Social Media Use for Youth Mental Health Awareness and Help-Seeking Attitudes: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

This study provides a systematic review of literature related to social media use for youth mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes. By adopting the Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR) protocol, 1418 peer-reviewed articles published in academic journals between January 2018 and February 2023 were identified and acquired from Google Scholar and Web of Science databases using keyword searching techniques. The retrieved articles were then organized and purified to exclude the articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Of these, only12 articles were eligible for evaluation, using content analysis and thematic analysis. In the context of mental health, our review revealed two themes of social media use, which were for seeking mental health information and seeking emotional support. It was also found that social media use has the potential to enhance mental health awareness and shape positive help-seeking attitudes among youth. Research gaps were identified in relation to the mediation mechanism of mental health awareness through which social media use is related to help-seeking attitudes, particularly in the context of a specific social media visual platform like Instagram. Derived from these findings, we offer research directions to further investigate the role of Instagram in developing youth help-seeking attitudes via mental health awareness.

Keywords SPAR-4-SLR, systematic review, social media use, mental health awareness, help-seeking attitudes, youth

Abstrak

Kajian ini membentangkan sorotan literatur bersistematik tentang kegunaan media sosial untuk kesedaran kesihatan mental dan sikap mencari bantuan dalam kalangan belia. Dengan mengaplikasi protokol Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR), 1418 artikel yang telah melalui semakan dan diterbitkan di jurnal-jurnal akademik dari Januari 2018 hingga Februari 2023 telah dikenalpasti dan diambil daripada pengkalan data Google Scholar dan Web of Science menggunakan teknik pencarian kata kunci. Artikel yang diperolehi kemudiannya disusun dan disaring untuk menyingkirkan artikel-artikel yang tidak menepati kriteria pemilihan. Hanya 12 artikel yang layak untuk semakan, menggunakan kaedah analisis kandungan dan analisis tema. Hasil semakan mendapati bahawa terdapat dua tema kegunaan media sosial dalam konteks kesihatan mental iaitu untuk mencari maklumat kesihatan mental dan mendapatkan bantuan emosi. Penggunaan media sosial juga berpotensi untuk meningkatkan kesedaran kesihatan mental dan membentuk sikap mencari bantuan yang positif dalam kalangan belia. Jurang ilmu dikenalpasti berkenaan mekanisme di mana kesedaran kesihatan mental bertindak sebagai mediator di antara penggunaan media sosial dan sikap mencari bantuan, terutamanya dalam konteks platform media sosial visual yang spesifik seperti Instagram. Berdasarkan dapatan ini, kami menyarankan agar kajian lanjutan dibuat untuk mengkaji peranan Instagram dalam membentuk sikap mencari bantuan melalui mediasi kesedaran kesihatan mental di kalangan belia.

INTRODUCTION

As technology continues to evolve, social media has become one of the most popular online activities, especially among youth all over the world. According to research conducted by Kepios, 60.4 percent (i.e., 4.88 billion) of the world population were social media users (DataReportal, 2023), with youths aged 18-34 representing the largest user pool. Statistics also indicate that they spend an average of five and a half hours per day on social media (Georgiev & Ivanov, 2023).They mostly use social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Whatsapp for various reasons, including communication with family and friends, sharing personal content, searching for information or entertainment, purchasing and selling goods or services, watching live streams, discussing opinions with others, and many more (DataReportal, 2023). The types of content they are interested in the most on these platforms include comedy, entertainment, food or cooking, fashion and beauty, music, gaming, and e-sports (YPulse, 2020).

