

# Exploring the Impact of Social Media Usage towards Mental Health among University Student in Malaysia

Roziya Abu<sup>\*1</sup>, Linda Setiawati<sup>2</sup>, Susanti Agustina<sup>2</sup>, Suci Yanti Ramadhan<sup>2</sup>, Lutfi Khoerunnisa<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Information Science, College of Computing, Informatic and Mathematics, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup>Educational Technology Department, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author

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## ABSTRACT

In this digital era, social media platforms play a vital role for the individual to communicate and share the ideas in human daily life. Various kinds of social media have been introduced over the years and widely been used by the youth nowadays. However, social media usage shows the negative effect to human behavior in which cyberbully has become the common digital practices among users. The negative action of online users could be seen from the harsh comments, spread of misinformation and sharing wrong information until it affects the mental health of individual who the victim in this social media. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of social media usage towards mental health status among university student particularly in Malaysia. The methodology that has been adopted is quantitative approach by distributed the questionnaire to 145 respondents among university students in Malaysia. The findings reveal that social media usage does not give the huge impact towards the mental health well-being of university students in Malaysia. However, there are minority groups of university students who feel that social media has impacted their mental health and lower their self-esteem and self-confidence. Through this research, the university could conduct counselling sessions among the victims of cyberbullying. The program and activities which related with ethical social media usage and mental health awareness should be conducted to give in-dept awareness to students on the ways to using the social media ethical ways.

**Keywords:** Information Science, Social Media, Mental Health, Human Behavior

## INTRODUCTION

Advancement of technologies are becoming increasingly and widely used by the user worldwide. According to World Population Website (2024), in 2022, the number of internet users will be around 4.9 billion, 69% of the world's population. In Malaysia, the number of active internet users around 92.7% while only 7.3% is non-internet users (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission Internet Users Survey, 2022). From the survey conducted by MCMC in 2022 show that the number of internet user increase as compared to the last three-year, inevitable trend occur especially during the pandemic Covid19, the number of internet user growth because of isolation needed during that time. With the new online environment and advancement technology has shifted analog technology to digitalization. Other than that, there are various kinds of technology that have been used nowadays and social media platforms mostly been used by society nowadays.

Social media has been used purposely to communicate and interact, share information, networking, attract viewer or audience, sharing photo and video and many others feature possess by social media. Youth between the age 15 until 31 years old is among the group that consume social media in their daily life nowadays. Youth like university students use social media as entertainment, communication as well as creating new networks. Howe (2024) in the Meltwater website mentioned that Malaysia in January 2024 show that social media usage within the age 18 until 24 years old are 24.5% from Malaysian population, with male is 11.6% and female

12.9%. While the highest group age that use the social media within the age 25 until 34 years old, with 17.9% male while 15% female. The platform like TikTok in Malaysia grow rapidly and show the new social media landscape that could attract the viewer in attracting Malaysian audiences. Social media has become the main platform especially for the youth because its offer various kind of the function and feature that could attract the audiences nowadays.

Various kinds of features have been added to social media such as content sharing, messaging, likes and reaction, collaborative as well as user-friendly features have attracted the youth to use it. However, even though social media has various features that could assist the user, there is rise of problematic behavior that associated with the high internet usage like social media platforms. Issues like cyberbullying, data manipulation, misinformation and social media addiction are negative activities that are associated with social media nowadays. A study conducted by Balakrishna (2015) state that social media is the main tool used by the younger generation for cyberbullying in Malaysia. Previous study state that 93.3% of Malaysian internet user use social media however no appropriate guidelines and policy on cyberbullying (Haris, 2023). Social media overdependence on usage is a major concern especially related with youth mental health problem nowadays.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of social media usage towards mental health among university student particularly in Malaysia. It is significantly important to explore the impact of social media usage among youth especially because this platform could give negative affect such as depression, anxiety as well as self-harm to themselves. Besides that, the social media platform also could disturb the academic performance of the university student in their study. Ashraf Iqbal and Hussain (2024) state that the effect of social media in student life includes the irregular pattern sleep and social media addiction. Activities such as counseling sessions, group therapy, digital detox, dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and other programs should be implemented at the university level so that mental health issues could be prevented in earlier phases.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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 format 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 customer 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 Wu (2023) state that the business utilizes the feature in social media for marketing and promoting in which it is include with live streaming and short video, in which that social media to attract large number of audiences or viewer. For personal life, social media is already a part of lifestyle for the people, especially youth to show their daily routine activities.

