

A Critical Literature Review of Social Media (TikTok) and Its Impact on Education and Mental Health of Elementary Aged Children (6-13)

Doctoral Digital Portfolio

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family. Thank you for your unwavering love and support!

*Maquaysia and Alliyah, you are the goodness and joy that everyone deserves. I am so proud of the women you are becoming. May you always know whatever you dream, you can accomplish. I love you both with my whole heart. This dissertation is dedicated to every individual that others counted out; you can accomplish whatever you put your mind to. With GOD all things are possible. Believe in yourself and you can achieve anything. **If I CAN, YOU CAN!** Now, go be GREAT!*

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between social media use, education, and the mental health of elementary school-aged children. A secondary aim was to determine whether the use of social media platforms, particularly TikTok, has contributed to an increase in mental health concerns among children in this age group. A critical review of the literature indicates a growing number of elementary school children being diagnosed with mental health issues. At the same time, researchers have raised concerns regarding the impact of social media on children's educational outcomes, mental well-being, and self-esteem, particularly due to exposure to unrealistic and idealized content. Despite these concerns, findings suggest that TikTok and similar platforms may offer educational and social benefits when used appropriately. In conclusion, intentional collaboration among parents, educators, and children is essential to foster a healthy digital environment that maximizes the positive effects of social media while minimizing its potential risks.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since the creation of TikTok in 2016, there has been an increase in the number of children under the age of 13 that use the social media platform. Despite the age usage requirements for TikTok, studies show that a significant percentage of children use TikTok (Nagata et al., 2025). This usage raises concerns about potential risks associated with social media, including mental health issues, exposure to inappropriate content, and privacy concerns (Nagata et al., 2025). As usage among children increases. Studies have shown that this increase in use has negatively impacted children's mental health. Because kids are spending so much time on TikTok, it makes it the most used social media platform among kids. These days kids are spending a lot of their time with devices, that makes it easier for them to access social media platforms. Thus, many of them are turning to TikTok for entertainment, which can lead to endless scrolling on the FYP (For You Page) (Nagata et al., 2025). In the U.S., kids spend an average of 113 minutes daily on TikTok, which is slightly higher than the global average of 107 minutes. Those in the UK spend 70 minutes per day on the video-sharing app (Nagata et al., 2025).

According to a study by the Royal Society for Public Health, TikTok is the second most detrimental social media platform for mental health after Instagram (*The Ness Center 2025*). The study found that TikTok users reported lower self-esteem, higher levels of anxiety, and poorer sleep quality than those who did not use the app. Negative experiences on TikTok, such as cyberbullying, body shaming, and comparison to unrealistic standards, can significantly impact users' mental health (*The Ness Center 2025*). There have been legal actions against TikTok for

not protecting children on their platform. In February 2019, the Federal Trade Commission fined TikTok \$5.7 million for violating children's privacy laws (*The Ness Center 2025*).

Contextualization of Topic

Historical

Social media has evolved over time. Since the beginning of social media conception, its use among children and pre-teens has increased tremendously. This trend has caused an increase in mental health diagnosis for children. According to a recent systematic review (2014–2024) concluded that frequent social media use among children is strongly associated with lower self-esteem, increased anxiety and depressive symptoms, and other mental-health challenges. Moderate use — especially when combined with social support at home or school — sometimes has positive effects, such as enabling social connection, emotional expression, and access to mental health information. Increasing use of social media, video games, and mobile phones among children and teenagers has raised concerns that excessive use may be contributing to a rise in mental health problems among young people. Most research has focused on total screen time, rather than the nature of screen time or how that use may change over time. In the past decade, there has been increasing concern over the impact of social media use and engagement with online content on anxiety symptoms and the development of anxiety disorders in children and adolescents. The impact can have positive and negative associations and varies by gender, age, social media platform, and time spent using them. Fear of missing out and validation seeking drive engagement with and time spent on social media can lead to increases in general anxiety symptoms (more common in boys) and anxiety around body image (more common in girls).

Sociopolitical

Social media platforms emerged in a political system that caused an increase in children being used as subjects, deregulated tech markets and low oversight early in the production of social media. Social media has become politicalized in various ways. It has created a situation in which the government has placed bans and filed several lawsuits on various social media platforms. There is currently a lawsuit against TikTok stating that the app's addictive design features are doing damage to the mental health of children and teens. The goal of the suits, the attorneys general said, is to stop TikTok from using addictive features, impose financial penalties, and collect damages for users who say the app has harmed them. The lawsuits, a nationwide bipartisan effort, have all been filed separately by attorneys general in the following states: New York, California, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Jersey, Oregon, South Carolina, Vermont and Washington, and in the District of Columbia. California Attorney General Rob Bonta and New York Attorney General Letitia James co-led the bipartisan coalition of the attorneys general in filing actions against TikTok for violations of state consumer protection laws.

The lawsuits allege that TikTok violated consumer laws and damaged the mental health of children. "These lawsuits add to a growing list of legal actions asserting that TikTok and other social media platforms are contributing to the mental health crisis among today's adolescents," Bonta stated in a news release. (*Attorney general James Sues TikTok for harming children's mental health* 2025). TikTok knows that the recommendation system that powers the "For You" video feed incites excessive, compulsive and habitual use by children. TikTok deceptively advertises the app as safe, well-moderated and appropriate, despite being aware of parental concerns. TikTok disregards the dangers to young users because profit comes first; TikTok

deceives New Jersey consumers about the efficacy of its so-called time management tools; and TikTok deceives children and parents about features such as beauty filters. (*Attorney general James Sues TikTok for harming children's mental health 2025*). TikTok's response to all these allegations was: "We strongly disagree with these claims, many of which we believe to be inaccurate and misleading," a TikTok spokesperson said in a statement to MHW. "We're proud of and remain deeply committed to the work we've done to protect teens, and we will continue to update and improve our product. We provide robust safeguards, proactively remove suspected underage users, and have voluntarily launched safety features such as default screentime limits, family pairing, and privacy by default for minors under 16."

TikTok added, "We've endeavored to work with the attorneys general for over two years, and it is incredibly disappointing they have taken this step rather than work with us on constructive solutions to industrywide challenges." (*Attorney general James Sues TikTok for harming children's mental health 2025*).

Sociocultural

Over the past ten plus years, social media use among children has transformed from books and hardcopies to everything being digital, especially when it comes to how children are being entertained. How children play and interact with one another has shifted due to the increased use of social media. The use of social media has changed how children communicate with one another, how parents interact and discipline their children. Due to societal norms, the world has created what they call ‘gentle parenting’. This parenting has become very controversial, saying that those parents that practice this parenting style are more lenient with their children. Family norms have changed as well, which can shape a child’s online experience. When you have less restrictive homes, children have more freedom and are exposed to more social media and social learning experiences. Some cultural differences when it comes to children’s use of social media include but are not limited to children being closely monitored. Based upon my personal experiences with my own children, compared to my non-black counterparts, we have different views on how children should be exposed to social media. I did not allow my children to access social media until they were in high school. My counterparts allowed their children to have access to social media, as early as fifth grade. I have seen social media access varies across academic demographics as well. I worked in a Title I education setting, in that setting children in elementary had access to social media platforms and used it negatively. On the other hand, I have worked in a non-Title 1 educational setting. The students were not at all interested in social media, as they were not following any social media trends. Those experiences have attributed to my cultural biases about social media usage amongst children.

