

The Educational Implications on the Association of Social Media Use and Mental Well-Being in the Post-Pandemic Period


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Article Information:

Received 2023-10-03

Revised 2023-12-01

Published 2024-02-04

Keywords:

COVID-19 Anxiety
 educational implications
 endemicity
 mental well-being
 social media

Abstract

This study investigates the educational implications of the association between social media use and mental well-being in the post-pandemic period. As educational practices increasingly incorporate digital platforms, understanding the impact of students' social media engagement on their mental health is imperative. The role of education in the transformation of information and knowledge within the realm of social media contributes to the significant influences towards individuals' mental well-being, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Education also serves as an instrument of social change to help reduce anxiety of COVID-19 among people. This research, therefore, aimed at investigating the association between social media use and COVID-19 Anxiety and mental well-being among Malaysian adolescents. It focused on the importance of educational implications in the associations among the study variables. Using a convenience sampling technique with a correlational research design, 329 adolescents, 18 to 25 years old, were selected for this study. Social Networking Usage Questionnaire (SNUQ), Coronavirus Anxiety Scale (CAS) and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) were utilised to measure social media use, anxiety of COVID-19 and mental well-being of the adolescents respectively. Three scales showed high internal consistency with $\alpha = .92$ for SNUQ, $\alpha = .90$ for CAS, and $\alpha = .94$ for WEMWBS. The findings of the study indicated a significant positive association between social media use and COVID-19 anxiety ($r = .12$, $n = 329$, $p < .05$), and a significant positive relationship between social media use and mental well-being ($r = .19$, $n = 329$, $p < .001$). However, results showed an insignificant association between COVID-19 anxiety and mental well-being among adolescents ($r = -.051$, $n = 329$, $p > .001$). The study concluded that the use of social media as a platform for educational transfer and information change abstains from anxiety of COVID-19 and uplifts awareness among Malaysian adolescents on the salient positive influences of it towards their mental health.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an integral part of modern communication, connecting people across the globe and revolutionizing the dissemination of information, while the nuanced

How to cite:

Fitriana, M., Savitri, S. I., Ahmad, J., Ali, R. S., & Lathifah, Z. K. (2024). The Educational Implications on the Association of Social Media Use and Mental Well-Being in the Post-Pandemic Period. *Islamic Guidance and Counseling Journal*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.25217/0020247450500>

E-ISSN:

2614-1566

Published by:

Institut Agama Islam Ma'arif NU (IAIMNU) Metro Lampung

relationship between social media and mental well-being has been a subject of ongoing debate, evolving alongside the dynamic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Malaysia, like many countries, grapples with the enduring effects of the pandemic. According to World Health Organisation ([WHO], 2020), continuous anxiety of COVID-19 and associated mental health issues persist, leading to what is referred to as pandemic fatigue. This study aims to provide insights into the complex relationship between social media, mental well-being, and education, with a specific focus on the ongoing COVID-19 endemic phase in Malaysia. The multifaceted objectives encompass understanding the impact of social media on anxiety, mental well-being, and education, while considering cultural nuances and the evolving educational landscape.

According to Kemp (2021), about 53% of the world's entire population used social media before the COVID-19 pandemic and this increased significantly (by almost 13%) during the pandemic in 2020 and has played a significant role in shaping public perceptions and disseminating information. Likewise, approximately 88.7% of Malaysians are internet users (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission [MCMC], 2020) and the rate of internet users increased in about 1.3% from 2018 to 2021 (MCMC, 2021). During the Movement Control Order (MCO) the rate was increased in 98%, especially for text communication (MCMC, 2020). Of all the internet users, adolescents in the age group of 20-34 years were reported to engage more in social network sites (SNSs) as compared to other groups of age (MCMC, 2020). With such figures, internet usage seems to be among the most important tools of social media, thus increasing further social networking activities in transferring information and communication around. Of those social networks, the use of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, and Instagram for getting and transferring information reached about 87.5% (Hashim et al., 2020). Social media transcends geographical boundaries, providing a platform for knowledge sharing on a global scale. This accessibility broadens the reach of information and enables individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate in the exchange of ideas (Yasir et al., 2020).

