



REVIEW ARTICLE

# From Likes to Bonds: A Scoping Review on the Impact of Social Media on Youth Social Interaction Patterns

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**Abstract:** Social media has profoundly reshaped the way youth interact, communicate, and build relationships in the digital age. As platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp become central to daily life, understanding their psychosocial impacts on young people is critical. This scoping review aims to map and synthesize existing research on how social media influences youth social interaction patterns. A total of 82 studies published between 2020 and 2025 were analyzed, covering diverse cultural and geographical contexts. Thematic analysis identified four key areas: (1) social media as a catalyst for friendship formation, (2) evolving communication styles shaped by visual and ephemeral content, (3) the rise of digital intimacy and emotional support networks, and (4) the amplification of peer conflict, social comparison, and algorithmic pressures. The findings reveal both opportunities (e.g., global connections and creative self-expression) and risks (e.g., performative self-presentation, cyberbullying, and FOMO). Practical recommendations include implementing digital literacy programs in education, fostering authentic connections through platform design, and developing policies for algorithmic transparency and youth online safety. This review highlights the need for intersectional and globally aware frameworks and calls for longitudinal research to inform interventions that promote youth well-being in digital spaces.

Keywords: Digital Bonding; Emotional Support; Peer Conflict; Social Interaction; Youth Social Media Use

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social interaction has undergone a radical transformation, particularly among the younger generation. Whereas relationships were once shaped by physical presence, shared routines, and face-to-face conversations, they are now deeply mediated by digital platforms. Today's youth initiate, maintain, and even end social ties through actions on screens liking a post, sharing a meme, tagging a friend, or sending disappearing messages. These are not merely technical gestures but socially meaningful acts that carry emotion, intention, and consequence. This shift has been explored through theoretical lenses such as Uses and Gratifications Theory, which emphasizes how youth actively engage with platforms like TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat to fulfill social and psychological needs including identity exploration, peer validation, entertainment, and information-seeking. These platforms function as digital "third places" neither home nor school yet serve as vital

arenas for bonding, emotional expression, and cultural engagement. By 2023, more than 4.9 billion people globally were active on social media, with youth aged 15–29 representing one of the most engaged demographics (Bozzola et al., 2022), spending an average of 2.5 to 3 hours daily on these platforms (Thulin & Vilhelmson, 2019).

Yet, this connectivity brings contradictions. While many young users report feeling more connected and supported online, others struggle with the pressure of constant availability, curated self-presentation, and the invisible toll of social comparison. Concerns around digital loneliness, cyberbullying, and decreased face-to-face empathy are rising, even as social media continues to evolve in form and function. Emerging frameworks such as Affective Publics further emphasize how these platforms amplify collective emotions joy, outrage, grief creating shared digital atmospheres that influence not just individual relationships but wider youth cultures. The same platforms that facilitate bonding can also deepen alienation, leading to what has been termed "alone together" phenomena, where users are digitally surrounded but emotionally distanced.

This dynamic is especially significant during adolescence and emerging adulthood life stages defined by the search for identity, belonging, and intimacy. Developmental psychology underscores that social interaction during these years is essential for emotional regulation, self-concept formation, and the development of relational competence. However, when these interactions are mediated by screens, filtered through algorithms, and governed by platform-specific norms, the rules of relationship-building shift in subtle but profound ways.

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Questions arise: What does “friendship” mean when it’s quantified by likes or maintained through Snapchat streaks? How do conflict, reconciliation, or empathy manifest when expressed via emojis or direct messages? The effects of these changes are not easily generalized. While some youth flourish in digital environments finding community, creative expression, and emotional support others feel overwhelmed, excluded, or misrepresented (Scott et al., 2017; Wielk & Standlee, 2021). The wide variation in youth experiences, shaped by intersecting factors such as age, gender, cultural background, digital literacy, and socioeconomic status, renders this a complex and deeply contextual phenomenon.

Crucially, much of the existing research remains rooted in Western contexts, often overlooking how young people in the Global South navigate and adapt to the social realities of digital life. In collectivist societies, for instance, cultural scripts around family honor, communal identity, and emotional restraint may shape how youth engage with social media in ways that differ markedly from Western norms. Without accounting for these cultural variations, we risk producing an incomplete and potentially biased understanding of youth digital interactions (Sarwatay & Raman, 2021; Anjum & Aziz, 2024). Addressing this gap is vital to building a more globally inclusive perspective on youth social media use.

Despite the growing body of research on youth social media use, the literature remains disproportionately concentrated in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) contexts, particularly North America and Europe. This over-representation limits the generalizability of findings to non-Western, Global South contexts where cultural norms, technological infrastructure, and social dynamics may differ significantly. For instance, youth in collectivist societies may engage with social media in ways shaped by familial expectations and communal identities, contrasting with the individualistic engagement often observed in WEIRD countries. This geographic imbalance highlights a critical gap in the existing literature and underscores the importance of conducting more research in underrepresented regions to ensure a more globally inclusive understanding of youth social interaction in digital spaces.