Social media has the potential to quickly disseminate information to audience and allows the integration of various media forms to engage the public (Jin et al., 2019). Because of this, social media platforms have been utilized by many mental health organizations and practitioners to generate mental health-related content and share it with the public to promote mental health awareness (Chen & Wang, 2021). For instance, as of October 19, 2023, Mental Health Foundation, a non-profit mental health organization in the United Kingdom with 209K followers, has posted 1,395 mental health-related posts on Instagram. Similarly, Mental Health America, with 254k followers, has posted 3,631 posts about mental health on the same platform. Besides that, there are many accounts that are promoting mental health on Instagram, created by psychologists, therapists, or influencers, such as @Thelastkate, @Youarecomplete, @Healthpscyhologyclinic, and @millenial.therapist among others. Accordingly, there is an abundance of mental health-related content available for users on social media. For example, 23 million posts on Facebook and 51 million posts on Instagram can be found when searching using the hashtag #mentalhealth. Meanwhile, using the hashtag #mentalhealthawareness generates 11 million posts on Facebook and 22.6 million posts on Instagram. Among the most common mental health topics addressed in Instagram posts include wellness practices related to mental health, anxiety, and depression (Lee et al., 2020).

Recent reports and studies have shown that mental health issues are becoming more prevalent among youth. According to the World Health Organization (2021), 14 percent of the adolescent global population experiences a mental disorder. The report also shows that suicide is among the leading causes of death among 15- to 29-year-olds. Research by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2023) indicates that young adults (18-25 years old) have higher rates of mental disorder compared to their older counterparts. The most common mental disorders experienced by young adults are depression, anxiety, and stress (WHO, 2021). Such disorders, if left untreated, could lead to more serious repercussions, such as aggression and self-abuse (Zhang et al., 2021), the feeling of hopelessness (Wolfe et al., 2019), or suicidal ideation (Barzilay et al., 2020). For students especially, these problems can affect their overall well-being, hamper their learning efficiency and motivation, and consequently result in deteriorating academic performance (Liew et al., 2021; Johari & Ahmad, 2019). Therefore, it is vital for youths to have the right knowledge and understanding about mental health and to be open to the idea of seeking mental health help.

Given that most youth nowadays have access to smartphones and spend most of their time online (Anderson & Jiang, 2018), it is no surprise that online media has been increasingly used by them to look for information and support regarding their mental health (Stawarz et al., 2019). Although not much is known about the extent to which mental health information disseminated on social media has reached this age group, past studies indicate social media has been regarded as a popular choice of tool for seeking mental health information and support among younger individuals with mental disorders (Naslund et al., 2019; Bucci et al., 2019). This is because social media platforms offer anonymity to users, have a vast array of mental health information, and can provide them with a sense of support from peers who may be experiencing similar mental health problems (O'Reilly et al., 2019).

Furthermore, studies have shown that social media can be effective in reducing stigma (Betton et al., 2015), which is often cited as one of the barriers to help-seeking among young people with mental disorders (Taylor & Kuo, 2018).

Based on the discussion above, we believe that there is a promising potential that social media can be beneficial for youth to communicate about mental health and to seek help from others in dealing with their mental health concerns. Nevertheless, empirical research on the use of social media in mental health communication is still scarce in the current literature, except for a few studies investigating social media use for promoting mental health awareness (e.g., Latha et al., 2020; O'Reilly et al., 2019; Pretorius et al., 2022; Saha et al., 2019; Plaisime, et al., 2020) and its impact on help-seeking behavior (Gere et al., 2019; Pretorius et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Naslund et al., 2019). Only a few of these studies, however, focus on the youth population (Plaisime et al., 2020; O'Reilly et al., 2019; Chen, et al., 2022; Gere et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2021).

Moreover, no systematic review has been carried out to date to evaluate research on the use of social media in mental health communication using the Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR) protocol (Paul et al., 2021). The recent systematic reviews on the topic (e.g., Ridout & Campbell, 2018) mainly employed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, which provide little rationale that researchers could use to justify their review decisions. Unlike PRISMA, the SPAR-4-SLR protocol would help researchers conduct a review that is more orderly, thoroughly justified, rigorous and transparent (Paul et al., 2021).

This paper attempt to systematically review all the relevant literature with the aim of identifying the knowledge gaps regarding the impact of social media use on mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes among youth. This study is significant because it complements the existing literature on the use of social media in mental health communication. In addition, the study contributes to the literature by identifying the link between social media use, mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes. Consequently, the results highlight a number of suggestions for future research in relation to the role of social media in youth mental health.