Contextual Experiences

As a child growing up, social media was not a growing trend. The researcher grew up in an era where social media was non-existent. I grew up during a time when children spent a lot of time in nature. I grew up when we learned through interactions and hands-on experiences. Times have changed compared to when I grew up. My growing up verses when my children grew up. My children learned through technology and the internet. My children were not exposed to social media platforms until they reached high school and then it was very limited. In my experiences, I feel that children who are exposed to social media are more prone to being mean to others. In my experiences as an educator, I saw more of the negative side of social media than the positive. I saw where children used social media to pick on other children. My experiences with children and social media have changed overtime based on the educational demographics I have been in. I learned that children who come from underserved communities have more negative exposure to social media. I learned that children often use social media as a means of entertainment. They used social media to intimidate other children. As a School Counselor, in that learning environment. I was tasked with creating an internet/social media parent meeting. This meeting was to give parents tools on internet safety and proper social media etiquette. This information was very helpful to parents, and I saw a change in how students begin to use social media. I will say from personal experiences that the use of social media can have both a positive and negative impact on children.

Research Gap

Research gaps exist in understanding the long-term effects of social media on younger children, the effectiveness of educational interventions in formal school settings, and the specific impact of different platforms and content types on diverse student populations. While research often focuses on negative impacts like addiction, anxiety, and distraction, there's also a need to investigate the benefits, identify the varying effects on different demographics (like girls versus boys, or across socioeconomic backgrounds), and study how to best mitigate harms in both formal and informal learning environments.

As an educator, I feel that parents are too busy to spend quality time with their children. In my experiences, I have seen where parents allow electronics to entertain their children so that they do not have to be bothered by them. Parents are trying to live and survive, so they are doing whatever it takes. I have seen high-school-aged children responsible for elementary-aged children, so we see children rearing children. So, they are using technology as entertainment. There are a lot of contributing factors to this problem, I feel. I think that there are generational issues that are being passed on, educationally students are falling behind, and parents are not taking the time to work with their children, parents are working to survive. I see so many different issues. As a School Counselor, I advocate for children. I collaborated with families and community partners to give parents resources and help them get jobs that are flexible with their child's school schedules. I feel that if we work with families and help them get the resources that they need, we can get better cooperation with the children's learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if social media has an impact on the mental health and education of elementary-aged children. This study also aims to examine how social media influences children's mental health. This study also looks at the positive and negative effects of social media. What social media platforms are most used by elementary school children? How much time are elementary school children spending on various social media platforms? Does the use of the platform impact learning? If at all does the use of the platform impact the child's mental health. This research also looks to highlight the gaps in the current research and explore factors that may be contributing to the gaps in communities and schools, which can impact children's education and mental health.

As an educator, I have firsthand experience at the trends we are seeing in the schools regarding students' social media usage and how it impacts their mental health and learning. I can assess what steps we can take as educators to ensure that students understand the impact that social media can have on them. I can also use my platform as an educator to inform parents about those social media impacts; how social media can have both a positive and negative impact on their child's learning and mental health.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

A theory that connects to my topic is Critical Digital literacy. Critical digital literacy theory is a set of skills, competencies, and analytical viewpoints that allow a person to use, understand, and create digital media and tools (*Teaching critical digital literacy* 2024). In today's rapidly evolving digital age, where information is just a click away and technology touches every aspect of our lives, digital literacy has become a fundamental skill for students. Digital literacy encompasses a wide range of competencies that empower students to navigate, comprehend, and critically engage with the digital world. I think that as the world continues to become more technologically inclined, the education sector will have an increased need for critical digital literacy. I think that there will be a need for increased knowledge and skill for students, as well as parents. There will be a need for increased information on internet and computer safety.

Critical digital literacy is a set of skills, competencies, and analytical viewpoints that allow a person to use and understand digital media and tools. Critical Digital Literacy is increasingly important in an age where many students read more from screens than they do from books. There are several pros and cons to using technology in education. Some pros to using Critical digital Literacy in the classroom are that it enhances the learning experience in the classroom, access to information, collaboration and communication and preparation for the future (*Teaching critical digital literacy* 2024). Critical digital literacy enhances the learning experience in the classroom by offering educators various ways to present learning information, which allows teachers to gain information about the learning style of the students in the classroom. Enhanced learning in the classroom also allows teachers to utilize differentiated learning methods, which helps students become more engaged in learning. Technology offers a variety of tools and resources that enhance traditional teaching styles and learning methods.

Access to information is another pro to using Critical digital literacy in education. The internet has a plethora of knowledge and information. Digital literacy enables students to access a vast pool of information, facilitating independent learning. Whether it's for research, self-study, or academic assignments, students with digital literacy skills can explore a multitude of resources, enhancing their overall educational experience. The internet has given students a wealth of educational resources at their fingertips. Online libraries, learning apps, databases, and academic journals enable students to explore topics in depth and conduct research beyond the restrictions of traditional textbooks. (*Teaching critical digital literacy 2024*).

Critical Digital literacy is not only about information that you can obtain. It teaches students how to evaluate sources, discern credible and unreliable information, and think critically about the content they consume. The information that is obtained can be useful to a young person's educational success. Critical Digital literacy is all about having the skills you need to thrive in a digital world. Although the use of social media can have an adverse effect on education and mental health, there are some positive ways to look at it as well. The fact that technology is becoming the new way of operating systems and completing schoolwork gives students the ability to explore various technological resources. The student's ability to access these resources opens a window of great opportunity for students. CDL gives students the ability to learn new skill sets that will allow them to be functional in society. Critical digital literacy has opened the door for access to healthcare providers and mental health agencies. Accessibility has created was for individuals to gather information and obtain knowledge about issues that they were experiencing. Digital platforms make children vulnerable to criminals and bullies. They can cause students to compare their existence to the often-fabricated online lives of others, inciting feelings of inadequacy, detachment, isolation, and even the development of mental health issues.

They can also leave students open to misinformation, manipulation, and fake news. Teachers must teach their students about staying safe online, and the threats of internet grooming, sexting, cyberbullying, and sharing information, including passwords and the distribution of photographs. Students should also be taught never to give out personal data as part of e-safety education.

Teachers want to ensure that their students understand that fake news just doesn't apply to what they see on tv, it happens in the classroom as well. Teachers want to be sure that the students understand the importance of always being accountable for what happens in the classroom. This is where my role as a School Counselor can help me advocate for students and teach them about internet safety. Teachers must teach their students that not everything we see and read online is true. These are things that we as educators make the mistake of assuming that all kids know, but many of them are clueless. If we do not educate and advocate for the use of Critical Digital Literacy in schools, we will see continued situations of students misusing and being mishandled using technology.

Critical Digital literacy in the classroom can improve writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills. It can also increase the ability to identify what viable information and lessons are to be distributed within the classroom. Increased use of digital technology is the ability to collaborate with students, teachers, and other educational stakeholders. The use of Critical Digital Literacy can improve academic performance and engagement. Students who have access to Critical Digital Literacy can check information. Identify reliable sources and conduct research. Students can participate in online communication and cite sources, and copyrighted materials. Students will be able to differentiate biases from word choice and sentence structure. Students that use Critical Digital Literacy will be able to find and identify images and videos.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

For educators, school psychologists, behavioral and mental health professionals are concerned about the increase in mental concerns for elementary school children, having become increasingly more important. The outcome of this new and broad emphasis on social behavior has led to a consensus that social and emotional development may lead to both positive and negative outcomes. According to a recent report from the Pew Research Center, 95% of teens use smartphones, and 45% say they are online almost constantly. About 70% of teens are on Snapchat and Instagram, while 85% are on YouTube. These statistics seem to be similar in comparison to another study conducted by a 2021 CENSUS report. The report revealed an even progressive increment of smartphone use by adolescents, which reached 95%. Many adolescents (59%) admitted they use smartphones even more frequently than in the past with a daily use of more than 3 hours in 46% of cases. Adolescents connected to the Internet alone (59%), consulting social media, mostly Instagram (72%), TikTok (62%), and YouTube (58%).

