

Social Media Use and Psychological Well-Being among Youth in Malaysia: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become an integral part of young people's daily lives, raising increasing concerns about its relationship with psychological well-being. This systematic literature review examines social media use and psychological well-being among youth in Malaysia. The review aims to identify patterns and forms of social media use, examine associated aspects of psychological well-being, and synthesise relationship patterns, related factors, and research gaps. A systematic review approach guided by PRISMA 2020 was employed to organise the identification, screening, eligibility, and selection of relevant studies. A total of 28 articles published between 2019 and 2026 were mapped and analysed according to the research questions. The literature indicates diverse forms of social media engagement, including general use, problematic use, addiction, self-disclosure, self-expression, and platform-specific use. Psychological outcomes commonly examined include depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, self-esteem, and mental well-being. Associated factors include cyberbullying, online harassment, nomophobia, and purposes of social media use. The review highlights gaps involving limited population representation, inconsistent conceptualisation and measurement, emphasis on negative psychological outcomes, insufficient examination of relationship mechanisms, and reliance on correlational designs. Future research should adopt broader populations and more comprehensive methodological approaches.

Keywords: social media use; psychological well-being; youth; Malaysia; systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

Background of Social Media Use Among Youth

The development of digital technology has made social media one of the most important communication platforms in the lives of young people. Social media is not only used for communication but also serves as a space for obtaining information, building social relationships, expressing identity, and participating in various forms of online interaction. In research contexts, social media use encompasses various forms of engagement, including active use such as creating content, commenting, sharing, and messaging, as well as passive use such as viewing or browsing content posted by other users (Xu et al., 2026).

However, social media use should not be assessed solely based on duration or frequency of use. Previous studies have shown that the forms of interaction and user engagement with social media are also important in understanding its psychological implications. For example, international literature indicates that previous research has frequently measured social media use based on frequency and duration, whereas different forms of user interaction may produce different implications for well-being (Valkenburg et al., 2020). This suggests that social media use is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires more comprehensive investigation, particularly among youth.

Issues of Psychological Well-Being Among Youth

Psychological well-being is an important aspect of youth development because this stage involves various educational, social, career, and identity-related changes. In the Malaysian context, recent research on young adults indicates that their well-being may be influenced by various social and environmental pressures, including economic instability, career uncertainty, and family pressures (Badri & Abdul Mutallib, 2026). These findings suggest that youth psychological well-being should be understood within the broader context of their lives rather than being attributed to a single factor in isolation.

In the digital environment, issues of well-being have become increasingly complex because young people's social experiences also take place in online spaces. Indicators frequently discussed in the literature on social media and mental health include depression, anxiety, stress, self-esteem, loneliness, and subjective well-being (Valkenburg et al., 2020). Therefore, research on youth psychological well-being should consider the role of the digital environment as part of their contemporary life experiences.

The Relationship Between Social Media and Psychological Well-Being

The relationship between social media use and psychological well-being is not necessarily linear or entirely negative. Literature reviews indicate that social media may provide social support, strengthen a sense of belonging, and facilitate relationship formation. At the same time, certain patterns of use have also been associated with anxiety, depression, changes in self-esteem, and dependence on social media (Wang et al., 2026).

These differences suggest that the more important question is not simply whether social media has positive or negative effects, but rather how specific forms of social media use are associated with different psychological outcomes. For example, research involving university students found that greater emotional investment in social media was positively associated with anxiety and depression (Al-Menayes et al., 2021). Other research suggests that problematic social media use should be interpreted alongside other psychosocial factors and may not necessarily function as a single indicator of poor well-being (Klanšček et al., 2026).

Therefore, the relationship between social media and psychological well-being should be critically analysed by considering the form of social media use, psychological indicators, and the context of the population being studied.

The Need for a Systematic Literature Review in the Malaysian Context

Although the relationship between social media and mental health has received considerable attention in the international literature, existing findings demonstrate considerable variation in the definitions of social media use, measures of psychological well-being, research designs, and populations studied (Valkenburg et al., 2020).

In the Malaysian context, studies have associated problematic digital use with psychological distress among university students (Chong et al., 2022). However, this evidence still needs to be systematically gathered and analysed, particularly within the context of Malaysian youth. Therefore, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is required to identify patterns of findings, similarities, inconsistencies, and research gaps in studies concerning social media use and psychological well-being among youth in Malaysia.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

This study aims to systematically synthesise empirical evidence concerning social media use and its relationship with psychological well-being among youth in Malaysia.

Specifically, this study has three objectives:

- i. to identify the patterns and forms of social media use reported in studies involving Malaysian youth;
- ii. to analyse the aspects of psychological well-being associated with social media use; and

- iii. to synthesise patterns of relationships, associated factors, and research gaps identified in the existing literature.

Based on these objectives, three research questions are proposed:

- i. RQ1: What patterns and forms of social media use have been identified among youth in Malaysia?
- ii. RQ2: What aspects of psychological well-being have been associated with social media use among youth in Malaysia?
- iii. RQ3: What patterns of relationships, associated factors, and research gaps can be identified from previous studies on social media use and psychological well-being among youth in Malaysia?

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to identify, evaluate, and synthesise empirical studies concerning social media use and psychological well-being among youth in Malaysia. A systematic approach was selected to ensure that the literature search, screening, selection, and synthesis processes were conducted in a structured and transparent manner.

The reporting of this study was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020, which provides guidelines for the identification, selection, evaluation, and synthesis of studies in systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021).

Systematic Literature Review Design

The SLR design was used to obtain a systematic overview of empirical evidence concerning social media use and psychological well-being among youth in the Malaysian context. Compared with a conventional literature review, this approach employs predetermined search and study-selection procedures to reduce subjective literature selection.

The review process was conducted through several main stages, namely record identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and study selection for the final synthesis. These procedures were reported with reference to PRISMA 2020 to enhance the transparency and reproducibility of the review process (Page et al., 2021).

Literature Search Strategy

The search strategy was developed based on three main concepts contained in the research questions: the youth population, social media use, and psychological well-being, with Malaysia serving as the geographical context. The search was proposed to cover publications from January 2015 to September 2026 in order to obtain relatively recent evidence concerning developments in social media use among youth.