METHODOLOGY

Search Strategy

The systematic review was performed using the Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR) protocol (Paul et al., 2021). The protocol comprises three stages, which are assembling, arranging, and assessing, and six sub-stages, which are identification, acquisition, organization, purification, evaluation, and reporting, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Assembling

The assembling stage involves two sub-stages: (1a) identification and (1b) acquisition of articles from journal databases that have not been synthesized (Paul et al., 2021). In the first sub-stage, the domain of the study, research questions, source type, and source quality were determined (see Figure 1). In the second sub-stage, peer-reviewed articles published between January 2018 and February 2023 were acquired from Google Scholar and Web of Science (WOS) databases, using the search words "social media" AND "mental health awareness" OR "help-seeking" AND "youth" for titles, abstracts, and keywords. The search generated 915 research articles in Google Scholar and 503 articles in WOS.

ASSEMBLING

Identification
Domain: Social media use in mental health communication
Research questions: What do we know about social media use for youth mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes?
How do we know about social media use for mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes?
Where should the research on social media use in mental health communication be heading?
Source type: Peer-reviewed research articles published in Google Scholar and Web of Science databases
Source quality: impact factors, citations

Acquisition
Search mechanism and material acquisition: Google Scholar and Web of Science online databases
Search period: From January 2018 to February 2023
Search keywords: "social media" AND "mental health awareness" OR "help-seeking" AND "youth"
Total number of articles returned from the search: Google Scholar (n=915), Web of Science (n=503). Total = 1418

ARRANGING

Organization
Organizing code: author, year, title, journal, article type (conceptual/ editorial/ empirical/ review/ other), research context, method, population, sample, findings

Purification
Article type excluded: irrelevant (e.g., social media usage on mental health problems, social media for mental health interventions) (n=1194), duplicates (n=178), review/commentary papers (n=34)
Article type included: Empirical studies addressing social media use for mental health promotion/awareness/literacy or help-seeking or stigma (n=12)

ASSESSING

Evaluation
Analysis method: content analysis, thematic analysis
Agenda proposal method: gap analysis

Reporting
Reporting convention: Table 1 (Study Characteristics), discussions, and future research
Limitations: Data type (only English-language journals)
Sources of support: (see acknowledgements)

Figure 1: Systematic literature review using the SPAR-4-SLR protocol
(Paul et al., 2021)

Arranging

The arranging stage involves two sub-stages: (2a) organization and (2b) purification of literature that are in the process of being synthesized (Paul et al., 2021). In the first sub-stage of organization, each article returned from the search were coded according to author, year of publication, title, journal, article type, research context, method, population, sample size and findings. In the next substage, articles that were irrelevant to the research topic or duplicates were removed. Of the 1418 records identified, only 12 articles were eligible for the review based on the predefined inclusion criteria i.e., must address social media use for (1) mental health (awareness or literacy); or (2) help-seeking (attitudes or behavior) among young people aged up to 25 years (see Table 1).

Table 1: Study Characteristics

No	Author	Year	Journal	Type[a]	Context	Method	Population	Sample
1	O'Reilly et al.	2019	Health Promotion International	E	Social media use for MH info seeking, MH awareness	Qualitative - focus group	Adolescents aged between 11 and 18	54
2	Latha et al.	2020	Journal of Education and Health Promotion	E	MH awareness	Qualitative - content analysis	FB and IG users	Not defined
3	Chen et al.	2020	Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health	E	Social media use for MH info seeking	Quantitative - survey	College students in China	491
4	Stawarz et al.	2019	JMIR Ment Health	E	Social media use for MH info seeking and emotional support	Quantitative - survey	Online users	81
5	Saha et al.	2019	Translational Behavioral Medicine	E	MH awareness	Qualitative - content analysis	Twitter posts	14,217
6	Plaisime et al.	2020	Social Media + Society	E	Social media use for MH info seeking, MH awareness	Mixed methods (survey, focus group)	Teens (ages: 13–18 years)	152
7	Gere et al.	2019	Journal of Psychology & the Behavioral Sciences	E	Social media use for emotional support, help-seeking	Quantitative - survey	College students	143
8	Noorwali et al.	2022	Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health	E	Help-seeking	Qualitative - semi-structured interviews	Young adults	12
9	Pretorius et al.	2022	Internet Interventions	E	MH literacy	Qualitative - Cross-sectional analysis	MH posts in TikTok and IG	50
10	Thompson et al.	2021	School Psychology Review	E	MH awareness and help-seeking	Quantitative - Pre-post test	6th- to 12th-grade students	11,478
11	Chen et al.	2022	Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking	E	Social media use for emotional support, help-seeking	Mixed methods (focus group, interview)	Hong Kong youths aged 15–19,	40

