

THE ROLE OF COUNSELORS IN ADDRESSING SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGES FOR HOLISTIC WELLBEING

Abdul Rashid Abdul Azizi¹, Rahma Mutia², Nilta Putri³, Kukuh Dwi Sastra⁴, Alvida
Fatma Ritonga⁵, Witra Oktaviani⁶

¹²³⁴⁵⁶ *Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, biccprosiding3@gmail.com.*

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Abstract

In the current digital age, social media plays a major role in the daily lives of many people, especially teenagers and young adults. Despite its advantages like staying connected and accessing information easily it also brings about serious problems such as cyberbullying, constant social comparison, anxiety, and overdependence on digital platforms. These challenges can have a major impact on an individual's overall wellbeing, both mentally and emotionally. Counselors are in a vital position to guide people through these digital struggles. By using appropriate assessment tools, offering psychoeducation, and applying targeted interventions, they can help clients manage the negative psychological effects that arise from social media use. This paper aims to discuss how counselors can effectively support individuals in dealing with social media-related stress. It will also highlight how counselors can encourage healthier habits and build psychological strength in a world that is always online and constantly connected.

Keywords: Social media, Mental health, Cyberbullying, Digital dependency, Youth and young adults
Counselors' role, Emotional wellbeing, Psychological resilience

1. Introduction

Social media continues to transform rapidly, shaping how people view themselves and engage with others. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook offer opportunities for self-expression, relationship building, and quick access to information. However, when used excessively or without boundaries, these platforms can harm individuals' emotional, mental, and physical health. Recent research has highlighted a correlation between unhealthy social media habits and heightened levels of anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, and body image concerns.

These negative effects are especially significant among teenagers and young adults, who are in crucial stages of forming their identity and learning to manage emotions. As such, counselors play a vital role in helping clients navigate the psychological challenges tied to social media. True wellbeing goes beyond physical health; it includes emotional resilience, mental focus, spiritual awareness, and strong social bonds. This paper examines the essential role counselors play in addressing the harmful consequences of social media while guiding individuals toward balanced and mindful digital engagement.

Moreover, counselors are uniquely positioned to educate clients about the psychological mechanisms that make social media so addictive such as intermittent rewards, social comparison, and fear of missing out (FOMO). By fostering awareness and emotional intelligence, counselors can equip individuals with tools to recognize their triggers and create healthier boundaries around their digital habits. Techniques such as digital detoxing, mindfulness, and reflective journaling may be introduced as part of therapeutic interventions.

Additionally, collaboration between mental health professionals, educators, and families is key to fostering a supportive environment for digital wellbeing. Preventative education in schools,



open dialogue within families, and public campaigns can collectively shift the culture around social media toward one that promotes balance rather than dependency. Counselors can advocate for these efforts by contributing their psychological expertise to community-based initiatives. Ultimately, cultivating a healthier relationship with social media involves more than simply reducing screen time. It requires a deeper understanding of one's emotional needs, values, and intentions in the digital space. Counselors serve not only as mental health supporters but also as digital wellbeing mentors who empower individuals to engage with technology in a conscious and meaningful way.

2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative review methodology by examining and synthesizing evidence from prior peer-reviewed articles and clinical case reports. Ten academic journals were carefully chosen for their relevance to the topic, academic reliability, and publication within recent years. These sources collectively provide a solid foundation for understanding the multifaceted relationship between social media and mental health.

The collected data was examined through thematic analysis, highlighting three primary focus areas: the psychological impacts of social media on users, the evolving roles and responsibilities of counselors, and the strategic approaches they can take. This thematic framework offers a clear structure for interpreting how social media use intersects with emotional wellbeing and counseling interventions.

By using this approach, the article uncovers patterns and insights that are useful for mental health professionals. It also generates practical recommendations to guide counselors in different environments as they respond to the challenges associated with social media. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how counseling practices can adapt to the digital age and promote healthier online behaviors.

3. Results and Discussion

Psychological Challenges from Social Media Use

Social media has been linked to various mental health challenges. Huang (2017) reports that spending excessive time on social networking platforms is associated with heightened feelings of isolation and depressive symptoms. Likewise, research by Levenson et al. (2017) indicates that using social media late at night can disrupt sleep patterns, contributing to emotional instability and mood disturbances.

A frequently discussed issue is the impact of social comparison. Image-centric platforms often intensify feelings of inadequacy, particularly among young women. According to Fardouly et al. (2015), regular exposure to idealized photos on Instagram can lead individuals to feel dissatisfied with their physical appearance and experience diminished self-worth.