Based on report from the We Are Social and Hootsuite, as of January 2021, 83% of Malaysia has penetration rate with the social media, and it significantly include the university student and youth who also an active users of social media platform in Malaysia (Zulkifli & Abidin, 2023). The purpose of youth or university students is to use social media for entertainment, sharing and exchange ideas, social interaction and engagement with public figures or icons. This has been supported by Ismail (2014) that Malaysian youth use the social media in various aspect such as searching information, education, entertainment as well as communication and engagement with the society. From the study conducted by Sheng et al (2022), the data reveal that 92.7% of students who participate in their study spend and use social media every day and 52% use social media more than seven times a day. Through this study, the researcher wants to explore whether Malaysian student in university spend most of their time in using the social media could give huge impact towards their mental health issues among students.

## Social Media and Mental Health

According to the World Health Organization (2022), mental health refers to the state of mental wellbeing that enables the individual to cope with their stress of life, problem, stability of life, work-life balance and contribute to society. Various studies have shown that there are positive and negative effects of social media on mental health. In terms of positive affect, social media is beneficial to the university student to social interaction with knowledge expert in other institution or country. According to Bono et al, (2024), individual view social media as a platform for entertainment and socialization, share and exchange the perspective and point-of-view, release feeling and emotion as well as a gain new knowledge in dealing with mental health. Social media is also a part of the platform that helps the individual to develop their communication skills, make friends and share thoughts and ideas by participation, connectivity, dialogue and community engagement (Pee, 2018).

However, the excessive usage of social media will have a negative effect especially on the mental health of the youth, especially university students nowadays. Draženović, Rukavina, & Poplašthey also mention the same statement that the social media could negative impact towards the student's mental health until they will face with anxiety, depression as well as stress. Not only that, the excessive usage of social media also can affect the academic performance of the student in the university. Previous studies also state that the overuse of social media can affect the university's student on the level of stress, anxiety and depression by lowering their self-esteem and self-confidence (Iwamoto & Chun, 2020). A serious concern should be taken by the management in university to handle this kind of matter. The appropriate measurement should be developed to health the university student handling with their mental health wellbeing.

In Malaysia, it is significantly important to understand the scenario of social media usage in which it could give huge impact on the mental health especially among university students. 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 the 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 member and friends will lead towards the depression and anxiety. Thus, this study will explore the impact of social media towards mental health issues that are faced by university students nowadays. The researcher will further discuss the findings and discussion based on the data collected on the impact of social media usage that could lead towards mental illness among university student nowadays.

## METHODOLOGY

This study has adopted the quantitative research approach by conducting the administrated survey through an online platform. Quantitative research refers to the systematic way in collecting and analyzing numerical data regarding the research topic (Rana et. al., 2021). These methods want to oversee the summarization of data, average, frequency, find pattern and make prediction based on numerical data that has been collected in this study. The survey has been adopted the previous study that associated with the impact of social media usage towards mental health among university students. Table below show the questionnaire development from previous studies:

Table 1 Questionnaire Development from Previous Study

Components	Adopted form Previous Study
Social Media Effect	Nesi (2020); Kanaganayagam, S. (2024); Punjabi (2024)
Anxiety using social media	Alkis, Kadirhan, & Sat (2017); Bao et al (2022)
Behaviors and actions	Althoff et. al. (2017); Kumari, K. (2022)
Content Filter	Jamali & Shahbaztabar (2017)
Self-Esteem	Botou & Marsellos (2018); Zainuddin, Ravichandran, & Md Yusof (2022)

This survey has been distributed among 145 Malaysian university students who use the social media daily. The number of respondents between 18 until 24 years old participated in this study. The sampling technique used in this study is random sampling in which the respondent who was university student that come from one local university located in Malaysia. The software used to analyze the quantitative data is Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) while the descriptive statistic has been conducted to the numerical date that has been collected in this study. Through the descriptive statistic, the researchers would like to understand the impact of social media platform towards mental health among university students nowadays. The descriptive statistic has been conducted because this survey a part of self-reporting on the condition of the university student particularly on one of local university in Malaysia. This data does not represent the overall population of university students on the impact of social media usage towards their mental health. In the data analysis section, further discussion has been conducted to understand the real issues and problems regarding the topic of the study.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In assessing the impact of social media usage towards mental health of university students in Malaysia, the descriptive statistic has been conducted to assess the frequency and percentage each of item in answering the study. The survey was begun asking the main statement of this study and the statement as follows “**Have you ever been harassed on social media?**” with two types of answer either “yes” or “no”. The result shows that 35 out of 145 respondents admitted that they had received bad treatment in the form of harassment or cyberbullying on social media. Concerning the issues of cyberbullying in Malaysia, based on Razali and Nawang (2022) state that three out of ten young people have become cyberbullying victim. Meanwhile, a previous study conducted by Sarina et al (2018) mentions that most of the young generation has experienced cyberbullying at least once in a year. This matter was concerned to the university management, parents and community itself and this matter will hinder the healthy practice in using the social media in the daily life. Worse cases could happen when the cyberbully victim among university student has intention to harm themselves. Chu et al (2022) mention that cyberbully victimization correlates with ideas to suicidal among college student and the mediating role is depression. Prevention measures should be taken by the responsible agency or university management to overcome this kind of matter.