12	Naslund et al.	2019	Early intervention in psychiatry	E	Social media use for emotional support, help-seeking	Quantitative - survey	Twitter users	135

a. Empirical

Assessing

Finally, the assessing stage involves two sub-stages: (3a) evaluation and (3b) reporting of the reviewed literature (Paul et al., 2021). In the first sub-stage, the articles that fit the inclusion criteria were evaluated by utilizing content analysis and thematic analysis. In content analysis, a deductive approach was applied, where the content of the reviewed articles was categorized into themes and coded accordingly based on several important key concepts and their subcategories (Humble & Mozelius, 2022), which are: characteristics (i.e., empirical); methods (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, and mixed); research contexts (i.e., social media use for mental health information seeking and social media use for emotional support, impact of social media on mental health awareness/literacy, and impact of social media on help-seeking); and population (i.e., youth, social media users, social media posts). Next, thematic analysis was performed by identifying the key themes that emerged from the review and analyzing the patterns to see how these themes were related to each other and contributed to the overall understanding of the research topic (Humble & Mozelius, 2022). Based on the findings, several knowledge gaps and the directions of future research were identified. In the reporting sub-stage, the results of the review were summarized as presented in Table 1 (Study Characteristics).

RESULTS

Study Characteristics

The characteristics of the reviewed articles (n=12) are shown in Table 1. All twelve articles were empirical studies. Of these, five studies utilized a quantitative approach through the survey method (Chen et al., 2020; Stawarz et al., 2019; Gere et al., 2019; Naslund et al., 2019) and the pre-post-test survey method (Thompson et al., 2021). Four studies reported qualitative evaluation, where two of them used content analysis method (Latha et al., 2020; Saha et al., 2019), one used focus group method (O'Reilly et al., 2019), one used semi-structured interview (Noorwali et al., 2022) and one used cross-sectional analysis (Pretorius et al., 2022). Two studies utilized mixed methods where Plaisime et al. (2020) employed survey and focus group methods, while Chen et al. (2022) adopted focus group and interview methods.

In terms of research context, the studies were centered on social media use for mental health information seeking (O'Reilly et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Stawarz et al., 2019; Plaisime et al., 2020) and social media use for seeking emotional support (Stawarz et al., 2019; Gere et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2022). Some studies also explored social media use for enhancing mental health awareness/literacy (O'Reilly et al., 2019; Latha et al., 2020; Pretorius et al., 2022; Saha et al., 2019; Plaisime et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2021) and help-seeking (Gere et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2022; Naslund et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2021). Other than that, there was also one article that investigated help-seeking barriers and facilitators among youth (Noorwali et al., 2022).

In terms of population, six studies were focused on youth, or adolescents, or young adults (O'Reilly et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Plaisime et al., 2020; Gere et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2021). Three studies used social media users (Latha et al., 2020; Stawarz et al., 2019; Naslund et al., 2019), while two studies used social media posts (Saha et al., 2019; Pretorius et al., 2022) as their study population.

By performing thematic analysis, three key themes were identified emerging from the reviewed literature i.e., (1) social media use; (2) social media use and mental health awareness/literacy; and (3) social media use and help-seeking.

Social Media Use

In the context of mental health communication, social media use was grouped into two themes. The first theme was social media use for mental health information seeking, which was highlighted in four articles (O'Reilly et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Stawarz et al., 2019; Plaisime et al., 2020). The second theme was social media use for seeking emotional support, which was highlighted in three articles (Stawarz et al., 2019; Gere et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2022).