Search terms were developed using synonyms and related terms to increase search sensitivity. The Boolean operator OR was used to combine terms representing similar concepts, while AND was used to connect different concepts.

The basic search strategy was as follows:

("social media" OR "social networking" OR Instagram OR TikTok OR Facebook OR Twitter OR "social media use" OR "problematic social media use") AND (youth OR adolescent OR "young adult" OR "university student*" OR undergraduate*) AND ("psychological well-being" OR "mental well-being" OR "mental health" OR depression OR anxiety OR stress OR loneliness OR "self-esteem") AND (Malaysia OR Malaysian)

The search string should be adapted according to the structure and functionality of each database. The final search should be documented together with the search date, database, actual search string, and number of records retrieved to ensure that the search process can be traced and replicated.

Databases and Preliminary Search

The preliminary literature search was conducted using the following databases.

Table 1. Databases Used in the Preliminary Literature Search

Database	Purpose
Scopus	International and multidisciplinary studies
Web of Science	International indexed studies
PubMed	Mental health and psychology studies
PsycINFO	Psychology and behavioural studies
MyCite and MyJurnal	Studies within the Malaysian context
Google Scholar	Supplementary searching and identification of potentially missed articles

The search focused on articles published between January 2015 and September 2026. Four conceptual components were used to develop the search strategy: social media, psychological well-being, youth, and Malaysia.

English keywords were primarily used for Scopus, while both Malay and English terms were used in searches conducted through MyCite and MyJurnal.

For Scopus, the preliminary search string was:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (("social media" OR "social media use" OR "social media addiction" OR "social networking site" OR "problematic social media use") AND (youth OR "young adult" OR adolescent* OR "university student*" OR undergraduate*) AND ("psychological well-being" OR "mental health" OR depression OR anxiety OR stress OR "psychological distress") AND (Malaysia OR Malaysian))

For MyCite and MyJurnal, a more flexible search strategy was employed using keyword combinations such as “media sosial” AND belia, “media sosial” AND “kesihatan mental”, “media sosial” AND “kesejahteraan psikologi”, “social media” AND “university students”, “social media addiction” AND depression, and “social media” AND anxiety AND Malaysia.

Several search combinations were required to address variations in terminology and search functions across databases. The preliminary search indicated the existence of Malaysian studies examining the relationship between social media use or addiction and psychological outcomes. These included studies involving university students in the Klang Valley that associated social media addiction with anxiety and depression, studies involving Universiti Sains Malaysia students examining social networking site use together with stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, and research involving IIUM nursing students examining social media addiction and mental health. These preliminary findings indicate that a relevant empirical literature base exists to support the continuation of the SLR.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles identified through Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, MyCite, and MyJurnal were assessed according to predetermined eligibility criteria.

Articles were included if they were published between January 2015 and September 2026, constituted empirical studies, involved participants in Malaysia, included youth aged 15 to below 40 years or student samples within this age range, examined social media use or social media addiction, and reported at least one psychological outcome such as depression, anxiety, stress, psychological well-being, or psychological distress.

Articles were excluded if the study was conducted entirely outside Malaysia; the population did not meet the youth age range and youth data could not be separated; the study only discussed Internet or technology use in general without a social media component; or the study did not include a relevant psychological outcome.

Review articles, previous SLRs, editorials, proceedings, theses, dissertations, book chapters, and non-empirical publications were also excluded from the final synthesis. For articles identified in more than one database, only one record was retained. Article titles, author names, and publication years were used to identify duplicate records.

Article Screening and Selection Process

The screening process was conducted according to the four main stages of PRISMA 2020: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. During the identification stage, all articles identified through Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, MyCite, and MyJurnal were compiled into a single reference database. The number of articles retrieved from each source was recorded separately before the records were combined.

Table 2. Recording of the Search Procedure

Source	Initial Records
Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, MyCite and MyJurnal	n = 43
Total	N = 43

All records were subsequently examined to identify duplicates across Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, MyCite/MyJurnal, and Google Scholar. Duplicate records were removed before title and abstract screening.

During the screening stage, the title and abstract of each article were examined to determine their relevance to the three main components of the study: Malaysian youth, social media use, and psychological outcomes. Articles that clearly failed to meet these components were excluded.

Articles that passed title and abstract screening subsequently underwent the eligibility stage. Full texts were examined with particular attention to participant age, data collection location, type of social media use, social media measurement instruments, psychological constructs, and research design. The reasons for each exclusion at the full-text stage were recorded.

The article selection process was as follows:

Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, MyCite/MyJurnal and Google Scholar

- Merging of all records
- Removal of duplicate articles
- Title and abstract screening
- Full-text assessment
- Application of inclusion and exclusion criteria

→ Final articles for synthesis

The preliminary search identified several studies that potentially met the scope of the SLR. For example, a study involving 230 students from private universities in the Klang Valley reported a relationship between social media addiction and anxiety and depression. A study involving 266 USM students aged 18 to 26 examined social networking site use together with stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Another study involving 208 IIUM nursing students examined the relationship between social media addiction and depression, anxiety, and stress.

However, studies identified during the preliminary search were not automatically considered final SLR articles. Each article was still required to undergo screening and full-text eligibility assessment before being included in the final synthesis.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Articles that passed the eligibility assessment were extracted using a data matrix containing author and year, study location, research design, sample size, participant age, type of social media use or platform, social media instrument, psychological construct, psychological instrument, and key findings.

The studies were subsequently compared using narrative and thematic synthesis. The analysis focused on patterns in the relationships between social media use and depression, anxiety, stress, and other indicators of psychological well-being. Similarities and inconsistencies across studies were also analysed to identify factors that might explain these differences and to determine research gaps within the context of Malaysian youth.

Article Screening and Selection Process

The article screening and selection process was conducted systematically to identify empirical studies related to social media use and psychological well-being among youth and young adults in Malaysia. The literature search covered articles published from January 2015 to September 2026 using six main databases.