As the pandemic unfolded, the use of social media witnessed a significant surge, becoming a pivotal force in shaping public perceptions, disseminating information, and influencing the levels of fear and anxiety among individuals. This surge persists into the endemic phase, where the relentless sharing of COVID-19 information on social media not only amplifies fear but also contributes to a myriad of mental health problems (Hassan, 2020; Mydin, 2022). The imperative for rapid information dissemination and global accessibility during the pandemic has intensified this connection, contributing to information overload and misinformation on social media platforms, thereby heightening fear and anxiety among the public (Garfin et al., 2020). Adolescents, in particular, turn to social platforms to navigate external pressures affecting their mental health (Boyd, 2014). Kemp (2021) reports a significant surge in global social media usage during the pandemic, underscoring its pivotal role in the evolving landscape. The excessive worries and tension, paired with physiological symptoms of Generalised Anxiety Disorder during the COVID-19 pandemic (Silva et al., 2020), increases post-traumatic stress and other psychological conditions (Banerjee & Rai, 2020; Brooks et al., 2020). In light of these challenges, recognizing the need for impactful influences, such as accurate information, positive support networks, and coping strategies, becomes crucial. Recognizing the exacerbation of mental health challenges during the endemic phase, the study seeks to guide individuals in navigating their social media consumption mindfully, critically evaluating information, and striking a balance between staying informed and protecting mental well-being.

In the realm of education, social media emerges not just as a communication tool but as a transformative force, reshaping the landscape for students, teachers, and institutions. Its influence transcends conventional educational boundaries, accentuating its role in fostering interaction and communication within virtual networks and communities (Lawson, 2022). As

an educational platform, social media creates a dynamic and interconnected space for global collaboration, communication, and knowledge sharing, revolutionizing the modern educational landscape. This impact is particularly pronounced in Malaysia, where the surge in internet usage, especially among adolescents, has elevated social media to a pivotal tool for information transfer and communication (MCMC, 2020, 2021).

The educational implications of using social media in the context of knowledge transfer during the ongoing phase of endemicity for COVID-19 are significant. Studies have indicated that knowledge transfer plays a significant role in the improvement of mental health issues among adolescents during and after the pandemic (Yusuf et al., 2022). The progressive transmission of imparting knowledge to empower reasoning and judgement as intellectual properties contributing to the significant transformation of values in education to the individual and the rest of the community has been meticulously deliberated in the use of social media (Agustina, 2019). The focus on education within this context emerges as a profound initiative, amplifying awareness in communities toward mental and psychological well-being, thus acting as a preventive measure against mental health issues and other psychological disorders (Artirestu et al., 2022; Pristiwanti et al., 2022). In essence, this narrative unfolds as an exploration of how social media's educational role becomes increasingly vital, especially in the context of the ongoing endemic phase. It not only serves as a medium for knowledge transfer but also as a potent instrument in shaping values, fostering global connectivity, and contributing to the collective well-being of individuals and communities alike.

Given Malaysia's diverse cultural landscape, mental health awareness initiatives must be culturally sensitive, considering varied backgrounds, beliefs, and practices. Awareness of information quality and relevance is a key factor in empowering individuals and families. Conscious decision-making, adaptability, and collaboration fostered by being aware of shared information contribute to the well-being of individuals and their families. Therefore, the implications of family communication, family interaction and family members' guidance are significant to reduce confusion, panic, anxiety, worry, emotional reaction and many other significant psychological and physical expression among the information receivers, especially during the COVID-19 endemic (Rashid et al., 2021). Such a strategy reduces the impact on individuals' susceptibility to symptoms of anxiety and depression (Deepa & Priya, 2020) which deplete the degree of stress and other psychological problems (Karim et al., 2020).

The post-pandemic period has observed a significant reliance on digital platforms for learning and communication. This transition has inspired a deeper examination of the relationship between social media use and mental well-being within the educational context. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the associations between the usage of social media and the occurrence of COVID-19 Anxiety. This study also aimed to examine the relationship between social media use and mental well-being of the Malaysian adolescents. A central focus lies on the significant educational implications of the study variables towards the development of mental health awareness among adolescents in Malaysia. The conceptual framework underscores the interaction between variables, emphasizing the substantial contributions of educational resources in the current use of social media.

Literature Review

Leveraging social media for educational purposes during the endemic phase of COVID-19 offers a multifaceted approach to addressing anxiety. By providing accurate information, promoting health literacy, fostering community support, and delivering engaging and inclusive educational content, social media can contribute significantly to reducing the prolonged impacts of pandemic-related anxiety. Almost two years into the pandemic, many countries witnessed a transition from a pandemic to an endemic state of COVID-19. Malaysia entered the "Transition to Endemic" phase of COVID-19 in April 2022, with most restrictions removed.