In terms of social media use for mental health information seeking, O'Reilly et al. (2019) claimed that as adolescents are increasingly using and relying on social media to look for information, it has been perceived as a useful and cost-effective source of mental health information. Similarly, Chen et al. (2020) stated that since young people are born and raised in the information age, they have been increasingly using online media to search for relevant mental health information that can help them understand their health status and alleviate mental problems. Chen et al. (2020) also revealed that young people are more likely to search for mental health information in online media if they perceive the information provided is accurate, up-to-date, and comprehensive.

It was highlighted in Stawarz et al. (2019) that the combined use of different technologies, such as smartphone apps, online discussion forums, social media platforms, websites, and Web-based programs, can serve many different needs of young people, including seeking mental health information and finding out how to manage their own mental concerns. In Plaisime et al. (2020), it was found that although social media use is widespread among teens, only a very small percentage of them actually use social media to seek health-related information. Nevertheless, they strongly believed that social media has the potential to disseminate health-related information to online users. Plaisime et al. (2020) added that health messages disseminated on social media should be visually attractive and related to young people in order to capture their attention.

The second theme of social media use was emotional support. In Stawarz et al. (2019), it was stated that social media allows users to learn from the experiences of others and use that knowledge to understand and address their own issues, such as depression, anxiety, and stress. Gere et al. (2019) found that social media has become increasingly popular as a platform for young people to share and get advice about their personal lives, problems, and struggles. Feedback from others via comments and likes provides input and social support, which can improve their personal well-being. A qualitative study by Chen et al. (2022) revealed that sharing personal stories on social media provides young people with emotional support, which can reduce suicidal intention. All these studies indicate that social media provides a platform for youth to discuss mental health issues or receive help with mental health problems.

Social Media Use and Mental Health Awareness

Of all articles that discussed social media use and mental health awareness, six studies have shown that social media can be used effectively to raise mental health awareness, which was highlighted in O'Reilly et al. (2019), Latha et al. (2020), Pretorius et al. (2022), Saha et al. (2019), Plaisime et al. (2020) and Thompson et al. (2021).

O'Reilly et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the potential use of social media in promoting mental health among adolescents (11-18 years old) in London and Leicester (UK). They utilized a focus group involving 54 adolescents to collect data. It was found that most of the participants agreed that conducting mental health promotions on social media can help raise awareness and promote positive mental health among adolescents. This is because social media offers a faster and more efficient way to reach large audiences, provides anonymity, and allows adolescents to search for mental health information, engage with other users with similar challenges, and learn about how to take care of their well-being from celebrities.

In another empirical study, Latha et al. (2020) found that social media can be an effective tool to promote mental health awareness. Their study employed a qualitative approach to investigate the effectiveness of three mental health campaigns on two social media platforms, i.e., Facebook and Instagram, by observing the number of likes and shares of the posts related to the campaigns. Their study found that mental health awareness can be enhanced through campaigns on social media and concluded that social media platforms are a better and more effective tool for promoting mental health because they are cost-effective and can reach a wider audience.

Pretorius et al. (2022) investigated social media posts by 50 professionals in the field of mental health who were viewed as 'influencers' in TikTok and Instagram, and their impact on mental health literacy. Using content analysis to evaluate the data, Pretorius et al. (2022) found that when addressing elements of mental health literacy from their sample, 23.57 percent of TikTok posts and 7.27 percent of Instagram posts enhanced the ability of followers to recognize specific disorders (such as depression). 19.29 percent of TikTok posts and 16.36 percent of Instagram posts promoted help-seeking attitudes, while 13.57 percent of TikTok posts and 17.27 percent of Instagram posts promoted knowledge of self-treatments or self-help strategies. Based on these findings, Pretorius et al. (2022) concluded that social media offers a potential for mental health influencers to engage and improve young people's mental health literacy.