### Social Media had any Effect on University Student’s Mental Health

Table 2 effect social media on mental health

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Never	39	26.9	26.9	26.9
Seldomly	83	57.2	57.2	84.1
To A Large Extent	23	15.9	15.9	100.0
Total	145	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 show the data on the statement “**Has social media had any effect on your mental health?**” among university students in Malaysia. The respond from the respondents on statement whether social media has an impact on a person's mental health shows that 39 (26.9%) respondents state that social media does not give impact to their mental health. Followed by 83 respondents (57.2%) respond and state that social media rarely impacts their mental wellbeing. However, 23 respondents (15.9%) gave the response that mostly social media give an impact to their mental wellbeing. Even though the majority mention that social media does not give an impact on their mental health, but there are also a minority group admit that social media give huge impact to their mental health. That means social media nowadays has a tendency to affect the youth mental health until affects the university student’s studies and their academic performance. In Bangladesh, the social media addiction positive impact on their academic performance and mental health (Mosharrafa, Akther & Siddique, 2024). While same findings reveal in one of the universities in Nigeria that state social media among undergraduate student led to mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression and stress (Oloyede et al, 2024). Recent study shows that the social media usage among university students could lead towards less study time that could impact on the academic performance (Adjei et al, 2022). Align the statement with by Perera and Harshanath (2022) that state social media addiction could affect academic performance as well as impact

negatively on mental and physical health of the university student. The appropriate therapy or any counselling session should be implemented so that this kind of issue will never occur in the future.

### Experience any form of anxiety while using social media platforms.

Table 3 anxiety while using social media platform

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Never</b>	50	34.5	34.5	34.5
<b>Seldomly</b>	77	53.1	53.1	87.6
<b>To A Large Extent</b>	18	12.4	12.4	100.0
<b>Total</b>	145	100.0	100.0	

The data above shows the result from the statement “**do you experience any form of anxiety while using social media platforms?**”. The result from the 145 respondents show that 50 respondents (34.5%) stated that social media never have experience in any form of anxiety when using the social media. Then, 77 respondents (53.1%) response that social media rarely makes university students feel any kind of anxiety. However, 18 respondents (12.4%) expressed that they feel some kind of anxiety while using the social media platform. Even though, majority of respondents do not feel any kind of anxiety, there are a group of university students who feel anxiety while using social media. The minority group of students who participate in this study may already have experience being cybervictim which leads towards social anxiety. There are studies by previous scholars that state excessive social media usage associated and trigger with social anxiety in individuals (Lai et al, 2023). Previous study shows that the social anxiety is the situation when the individual is sensitive with the evaluation from other people in social media and feel like the netizen in social media have negative perception or evaluation while socializing online (Hutchins et al, 2022). Same with the scenario in Indonesia where the social media usage among college student has affect the sleep pattern and increase the anxiety and unhappiness (Iftikhar et al, 2024). However, different result from United Kingdom that reveal social media could decrease anxiety among university students through right connectivity, escapism and social connectivity (Anto et al, 2022). The result from United Kingdom has same with this study result in which decrease the anxiety. University students should avoid excessive use of social media in which known that platform could trigger social problem either mental or physical well-being. University students should begin to change their lifestyle to not spend more time on social media. Physical activities like jogging, walking and travelling could assist the university student to avoid spending more time on social media.

### Social media influence University Student’s behaviors and actions.

Table 4 Descriptive Analysis on Social Media Influence Behavior and Actions

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Never</b>	18	12.4	12.4	12.4
<b>Seldomly</b>	104	71.7	71.7	84.1
<b>To a large extent</b>	23	15.9	15.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>	145	100.0	100.0	

The Table 3 show the results of the statement on “**To what extent does social media influence your behaviors and actions?**” among universities students. The data revealed that 18 respondents (12.4%) stated that social media never influenced their behavior and action in doing something. Meanwhile, 104 respondents (71.7%) stated that social media rarely influenced their behavior and action virtually. Still, there are 23 respondents (15.9%) gave a response that mostly the social media influenced their behavior and action. The data revealed majority of student state that social media rarely influences their behavior and action. This has been supported by the statement by Amălăncei et al (2022) that state that majority of the student in university has positively attitude when using the social media ethically and the university student concern to use

appropriate language, content selection and copywriting when posting in their social media accounts. Social media usage among university student in Indonesia significantly influence the learner or student behavior and their achievement because they follow the digital ethics norms (Deviv and Lawa, 2023). University students should use social media ethically and appropriately to avoid any negative circumstances happening in the future.