Evidence on the impact of social media on mental health is conflicting. Some studies report benefits of social media use for mental health, including increased social support, strengthened bonds, and help seeking. Other evidence has shown that high social media use has been linked with depression, anxiety, psychological problems, and distress, particularly for young people. When social media use begins to interfere with everyday life, it can be considered problematic, with the most severe form arguably termed social media addiction. Problematic social media use is described as a preoccupation with social media, resulting in distraction from primary tasks and the neglect of responsibilities in other aspects of life. Reports suggest that 17.4% of social media users are affected by some form of problematic social media use, and it is

most prevalent in adolescents and young adults. Previous research has identified significant positive associations between problematic social media use and depression and anxiety.

I see firsthand how social media has impacted the lives of so many young children. Not all impacts are negative, but students are not mentally prepared for what social media is offering them. A teacher from North Carolina stated that social media has crippled the way that her students communicate. Jean Twenge, a psychology professor at San Diego State University, conducted a study in which she discovered that students who spend more time using smartphones and other electronic devices are less satisfied with their lives than students who frequently engage in face-to-face interaction. Although these stats are high, studies show that children/teens do not think that social media affects their lives that much. The stats below show how teens feel about the impact of social media. About 45% of teens feel that social media does not impact their lives either way. The stats below also show that only 4 of the students surveyed feel that social media impacts their mental health. However, there is information that says otherwise, on the impacts of social media on students' mental health.

History of social media

Social media is forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos) (“Social Media,” 2024).

One of the first social media sites was created in 1997, SixDegrees.com, is where you could set up a profile page, create lists of connections, and send messages within networks (Samur, 2023). SixDegrees.com accumulated around one million users before being sold for \$125 million dollars. In 2000, SixDegrees.com was shut down. Social media platforms/sites continued to be established throughout the late 1990’s and 2000’s. It wasn’t until, 2003 that Myspace was created and became the first global social media platform (“Social Media,” 2024). It took social media about six years to create a platform that would be globally accessible. In 2023, there was an estimated 4.9 billion social media users worldwide. The average person spends about 145 minutes on social media daily. Social media can negatively impact our overall wellbeing by fueling anxiety, depression, loneliness, and the fear of missing out. These issues are especially prevalent in teens and young adults. If social media exists and evolves, we will see a lot of young people who are feeling sad, dissatisfied, frustrated, or lonely. Understanding how social media impacts our mental health and overall wellbeing should be important to everyone. Social media use may increase feelings of anxiety and depression in teens and young adults.

Social media is a form of mass media communications on the internet (such as on websites for networking and microblogging) through which users share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos). Social networking and social media are overlapping concepts, but social networking is usually understood as users

building communities among themselves while social media is more about using social networking sites and related platforms to build an audience. Social media sites became popular in the early 21st century. Social networks emerged that allowed family members, friends, and acquaintances to connect online. TikTok is specifically designed for sharing short videos. Concerns over the possible negative effects of social media are also growing technology. Some studies also suggest a strong tie between heavy social media use and increased depression, anxiety, loneliness and suicidal tendencies, and feelings of inadequacy. The survey found that 9 in 10 teens (90%) believe online harassment is a problem for people their age. 24% of teens reported believing social media has a generally negative effect. 31% say its effect is positive, and 45% say its impact is neither negative nor positive. Research studies show a strong connection between the use of social media and its undesirable outcomes that increase the prevalence of numerous mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression. Social media use correlates with depressive symptoms, anxiety, and loneliness. Physical activity negatively correlates with depression. High levels of screen time and social media use correlate to depression, anxiety, and misperception of body image, addiction, and mental health outcomes. Social media usage can have both a negative and positive impact on children. A few facts about social media. A review of 43 studies showed that social media use was linked to depression, anxiety, poor sleep, and low self-esteem. Social media has evolved over the years. Today, social media platforms exist for every hobby, passion, group, industry, and interest. Some of the most popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Google Classroom, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok, and Seesaw (Maryville University, 2020).

The Negative Impacts of social media

There are many researchers that believe social media usage in education can negatively impact children's learning. Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) believed that the grades of children who spent time on social media were negatively impacted. The use of social media has negatively affected teens, distracting them, disrupting their sleep, and exposing them to bullying, spreading rumors, unrealistic views of other people's lives, and peer pressure. On social media, young people are more vulnerable and may display risky behaviors, including pertaining substance abuse, sexual behaviors, or violence. They may be exposed to cyberbullying, sex-trafficking and so much more. Young people do not believe that social media is attributed to their mental health, their ability to focus, and/or decisions they make in school.

The Positive Impact of Social Media

Access to other people's health experience and expert health information. Social networking offers young people who may be suffering from mental health issues an opportunity to read, watch or listen to, and understand, the health experiences of others – relating them back to their own reality. Emotional support and community building. Conversations on social media can emerge and provide young people with essential interaction to overcome difficult health issues, particularly when they may not have access to that support face-to-face. Self-expression and self-identity. Social media can act as an effective platform for accurate and positive self-expression, letting young people put forward their best self. They can personalize their profiles and feeds with images, videos and words that express who they are and how they identify with the world around them.

Social Media Usage in Schools.

Social media usage in the classroom gives students an opportunity to participate in learning through different learning styles. There are several different ways that children learn through visual and auditory. Children that are visual learners can see content using social media. Teachers may post a picture and ask students about the picture, for those visual learners that gives them a positive interaction with social media usage. Children can learn through listening as well, so teachers use social media platforms for auditory learners to build their confidence. Torphy et al. (2020) highlighted the use of social media by teachers to locate resources and improve their lessons. According to Amazon Education, educators spend up to twelve hours per week outside of the school in search of resources and materials online. Many teachers use sites such as Pinterest or Teachers Pay Teachers for mathematics and language arts supplemental sources and materials. By using these sites, teachers can see photos of ways to use the materials and archive them in their search history. Teachers have suggested using social media as a resource saves teachers the social stigma of asking others in person for help, allowing them to instead search for the answers in private. The benefits of using social media are more than the risk of using social media in the classroom (Blazer, 2012). When you use social media in the classroom, it can have a positive effect on a child's confidence and self-esteem, thus limiting the rise of depression or anxiety in children. Social media usage in education can be rewarding for children and teachers. Social media usage in the classroom often students are more engaged in learning, and they are excited about learning just because they are familiar with the various social media platforms that are being used.

Social media and children (6-11)

Children today are growing up as digital natives. Many encounter smartphones and tablets before they can fully read, and some are active on social platforms before they even understand what privacy means. While this offers opportunities for learning and connection, it also poses unique risks (ScienceNewsToday, 2025). Excessive screen time in children has been associated with difficulties in attention, sleep disturbances, and delayed language development. Social media specifically can expose children to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, or unrealistic portrayals of life. At an age when identity is forming, the constant comparison to polished images can create insecurities about appearance, talents, or popularity (ScienceNewsToday, 2025). On the positive side, when monitored and guided by parents, social media can also support creativity. Platforms like YouTube Kids or educational communities can spark curiosity, inspire learning, and help children express themselves. The challenge is not whether children will use social media; it's how they will be guided to use it responsibly.