The concept of transitioning from a pandemic to an endemic phase typically involves a shift from widespread outbreaks to more predictable and manageable levels of the virus within a population. The enduring effects of the pandemic, including economic challenges, disruptions to daily life, and the loss of loved ones, can contribute to persistent mental health issues.

Studies indicated that mental health education signifies the progress of improvement in mental health issues among adolescents during and after pandemic (Yusuf et al. 2022). The progressive transmission of imparting knowledge to empower reasoning and judgement as intellectual properties contributing to the significant transformation of values in education to the individual and the rest of the community has been meticulously deliberated in the use of social media (Agustina, 2019). Mental health education has been profoundly promoted to amplify awareness of the community towards mental and psychological well-being to prevent the occurrence of mental health issues and other psychological disorders (Artirestu et al., 2022; Pristiwanti et al., 2022).

The dynamic and transferable nature of informal teaching and learning in the digital space coupled with the pragmatic use of educational values, creates a powerful and versatile learning environment. Digital spaces facilitate the creation of informal learning communities where individuals share their goals and interests, enable global connectivity, allowing individuals to learn from diverse perspectives and cultures that promote accessibility and inclusivity. Ultimately, family and parental guidance are the primary educators in digital social media usage for the young generation, particularly in digital learning environments (Lathifah, Helmanto, & Maryani, 2020). The post-pandemic period has observed a significant shift in educational practices, with an increased reliance on digital platforms for learning and communication. This transition has inspired a deeper examination of the relationship between social media use and mental well-being within the educational context.

During the COVID-19 pandemic an innovative utilization of social media usage via smartphone helped keeping the population informed and socially connected during the COVID-19 pandemic, but excessive use may become an issue, leading to problematic usage. Psychosocial education and counselling programs should be implemented to prevent and mitigate the development of Problematic Smartphone Use (PSPU) and Problematic Social Media Use (PSMU), which related psychological problems especially among vulnerable populations (Islam et al., 2021). Such findings were also supported by another study on female colleague students in China whereby smartphone addiction is significantly increased in the absence of school adjustment to determine students' psychological health to include meaning in life balancing their mental well-being (Zhao et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, a few other research findings have shown that continuous fear of COVID-19 and other mental health issues have increased in the endemic phase (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Mydin, 2022), due to continuous uncertainty, changes in public health measures, concerns about new variants and the need to grapple with concerns about personal health, the health of loved ones, and the broader societal implications of the virus. Studies have shown that adolescents' excessive use of social media significantly increased their fear of getting COVID-19 during the pandemic due to the volume of unvalidated and falsehood information about COVID-19 reported on social media. Bösselmann et al. (2021) found that the use of social media is highly associated with adolescents' fear of COVID-19. Adolescents who were online more engaged, especially with social media, did express increased dread of COVID-19 (Bösselmann et al., 2021). Another study done in Ghana, an emerging economy like Malaysia on Social media usage, and fear of COVID-19 utilizing a sample of 209 Ghanaian university students indicated that social media use had a significant and positive connection with fear of COVID-19 (Malm et al., 2022). Similarly, Ahorsu et al. (2022) cross-sectional survey of 10,843 people of Qazvin City in Iran on problematic social media usage, fear of COVID-19, COVID-19 risk perception, and desire to acquire a COVID-19 vaccination. The SEM results found a

significant positive link between problematic social media use and anxiety and fear of COVID-19. Likewise, regarding the impact of the use of social media and adolescents' mental wellbeing, studies show mixed findings. While some reported positive relationships, others found a negative impact. Adolescents who experienced browsing-induced jealousy had a higher rate of low emotional well-being (25% vs. 13%). Adolescents who enjoyed browsing had a higher rate of good emotional well-being (47% vs. 9%) (Valkenburg et al., 2022). Beyens et al. (2021) found that distinct forms of social media use within the same adolescent were extremely rare to produce different effects: 28% of adolescents only saw decreases in well-being, 26% only saw increases in well-being, and 45% of adolescents experienced no changes in well-being as a result of any of the three forms of social media use. Furthermore, The level of fear experienced by people during the coronavirus pandemic was found to serve as a 'warning' factor because it had a significant positive relationship with the mental wellbeing of adolescents youth (Krok et al., 2021). Likewise, Wright et al. (2021) concluded that the COVID-19 Anxiety during the pandemic negatively affected the mental health and wellbeing of adolescents. Studies also indicated the quarantined people during pandemic, used social media more frequently than non-quarantined people (Yue et al., 2023). Importantly, the negative association between social media use and psychological well-being was significantly stronger for quarantined people than unquarantined people.