Table 3. Article Screening and Selection

Stage	Technical Procedure	Criteria/Process
1. Identification	Searching Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, MyCite/MyJurnal and Google Scholar	Articles published between January 2015 and September 2026
2. Keyword searching	Combination of Malay and English keywords using AND and OR	social media, social media use, social media addiction, problematic social media use, media sosial, youth, young adult, university student, belia, psychological well-being, mental health, depression, anxiety, stress, Malaysia
3. Record merging	Records from all sources combined	Title, author, year, journal and DOI recorded
4. Deduplication	Duplicate records identified and removed	Matching based on DOI, title, author and publication year
5. Title screening	Titles of all articles screened	Studies must relate to social media, Malaysian populations and psychological outcomes
6. Abstract screening	Abstracts of articles passing title screening examined	Studies unrelated to SLR objectives excluded

7. Full-text assessment	Full texts assessed against eligibility criteria	Location, sample age, social media variables, psychological outcomes and study design examined
8. Population screening	Participant age characteristics examined	Priority given to youth; studies involving participants up to 40 years considered based on relaxed study criteria
9. Study-design screening	Research design examined	Quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method empirical studies considered
10. Exclusion	Articles failing eligibility criteria removed	For example, non-Malaysian context, no social media component, no psychological outcome or non-empirical study
11. Final inclusion	Articles meeting all criteria included	Used for data extraction and synthesis
12. PRISMA documentation	Number of articles at each stage recorded	Reported using a PRISMA flow diagram

Table 4. Publication Period and Eligibility Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication year	January 2015–September 2026	Before January 2015
Databases/sources	Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, MyCite/MyJurnal and Google Scholar	Records outside the predetermined search strategy
Context	Malaysia	Studies outside Malaysia without identifiable Malaysian data
Population	Youth and young adults; flexibility up to 40 years	Samples above 40 years where target-group data cannot be separated
Phenomenon	Social media use, problematic use or social media addiction	Internet/device use without a social media component
Outcome	Psychological well-being, mental health, depression, anxiety, stress and related psychological constructs	Outcomes unrelated to psychology

Technically, the article selection process can be summarised as follows:

Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, MyCite/MyJurnal and Google Scholar (2015–2026) → Identification → Deduplication → Title Screening → Abstract Screening → Full-text Eligibility → Final Included Studies → Data Extraction → Narrative/Thematic Synthesis

The number of articles at each stage (n) should only be entered after the complete search results from the six sources have been combined and final duplicate records have been removed.

Table 5: Final Selected Articles

No.	Year	Article Title	Research Focus	Author(s) / Source
1	2019	<i>Association of Social Media Use and Psychological Effects Among Undergraduate Students</i>	Relationship between social media use and psychological effects among university students.	Ng Yan Yen

2	2020	<i>Social Media Use and Depression among UPSI Students</i>	Relationship between social media use and depression among UPSI students.	Rizky Hafiz Chaniago Chaniago, Sarina Yusuf, Siti Nor Amalina Ahmad Tajuddin & Roslan Ali
3	2021	<i>Addictive Behaviours Among University Students in Malaysia During COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	Addictive behaviours and mental health among university students during the pandemic.	Chuong Hock Ting & Cecilia Essau
4	2021	<i>Implications of Social Media Addiction on Adolescent Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	Review of social media addiction and adolescent mental health.	Abdul Rashid Bin Abdul Aziz, Mohd Faizal Bin Kasmani & Nor Hamizah Binti Ab Razak
5	2022	<i>Internet-Related Instruments and Their Associations with Distress Among Malaysian University Students</i>	Internet-related instruments and psychological distress.	Serene En Hui Tung et al.
6	2022	<i>Self-Disclosure on Social Media and Its Influence on the Well-Being of Youth</i>	Self-disclosure through social media and youth well-being.	Faizal Kasmani, Abdul Rashid Abdul Aziz & Rezki Perdani Sawa
7	2022	<i>The Factors of Social Media Usage and Mental Health: A Study on Malaysian Adolescents</i>	Factors related to social media use and mental health among Malaysian adolescents.	Samantha Lee & Zhooriyati Sehu Mohamad
8	2022	<i>Association between Social Media Addiction and Mental Health Among IIUM Undergraduate Nursing Students</i>	Social media addiction and mental health among nursing students.	Cho Cho Zaw & Nur Amira Azenal
9	2023	<i>Cyberbullying, Social Media Addiction and Associations with Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Among Medical Students in Malaysia</i>	Cyberbullying, social media addiction, depression, anxiety, and stress.	Michelle Hui Lim Lee, Manveen Kaur, Vinorra Shaker & Anne Yee
10	2023	<i>Do Social Media and Messaging Apps Influence Loneliness?</i>	Social media use, messaging applications, and loneliness.	Teun De Rycker & Fatin Umairah Abdul Jamal
11	2023	<i>Adolescent Depressive Symptoms Resulting from Social Media Use</i>	Social media use and depressive symptoms among adolescents.	Noor Amila Abdul Halim, Fariza Md Sham & Mohd Al Adib Samuri
12	2023	<i>The Relationship between Social Media Addiction with Anxiety and Depression among Undergraduate Students in Klang Valley, Malaysia</i>	Social media addiction, anxiety, and depression.	Nuzha Mohamed Taha, Intan Surianie Mahassan, Nur Adilah Aishah Nor Azman & Nur Aina Irman Zuwardi
13	2023	<i>Exploring Social Media Addiction among Malaysian University Students</i>	Factors and experiences associated with social media addiction among university students.	Nurul Fatin Najihah Zulkifli & Muhammad Zaiamri Zainal Abidin