Saha et al. (2019) conducted a computational study on mental health awareness campaigns on Twitter. 14,217 Twitter posts with the hashtag #MyTipsForMentalHealth were collected between September and October 2017 and analyzed using content analysis to understand how the posts were disseminated on the platform based on their categories. They found that posts with inspirational content were the most spread, with a mean of 4.17 retweets, and posts with stigmatizing content were second, with a mean of 3.66 retweets. Based on these findings, Saha et al. (2019) concluded that social media can benefit users not only by providing useful mental health content but also by enhancing mental health awareness and reducing stigma.

Plaisime et al. (2020), in their study, also investigated how teens perceive the use of social media as a health promotional tool. Data were collected by conducting a focus group with 16 teens. It was found that the participants acknowledged that social media is a great vehicle for promoting a healthy lifestyle among teens. They also agreed that social media can spread information quickly and engage and maintain large audiences, which helps increasing awareness and encouraging health behavior change among teens.

Thompson et al. (2021) conducted a pre-post-test survey to examine the impact of Look Around (LA), a mental health campaign on social media aimed to reduce stigma among the 6th- to 12th-grade youth in one Midwestern county in Missouri, United States. Data were collected from 11,478 samples and analyzed using paired t-tests to investigate the differences in the score of stigma between the pre-test and post-test surveys. Their results revealed a significant reduction in stigma at the post-test, which implied that social media-based mental health campaigns can be effective in eradicating stigma associated with mental health among youth.

Social Media Use and Help-Seeking Attitudes

The role of social media in shaping attitudes toward help-seeking was discussed in four articles (Gere et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2022; Naslund et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2021).

Gere et al. (2019) conducted an empirical study to examine the relationships between social media use, self-therapy and mental health seeking behavior among college students. Data were collected using a survey from a sample of 143 undergraduate and graduate students at a large Historically Black University (HBCU) in the south-eastern region of the United States. Their study found that 21 percent of the participants were willing to share personal problems on social media in order to get advice from other people. These findings supported earlier studies that it is becoming more common for young people to seek online help nowadays due to the anonymity provided in the virtual environment and the taboo surrounding help-seeking (Naslund et al., 2016; Edwards-Hart, & Chester, 2010). They prefer sharing on social media because it allows them to engage and interact with other people who face similar problems without having the fear of being judged by adults. Their results also indicate differences in

help-seeking online via social media across gender and academic level groups, where the level of help-seeking is higher among female and undergraduate students compared to male and graduate students.

Chen et al. (2022) employed a mixed-methods approach to examine the motives of using social media and their relationship with help-seeking willingness and suicide risks among youths aged 15–19 in Hong Kong. They conducted a survey with 1676 youths to determine the motives prevalence and their correlations with online help-seeking willingness and suicide risks. Interviews were also conducted with 6 focus groups and 12 individuals to gain qualitative data about online expression motives and features as well as the willingness to seek help among suicidal youths. Their regression model revealed that using social media for "emotional expression" and "image building" leads to increased suicide risks, while using social media for "life sharing" is correlated to decreased suicide risks. Those who use social media for "self-expression" and "friend making" are more willing to seek online help.

Thompson et al. (2021) also conducted a pre-post-test survey to investigate the impact of a social media-based mental health campaign, Look Around (LA), on help seeking among youth in Missouri, United States. The collected data from 11,478 samples was analyzed using paired t-tests to observe the change in help-seeking before and after the campaign. It was found that the score of help-seeking increased significantly at the post-test, which implied that the campaign had a positive impact on the youth's perceptions of help-seeking.

Naslund et al. (2019) conducted a survey on 240 social media users in Twitter platform who self-identified as having a mental illness to learn about their use of social media for mental health and their interest in accessing mental health programs delivered through social media. Their results revealed that 85 percent of the participants expressed interest in mental health programs delivered through social media, especially to promote overall health and wellbeing (72%) and for coping with mental health symptoms (90%). Their study also shed light on the importance of social media for accessing peer support among people with mental illness. These findings indicate that people with mental illness tend to go to social media to learn about others' experiences in managing the illness, especially when they have limited access to knowledgeable and supportive peers in offline contexts.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to conduct a systematic review of the literature in relation to social media use for youth mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes. Specifically, the review aimed to understand social media use among youth in the context of mental health communication and its impact on their mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes.