Webste et al. (2021) came to the conclusion that in order to address the threats to subjective well-being posed by online social networks, there is a need for intervention programs as well as education for parents, educators, and young people. This is due to research demonstrating a strong negative correlation between high levels of investment, passive usage, receiving unfavorable feedback, and social media exclusion and mood, self-esteem, life satisfaction, body image, and general subjective well-being.

Studies further shown that adolescents turn to social platforms to escape the external pressures threatening their mental health (Boyd, 2014). This prompted the need to recognize the importance of efficacious influences. Studies conducted by Capone et al. (2020) on Italian students also revealed that students involved in social media use showed 22.3% increase in their academic achievements, and levels of their mental well-being appeared in line with normative values where levels of academic stress were not significantly higher than those found in other student samples before the COVID-19 outbreak. Students with high levels of information seeking presented higher levels of well-being and risk perception. Results could be considered useful to realize training pathways, to help the university students to improve their well-being, reducing lower level of stress, anxiety, and depression, in the post-pandemic. Such findings were also supported by Sujarwoto et al. (2021) in which students with higher social media addiction scores had a greater likelihood of experiencing mild depression (Sujarwoto et al., 2021).

Therefore, the current study investigated the use of social media and its association on the Malaysian adolescents' mental well-being. the implications of education in the family communication, family interaction and family relationship are significant in reducing confusion, panic, anxiety, worry, emotional reactions and many other significant psychological and physical expressions among the information receivers, especially during the COVID-19 endemic (Rashid et al., 2021). Educational implications also enhance mental well-being and empower mental health of the adolescents in Malaysia. The conceptual framework of the current study showed in figure 1, explained the interaction between the variables which implied significant contributions of educational resources in the current use of social media.

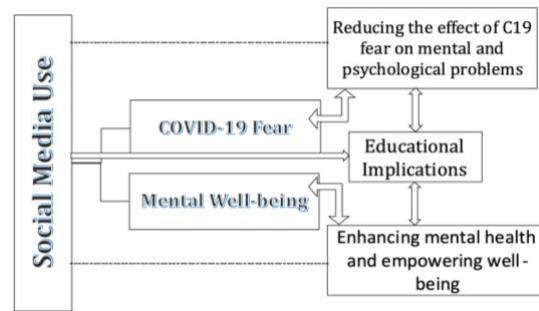


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

The current research highlighted the importance of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (2012) which extensively describes the substantial of human motivation and personality of the individuals in their interaction with their social contexts. This theory explained human's different extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012) that emphasizes on the three comprehensive human needs. The needs are pertinent for the growth and functioning, which require human competency, autonomy, and relatedness. The competence component as one's experience of mastery and being effective in his/her activities. While autonomy describes the feeling to choose and to willingly endorse the behaviour to perform independently, the relatedness component explains how one feels connected and belonged to others. SDT further elaborates that these three psychological needs strongly influence people to motivate their thoughts and behaviours. It emphasizes the supportive condition within the environment whereby the quality of motivation will be more autonomous when the social environment is more supportive of these psychological needs. Alternatively, the quality of motivation will be more controlled when psychological needs are not well met or even thwarted through social interactions. The theory highlights the importance of achieving certain goals over time when people are autonomously motivated.

The theory significantly contributes to the selection of the variables in this current research whereby the importance of autonomy in individuals' capacity for selecting pertinent information needed in the use of social media usage inhibits the users' own competency for their efforts in interacting with people in their cyberspace. Such potential characters are required in the users' smart way of deliberating and empowering their feeling of closeness and belongingness to others with immense knowledge and experience shared among the cyberspace users. Therefore, the components in the theory sufficiently expand the constructs used in the current research to incumbently extend its concept for discussion.

