 2016; Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019). It is important to note that non-empirical research does not include direct data collection from participants, which alleviates concerns about informed permission and participant protection (Clark, Foster, & Bryman, 2019). Thus, ethical considerations are critical in non-empirical research to protect participant rights, maintain study integrity, and maintain credibility when using external resources (Thomas, 2017). Furthermore, Largan and Morris (2019) emphasise the importance of upholding ethical norms for preserving gathered data, such as installing password security. This applies to both empirical and non-empirical research methods, emphasising the importance of sharing information with others in a responsible and courteous manner.

The important considerations I measured when working with secondary data were its sensitivity, creator, audience, purpose, and research applications. Before reusing participant data, it is necessary to establish ownership and obtain consent from data supervisors on behalf of contributors (BERA, 2024). Therefore, ethical research, including literature reviews, emphasises informed consent, respect for sources, thorough documentation, and ethical awareness. Accurate attribution, citation, and communication are essential for responsible treatment of other researchers' work, respecting their contributions and intellectual property (Cohen, Manion, & Morrisons, 2018). This principle is central to the planning and implementation of my study.

Subsequently, my research into the impact of social media on adolescents' mental health and school interventions can benefit in addressing knowledge gaps and promote a comprehensive approach to the well-being of the student. My evaluation of the effectiveness of current school-based interventions could lead to recommendations for improving existing programmes or formulating new initiatives. The findings may facilitate more effective environments for students by advocating a comprehensive approach to student well-being in the digital age.

As a parent of adolescents, I recognised that my positionality could influence my views on adolescents' use of social media before I began my literature review. Nevertheless, I approached the research with an open mind and a genuine desire to uncover the true nature of the situation. Qualitative research is naturally subjective and impacted by personal biases, requiring reflection on one's experiences and positionality relative to participants and the potential impact of these components on data collection and analysis (Clark, Foster, and Bryman, 2019).

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the complex connections between social media interaction, cyberbullying, mental health, and academic performance among adolescents, with a specific focus on intervention strategies in secondary schools. The findings reveal important insights that could inform school policies and practices and significant gaps that require attention. Consequently, the research reveals that effective policies to combat cyberbullying should include thorough frameworks, ongoing educational sessions, well-defined reporting mechanisms, and adequate support for those impacted. Nonetheless, the National Bullying Helpline (2022) has pointed out that these strategies may not be

entirely effective, as numerous schools face challenges in maintaining consistency, especially with incidents that arise outside school hours yet influence the school atmosphere. This highlights the necessity for standardised inspection protocols, explicit guidelines, and collaborative efforts among technology experts, counsellors, educators, parents, and anti-bullying organisations. Moreover, the correlation between social media and mental health is notably alarming, with data associating prolonged social media engagement with increased anxiety and depression. The study emphasises various factors contributing to mental health issues, such as FOMO, detrimental social comparisons, and experiences of cyberbullying. According to data from NHS England (2023), more than 20% of children aged 8 to 16 are likely experiencing mental illnesses, which emphasises the magnitude of the problem. Although schools are adopting comprehensive approaches to support mental health and wellbeing, the efficacy of these programmes is inconsistent, signalling an urgent requirement for improved cooperation among schools, mental health services, and families.

The findings also underscore the complex influence of social media on students' academic achievements, indicating that these digital platforms can act as both beneficial learning resources and sources of distraction (O'Reilly, 2020). Effective educational policies include teaching media literacy, which equips students to engage with online environments thoughtfully and responsibly, rather than resorting to excessive restrictions that could inadvertently promote undesirable behaviours. Similarly, the integration of viewpoints from educators, parents, and students has provided a comprehensive insight into the difficulties and possibilities associated with tackling cyberbullying, mental health issues, and advancing positive digital citizenship. Of particular significance is the emphasis on collaborative strategies that encourage transparent dialogue among these stakeholder groups. Conversely, the limitations of this study include its reliance on existing research rather than primary data collection, the rapidly changing nature of social media platforms, and potential biases in self-reported data about social media usage and mental health issues. Future policy development should prioritise student voice, inter-agency collaboration, and regular evaluation of intervention effectiveness. Additionally, future research should address these limitations through longitudinal studies that track the evolving relationship between social media use and adolescent well-being.

Finally, upon approaching the research with an objective perspective and methodological meticulousness, this study revealed that social media engagement among adolescents presents a nuanced picture rather than an exclusively detrimental influence. While empirical evidence indicates a concerning correlation with increased prevalence of mental health issues, strategic coordination among key stakeholders, implementation of evidence-based policies, and promotion of digital literacy can facilitate responsible social media utilisation among adolescents, thereby maximising potential benefits. When adolescents exhibit mental health issues, schools must implement comprehensive intervention protocols through collaborative frameworks that prioritise adolescent wellbeing (O'Reilly *et al.*, 2018). The literature demonstrates that through coordinated initiatives involving parental guidance, educational systems, and relevant external organisations, adolescents can be effectively supported in optimising the advantages of digital platforms while concurrently mitigating potential adverse outcomes. This integrated theoretical framework represents a more balanced conceptualisation of digital engagement management, potentially reducing associated risks and enabling adolescent development and resilience within increasingly digitised social environments.

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