14	2024	<i>Self-Expression and Mental Wellbeing of Malaysian Youths on Social Media</i>	Self-expression and mental well-being among youth.	Jamilah Maliki et al.
15	2024	<i>The Role of Instagram in Promoting Mental Health Awareness and Help-Seeking Attitudes</i>	Instagram use, mental health awareness, and help-seeking attitudes.	Idzreen Nur Fathennadwa Mohamad, Nur Nadia Abd Mubin & Ahmad Jazimin Jusoh
16	2024	<i>Managing Anxiety and Uncertainty Through Social Networking Sites</i>	The use of social media to manage anxiety and uncertainty.	Hamizah Sahharon, Jusang Bolong, Siti Zobidah Omar & Shazleen Mohamed
17	2024	<i>Networking Your Way into Mental Illness: SLR of Social Media Usage Among Malaysian Youth</i>	Systematic review of social media use and mental health among Malaysian youth.	Stephanie Ann Victor, Sarina Yusuf & Khairulnissa Abdul Kadir
18	2024	<i>Analysis of the Effects of TikTok on Youth Psychological Well-Being: A Systematic Literature Review</i>	Systematic review of TikTok use and youth psychological well-being.	Asna Zukrina Ann Ahmad Zukni, Mazura @ Mastura Muhammad & Faizul Nizar Anuar
19	2024	<i>The Relationship Between Smartphone Addiction and Perceived Stress Among University Students</i>	Smartphone addiction and perceived stress.	Muhammad Audi Nabil Mat Isa & Suzana Mohd Hoesni
20	2024	<i>The Relationship Between Body Image Appreciation, Psychological Well-Being and Disordered Eating Behaviour Among UKM Students</i>	Body image, psychological well-being, and disordered eating behaviour.	Danial Fikhry & Chong Sheau Tsuey
21	2024	<i>Exploring an Adverse Effect of Social Media on Adolescent's Mental Health</i>	Adverse effects of social media on adolescent mental health.	Mohd Radzi Tarmizi A Halim et al.
22	2024	<i>Social Media Addiction and Depression among Adolescents in Two Malaysian States</i>	Social media addiction and depression among adolescents.	Stephanie Ann Victor, Shamsul Ibrahim, Sarina Yusuf & Norasyikin Mahmud
23	2024	<i>The Impact of Online Harassment via Social Media to Self-Esteem Among Youth</i>	Online harassment through social media and youth self-esteem.	Nur Shazana Abdul Rani, Siti Nur Izyandiyana Ab. Hadi, Siti Hajar Abd Aziz & Shafezah Abdul Wahab
24	2025	<i>The Mediating Effect of Nomophobia in the Relationship Between Problematic Social Media Use/Problematic</i>	Nomophobia as a mediator between problematic social media/smartphone use and psychological distress.	Serene En Hui Tung et al.

		<i>Smartphone Use and Psychological Distress</i>		
25	2025	<i>Analysis of the Intervention Framework for Youth Mental Health Education Packages in Malaysia: A Narrative Review</i>	Narrative review of youth mental health education interventions.	Nur Iziatul Athirah M Daud, Rosnah Sutan & Zaleha Md Isa
26	2025	<i>The Impact of TikTok Addiction on Depression, Anxiety and Stress Severity among University Students</i>	TikTok addiction, depression, anxiety, and stress.	Nur Shafira Izzatie Mohd Nor Shokri, Tarek M Elsayed & Abdul Rahman Fata Nahas
27	2026	<i>Prevalence of Social Media Addiction and Its Associated Factors Among Undergraduate Students at UNIMAS</i>	Prevalence of social media addiction and associated factors.	D. P. Ngadan, N. S. Mazlan, A. M. Jamel & Sharifah Raudhah Syed Ismail
28	2026	<i>Scrolling into Sadness: A Correlational Study Between Social Media Addiction and Depression among University Students</i>	Relationship between social media addiction and depression among university students.	Ellail Ain Mohd et al.

Final Table

The 28 articles were classified according to the three research questions (RQs) of this Systematic Literature Review (SLR):

- **RQ1:** What are the forms and patterns of social media use among youth in Malaysia?
- **RQ2:** What aspects of psychological well-being are associated with social media use among youth in Malaysia?
- **RQ3:** What patterns of relationships, associated factors, and research gaps can be identified in the literature on social media use and psychological well-being among youth in Malaysia?

This classification was based on the titles and research focus of the studies presented in the table, rather than on the full findings of each article. Some articles are relevant to more than one research question (RQ).

Classification of Articles Based on Research Questions

RQ1: Forms and Patterns of Social Media Use

RQ1 focuses on the ways in which social media is used, the types of social media platforms, social media addiction, and user behaviours.

Table 6: Classification of Articles Based on Research Questions

Original No.	Year	Article Title	Focus Related to RQ1
1	2019	<i>Association of Social Media Use and Psychological Effects Among Undergraduate Students</i>	Social media use among university students.

3	2021	<i>Addictive Behaviours Among University Students in Malaysia During COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	Addictive behaviours during the pandemic.
6	2022	<i>Self-Disclosure on Social Media and Its Influence on the Well-Being of Youth</i>	Self-disclosure through social media.
7	2022	<i>The Factors of Social Media Usage and Mental Health: A Study on Malaysian Adolescents</i>	Factors influencing social media use.
10	2023	<i>Do Social Media and Messaging Apps Influence Loneliness?</i>	Use of social media and messaging applications.
13	2023	<i>Exploring Social Media Addiction among Malaysian University Students</i>	Experiences and factors associated with social media addiction.
15	2024	<i>Self-Expression and Mental Wellbeing of Malaysian Youths on Social Media</i>	Self-expression through social media.
16	2024	<i>The Role of Instagram in Promoting Mental Health Awareness and Help-Seeking Attitudes</i>	Use of Instagram for mental health awareness.
19	2024	<i>Analysis of the Effects of TikTok on Youth Psychological Well-Being</i>	Use of the TikTok platform.
28	2026	<i>Prevalence of Social Media Addiction and Its Associated Factors Among Undergraduate Students at UNIMAS</i>	Prevalence of social media addiction and associated factors.

Total: 10 articles that potentially contribute to RQ1.

Aspects of Psychological Well-Being

RQ2 identifies the psychological aspects examined in the studies, including depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, self-esteem, and mental well-being.

Table 7: Aspects of Psychological Well-Being

Original No.	Year	Article Title	Psychological Aspect
2	2020	Social Media Use and Depression among UPSI Students	Depression.
4	2021	Implications of Social Media Addiction on Adolescent Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic	Adolescent mental health.
5	2022	Internet-Related Instruments and Their Associations with Distress Among Malaysian University Students	Psychological distress.
8	2022	Association between Social Media Addiction and Mental Health Among IIUM Undergraduate Nursing Students	Mental health.
9	2023	Cyberbullying, Social Media Addiction and Associations with Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Among Medical Students in Malaysia	Depression, anxiety, and stress.