### University student filter the online content

Table 5 Descriptive Analysis on Filter the Content You Consume Online Platforms

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Never</b>	11	7.6	7.6	7.6
<b>Seldomly</b>	64	44.1	44.1	51.7
<b>To A Large Extent</b>	70	48.3	48.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	145	100.0	100.0	

The finding reveals from the statement “**Do you filter content you consume online?**” from this study. The data revealed that the respondents respond with the statement and show that 11 respondents (7.6%) stated that they never filter the content the student consume in online platforms. Meanwhile, 64 respondents (44.1%) stated that university students rarely filter the content that they consume online and follow by 23 respondents (15.9%) stated that mostly this group of students filter the content that they consume online. Based on the data mentioned, the majority of respondents do not filter the content that they consume through online platforms. This scenario will be problematic when the university student does not filter the digital content, it will affect their perception and point of view on certain issues or topic. Therefore, the management in the university should take seriously in this matter so that the university student can evaluate the appropriate content when using social media. According to Rowe (2014) the higher management in the university should establish appropriate limits for the university student in using social media and develop rules to categorize a model in handling the inappropriate comments on social media.

### Social media affected university’s student self-esteem

Table 6 Social Media Affected Student’s Self-Esteem

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Never</b>	26	17.9	17.9	17.9
<b>Seldomly</b>	78	53.8	53.8	71.7
<b>To A Large Extent</b>	41	28.3	28.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	145	100.0	100.0	

The result from the statement “**to what extent has social media affected your self-esteem?**” within the university student show that 26 respondents (17.9%) state that social media never affect their self-esteem, while 78 respondents (53.8%) state that social media rarely affect their self-esteem. However, 41% of respondents (28.3%) state that social media mostly already affected their self-esteem. These findings show that social media does not impact individual self-esteem, especially among university students. This is supported by Zainuddin et al (2022) that discuss the self-esteem of student in the higher education institution not significantly influence with the time they spend in the social media platform. However, it is contradicted with the study by Iwamoto and Chun (2020) that state the lower of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth among university student caused by social media usage. In Bangladesh, the social media addiction among student in private university has harm their self-esteem and self-worth because spend more than 60 hours in the platform a week (Islam & Sikder, 2020). While there are significantly relationships exist between social media and student’s self-esteem among university student in Indonesia (Subiyakto, Saktini, & Sumekar, 2024). University students still value in the positive ways and this is the significant important for the university student feel that they are significantly important within the society.

## CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, this study has assessed whether the social media usage could give a huge impact on the university student mental health and well-being. The findings show that the social media platform does not affect the university student's mental health, however, there are minority group of university students has been affected by the negativity of social media itself. This may be because the student has become the victim of negative activities on the social media platform. The result also shows that the university student who participated in this study does not filter the online content that they consume in social media. The university management should pay attention to this matter and develop appropriate guidelines so that social media usage could be controlled in the future. Besides that, through this paper will assist the policy maker and educator to tackle these issues that related with the mental health of university students for their mental health well-being. The program such as counseling, therapy should support to the student by government in overcome the mental health problems among university students particularly in Malaysia.

The appropriate action should be taken by the higher education institution to control the usage of social media especially on the activities not related with academic for the student could focused during their study. The code of digital ethics should be implemented among university students and taken appropriate legal action especially among cyberbully in social media networks. In Malaysia, based on Ministry of Communication, Fahmi Fadzil, first version of code of conduct for social media will be launch in Jan 2025 that could use as a guideline in using the social media and messaging platform ethically and responsibility (BERNAMA, 2024). This kind of action will minimize any damage that has been survey among cybervictim within the higher education institution particularly in Malaysia. Besides that, this study could be extended by conducting the mixed-method approach through conducting quantitative and qualitative research in exploring the critical factor that influence social media usage of university student could affect their mental health. The qualitative research on the suggested research could shed light on the reasoning behind the condition of the mental health of university student answer the question whether mental health of current generation could hinder the student development well-being in the future.

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