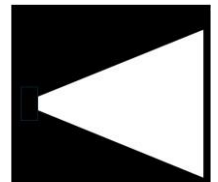


# Social Media is OK !?



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Ferguson, C. J., Kaye, L. K., Branley-Bell, D., & Markey, P. (2024). There is no evidence that time spent on social media is correlated with adolescent mental health problems: Findings from a meta-analysis. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*.

## Overview

Meta-analysis questions the link between screen time and mental health issues in adolescents

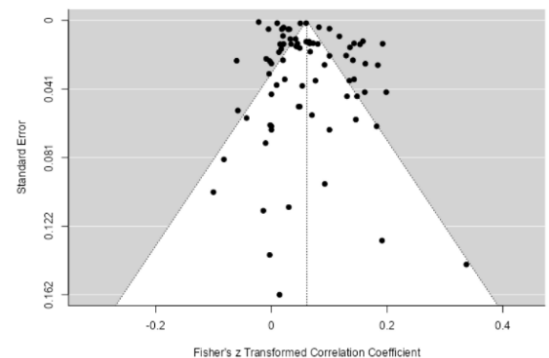
The debate over whether social media harms mental health has been raging, with many reports attributing anxiety and depression to increased screen time. However, this meta-analysis of 46 studies, paints a different picture, reporting no substantial evidence that time on social media correlates with poor mental health in adolescents.

## Key Findings

*Negligible Effect Size:* The pooled data showed an average effect size of  $\beta = 0.061$ , indicating no meaningful relationship between social media time and mental health issues like depression or anxiety.

*Moral Panic Narrative:* The findings align with the idea of “moral panic,” a term used to describe exaggerated public fears about new technologies. Historical parallels, such as the introduction of television and video games, suggest a tendency to scapegoat emerging technologies without strong evidence of harm.

*Limitations in Methodology:* Researchers emphasized that existing studies often lack rigorous methods. Key issues include reliance on self-reported data, a lack of differentiation between different social media platforms, and overuse of the “addiction” framework.



## Moderators

*Sex:* slightly larger effect sizes for females ( $\beta = 0.075$ ) compared to males ( $\beta = 0.044$ ). While both effect sizes were below the threshold for clinical significance, suggesting girls might be more at risk.

*Type of Study:* correlational studies have slightly higher effect sizes ( $\beta = 0.072$ ) compared to longitudinal studies ( $\beta = 0.044$ ), indicating the former is more prone to detecting small associations that could be inflated by shared biases.

*Dataset Type:* large national surveys showed slightly larger effect sizes ( $\beta = 0.067$ ) than bespoke datasets or dissertations, suggesting widely-used large datasets may have an outsized influence on findings.

*Outcome Type:* the authors note that many studies used self-reported measures of social media, which have shown to be unreliable compared to objective logs or time diaries.

*Content and Type of Use:* although not directly tested in the meta-analysis, the authors identify a major gap in the literature exploring if different types of social media use have a different impact

The authors advocate for future studies that adopt more nuanced measures of social media use, focusing not only on the time spent but also on the context, motivations, and types of engagement. They argue that these dimensions could reveal more about the complex relationship between social media and mental health.

## Insights

The study highlights the need for policymakers and the public to adopt a more balanced view of social media. Instead of focusing on the amount of time spent online, the research suggests looking deeper into how and why social media is used. Simply blaming social media ignores more complex social factors that may influence youth mental health. The same applies to all media, as reading negatively framed books for hours a day might also have detrimental impact on well-being.

## Conclusion

Is it time to stop blanket blaming social media and start thinking about helping people make the most of it?