TikTok

TikTok is a social network launched in the Chinese market in 2016 (as Douyin) and internationally in 2017 (as TikTok). In 2018, it was the most widely downloaded mobile app in the United States and other countries and is currently available in more than 150 countries and has more than 800 million monthly active users. TikTok is a platform that, in addition to entertaining videos, gives a young and global audience access to a new format of short educational videos created by expert authors. This perspective presents several opportunities for the dissemination of knowledge in various fields of science concisely and effectively. TikTok is a video-sharing social networking service that is rapidly growing in popularity. It was the second most downloaded app in the app world in 2020. While the platform is known for having users post videos of themselves dancing, lip-syncing, or showing off other talents, videos of users sharing specific knowledge have increased because of initiatives such as learning on TikTok.

TikTok is one of the most popular music video social platforms in the world, which currently has 800 million active users in 155 countries. This video app was launched in 2017 by a Chinese company named Byte Dance and within one and half years, it has become the most popular short music video app in the world. Ranking as the most frequently downloaded app in the world, TikTok has shown over 2 billion times on the app store and Google play. This “addiction” to TikTok has a negative impact on students’ learning, attention spans, and overall mental health. TikTok, like all social media platforms, has diverse impacts on its users. When used in excess, students are drawn away from their work, shift their focus and even may develop, or think that they’ve developed mental health problems. TikTok can lead a child to engage in a dangerous activity in the form of a challenge, lead to shorter attention spans, and expose them to constant negative comparisons. It may also expose children to misinformation which may lead to

poor mental and physical health.” In the years since, TikTok has continued to dominate younger users. On average, children aged 9–12 spend 1.5 h per day on social platforms, with YouTube and TikTok being the most popular among this demographic (Potvin Kent M.). By the end of 2021, kids and teens were watching an average of 91 minutes of TikTok per day compared with just 56 minutes per day spent watching YouTube, on a global basis.

TikTok and Education

A middle school teacher in Florida was recently terminated due to TikTok videos deemed inappropriate by the county school system. Todd Erdman, a 45-year-old English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, was fired after TikTok videos he claimed were private, were leaked to his public account and viewed by students and parents. In the videos, Erdman can be seen drinking alcohol, making rude and disparaging remarks about students and fellow teachers, and taking a candle-lit bath. Another Texas teacher was recently terminated due to a TikTok video she posted following a meeting with her administrator. Sophia DeLoretto-Chudy was terminated by the Austin Independent School District after a TikTok video she posted went viral. The video highlighted items that DeLoretto-Chudy’s principal noted in a meeting she had with her regarding her classroom performance. One of the items of concern was that DeLoretto-Chudy was teaching her students about their rights as United States citizens. TikTok use in schools can have a negative impact on both children and adults. That is why educators are cautious about TikTok usage in education.

TikTok and Children (6-11)

A study conducted by UC San Francisco finds that most children between the ages of 11 and 12 use TikTok, despite the platform’s age restrictions. According to the study, 6.3% have a

social media account they hide from their parents. Many underage users of TikTok show signs of addiction to the social media platform. Jason Nagata, MD and lead researcher at UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals suggested that parents start having open dialogue with their children about safe social media practices. He also suggested that parents' model appropriate social media practices for their children as well. The research also shows that underage social media use is linked with greater symptoms of depression, eating disorders, ADHD, and disruptive behaviors.

In my work with children, I have seen firsthand how TikTok is influencing student behaviors and their experiences in the classroom. What bothers me the most is the way that some parents are encouraging and involving their children on the platform. I have encountered situations where students are being posted by their parents, often in ways that are profitable to the parents. While some parents view these encounters as innocent views and likes. Children are being placed in the spotlight that they are not cognitively ready for. I have also experienced situations where students who have gone viral on TikTok show up to school full of excitement, which creates an unpleasant learning environment for the teacher. The excitement turns into distractions for the other students. When the child is redirected, he/she becomes upset and then refuses to listen to the teacher for the rest of the lesson. These experiences have shown me that TikTok is not just a harmless platform for young people. It also influences the way children think, learn, and behave. As we are becoming a more tech savvy world, we must be mindful and attentive to the impact that it is having on the minds and behaviors of our children. We must model and support healthy interactions both online and in-person.

History of Education

Education is both the act of teaching knowledge to others and the act of receiving knowledge from someone else. Education also refers to the knowledge received through schooling or instruction and to the institution of teaching, the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life. Education is the act or process of imparting or acquiring knowledge or skills, as for a profession, a degree, level, or kind of schooling such as education obtained through a college or university. (*Education definition and meaning*). The first public school was established on April 23, 1635, in Boston, Massachusetts. This school was called Boston Latin School, which was an all-boys secondary school. This school was to help boys prepare for college. (Mary Crooks, National Geographic Society, *First Public School in America 2023*, national geographic). Over time, we can see how education has changed. In 2024, we can see that education has evolved on various levels including gender, race, grade levels, and standards. In 1635, the first public school was created just for boys, although there are schools that are just for boys. Education has opened its doors to female learners as well. Unlike in 1635, access to public education can begin at the age of three. Education has been evolving for over three centuries. That is a long time, but with all the changes in policy and practices, we can see that there is a change needed. Some policies that were enacted over the years were in 1954 The National Defense Education Act was passed which allocated funds to education establishments in the United States. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed which allowed monies to be spent on professional development for educators, resources for educational support, and parent involvement. We can see that over time many laws and regulations were passed to ensure that everyone had an equal

opportunity to receive a quality education. While policy changes have increased, we can see that there are still some discrepancies in the quality of education that some individuals receive.

Social Media and Education

Social media has changed the way that the world learns, receives, and gives information. Thus, bringing about big changes in how children learn. Before social media became popular, education was learned through textbook materials, which sometimes caused challenges for educators to keep children engaged in learning. Since the development of social media, children can express their creativity of learning through various lenses. Social media usage in education allows children to communicate with their teachers and peers in positive and effective ways. Social media usage in education allows students to collaborate with one another, which builds self-confidence and character in children. Research shows that's higher levels of engaged learning produce higher levels of student satisfaction with learning. Social media usage in education is a win for educators because most children come to school already knowing how to use social media, thus creating a learning environment that builds confidence. There are many benefits to using social media in education. Social media usage can build positivity amongst children, character building, it builds positive peer interactions, and students enjoy collaborating with one another. There are many positive benefits to using social media in education.

Mental Health in Children.

Mental disorders among children are described as serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions, which cause distress and problems getting through the day. Many children occasionally experience fears and worry or display disruptive behaviors. If symptoms are serious and persistent and interfere with school, home, or play activities, the child may be diagnosed with a mental disorder (Dalsgaard S, 2019). Overall, 15% of children and youth were diagnosed with a mental disorder before age 18, including 14.6% of girls and 15.5% of boys. The overall risk of being diagnosed with a mental disorder before age 6 was 2%. The study identified several differences in rates of specific mental illnesses in boys and girls. Anxiety disorder was the most common mental health diagnosis in girls at 8%, and ADHD was the most common diagnosis in boys at 6%. Girls had a higher risk than boys with depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and eating disorders. ADHD, anxiety problems, behavior problems, and depression are the most diagnosed with mental disorders in children. Estimates for ever having a diagnosis among children aged 3-17 years, in 2016-19, are, anxiety 9.4% (approximately 5.8 million) and depression 4.4% (approximately 2.7 million).