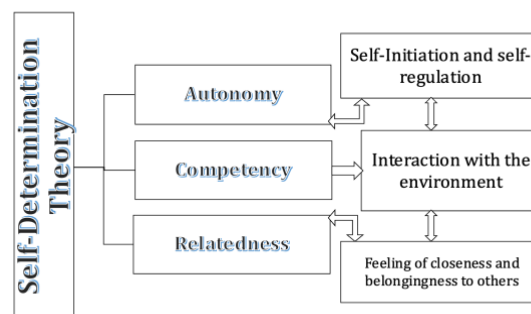


Figure 2. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012)

The theory is used to explain how social media could be one of the primary functions to explain people's social environment which promotes their strivings to support other people's

psychological needs. The influence of social media in this context could be perceived as a motivating factor for people to involve in their vigilant steps of filtering the information supporting their current psychological condition. Attempting to grasp and acknowledge other people's perspectives, selectively conveying the message and providing the rationale for information transfer are the choices to make when dealing with the use of social media. Such autonomous character leads to established self-determination to serve as a measure in controlling the negative behaviours to occur. Although the challenges faced by people during the COVID-19 pandemic, their competency in filtering information and transferring information to others by using social media, encourage their sense of initiation to provide themselves with mechanisms to bring positive outcomes to the behaviours. People feel competence in making changes and such competency character helps enhance their psychological well-being better. Further use of social media could affect other people's significant characters, and therefore, when others are involved and show interest in one's activities, it shows greater empathy and a feeling of relatedness to one another instead of portraying the information received in a more irrelevant way.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach, adapting the correlational design to investigate the association between social media usage, COVID-19 anxiety, and mental well-being among Malaysian adolescents in the post-pandemic period (Seeram, 2019; Senthilnathan & Samithamby, 2019). The study targeted a diverse sample of Malaysian adolescents aged 13 to 25, from the Klang Valley, Kuala Lumpur, and some area of the Selangor states of Malaysia. Participants were from various socio-economic backgrounds to ensure a representative sample. A total of 329 Malaysian adolescents participated in the study with 249 female participants and 80 male participants. Participants' age was divided into three categories, 18-19 years old with 31 participants, 20-22 years old with 168 participants, and 23-25 years old with 40 participants.

The research utilizes three standardized scales. The following measures are used in the current study: The Social Networking Usage Questionnaire (SNUQ), the Coronavirus Anxiety Scale (CAS), and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). All measures are standardized to assess each variable.

The Coronavirus Anxiety Scale (CAS), developed by Sherman Lee (2020), measure the level of anxiety related to COVID-19. It includes items assessing anxieties about personal health, family well-being, and concerns about the future. It is a unidimensional scale consisting of 5 items measuring impairing physiological anxiety symptoms with a scale ranging from "Not at all" to "Nearly every day over the last 2 weeks". The scale has been proven to be "highly reliable ($\alpha = .93$), thematically consistent and stable". Furthermore, another validation study done by Lee et al. (2020) also proved the reliability of the scale ($\alpha = .92$) as well as the construct validity of the scale whereby the scores demonstrated correlations with various other factors such as functional impairment, hopelessness, and coping methods. Independent studies of adults residing across the United States have demonstrated that the CAS is a reliable instrument ($\alpha > .90$), with solid factorial (single-factor; invariant across socio-demographics) and construct (correlated with anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and drug/alcohol coping) validity. The diagnostic properties of the CAS (90% sensitivity and 85% specificity) are comparable to related screening instruments, such as the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7. The current internal reliability of this scale was also high ($\alpha = .92$).

The Social Networking Usage Questionnaire (SNUQ), developed by Savita Gupta and Liyaqat Bashir (2018) consists of 4 dimensions such as Academic (i.e. I use social networking sites to solve my academic problem), Socialization (i.e. I use social networking sites to become more sociable), Entertainment (i.e. I use social networking sites to look at funny sharing), Informativeness (i.e. I use social networking sites for reading news). Total items were 19,

measuring the social media usage of individuals, especially in an education context. The scale ranges from “Never” to “Always”. The scale has good reliability ($\alpha = .83$) as well as good convergent validity whereby the scores demonstrated correlation with other factors such as socialisation and entertainment (Gupta & Bashir, 2018) and the internal reliability of this scale of the current research was 0.90 which was also significantly high.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), developed by Tennant et al. (2007) consists of 14 items which include “items that focus on positive affect, interpersonal relations and positive functioning” with a scale ranging from “None of the time” to “All of the time”. The scale has good reliability ($\alpha = .83$ to $\alpha = .91$) and has been validated for usage in Malaysia (Husin et al., 2016). The internal consistency for this scale was found to be substantially high as well ($\alpha = .94$).