In addition, cyberbullying and online abuse continue to be widespread problems. Kowalski et al. (2014) found that those targeted by cyberbullying frequently suffer from elevated anxiety, a tendency to withdraw socially, and in severe cases, thoughts of self-harm or suicide. Moreover,

issues such as cyberbullying and digital harassment remain prevalent across various online platforms.

According to Kowalski et al. (2014), individuals who experience cyberbullying often exhibit heightened levels of anxiety, social withdrawal, and, in extreme circumstances, may develop suicidal ideation or engage in self-harming behaviors. The psychological toll of cyberbullying is particularly concerning among adolescents and young adults, who are more vulnerable due to their ongoing emotional and identity development. The anonymous nature of the internet often emboldens perpetrators, making it harder for victims to seek justice or support. As a result, the long-term effects can include chronic stress, depression, and diminished self-esteem.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving educators, parents, counselors, and policymakers. Schools can play a vital role by implementing anti-cyberbullying policies and integrating digital citizenship education into the curriculum. Additionally, mental health professionals should be equipped to recognize and treat the unique psychological impacts of online abuse, while social media platforms must take stronger measures to detect, prevent, and penalize harmful behavior online.

Counselor Roles in Intervention

Counselors can take action in a variety of essential ways. **Assessment and Evaluation:** It is important for counselors to assess how social media usage affects a client's psychological wellbeing. This can be done through interviews, structured digital usage questionnaires, or standardized tools like the Social Media Disorder Scale (van den Eijnden et al., 2016).

Psychoeducation: Many individuals are not fully conscious of the emotional toll social media can take. Counselors have a responsibility to educate clients about digital wellness, including the dynamics of validation-seeking behavior and the psychological impacts of excessive online exposure.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): CBT remains a highly effective therapeutic approach. It enables clients to challenge and reframe distorted thinking related to online engagement for example, the false belief that one's value is determined by the number of likes or comments received (Rozgonjuk et al., 2019).

Mindfulness and Digital Detox: Practicing mindfulness and implementing digital detox strategies are valuable tools. Counselors can introduce mindfulness techniques and recommend regular breaks from screens to help clients become more self-aware and less reliant on constant digital stimulation. **Family Counseling:** For younger clients, particularly adolescents, involving family members is crucial. Counselors can work with parents or guardians to set appropriate screen time boundaries and foster honest, supportive communication within the home.

Counselor Competency in the Digital Age

A critical aspect of effective counseling today involves the counselor's commitment to staying current with digital developments. Given the fast-paced evolution of social media, professionals in the mental health field must consistently expand their understanding of new platforms, digital behaviors such as "doomscrolling" or the rise of influencer-driven content and the unique ethical dilemmas these trends may present (Naslund et al., 2016). Moreover, counselors should be prepared to help clients navigate digital-specific challenges like emotionally draining parasocial relationships and confusion around online versus real-life identity.

Beyond technical awareness, counselors must also develop cultural sensitivity regarding how digital spaces influence self-image, belonging, and mental health. For example, youth immersed in filtered perfection and constant comparison on social platforms may experience decreased self-worth and increased anxiety. A counselor's ability to validate these experiences and provide tailored support is key to fostering resilience and psychological balance.

Additionally, integrating digital literacy into counseling sessions can empower clients to make more conscious online decisions. This includes guiding clients to critically assess the content they consume, become aware of their screen time habits, and explore healthier patterns of online engagement. Such strategies help individuals reframe their relationship with technology, promoting digital wellness rather than avoidance or fear.

Collaborative efforts between counselors, educators, and parents are also necessary to strengthen digital mental health literacy in communities. Schools and families often serve as the first line of exposure to digital culture, and counselors can contribute by offering workshops, resource guides, or consultations to build awareness and early intervention strategies. This holistic support network ensures clients are not working through digital pressures in isolation.

4. Conclusions

The emergence of social media has brought both beneficial opportunities and significant challenges to individuals' overall wellbeing. While it enhances communication and social interaction, it can also destabilize emotional health and contribute to a range of mental health concerns. It is essential for counselors to respond to these issues by incorporating assessment methods, research-based practices, and psychoeducational approaches into their therapeutic work.

To effectively support clients, counselors must remain updated on digital media trends and maintain a personalized, empathetic approach. This enables them to guide individuals in navigating their online activities with awareness, resilience, and emotional insight. As technology continues to advance, the field of counseling must also adapt remaining ethical, proactive, and aligned with the goal of fostering comprehensive wellbeing.

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