Some of these conditions commonly occur together. For example, among children aged 3-17 years in 2016, Having another mental disorder was most common in children with depression: about 3 in 4 children with depression also had anxiety (73.8%). For children with anxiety, more than 1 in 3 also had behavior problems (37.9%) and about 1 in 3 also had depression (32.3%). Depression and anxiety in children have increased over time. Even before the pandemic, anxiety and depression were becoming more common among children and adolescents, increasing 27 percent and 24 percent respectively from 2016 to 2019. By 2020, 5.6

million kids (9.2%) had been diagnosed with anxiety problems and 2.4 million (4.0%) had been diagnosed with depression. The chart below shows the percentage of children by age with depression and anxiety. Children encounter content that adults often do not notice. A report by Internet Matters found that more than half of children accessing news via TikTok or Instagram encounter violent or distressing material, including accidents or crises, often without seeking it. Almost forty percent of these children felt extreme distress after seeing such content. A child scrolling through a phone is not just playing or socializing. The child is absorbing information that can overwhelm and confuse. Exposure to global news and online content creates stressors that few adolescents are equipped to manage alone. A study by the World Health Organization shows a rise in problematic social media use among adolescents, climbing from seven percent in 2018 to eleven percent in 2022, and with it a rise in mental health challenges. The pressures of daily life are layered with the invisible currents of the digital world. Anxiety, sadness, and behavioral difficulties are becoming more common. Doctors and counselors speak quietly about the children who cannot sleep, who withdraw from friends, who seem lost even in a room full of people.

Depression

Depression is defined as a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest in things and activities you once enjoyed. It can also cause difficulty with thinking, memory, eating and sleeping. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Depression 2025*). Some people think that only adults become depressed. In fact, children and adolescents can experience depression, and studies show that it is on the rise. More than one in seven teens experience depression each year. An estimated 3.2 percent of American children and adolescents have diagnosed depression. And while depression was long seen as an adult problem, researchers now know that even a 2-year-old can experience depression. Occasionally being sad or feeling hopeless is a part of every child's life. However, some people think that only adults become depressed. In fact, children and adolescents can experience depression, and studies show that it is on the rise. More than one in seven teens experience depression each year. Some symptoms to look for in children would be feelings of sadness, hopelessness, of the irritable, not wanting to do fun things. Showing changes in eating habits, eating more or less than usual, sleeping more than normal, being tired and sluggish and restless a lot of the time. Difficulty paying attention, feeling worthless, useless, or guilty, and self-harm. Depression can present a wide range of signs and symptoms that can be easily confused with other mental health disorders in childhood, such as anxiety disorders and/or emotional issues related to adolescence. Common presentations of depression in children and adolescents include sadness and irritability; tearfulness; decreased interest; decreased pleasure in most activities; low energy; weight loss or gain; sleep disturbance including hypersomnia; inattention; somatic complaints (aches and pains); ambivalence or difficulty with making decisions; worthlessness and hopelessness; and suicidal. Depression in children can also be influenced by social media and educational

experiences as well. Too much negative social media usage can contribute to depressive moods. Academic pressure can also contribute to depression in children as well. When we use social media positively, it can provide peer support and educational support that can strengthen a child's educational experience, thus helping children be emotional and educationally successful.

Depression and Social Media

Depression is another factor related to children and social media. Studies have shown that excessive scrolling and exposure to unrealistic lifestyles can contribute to children feeling low and sad about themselves. Depression can also cause low cognitive engagement and impair learning. With the right positive influence and interactions and mental health support, children can mitigate depressive symptoms.

Depression and Education

Depression can impact school attendance, school performance, and/or social interactions with peers and teachers. Depression negatively impacts a child's development. Depression can also prevent your child from enjoying school.

Depression and Children

Depression in children is a mood disorder that can cause them to feel sad, irritable, or hopeless. Children often experience mood changes. They may feel sad or irritable for a short period of time, like after getting a bad grade or falling out with friends. But after a while, they tend to feel better again. Depression is different. If your child has depression, their sadness hangs on for more than two weeks. They may also have irritability or hopelessness that lingers. It may affect your child's sleep, appetite, or relationships with others. Depression can also prevent your child from enjoying sports or hobbies they once enjoyed. In severe cases, depression can

lead to thoughts of suicide. About 3% of children and teens between the ages of 3 and 17 have depression. It's more common in teens than children. (2025 Cleveland clinic).

Anxiety

Anxiety may be present as fear or worry but can also make children irritable and angry. Anxiety symptoms can also include trouble sleeping, as well as physical symptoms like fatigue, headaches, or stomachaches. When a child does not outgrow the fears and worries that are typical in young children, or when there are so many fears and worries that they interfere with school, home, or play activities, the child may be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. Some anxious children keep their worries to themselves and, thus, the symptoms can be missed. Being very afraid when away from parents (separation anxiety), Having extreme fear about a specific thing or situation, such as dogs, insects, or going to the doctor (phobias). Being very afraid of school and other places where there are people (social anxiety). Being very worried about the future and about bad things happening (general anxiety).

Childhood anxiety is a common psychiatric disorder. It is estimated that more than 7% of adolescents 13 to 17 years of age have been diagnosed with anxiety, and more than 36% of children with behavioral problems have been diagnosed with anxiety disorders. A systematic review of studies conducted in 27 countries estimates that the worldwide prevalence of anxiety disorders in children is 6.5%. In the United States, nearly 1 in 12 children three to 17 years of age have anxiety. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that the prevalence of anxiety disorders in adolescents 13 to 18 years of age is 1 in 4, and the prevalence of severe anxiety is about 1 in 17. Prevalence rates are approximately 20% for specific phobias, 9% for social anxiety disorder, 8% for separation anxiety disorder, and 2% each for agoraphobia, panic disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder. In the past decade, there has been increasing concern over the impact of social media use and engagement with online content on anxiety symptoms and the development of anxiety disorders in children and adolescents. The impact can have

positive and negative associations and varies by gender, age, social media platform, and time spent using them. Fear of missing out and validation seeking drive engagement with and time spent on social media can lead to increases in general anxiety symptoms (more common in boys) and anxiety around body image (more common in girls). (Kowalchuk et al., 2022)

Anxiety and Education

Anxiety can significantly impact a child's ability to learn and engage in school. Children who experience anxiety may struggle to pay attention and complete tasks. Children often experience social anxiety in school, which can lead to awkward social interactions with their peers. These interactions can lead to children avoiding classroom tasks.

Anxiety and Social Media

Children exposed to frequent social media usage may experience an extreme level of anxiety due to children comparing themselves to others, cyberbullying and fear of missing out on social media trends. Children who maybe seek validation from social media platforms also experience some level of anxiety. While social media has its negative impacts, it can also help children minimize anxiety with the right positive support.

Anxiety in Children

Anxiety is a normal part of childhood. Anxiety is a reaction to a possible threat. Anxiety is usually short-lived and shows that kids are learning to solve problems on their own. According to a study by the Cleveland Clinic, 1 in 5 kids will develop what healthcare providers consider anxiety disorders. Childhood anxiety disorders differ from normal fear or anxiety because they involve more extreme avoidance, bigger emotional reactions, or last longer than expected.