Ethical clearance and approval were obtained from the Research Ethic Committee of the International University of Malaya-Wales prior to the distribution of the questionnaires, with the reference number IUMW.DVC.IUMWREC/IG0212/22-2. Ethical guidelines were also provided to all the participants. The survey was prepared using Google Forms and was disseminated to the targeted population via social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. The use of Google form was due to the unprecedented rate of COVID-19 to rise by anticipating the face-to-face meeting with the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The estimated number of participants for this study were 329. Data cleaning determined the current recruited 304 participants (Male = 67; Female = 237; M-Age = 23.3 years old). Table 1 showed the demographic data of the participants.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic of Participants

Socio-demographic	Categories	n	%
Age (Years)	18 – 19	31	10.1
	20 – 22	151	49.6
	23 - 25	122	40.1
Gender	Female	237	77.9
	Male	67	22.1
Total	Participants	304	100

Tabel 2. Mean of Mental Well-Being, COVID-19 Anxiety, and Social Media Usage

Variables	M	SD	Min	Max
Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)	55.11	13.31	22	85
COVID-19 Anxiety Scale (CAS)	2.89	3.48	0	12
Social Networks Usage Scale (SNUQ)	55.55	8.64	27	72

Table 1 showed that among the age groups, 20 to 22 years has the highest percentage with 49.6%, followed by 23 to 25 years of age with 40.1%. The least age group participation was in 18 to 19 years with 10.2%. Furthermore, table 1 also showed the highest percentage between gender was dominated by the female adolescents with 77.9%, followed by male adolescents with 22.1%.

Table 2 showed the mean scores and the standard deviation of the mental well-being ($M = 55.11$, $SD = 13.31$), COVID-19 anxiety ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 3.48$), and social usage scale ($M = 55.55$, $SD = 8.64$) respectively. The scores showed the highest mean for SNUQ as compared to WEMWBS and CAS.

Results of this current research also showed significant positive relationship between social media usage and COVID-19 Anxiety. Table 3, 4 and 5 indicated the significant

association between the variables. The tables indicated the significant positive association between the Social Media Use and COVID-19 Anxiety ($r = .119$, $N = 329$, $p < .05$), and significant positive associations between social media use and mental well-being of the adolescents in Malaysia ($r = .192$; $p < .01$, $N = 329$). However, table 5 showed insignificant negative associations between COVID-19 Anxiety and mental well-being among the Malaysian Adolescents ($r = -.051$, $n = 329$, $p > .001$).

Table 3. Correlation of all variables

Variables	r	p
Social Media Usage – COVID-19 Anxiety	0.119*	0.031
Social Media Usage – Mental Well-being	0.192**	0.000
COVID-19 Anxiety – Mental Well Being	-0.051	0.358

Results in table 3 showed significant positive associations between social media use and COVID-19 Anxiety among Malaysian adolescents ($r = .12$, $n = 329$, $p < .05$), significant positive associations between social media use and mental well-being of the adolescents in Malaysia ($p < .01$, $N = 329$). However, indicated insignificant associations between COVID-19 Anxiety and mental well-being among the Malaysian Adolescents ($r = -.051$, $n = 329$, $p > .001$).

A multiple regression analysis was utilised to predict the mental well-being of young adults in the endemic period, based on scores on COVID-19 anxiety and social media usage. These variables statistically and significantly predicted mental well-being $F(2, 301) = 6.862$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .044$. Both variables added significantly to the prediction, $p < .05$. (Table 6 & table 7)

Table 6. Determination of Mental Well-being with Multiple Regression Analysis

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	2345.790	2	1172.895	6.862	.001
Residual	51450.408	301	170.932		
Total	537961.197	303			

Anova table for the significance of the model: Dependent Variable = Mental Well-being; Predictor = Constant, COVID-19 Anxiety, and Social Media Usage

Table 7. Coefficients

	Correlation	B	Std.Error	Std.Beta	t	p
Constant	-	42.617	3.914		10.888	.000
COVID-19 Anxiety	.034	-.289	.216	-.076	-1.340	.000
Social Media Usage	.195*	.240	.069	-.197	3.498	.002

Dependent Variable: Mental Well-being; * $p < .05$.