11	2023	Adolescent Depressive Symptoms Resulting from Social Media Use	Depressive symptoms.
12	2023	The Relationship between Social Media Addiction with Anxiety and Depression among Undergraduate Students in Klang Valley, Malaysia	Anxiety and depression.
17	2024	Managing Anxiety and Uncertainty Through Social Networking Sites	Anxiety and uncertainty.
21	2024	The Relationship between Body Image Appreciation, Psychological Well-Being and Disordered Eating Behaviour among UKM Students	Psychological well-being and body image.
22	2024	Exploring an Adverse Effect of Social Media on Adolescent's Mental Health	Adolescent mental health.
23	2024	Social Media Addiction and Depression among Adolescents in Two Malaysian States	Depression.
24	2024	The Impact of Online Harassment via Social Media to Self-Esteem Among Youth	Self-esteem.
26	2025	Analysis of the Intervention Framework for Youth Mental Health Education Packages in Malaysia: A Narrative Review	Mental health education.
27	2025	The Impact of TikTok Addiction on Depression, Anxiety and Stress Severity among University Students	Depression, anxiety, and stress.
29	2026	Scrolling into Sadness: A Correlational Study Between Social Media Addiction and Depression among University Students	Depression.

Total: 15 articles that potentially contribute to RQ2

Patterns of Relationships, Associated Factors, and Research Gaps

RQ3 requires an analysis of the relationships between variables, factors that may influence these relationships, and limitations or gaps in previous research.

Table 8: Patterns of Relationships, Associated Factors, and Research Gaps

Original No.	Year	Article Title	Potential Contribution to RQ3
1	2019	Association of Social Media Use and Psychological Effects Among Undergraduate Students	Relationship between social media use and psychological effects.
6	2022	Self-Disclosure on Social Media and Its Influence on the Well-Being of Youth	Self-disclosure as a factor associated with well-being.
7	2022	The Factors of Social Media Usage and Mental Health: A Study on Malaysian Adolescents	Factors associated with social media use.

9	2023	Cyberbullying, Social Media Addiction and Associations with Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Among Medical Students in Malaysia	Cyberbullying and social media addiction as associated factors.
10	2023	Do Social Media and Messaging Apps Influence Loneliness?	Relationship between social media use and loneliness.
13	2023	Exploring Social Media Addiction among Malaysian University Students	Factors and experiences associated with social media addiction.
18	2024	Networking Your Way into Mental Illness: SLR of Social Media Usage Among Malaysian Youth	Synthesis of previous research and potential research gaps.
19	2024	Analysis of the Effects of TikTok on Youth Psychological Well-Being	Synthesis of research specifically focusing on TikTok.
20	2024	The Relationship Between Smartphone Addiction and Perceived Stress Among University Students	Relationship between smartphone addiction and perceived stress.
23	2024	Social Media Addiction and Depression among Adolescents in Two Malaysian States	Relationship between social media addiction and depression.
24	2024	The Impact of Online Harassment via Social Media to Self-Esteem Among Youth	Online harassment and self-esteem.
25	2025	The Mediating Effect of Nomophobia in the Relationship Between Problematic Social Media Use/Problematic Smartphone Use and Psychological Distress	Nomophobia as a mediating variable.
28	2026	Prevalence of Social Media Addiction and Its Associated Factors Among Undergraduate Students at UNIMAS	Factors associated with social media addiction.
29	2026	Scrolling into Sadness: A Correlational Study Between Social Media Addiction and Depression among University Students	Correlational relationship between social media addiction and depression.

Total: 14 articles that potentially contribute to RQ3.

Findings

This section presents a synthesis of the literature on social media use and psychological well-being among Malaysian youth. The analysis is organised according to the three research questions: the forms and patterns of social media use, aspects of psychological well-being associated with social media use, and patterns of relationships and associated factors.

Overall, the 28 articles in the reference list demonstrate diverse research approaches. The collected studies encompass general social media use, problematic use, addiction, self-disclosure, self-expression, platform-specific use, and negative online interaction experiences. This diversity is important because social media use is

not a uniform construct. Similarly, psychological well-being encompasses multiple dimensions that may not necessarily be directly comparable.

Profile and Characteristics of Selected Studies

A total of 28 articles published between 2019 and 2026 were listed in the study reference corpus. The publication distribution shows that studies concerning social media use and psychological well-being appeared more frequently in the collected literature, particularly in 2024.

Table 9. Distribution of the 28 Articles by Publication Year

Publication Year	Number of Articles (n)	Percentage (%)
2019	1	3.6
2020	1	3.6
2021	2	7.1
2022	4	14.3
2023	5	17.9
2024	10	35.7
2025	3	10.7
2026	2	7.1
Total	28	100.0

Note: Percentages are rounded to one decimal place. The distribution is based on the publication years stated in the list of 28 articles provided.

The year 2024 recorded the highest number of articles, with 10 articles, followed by 2023 with five articles. However, this distribution only represents the collected reference corpus and does not demonstrate the overall publication trend in Malaysia. In terms of population, a substantial proportion of the articles focused on university students. These included studies involving UPSI students (Chaniago et al., 2020), IIUM nursing students (Zaw & Azenal, 2021), medical students (Lee et al., 2023), and university students in the Klang Valley (Taha et al., 2023).

Studies focusing on adolescents expanded the scope of research to different age groups, including Lee and Sehu Mohamad (2022) and Victor et al. (2024). These population differences are important because adolescents' experiences of social media use may not necessarily be the same as those of university students. In terms of focus, the identified articles included studies of general use, social media addiction, specific platform use, digital interaction experiences, and various psychological indicators. In addition, systematic reviews and narrative reviews may contribute to conceptual understanding and discussions of research gaps. However, review articles and narrative reviews need to be distinguished from primary empirical studies when reporting the number of studies finally included in the SLR.