Children with anxiety disorders often have emotional outbursts like crying or tantrums. They

may also show a lot of avoidance. They might try to escape, hide and be “on the lookout for danger” much of the time. In addition, kids often have body symptoms, like stomachaches, headaches, nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath, or sleep issues (Cleveland Clinic, 2025).

Literature Review Tables

The table below provides information of a critical literature review.

Table 1. Summary of Literature Review Table

Author(s)/Year	Topic/Purpose	Key Findings	Relevance to Elementary -Aged Children
Abdul Qayyum et al. (2016)	Learning styles of social media users vs. non-users	Social media users showed different engagement patterns and learning preferences.	Early exposure may shape cognitive habits and attention patterns in young learners.
Alvarado (2014)	Educators' perspectives in rural districts	Teachers see benefits for engagement, but report concerns safety and distraction.	It shows how teachers perceive risks and opportunities for younger students.
Ávila & Zacher Pandya (2012)	Critical digital literacies	Emphasizes teaching children to navigate digital spaces critically.	Supports integrating digital literacy at the elementary level.
Barrett (n.d.)	Social media's mental health impact	Reports increase in student anxiety, self-esteem issues, and emotional distress.	It indicates rising concerns among educators about young children's emotional well-being.
Blazer (2012)	Benefits/risks of school social networking	Highlights collaboration benefits but notes distractions and	Provides early warnings applicable to

		cyberbullying risks.	elementary settings.
Bozzola et al. (2022)	Scoping review of risks	Links high screen time to anxiety, behavioral issues, and mental health decline.	Shows the vulnerability of younger users to emotional dysregulation.
CDC (n.d.)	Childhood anxiety and depression	Childhood mental health concerns are increasing nationwide.	Social media may be a contributing stressor.
Davidson (2017)	School warnings on social media	Schools caution students about digital dangers.	Demonstrates real-world school interventions for younger students.
Fox (2015)	Social media hoax effects	Hoaxes caused school absenteeism and fear.	Highlights susceptibility of children to misinformation.
Kellner & Share (2007)	Critical media literacy	Argues for democratic, critical engagement with media.	Reinforces need for early digital literacy education.
Karim et al. (2020)	Systematic review on mental health	Social media is linked to anxiety, depression, and loneliness.	Confirms psychological risks relevant to elementary students.
Keles et al. (2019)	Systematic review	Social media increases psychological distress among young people.	Supports concern about early exposure.
Kirschner & Karpinski (2010)	Academic performance and SNS use	Heavy social media use predicts lower academic achievement.	Implications for attention, homework, and focus on children.
Lin et al. (2020)	Social support, self-esteem, loneliness	SNS influences loneliness through self-esteem.	Suggest children may struggle with online comparison.

López (2023)	Administrators' perceptions	Social media brings opportunities and challenges; policies are inconsistent.	Highlights need for elementary-specific guidelines.
Maryville University (2020)	Evolution of social media	Platforms have evolved faster than school policies.	Shows why younger children are using platforms without guardrails.
Nagata et al. (2025)	Children's TikTok use	Most children under 13 use TikTok despite restrictions.	Shows widespread early exposure and risk.
Ness Center (n.d. 2025)	TikTok and addiction	Algorithms promote compulsive viewing and overstimulation.	Younger children are highly vulnerable to addictive patterns.
Plackett et al. (2023)	Interventions reducing social media use	Screen-time reduction improves well-being.	Supports limiting use for elementary children.
Popat & Tarrant (2023)	Adolescents' perspectives	Teens report on mental health effects from social media.	Suggest effects may begin even earlier.
Potvin Kent et al. (2024)	Marketing to children online	Children exposed to unhealthy food influencer marketing.	Shows risks of targeted advertising on child behavior.
Richard (2019)	Principals' views on technology use	Many principals feel underprepared for digital challenges.	Reflects system-wide need for training in K–6 schools.
Royal Society for Public Health (n.d.)	"Status of Mind" report	Social media negatively impacts sleep, self-esteem, and mood.	Highly relevant to developing children.
Singh et al. (2023)	Burden of cyberbullying on teachers	Teachers experience stress managing cyberbullying cases.	Cyberbullying often begins in late elementary years.
Wall (2015)	Teacher identity and social media	Teachers' professional development is	Shows the need for teacher preparation

		influenced by digital environments.	for student digital use.
Williams (2005)	Media impact on academic achievement	Media exposure affects social skills and learning.	Early evidence supporting concerns about new platforms.
Science News Today (2025)	Social media and mental health	All ages are affected by overstimulation and emotional strain.	Elementary children are highly influenced by these patterns.
Northlines (2025)	Mental health in youth	Reports concern the worsening mental well-being linked to social media.	Reflects public health concerns for young child users.

Table 2.

Comparison Table: Positive And Negative Impacts of Social Media, Education and Children's Mental Health

Category	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts	Notes/Examples
Social media (General)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social support and community building - Self-expression and identity development - Access to health information and educational resources - Enhances engagement and collaboration in learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Depression, anxiety, loneliness - Cyberbullying and harassment - Distraction from schoolwork - Unrealistic comparisons and low self-esteem 	17.4% of users experience problematic social media use; teens often unaware of mental health impacts
TikTok	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short educational videos increase knowledge - Platform for creative self-expression - Learning initiatives like "Learning on TikTok" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short attention spans and distraction - Exposure to harmful challenges and misinformation - Addiction-like behaviors - Negative impact on classroom focus 	Children 9–12 spend ~1.5 hrs/day; underage use linked to depression, ADHD, disruptive behaviors
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourages collaborative learning and peer engagement - Familiarity with social media platforms can boost confidence - Teachers can access resources and teaching aids online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic pressure can contribute to stress and depression - Digital distractions may reduce learning focus 	Social media use in class can be positive if structured; engagement linked to higher student satisfaction
Mental Health: Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive social media interactions and supportive educational environments may mitigate symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Persistent sadness, irritability, low energy, sleep/appetite disturbances - Impaired cognitive engagement and 	~3% of children 3–17 diagnosed; early support can improve outcomes

Mental Health: Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guided positive social media engagement can reduce isolation and stress - educational support can reduce worry about school tasks 	<p>academic performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excessive social media use can cause fear of missing out, body image anxiety, validation seeking - May interfere with learning and social interactions 	<p>1 in 5 children develop anxiety disorders; social anxiety in school is common</p>
Children (6–11) Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social media can support creativity, learning, and self-expression when monitored - Visual and auditory learning benefits in the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early exposure may impair attention, language development, sleep - Exposure to inappropriate content and cyberbullying 	<p>Children are digital natives; guidance is critical for healthy use</p>

Chapter 4

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be investigated in this study is the impact that social media (TikTok) has on the education and mental health of elementary school aged children. There has been an increase in access to social media over time in elementary-aged children. This increase has caused concerns regarding children's mental and academic development. Many social media platforms are created for an older audience; elementary aged children are gaining access to these platforms through various avenues. Some of which may include falsifying their correct age, through older siblings and sometimes their parent/guardian. Over time, this problem has grown significantly and has had an impact on the way children learn. The researcher's intention is to gather information regarding social media and its impact on children's education and mental health. The problem is that there has been a rise in the use of social media in elementary-aged children. There has also been an uptick in the number of children diagnosed with mental health issues. The information gathered from this research will determine if there is a direct correlation between the three variables.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media has significantly reshaped how children communicate, learn, and form social identities, prompting growing concern among educators, researchers, and policymakers. While early scholarship often emphasized the potential of social media to enhance engagement and collaboration, more recent literature increasingly highlights its risks to mental health, cognitive development, and academic performance—particularly for elementary-aged children (Abdul Qayyum et al., 2016; Karim et al., 2020). This review critically

examines existing research on social media's educational, psychological, and social implications, focusing on early exposure, educators' perceptions, digital literacy, and institutional responses.