According to Table 6, the general form of the equation to predict mental well-being from COVID-19 anxiety and social media usage is $Y = 42.617 - .289(X_1) + .240(X_2)$. This equation means, in every decrease of .289 COVID-19 Anxiety, it will increase mental well-being, and in every increase of Social Media Usage, Mental Well-being scores will increase by .240.

The results indicated COVID-19 Anxiety and Social Media Use simultaneously influence participants' mental well-being. As shown in model table 7, the COVID-19 variable has a positive correlation ($r = 0.034$) but is not significant, while coefficient B shows a negative value which indicates that every decrease ($B = -.289$) in the COVID-19 score will increase the score Participants' well-being. Meanwhile, the Social Media Use variable shows a significant positive correlation ($r = .195^*$), meaning that an increase in the Social Media Use variable will increase

participants' well-being ($B = .240$), while together, the two variables significantly influence well-being ($B = 42,617$).

Discussion

The findings of this current research indicated significant associations between social media use and COVID-19 Anxiety and between social media use and mental well-being among the adolescents in Malaysia. This showed that the usage of social media is pertinent to the adolescents' development of anxiety. When the social media has been widely used and the information transferred with values and subsequent impacts of learning process from it, anxiety pertaining to any information of the COVID-19 will be significantly reduced (Karim et al., 2020; Rashid et al., 2021). As anxiety subsides due to the wise usage of social media among the young people in transmitting the information and in interpreting the news as positive inputs, anxiety shall be gradually dismissed. Anxiety is strongly developed with excessive worries and repetitive negative thoughts and such psychological issues were associated with symptoms of Generalised Anxiety Disorder. However, when social media are utilised in the context of knowledge deliverables, it further assists the receivers to interpret it positively. Therefore, information senders must be vigilant and are able to identify the information carefully before disseminating to others. The dynamic understanding on the importance of social media usage requires profound awareness of the adolescents, hence, awareness campaigns on significant concepts of digital technology and digital information are substantial.

The study's results showed that as individuals spend more time on social media platforms, their exposure to pandemic-related information, including news updates, personal anecdotes, and global statistics, may contribute to an increased sense of anxiety. The constant inflow of information in abundance, often characterized by uncertainties, conflicting narratives, and sensationalized content, may intensify individuals' concerns about their health, safety, and the overall impact of the pandemic on society (Beyens et al., 2021; Valkenburg et al., 2022).

These findings echo with prior research that has exposed the role of social media in disseminating information, both accurate and misleading, and its potential to influence individuals' emotional responses to global crises. In line with the findings, a systematic literature review in 2021 (Phalswal et al., 2023) found that maximum participants used social media as a primary source of information. This has led to relatively high rates of symptoms of depression (14.14% to 48.3%), anxiety (7.4% to 47.82%), and prevalence of stress increased to 37.67% are reported after exposure to social media for coverage of COVID-19 news in the general population. Risk factors of psychological distress are associated with female gender, younger age group, marital status, staying alone, and duration of exposure to mass media. Increased coverage to COVID-19 information through mass/social media is associated with highly significant levels of psychological health issues (Krok et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2021).

The positive relationship between social media use and mental well-being could be attributed to various factors. Social media platforms offer opportunities for connection, social support, and community building, especially during times of physical isolation. Online communities, virtual events, and shared experiences on social media may contribute positively to individuals' mental well-being by fostering a sense of belonging and social connectedness. This finding emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of social media's impact on mental health, recognizing that the relationship is influenced by various factors, including the content consumed, the nature of online interactions, and individual differences. The findings of the research revealed an unexpected result, indicating an insignificant negative association between COVID-19 Anxiety and mental well-being among the Malaysian adolescents. The discovery challenges common assumptions and insights (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Mydin, 2022). This could lead to the relationship between pandemic-related anxieties and the mental well-being of the specific demographics. This insignificant finding on the other hand, might

indicate that the more the adolescents understand digital technology and the usage of such digital information, the more they balance their mental health. Adolescents are known for their resilience and adoptability, might have developed coping strategies such as seeking social support, engaging in positive activities, or adopting cognitive reframing which might have positive impact of COVID-19 Anxiety on their mental well-being.