First, six articles were reviewed regarding the use of social media use to support mental health. Based on the findings in O'Reilly et al. (2019), Chen et al. (2020), Stawarz et al. (2019), and Plaisime et al. (2020), it was evident that social media has been increasingly utilized by users to seek information about mental health. Many people nowadays perceive social media as a useful and cost-effective way to find relevant mental health information that can help improve their mental well-being. Meanwhile, the findings in Stawarz et al. (2019), Gere et al. (2019), and Chen et al. (2022) indicated that social media has also been increasingly utilized by users, particularly young people, to seek emotional support. In other words, they tend to go to social media to share their personal problems in order to feel supported or get advice on how to address their problems.

Secondly, six articles were reviewed regarding the role of social media in raising mental health awareness. Based on the findings in O'Reilly et al. (2019), Latha et al. (2020), Pretorius et al. (2022), Saha et al. (2019), Plaisime et al. (2020), and Thompson et al. (2021), it was evident that social media-based mental health campaigns can promote youth mental health awareness effectively. This is because most youths nowadays use social media as a source of information, which can help them recognize symptoms of mental disorders, search for self-treatment, or develop strategies of self-help. Furthermore, social media can spread information quickly and efficiently to reach a wider audience and provides a platform for engagement among users to discuss mental health issues, making it an effective tool for promoting mental well-being and eradicating stigma.

Lastly, four articles were reviewed regarding the role of social media in shaping positive help-seeking attitudes. Based on the findings in Gere et al. (2019), Chen et al. (2022), Naslund et al. (2019), and Thompson et al. (2021), it was evident that social media-based mental health campaigns can help eradicate stigma associated with mental illness, thus encouraging young people to be more open about discussing mental health issues and seeking help.

Nevertheless, we found that most of these studies were conducted without focusing on specific social media platforms. Only several studies highlighted the use of certain platforms like Facebook (Latha et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020), Instagram (Latha et al., 2020; Pretorius et al., 2022), Twitter (Saha et al., 2019) and Tik Tok (Pretorius et al., 2022) for youth mental health. This indicates a need to conduct further research to gain better understanding of the differences in the impact of social media use on youth mental health across different social media platforms. It is important to identify which platforms are the most effective in delivering mental health information to youth. This is because different social media platforms might have different impacts on how users view the content of the posts and use them to seek information.

Visual social media platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat might be more effective in promoting mental health because they have a large and diverse user base, which provides an opportunity to reach a wide audience with mental health messages and resources. In addition, visual content such as images and videos can be particularly effective and more appealing in engaging users and to educate them about the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions or to promote mental health resources and support services. Moreover, social media platforms with personal stories features might offer better opportunity for individuals to share their own experiences with mental health, which can inspire others to seek help and support.

It was also found that none of the reviewed studies considered the effect of mental health awareness as a mediator between social media use and help-seeking. Further research is therefore needed to understand the mechanism through which social media use for mental health information seeking or emotional support is related to help-seeking. Understanding this is important because without mental health awareness, youth may still have stigma, which is a major barrier to help-seeking for mental health concerns. Stigma can cause individuals to feel ashamed or embarrassed about seeking help, which can lead to delays in treatment and worsen mental health outcomes. When people have accurate information about mental health and understand that mental illness is a common and treatable condition, they are more likely to seek help when they need it.

FUTURE RESEARCH

In this study, we have systematically reviewed the existing literature related to social media use for youth mental health awareness and help-seeking attitudes. The findings suggest that future work should be carried out to overcome the current gaps in understanding the impact of social media use on help-seeking through the mediation of mental health awareness, particularly in the context of specific social media platforms like Instagram that are currently popular among youth. This will guide mental health practitioners on how to conduct mental health promotion using social media effectively, integrate best practices for expanding reach, and foster better engagement with youth.

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