Patterns of Social Media Use Among Malaysian Youth

To address RQ1, the classification table identified 10 articles that could potentially contribute to understanding the forms and patterns of social media use. Based on the focus of these articles, three main themes can be identified: general use, problematic use, and purpose- and platform-based use. The first theme is general social media use. Ng (2019) focused on social media use among university students and its relationship with

psychological aspects. De Rycker and Abdul Jamal (2023), meanwhile, extended the investigation to social media and messaging application use in relation to loneliness.

These studies indicate that research on usage patterns should consider the type of digital activity being investigated. Social media use and messaging application use may involve different interaction characteristics and therefore should not be treated as identical constructs without appropriate measurement justification. The second theme is problematic social media use and addiction. Ting and Essau (2021) focused on addictive behaviours among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Zulkifli and Zainal Abidin (2023) examined experiences and factors associated with social media addiction among Malaysian university students, while Ngadan et al. (2026) focused on the prevalence of social media addiction and its associated factors. These studies provide a basis for distinguishing ordinary social media use from use characterised as problematic. This distinction is important because frequent use does not necessarily indicate addiction.

The third theme concerns use according to purpose and platform. Kasmani et al. (2022) examined self-disclosure, while Maliki et al. (2024) focused on self-expression through social media. Mohamad et al. (2024) examined Instagram use for mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes. The review by Ahmad Zukni et al. (2024) extended the discussion to TikTok. This diversity indicates that usage patterns should not be evaluated solely through duration or frequency. Purpose of use, type of engagement, and platform used are relevant dimensions in understanding youth experiences.

However, the provided table does not report average duration of use, daily frequency, or the percentage of users for each platform. Therefore, the patterns identified in this section refer to categories of use investigated in the studies rather than the actual distribution of usage behaviour among the Malaysian youth population.

Effects on Psychological Well-Being

To address RQ2, the classification table identified 15 articles that could potentially contribute to the examination of psychological well-being. Based on the focus of these studies, the identified aspects include depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, self-esteem, and mental well-being. Depression is one of the prominent constructs. Chaniago et al. (2020) examined the relationship between social media use and depression among UPSI students. Taha et al. (2023) focused on social media addiction, anxiety, and depression among university students in the Klang Valley.

Victor et al. (2024) extended this investigation to adolescents in two Malaysian states, while Mohd et al. (2026) examined the correlational relationship between social media addiction and depression among university students. Although these studies examined depression, differences in populations and measurements of social media use need to be considered before their findings are compared. In addition to depression, anxiety and stress have also received considerable research attention. Zaw and Azenal (2021) examined social media addiction and mental health among nursing students. Lee et al. (2023) examined cyberbullying and social media addiction alongside depression, anxiety, and stress.

Mohd Nor Shokri et al. (2025) focused on TikTok addiction and the severity of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms. This study reflects a development in research focus from general social media use towards specific platforms. Other psychological aspects have also received attention. De Rycker and Abdul Jamal (2023) examined loneliness, while Abdul Rani et al. (2024) focused on online harassment and youth self-esteem. Studies on self-expression and mental health awareness provide a broader perspective on users' psychological experiences (Maliki et al., 2024; Mohamad et al., 2024).

Critically, this diversity of constructs indicates that psychological well-being cannot be represented by a single indicator. Depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and self-esteem have different meanings and measurement approaches. Furthermore, the term “effect” does not necessarily imply a causal relationship. Based on the provided table, the research designs and statistical results of all studies cannot be fully identified. Therefore, this discussion retains the terms “relationship” or “association” where causal evidence is unavailable.

Factors Influencing the Relationship Between Social Media and Psychological Well-Being

To address RQ3, the classification table identified 14 articles that could potentially contribute to understanding patterns of relationships, associated factors, and research gaps. Based on the focus of these articles, the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being can be discussed through four main dimensions.

The first dimension is social media addiction and problematic use. Studies by Zaw and Azenal (2021), Taha et al. (2023), Victor et al. (2024), and Mohd et al. (2026) focused on social media addiction and aspects of mental health, particularly depression and anxiety. These studies highlight the importance of distinguishing levels of social media use from characteristics of problematic use. Individuals who use social media frequently are not necessarily addicted. Therefore, studies using addiction instruments should not be directly compared with studies that measure only duration of use. The second dimension concerns negative online interaction experiences. Lee et al. (2023) examined cyberbullying alongside social media addiction and psychological symptoms. Abdul Rani et al. (2024) focused on online harassment and youth self-esteem.

These studies suggest that interaction experiences are a relevant dimension for investigation. Social media research should not focus solely on the amount of time spent using social media without considering the types of interactions experienced by users. However, based on the information provided in the table, it cannot yet be determined whether cyberbullying and online harassment functioned as independent, mediating, or moderating variables in each study. The third dimension concerns purpose of use and self-engagement. Kasmani et al. (2022), through their study of self-disclosure, and Maliki et al. (2024), through their study of self-expression, demonstrate the importance of understanding what users actually do when using social media.

Using social media to share experiences, communicate, or express oneself has different characteristics from social media use measured through addiction scores. Mohamad et al. (2024), through their study of Instagram, also introduced the context of using social media to obtain mental health information and shape help-seeking attitudes. Therefore, purpose of use is a dimension that warrants further attention in future research. However, its role as a factor influencing psychological relationships still requires confirmation based on the original study findings.

The fourth dimension concerns psychological factors and usage context. Tung et al. (2025) examined nomophobia as a mediating variable in the relationship between problematic social media use/problematic smartphone use and psychological distress. This study is conceptually important because it introduces an approach involving relationship mechanisms rather than merely examining a direct relationship between two variables. However, problematic social media use and problematic smartphone use are constructs that need to be distinguished when interpreting the findings. In addition, Ting and Essau (2021) examined addictive behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic. This context is relevant because changes in educational environments and social interactions may have influenced experiences of digital technology use.

Overall, the literature mapping indicates that the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being should be examined by considering usage characteristics, interaction experiences, purposes of use, and psychological factors. However, factors that genuinely influence the strength of these relationships can only be determined through empirical analysis.