Social Media, Learning, and Cognitive Development

Research suggests that social media use is associated with distinctive learning behaviors and cognitive engagement patterns. Abdul Qayyum et al. (2016) found that social media users demonstrate different learning styles and levels of engagement compared to non-users, indicating that early exposure may shape attention patterns and cognitive habits. Concerns regarding academic performance are addressed by Kirschner and Karpinski (2010), who reported that heavy social networking site (SNS) use is associated with lower academic achievement. Although their research focused on older students, the findings show implications for younger children whose executive functioning and self-regulation skills are still developing. These concerns align with earlier media research by Williams (2005), which demonstrated that media exposure can influence learning outcomes and social development. Literature identifies social media as a significant contributor to mental health challenges among young people. Systematic and scoping reviews consistently link social media use to anxiety, depression, loneliness, and emotional dysregulation (Bozzola et al., 2022; Karim et al., 2020; Keles et al., 2019). Public health data further indicate a nationwide increase in childhood anxiety and depression (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], n.d.), with social media identified as a potential contributing factor. While most research focuses on adolescents, new evidence suggests that negative effects may have begun earlier. (Nagata et al. 2025) found that many children under the age of 13 use TikTok despite platform restrictions, exposing them to algorithm-driven content linked to overstimulation and compulsive use (Ness Center, n.d./2025). Usage data from indicate (safety et al., 2025) that children spend nearly two hours per day on TikTok, raising concerns

about excessive screen time during critical developmental periods. (Plackett et al. 2023) demonstrated that reducing social media use is associated with improvements in well-being, suggesting that negative mental health outcomes are modifiable through intentional regulation—particularly relevant in elementary school contexts.

Educators' and Administrators' Perspectives

Educators' perceptions of social media use in schools are largely ambivalent. Teachers acknowledge its potential to increase engagement but express concerns about safety, distraction, and classroom management (Alvarado, 2014; Blazer, 2012). These concerns are echoed by administrators, who report inconsistent policies and limited preparedness to address digital challenges in elementary settings (López, 2023; Richard, 2019). School responses often remain reactive rather than preventative. Davidson (2017) described how schools issue warnings about digital dangers only after incidents occur, rather than implementing comprehensive, proactive digital education strategies. This lag in response represents a broader institutional challenge, as social media platforms have evolved more rapidly than school policies and governance structures (Maryville University, 2020). Scholars widely advocate for digital and media literacy as a critical response to the risks associated with social media. Kellner and Share (2007) argue that critical media literacy fosters democratic engagement and critical thinking, while Ávila and Zacher Pandya (2012) emphasize teaching children to navigate digital spaces critically and ethically. Although these frameworks are theoretically compelling, empirical evidence demonstrating their effectiveness in elementary contexts remains limited. Supporting roles within schools are increasingly important. (safety et al., 2025) highlights the expanding responsibilities of school counselors in addressing digital behavior and social media-related

concerns, while Wall (2015) underscores the need for teacher preparation and professional development in digital mediated environments.

Limitations of Research

In schools, communities, and within the home there is limited research that puts all three into one study related to mental health in children. There is limited research that has been done related to social media and its negative impact on mental health in school-aged children. Evidence that is emerging from cross-sectional and longitudinal studies can show that social media may be the cause for depression and anxiety; however, it may show that depression and anxiety are causing children to turn to social media. Limitations of research is related to how data is collected in studies for social media, mental health and education.

Many of the studies included in this research report that they used self-reporting assessments and measures which could be unreliable. Children may not be able to identify their feelings or needs because they do not understand what anxiety and depression are. Those who have participated in the studies could show positive self-esteem by over or under reporting their experiences. This could directly or indirectly relate to social desirability bias, information bias, and reporting bias. There was a limitation related to studies focusing on TikTok only on social media and depression and anxiety for mental health, which can cause bias and limit the accurate depiction of how much children use social media. Some limitations also included being able to secure the number of participants for the surveys and questionnaires. The researcher encounters several hiccups along the way. The researcher was able to gather information to argue her point. There is a lot of information that shows the impact that social media can have on children's mental health and education. Sometimes the information can be skewed. The researcher will work to minimize the limitations of the research discussion.

Chapter 5

Discussion of Findings

The researcher will attempt to answer these questions by gathering research from various sources including the literature review and my personal views and experiences.

Research Questions

The questions that the researcher will focus on are as follows.

1. Does the use of social media (i.e.,TikTok) impact the learning environment of Elementary aged children?

Yes, the literature indicates that social media use does impact the learning environment of elementary-aged children, primarily through its influence on attention, engagement, classroom behavior, and instructional management. Research shows that early exposure to social media shapes cognitive habits and learning behaviors. Abdul Qayyum et al. (2016) found that social media users demonstrate different engagement patterns and learning preferences compared to non-users, implying that frequent interaction with platforms such as TikTok may affect attention span and learning styles. These concerns are reinforced by Kirschner and Karpinski (2010), who reported that heavy social networking use is associated with lower academic performance, raising implications for focus, homework completion, and sustained attention—skills still developing in elementary-aged children. Educator perspectives further highlight disruptions to the learning environment. Teachers report on increased distraction, classroom management challenges, and concerns about student safety related to social media exposure (Alvarado, 2014; Blazer, 2012). Administrators similarly acknowledge both opportunities and challenges, noting inconsistent policies and a lack of preparedness to address social media’s impact in elementary settings (López, 2023; Richard, 2019). Additionally, misinformation and viral content

circulating on social media have directly affected school environments. Fox (2015) documented instances in which social media hoaxes caused fear, absenteeism, and instructional disruption, demonstrating how online content can spill into physical school settings. Davidson (2017) further showed that schools often respond reactively to social media-related incidents, suggesting that learning environments are affected even when social media use occurs outside of school hours.

Overall, while social media may offer engagement opportunities, the evidence indicates that platforms such as TikTok can negatively affect the elementary learning environment by contributing to distraction, reduced academic focus, and increased demands on educators, particularly in the absence of clear policies and structured digital literacy instruction.

2. Is there any evidence to prove that social media usage among elementary aged children impacts their mental health?

Yes, there is growing evidence that social media use negatively impacts the mental health of children, with emerging research indicating that these effects begin during elementary-aged years. Systematic and scoping reviews consistently link social media use to anxiety, depression, loneliness, and emotional dysregulation among young people (Bozzola et al., 2022; Karim et al., 2020; Keles et al., 2019). While much of this research focuses on adolescents, recent studies demonstrate that elementary-aged children are increasingly exposed to social media platforms. Nagata et al. (2025) found that many children under 13 use TikTok despite age restrictions, and (safety et al., 2025) reported that children spend nearly two hours per day on the platform. Public health data indicate a broader rise in childhood anxiety and depression nationwide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], n.d.), with social media identified as a contributing stressor. Algorithm-driven platforms such as TikTok have been shown to promote

compulsive viewing and overstimulation, which may exacerbate emotional regulation difficulties in younger children (Ness Center, n.d./2025). Reports from the Royal Society for Public Health (n.d.) further link social media use to poor sleep, reduced self-esteem, and mood disturbances, all of which are essential components of child mental health. Evidence supporting intervention strengthens this conclusion. Plackett et al. (2023) demonstrated that reducing social media use leads to improvements in well-being, indicating a causal relationship between exposure levels and mental health outcomes.