The significant contribution of social media usage on the adolescents' mental well-being, in the post pandemic phase might indicate the psychological states of the young people in Malaysia during the COVID-19 pandemic has been affected to impact the fluctuate condition of their mental health during the endemicity. The social isolation condition during the pandemic has contributed to the tremendous changes of the personal relationship (Choi & Noh, 2019), lacking true engagement with others with lack of social belongingness, unsatisfying relationship to increase mortality and morbidity (Primack et al., 2017). Such immense changes might among the instrumental factors in the development of anxiety and fluctuate the mental health condition of the young people during the pandemic and developed potential increase of worry during the endemic phase. Quarantined people used social media more frequently than non-quarantined people. Importantly, the negative association between social media use and psychological well-being was significantly stronger for quarantined people than unquarantined people. Although studies have shown that those who experience social isolation are deprived of social relationships and lack contact with others or involvement in social activities (Schinka et al., 2012), the condition might be worsen during the pandemic which imbalanced the aftermath circumstances leading to the occurrence of multiple psychological and mental health issues (Webster et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2021). While social media usage has been associated with anxiety, loneliness, and depression and social isolation (Van Den Eijnden et al., 2016; Whaite et al., 2018), some recent studies have also argued that social media use decreases social isolation (Primack et al., 2017; Meshi et al., 2020). The increased use of social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter, among others, may provide opportunities for reducing social isolation. Interpersonal connectivity via videos and images on social media help users in attenuating social isolation (Whaite et al., 2018). Likewise, this research showed that in conditions of social isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of social media has enhanced the well-being of the young people in Malaysia.

Implications

Understanding the implications of the study is crucial for educators, policymakers, and institutions as they chart the evolving landscape of digital learning and communication. The post pandemic trend indicates that students are likely to continue using social media for academic and social purposes. Digitization is here to stay especially in education. The educational system should prioritize digital literacy education to empower students with the skills to critically evaluate online content, identify misinformation, and navigate social media responsibly. Integrate digital literacy courses into the curriculum and teach students to discern credible information, manage screen time, and promote positive online interactions. The findings suggest that a positive online environment can contribute to students' mental well-being. Educational institutions should recognize the role they play in creating and maintaining a supportive digital community. Implement policies and programs that promote respectful and positive online communications. Encourage the creation of virtual support groups, discussion forums, and collaborative platforms that foster a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Excessive usage of social media may contribute to mental health challenges. Striking a balance between technology use and well-being is crucial. Among strategies that should be considered are developing guidelines for responsible technology use, including recommendations for screen time, device-free periods, and digital detox strategies. Educators too can play a role to incorporate a mix of digital and non-digital learning experiences.

Limitations

The current study has various limitations. The study relies on self-reported data which might be subjected to bias. While self-report is a common and valuable method in psychological and social research, it comes with inherent limitations. One of the limitations is particularly related to biases that may influence participants' responses. Participants may tend to respond in a manner that is socially acceptable. There is also a concern on generalizability, which arises from the recognition that the findings of the study may not be universally applicable to populations beyond the specific demographic and cultural context of Malaysian adolescents.

CONCLUSION

The findings contribute to understanding the interplay between social media, COVID-19 anxiety, and mental well-being among Malaysian adolescents. Insights gained can inform interventions and policies aimed at promoting healthier social media habits and mental well-being. The research findings indicating an insignificant negative association between COVID-19 Anxiety and mental well-being among Malaysian adolescents challenge conventional expectations and underscore the complexity of the interplay between psychological responses to a global health crisis and overall mental well-being. Further exploration of the factors influencing this relationship is crucial for developing effective strategies to support the mental health of adolescents in the unique socio-cultural context of Malaysia.

It is important to highlight the significant implications of educating the young people on the positive and negative consequences of using the social media. Awareness campaigns and training for further enhancement of knowledge and understanding on information sharing via digital technology in the cyberspace. Internet has been profound in its influence towards the mental health of the adolescents, and it becomes the highest usage of social media platform where its impactful influences might be either beneficial or damaging. The consequences are experienced by the users and when communication in the cyberspace increases, the expectation for positive information dissemination should be further increased. Future research could explore longitudinal designs and consider cultural nuances in different populations.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contribute to this article and agree to the final version for publication.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The current study has been funded by the University internal grant and the ethical clearance was approved by IUMWREC with the reference IUMW.DVC.IUMREC/IG0212/22-23. Our gratitude to the participants involved in this research and we thank IUMW for the support in this research.

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