Synthesis of Key Findings

The overall synthesis of the literature produced three main themes aligned with the research questions. The first theme is the diversity of forms of social media use. The literature encompasses general use, problematic use, addiction, self-disclosure, self-expression, and specific platform use. This diversity demonstrates that social media use needs to be clearly defined before its relationship with psychological well-being can be analysed.

The second theme is the diversity of psychological well-being dimensions. The identified studies focused on depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and self-esteem. Research on self-expression, mental well-being, and mental health awareness further expands the discussion beyond negative psychological symptoms.

The third theme is the importance of associated factors. Studies involving cyberbullying, online harassment, and nomophobia demonstrate the need to examine potential mechanisms linking social media use with users' psychological experiences.

Table 3.1. Thematic Synthesis Based on Research Questions

Research Question	Main Themes	Relevant Studies	Interpretation
RQ1	General use, addiction, self-disclosure, self-expression and specific platforms	Ng (2019); Kasmani et al. (2022); Zulkifli & Zainal Abidin (2023); Maliki et al. (2024); Ngadan et al. (2026)	Social media use is a multidimensional construct.
RQ2	Depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, self-esteem and mental well-being	Chaniago et al. (2020); Zaw & Azenal (2021); De Rycker & Abdul Jamal (2023); Lee et al. (2023); Victor et al. (2024)	Psychological well-being needs to be assessed through multiple indicators.
RQ3	Problematic use, negative interaction experiences, purpose of use and nomophobia	Kasmani et al. (2022); Lee et al. (2023); Abdul Rani et al. (2024); Tung et al. (2025)	The relationship between social media use and psychological well-being may involve multiple factors.

This synthesis demonstrates a conceptual relationship between the three research questions. Different forms of social media use are examined alongside different psychological dimensions, while several studies also investigate additional factors associated with these relationships. However, the classification table does not contain statistical values or complete findings from all studies. Therefore, this synthesis does not conclude that all studies found significant relationships or that any particular factor had the strongest influence.

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the identified themes by focusing on similarities and differences between studies, measurement issues, research gaps, and implications for Malaysian youth. Unlike Section 3.0, which presents themes identified in the literature, this section examines the meaning of these themes for understanding the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being.

Overall Interpretation of Findings

The main interpretation arising from the literature mapping is that social media use should not be regarded as a uniform form of behaviour. Studies examining general social media use differ in focus from studies examining social media addiction. Similarly, studies of self-disclosure and self-expression examine aspects of user engagement that may not necessarily be represented by measures of usage frequency. These differences are important because studies using different constructs may produce different relationships with psychological indicators.

For example, Chaniago et al. (2020) examined social media use and depression, whereas Taha et al. (2023) focused on social media addiction together with anxiety and depression. Both are relevant to the relationship between social media and mental health, but they do not necessarily measure the same form of social media use. In addition, studies of self-disclosure, self-expression, and the use of Instagram for mental health awareness indicate that purpose of use should also be considered (Kasmani et al., 2022; Maliki et al., 2024; Mohamad et al., 2024). From the perspective of psychological well-being, the literature demonstrates a substantial focus on negative symptoms. However, studies concerning loneliness, self-esteem, and mental well-being indicate that users' psychological experiences are broader.

Therefore, the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being should be interpreted according to the form of use, interaction context, and psychological construct being measured.

Comparison and Inconsistencies in Previous Research Findings

A comparison of previous studies reveals several differences that may influence the interpretation of research findings.

The first difference concerns the measurement of social media use. Ng (2019) and Chaniago et al. (2020) focused on general social media use, whereas Zaw and Azenal (2021), Taha et al. (2023), and Mohd Nor Shokri et al. (2025) examined social media addiction or addiction to a specific platform.

This distinction requires attention because frequent use and addiction do not necessarily represent the same condition.

The second difference concerns psychological indicators. Lee et al. (2023) examined depression, anxiety, and stress, whereas De Rycker and Abdul Jamal (2023) focused on loneliness. Abdul Rani et al. (2024), meanwhile, focused on self-esteem.

Therefore, studies producing different findings are not necessarily contradictory if the psychological indicators used also differ.

The third difference concerns population. Studies involving university students, nursing students, medical students, and adolescents include respondents with heterogeneous backgrounds.

For example, Zaw and Azenal (2021) focused on nursing students, whereas Victor et al. (2024) examined adolescents in two Malaysian states. Such differences need to be considered before findings are generalised to the broader youth population. The fourth difference concerns temporal context. Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic should be compared cautiously with studies conducted under different circumstances.

However, based on the provided table, complete information regarding the statistical results of each article is not yet available. Therefore, this discussion identifies methodological and conceptual differences that may explain inconsistencies in research findings rather than claiming that particular empirical contradictions have been established. To discuss actual inconsistencies, findings such as correlation direction, statistical significance, effect size, and control variables need to be directly compared.

Gaps in the Malaysian Literature

Based on the mapping of 28 articles, several research gaps can be identified. These involve population representation, construct measurement, the scope of psychological well-being, relationship mechanisms, and methodological approaches.

The first gap concerns the representation of the youth population. A substantial proportion of the identified studies focused on university students, including Ng (2019), Chaniago et al. (2020), Zaw and Azenal (2021), Taha et al. (2023), and Ngadan et al. (2026). Focusing on university students enables researchers to understand social media use within higher education settings. However, university students' experiences do not necessarily represent the entire Malaysian youth population. Future research should therefore consider employed youth, youth who do not pursue higher education, and youth from urban and rural areas. Nevertheless, the representation of these groups across the Malaysian literature needs to be established through a comprehensive search.

The second gap concerns inconsistencies in concepts and measurements. The collected literature employs various constructs, including general social media use, social media addiction, Internet use, and problematic smartphone use. For example, Tung et al. (2022) examined Internet-related instruments, while Mat Isa and Mohd Hoesni (2024) focused on smartphone addiction. Although both studies are relevant to discussions of digital behaviour, Internet use and smartphone use cannot be treated as equivalent to social media use without specific

measurement. Such inconsistencies may make it difficult to compare findings. Future research should therefore employ clear operational definitions and distinguish between the different forms of use being examined.