In conclusion, while studies focused exclusively on elementary-aged children remain limited, the convergence of usage data, public health trends, systematic reviews, and intervention evidence strongly suggests that social media use poses significant mental health risks for children beginning in the elementary years.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Impact in the Field

Social media has become an intricate part of children's daily lives. The influence that social media has on education and mental health can be significant. In education, social media can be a great tool for learning. It allows students access to educational videos, tutorials, and students can build positive online educational communities. Students can share ideas, build their creativity, and learn from others. There are many social media platforms that can be used in a positive manner in education such as YouTube, TikTok, google classroom, class dojo, just to name a few. All of these are positive ways that social media can be used effectively in the classroom. Although there are many positive ways to use social media in education, social media can also negatively impact education. Excessive social media usage can cause distractions for children, short-term focus, and lower concentration that can negatively impact education.

When it comes to mental health, social media can have both negative and positive effects. On the positive side, social media can provide children with opportunities to build support groups, friendships, and express themselves in a creative way. Social mental health can build children's confidence in communicating with others. On the opposite side of that, too much social media exposure can lead to anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression. As reported in the research, children can compare themselves to others' lives unrealistically. Social media also opens the door for children to be exposed to cyberbullying as well. Too much screen time can contribute to children feeling alone, emotional instability and sleep problems.

According to a study conducted by Neira and Barber, anxiety and depression were the most measured outcomes. The prominent risk factors for anxiety and depression emerging from

this study comprised time spent, activity, and addiction to social media. In today's world, anxiety is one of the basic mental health problems. People liked and commented on their uploaded photos and videos. In today's age, everyone is immune to the social media context. Some teens experience anxiety from social media related to fear of loss, which causes teens to try to respond and check all their friends' messages and messages on a regular basis.

Overall, social media can be both an educational resource and a challenge to mental health. Social medias impact can be dependent upon how it is used; the amount of time children spends on it and how children are supervised and monitored while using social media. Encouraging healthy online habits, digital literacy, and open dialogue can all be beneficial to children with positive social media interactions, thus minimizing the potential risk.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is an educational theory where learners significantly alter their beliefs, assumptions, and worldview through critical reflection on their experiences. So, how does my research relate to transformative education? The influence that social media has on education and mental health in children can be connected to transformative learning. Social media exposes children to diverse ideas, cultures, and viewpoints. All of these can encourage children to question others' ideas and develop new ways that they look at the world around them. Transformative learning depends on children's ability to think critically on their experiences, which can negatively be impacted by social media issues such as comparing themselves to others, cyberbullying, and anxiety. All these may be social media factors that can negatively impact children. Social media can support transformative learning by expanding children's ideas and thoughts, while encouraging new experiences. All these positive interactions will require guidance, emotional support, and digital literacy to ensure that children can reflect on their

experiences in a positive, healthy, and effective way. This research also relates to transformative education in that it involves looking at the use of social media from a different perspective.

This research is asking learners and educators to look beyond the scope of the classroom to determine if social media has a negative or positive effect on mental health and education. Thus, in transformative education teaching and learning is geared to motivate and empower happy and healthy learners to take informed decisions and actions at the individual, community and global levels. Transformative education encourages learners to build a world they wish to see outside of school and in order to do that we must learn not only the basic learning fundamentals but also how to collaborate, have empathy, learn how to solve problems and connect with others.

Benefits

This research on social media, its impact on children's education and mental health can be helpful to marginalized communities in several ways. This research can be beneficial by highlighting the challenges that communities face and identifying ways to support them more effectively. Many marginalized communities experience limited access to mental health services, educational opportunities, and are at higher risk for online insecurities like cyberbullying and/or harmful social media content. This research can be beneficial to schools, social workers, and communities to help them understand the disparities in those marginalized communities. This research can also develop culturally responsive programs to promote a safe online environment, digital literacy, and emotional well-being of those community members. This research can also guide community organizations and schools in ways to organize and create outreach programs that will benefit marginalized communities. This research can benefit

marginalized communities by addressing inequalities, more inclusive learning about their environments, stronger mental health support systems, and ways to empower the community.

Implications of Future Research

In future research, it will be important for researchers to look at the impacts of constant connection to social media at the fingertips of younger students. In the ever-growing life of technology, younger children are given access to the internet, and ways to communicate as early as two years old. When children come to kindergarten, their knowledge of social media and how to work phones and computers far surpasses their needs for social skills that can only be learned within interactions. I also believe that social media and environment/higher expectations play a larger role in children's mental health. There is a lot of creditable research out there to identify how social media and the environment can negatively affect mental health. In the same lines, there is credible research that backs how the environment can positively impact education. However, as the environment has changed access to the internet, social media, and online gaming could have a lasting effect on education and mental health, that children cannot escape due to consistency. For example, TikTok and mental health can be related in terms of TikTok usage (the amount of time spent on it) causing mental health issues. This could also mean that people with mental health concerns use TikTok more often in search of something to increase their self-esteem. This can make it difficult for researchers to determine if mental health is causing the effect of social media usage being high, or if social media usage is causing mental health to be high.

In the future, researchers who consider using the same individuals repeatedly over time to help determine the effects of schools/environments/higher expectations, and social media may have on mental health. I would also like to see a variety of participants used in the same studies

which differ by race, social economics stance, and geographic locations. In the future, there needs to be a connection between the different impacts that social media can have on children's education and mental health.

Conclusion

The use of the TikTok app among children has a significant impact on their mental health. On one hand, TikTok provides a space for individual creative expression and social interaction, which can help boost a child's self-confidence, social interaction, and communication skills. However, there is also a negative impact which can lead to exposure to inappropriate content and the increased social pressure to get attention through likes, views, and comments that can lead to depression and anxiety among children. Research shows that children who use TikTok frequently seem to be more exposed to negative social comparisons, which can lead to them comparing themselves to others. This can also have a negative impact on children's development of how they view themselves through the eyes of others. TikTok has a negative impact on children and parents who can knowingly and unknowingly contribute to this impact by giving their children access to electronic devices for hours. This can cause children to become addicted to technology devices which can also negatively impact their mental health as well as their educational growth. Studies have shown that the use of TikTok can impact children's learning as well. It is important for parents and educators to monitor children's social media usage. To support children's mental health, collaboration between schools and parents is important to create a safe and positive learning environment for children to be successful.

Social media is rapidly growing, and our understanding of how it relates to mental health in children is increasingly challenging. Schools do not have the ability to monitor social media, and parents are sometimes unaware of what their children are posting. Students' mental health

needs to be a top priority for schools and parents because not every child is going to tell you they need help. Social media guidelines should look at blocking and banning children from their websites and reporting when they see signs of mental health. We all need to work together to help our children be safe.

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This document was created with the assistance of AI(ChatGPT) tools. The author used ChatGPT to help produce a concise flow of information using the information gathered and reviewed. For more information on how AI(ChatGPT) was used, please contact the author.

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