

# Social media and mental health: a documentary analysis of its impact on psychological well-being

Redes sociales y salud mental: análisis documental de su impacto en el bienestar psicológico

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## Abstract

Technological advancements have significantly transformed communication and social interaction, positioning social media as central elements in everyday life. However, their intensive use has raised growing concerns about their impact on mental health, especially in younger populations. The aim of this study was to analyze the effect of social media use on mental health and psychological well-being, based on the available scientific evidence. A documentary, non-experimental, qualitative research approach was conducted, based on the review and critical analysis of academic literature published between 2018 and 2025 in peer-reviewed and indexed scientific sources. The results revealed a duality in the effects of social media use. Positive effects included the strengthening of social support, self-expression, identity building, and a sense of belonging, particularly in contexts of isolation. However, excessive and unregulated use was associated with anxiety, depression, decreased self-esteem, insomnia, digital fatigue, and technological dependence, primarily related to constant social comparison and prolonged exposure to idealized content. Overall, the findings suggest that the impact of social media on mental health is neither inherently positive nor negative, but depends on usage time, type of interaction, purpose of content consumption, and emotional self-regulation skills. These results emphasize the importance of promoting digital literacy, mindful use of digital platforms, and preventive strategies aimed at protecting mental health and fostering a healthy balance between digital life and psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** social media; mental health; psychological well-being; social comparison; digital literacy

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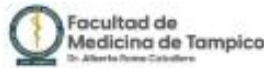
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## Resumen

Los avances tecnológicos han transformado de manera significativa las formas de comunicación e interacción social, posicionando a las redes sociales como elementos centrales en la vida cotidiana. No obstante, su uso intensivo ha generado crecientes preocupaciones respecto a su impacto en la salud mental, especialmente en poblaciones jóvenes. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar el efecto del uso de las redes sociales sobre la salud mental y el bienestar psicológico, a partir de la evidencia científica disponible. Se realizó una investigación documental, no experimental y de enfoque cualitativo, basada en la revisión y análisis crítico de literatura académica publicada entre 2018 y 2025 en fuentes científicas arbitradas e indexadas. Los resultados evidenciaron una dualidad en los efectos del uso de las redes sociales. Entre los efectos positivos se identificaron el fortalecimiento del apoyo social, la autoexpresión, la construcción de identidad y la sensación de pertenencia, particularmente en contextos de aislamiento. Sin embargo, el uso excesivo y no regulado se asoció con ansiedad, depresión, disminución de la autoestima, insomnio, fatiga digital y dependencia tecnológica, principalmente relacionados con la comparación social constante y la exposición prolongada a contenidos idealizados. En conjunto, los hallazgos sugieren que el impacto de las redes sociales en la salud mental no es intrínsecamente positivo ni negativo, sino que depende del tiempo de uso, el tipo de interacción, la finalidad del consumo de contenidos y las habilidades de autorregulación emocional del usuario. Estos resultados subrayan la importancia de promover la alfabetización digital, el uso consciente de las plataformas digitales y estrategias preventivas orientadas a proteger la salud mental y fomentar un equilibrio saludable entre la vida digital y el bienestar psicológico.

**Palabras clave:** redes sociales; salud mental; bienestar psicológico; comparación social; alfabetización digital





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**INTRODUCTION**

Technological advances have transformed communication and the way people interact. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X have brought millions of users closer together around the world, but they have also raised concerns about their impact on mental health.

Young people, in particular, being the most active users on these platforms, may experience effects such as anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem.

Therefore, this study analyzes how the intensive use of social media influences emotional well-being and seeks to promote a more conscious and balanced use of technology.

**OBJETIVE**

**General Objective**

To analyze, through documentary research, the impact of social media use on mental health and psychological well-being based on the critical review of recent academic sources.

**Specific Objectives**

- To identify the main factors associated with social media use that influence mental health.
- To examine the positive and negative effects reported in the scientific literature regarding social media use.
- To describe the population groups most vulnerable to the adverse effects of excessive social media use.
- To evaluate the strategies proposed in previous research to promote healthy and responsible use of these digital platforms.

**RESULTS**

The results obtained from the documentary analysis reveal a series of both positive and negative elements regarding the use of social media.

Regarding the positive and negative effects of social media use, the analysis of the literature made it possible to identify a duality in the effects of social media on mental health.

**Positive effects:**

- Social media can serve as spaces for emotional support, especially in contexts of isolation or crisis, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic (Boto & Muñoz, 2022).
- They promote self-expression and personal identity, allowing users to share experiences, interests, and opinions (Gómez & Cárdenas, 2023).
- They encourage social interaction and a sense of belonging, reducing feelings of loneliness when used consciously (UNSA, 2021).

**Negative effects:**

- Excessive use can lead to digital fatigue, insomnia, anxiety, and depression (Martínez Soler, 2021; López & Paredes, 2022).
- Constant social comparison and exposure to unattainable ideals of success or beauty can decrease self-esteem and increase body dissatisfaction (Valenzuela et al., 2021).
- An increase in technological dependence and a sense of emotional isolation has been observed, even while being "connected" with other people (Gómez & Cárdenas, 2023).

These findings demonstrate that the impact of social media is not intrinsically negative or positive, but rather depends on the balance between time of use, the purpose of connection, and the user's ability to manage their emotions when interacting with digital content.

**METHODOLOGY**

The present research adopts a documentary design with a qualitative approach, focused on the review, analysis, and synthesis of information obtained from peer-reviewed and indexed academic and scientific sources related to the impact of social media on mental health, published between 2018 and 2025. The main objective is to gather, contrast, and interpret the theoretical and empirical findings reported in previous studies in order to identify the main risk and protective factors associated with social media use and their influence on psychological well-being.

The study is non-experimental, since variables are not manipulated and there is no direct intervention on a population. Instead, the results of previously conducted research are analyzed, which allows conclusions to be generated based on existing knowledge and provides an integrative perspective on the phenomenon.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, social media can be a very powerful tool for connecting with others, learning new things, and expressing our ideas and emotions. However, it also represents a risk if it is used without control or without awareness of the impact it can have on our daily lives. Balance is essential: it is necessary to take advantage of the benefits of these platforms without allowing them to affect our mental health, our emotions, or our social relationships in real life.

Therefore, it is crucial to promote awareness about the use of social media and to learn how to establish healthy digital habits. This includes recognizing personal limits, prioritizing face-to-face relationships, reflecting on the content we consume and share, and paying attention to warning signs in ourselves and in those around us. Likewise, it is necessary to promote digital education from an early age, so that new generations learn how to manage these tools without compromising their emotional well-being.

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