The third gap concerns the focus on negative psychological symptoms. Many of the listed studies focus on depression, anxiety, and stress. However, psychological well-being is a broader concept than the absence of negative symptoms. Studies by Kasmani et al. (2022), Maliki et al. (2024), and Mohamad et al. (2024) provide additional perspectives through their examination of self-disclosure, self-expression, and mental health awareness.

Future research could expand measurement to include life satisfaction, quality of social relationships, autonomy, and personal growth. Such an approach could contribute to a more balanced understanding of the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being.

The fourth gap concerns relationship mechanisms. Studies by Lee et al. (2023), Abdul Rani et al. (2024), and Tung et al. (2025) demonstrate the importance of examining additional factors such as cyberbullying, online harassment, and nomophobia. However, the classification table does not yet provide sufficient information to determine the relative roles of these factors in explaining the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being. Future studies could therefore focus more systematically on testing mediating and moderating variables.

The fifth gap concerns research design. Correlational studies are important for identifying associations between variables. However, such designs have limitations in determining causal direction. Longitudinal research could help explain changes in social media use and psychological conditions over time. Mixed-method approaches could also combine quantitative measurement with an exploration of users' experiences. Overall, the identified gaps demonstrate the need to broaden population representation, standardise measurements, and investigate relationship mechanisms in greater depth.

Implications for Youth, Research and Intervention

This literature synthesis has implications for youth, the research community, and stakeholders involved in the development of mental health programmes. From the perspective of youth, social media use should be understood according to the form and experience of use. Discussions concerning healthy social media use should not focus solely on duration of use. Studies on cyberbullying and online harassment indicate that digital interaction safety is a relevant aspect to incorporate into digital literacy education (Lee et al., 2023; Abdul Rani et al., 2024). At the same time, studies on self-disclosure, self-expression, and mental health awareness demonstrate the importance of understanding different purposes of social media use (Kasmani et al., 2022; Maliki et al., 2024; Mohamad et al., 2024). Digital literacy education could therefore emphasise the management of problematic use, interaction safety, and the ability to identify appropriate sources of mental health information.

From a research perspective, this synthesis highlights the need to use clear operational definitions and instruments. Researchers should distinguish general social media use from problematic use and addiction. Similarly, the selection of psychological instruments should be aligned with the constructs being investigated. Research involving diverse groups of youth may also help increase the applicability of findings to the Malaysian population. From an intervention perspective, the literature provides a basis for considering digital literacy programmes, cyberbullying prevention, and psychological support.

The narrative review by M Daud et al. (2025) may be used as a supporting reference in discussions concerning the development of youth mental health education interventions. However, these recommendations do not imply that the effectiveness of any intervention has been demonstrated by the current corpus of studies. Programme evaluation and intervention studies are required before an approach can be recommended on the basis of evidence of effectiveness.

Limitations of the SLR

This literature review has several limitations that should be acknowledged to ensure transparent reporting of the findings.

First, the provided list contains 28 articles comprising empirical studies, systematic reviews, narrative reviews, and studies related to digital behaviour. Therefore, the total of 28 articles needs to be distinguished from the number of primary empirical studies that genuinely meet the SLR inclusion criteria.

Second, the classification of articles according to the research questions was conducted based on article titles and research focus. This classification enables preliminary mapping but is insufficient to demonstrate that each article provides empirical findings that directly answer the research questions.

Third, the table does not provide complete methodological information and statistical results for all articles. Information such as sample size, instruments, correlation values, significance levels, and effect sizes is required to produce a stronger empirical synthesis.

Fourth, there are differences between studies examining social media and studies focusing on Internet or smartphone use. These differences need to be considered when determining the suitability of articles for the main synthesis.

Fifth, information regarding methodological quality assessment and risk of bias has not been included in the table. Therefore, the level of confidence in the overall body of evidence cannot yet be determined.

Sixth, the RQ classification tables still use numbering from an earlier article list. The numbering needs to be standardised to prevent classification and article-counting errors.

Finally, the document states that the number of articles at each PRISMA stage will only be entered after the results from the six sources have been combined and final duplicate records have been removed. Therefore, the final number of studies and the number of exclusions at each stage cannot yet be reported conclusively.

These limitations do not negate the usefulness of the literature mapping but establish boundaries regarding the conclusions that can be drawn from the available information.

CONCLUSION

This literature review aimed to examine the forms and patterns of social media use, associated aspects of psychological well-being, and relevant relationship patterns and factors among Malaysian youth. Based on the mapping of the 28 collected articles, the literature demonstrates considerable diversity in forms of social media use. The identified research encompasses general use, problematic use, addiction, self-disclosure, self-expression, and specific platform use.

This diversity indicates that social media use should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon. General social media use should not be equated with addiction, while differences in purposes of use need to be considered when interpreting research findings. In terms of psychological well-being, the literature focuses on various indicators, particularly depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and self-esteem. Studies concerning mental well-being, self-expression, and mental health awareness further broaden the discussion. Therefore, psychological well-being should not be interpreted solely in terms of negative symptoms. Research encompassing both positive and negative dimensions of well-being is required to produce a more comprehensive understanding. Furthermore, the literature mapping identifies several relevant factors, including problematic social media use, cyberbullying, online harassment, purposes of use, and nomophobia. These factors suggest that the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being may involve complex mechanisms. However, the actual roles of these factors need to be determined based on empirical findings and appropriate statistical analyses.

From a research contribution perspective, this review establishes a foundation for synthesis through three main dimensions: forms of social media use, aspects of psychological well-being, and associated factors. This approach enables the literature to be compared according to similarities in concepts and research focus.

Future research is recommended to broaden the representation of youth populations, employ clearer operational definitions, integrate measurements of both positive and negative well-being, and investigate relationship mechanisms through more comprehensive research designs. Overall, the literature mapping indicates that the

relationship between social media use and psychological well-being among Malaysian youth is complex and requires simultaneous consideration of multiple dimensions. Nevertheless, the final empirical conclusions of the SLR can only be established after the study-selection process, data extraction, and methodological quality assessment have been completed. Once these steps are completed, the review has the potential to provide a stronger evidence base for future research, digital literacy education, and mental health interventions appropriate to the Malaysian youth context.

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