The COVID-19 pandemic further heightened the urgency to understand youth social interaction in digital contexts (Shah et al., 2020). During lockdowns, social media became a lifeline, particularly for adolescents cut off from in-person socialization. Online platforms provided continuity of friendship, emotional release, and a sense of community. However, prolonged digital dependence also surfaced new stressors: “Zoom fatigue,” online peer pressure, and a heightened sense of missing out (FOMO) (Ngo et al., 2023). The long-term consequences of this period are still unfolding and underscore the importance of systematically reviewing what we know.

The relevance of this study is heightened in the context of post-pandemic social dynamics and the rapid evolution of algorithmic technologies on social media platforms. During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital interactions became the primary mode of communication for many youths, leading to an intensified reliance on social media for maintaining relationships, emotional support, and a sense of belonging. This period not only amplified existing patterns of online engagement but also introduced new behaviors such as increased participation in digital communities and reliance on algorithmically curated content. Moreover, recent algorithmic changes such as TikTok’s hyper-personalized For You Page and Instagram’s shift toward video-centric reels have reshaped how youth

discover content, engage with peers, and experience social pressure online. These developments make it critical to examine how algorithmic design influences youth social interaction, peer validation, and emerging phenomena like Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). Understanding these post-pandemic and technological shifts provides valuable insights for designing interventions and policies that support youth well-being in an increasingly digital world.

Given these complexities, a scoping review offers a crucial opportunity to map the landscape of existing research from 2020 to 2025. Rather than asking if social media is “good” or “bad” for youth, this review seeks to explore how it is used, why it matters, and what patterns of interaction have emerged over the last decade. It will identify what we know, what we assume, and, importantly, what remains underexplored.

This inquiry matters because social media is no longer peripheral to young people’s lives it is central. To design policies, educational interventions, and healthier digital ecosystems, we must understand not only the psychological and social implications of youth social media use but also the cultural and regional nuances that shape these experiences. Exploring the impact of social media on youth social interaction is not just a research priority; it is a generational imperative.

## Objectives

This scoping review aims to systematically synthesize research published between 2020 and 2025 on how social media influences youth social interaction (ages 15–29). It explores the scope and characteristics of existing studies, including methodologies, populations, platforms, and geographic focus. Key objectives include identifying common themes in digital connection and disconnection, examining the theoretical frameworks used, and highlighting cultural and developmental variations particularly those from underrepresented Global South contexts. The review also seeks to identify gaps to guide future research, policy, and practice.

## Questions That Guide This Review

To keep this review focused and grounded, it will be driven by the following key questions: 1) How has social media shaped the ways young people build and maintain social relationships between 2020 and 2025?; 2) Which platforms and interaction types have received the most attention in research, and why?; 3) What theories or models including Uses and Gratifications and Affective Publics do scholars use to understand social interaction in the context of social media?; 4) To what extent does the literature reflect the diversity of youth experiences across age, gender, culture, and region, and how are Global South contexts represented?; 5) What important questions are still unanswered in the current body of research, and how can future studies better integrate cross-cultural insights and theoretical perspectives?

## METHODS

This scoping review was designed to systematically explore and synthesize research on how social media has influenced the patterns of social interaction among youth aged approximately 15 to 29, focusing on literature published between 2020 and 2025. The review follows the methodological framework proposed by Peters et al. (2020).

## Eligibility Criteria

To ensure relevance and focus, studies were included based on the following criteria:

**Table 1.** Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Empirical studies (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method) published in peer-reviewed journals or academic theses/dissertations	Non-empirical works (e.g., theoretical papers, commentaries, opinion pieces, blogs, or conference abstracts)
Published between 2020 and 2025	Published before 2020
Focus on youth populations (ages 15–30)	Studies focusing exclusively on children under 15 or adults over 30
Examination of social interaction in the context of social media use (e.g., friendship, communication, emotional intimacy, peer conflict)	Studies addressing only screen time, academic performance, or technology use without examining interpersonal/social aspects
Written in English	Publications in languages other than English

## Information Sources and Search Strategy

To comprehensively and systematically identify relevant studies, a multi-database search strategy was implemented, incorporating both disciplinary and interdisciplinary sources. The search spanned six key academic databases widely recognized for indexing peer-reviewed literature in psychology, education, communication, media studies, and the broader social sciences. These databases included Scopus, Web of Science (Core Collection), APA PsycINFO, PubMed, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Disciplinary databases like PsycINFO and ERIC ensured subject-specific depth, while multidisciplinary databases such as Scopus and Web of Science provided broader coverage. Google Scholar was added to capture gray literature and dissertations, especially those from non-Western or underrepresented regions that may not appear in conventional databases.

The search strategy was developed in collaboration with a university research librarian to improve precision and coverage. Keywords were identified through a preliminary scan of relevant literature and refined using database-specific thesauri (e.g., MeSH terms in PubMed and APA Thesaurus in PsycINFO) where available. A combination of controlled vocabulary and free-text terms was used, connected by Boolean operators to enhance retrieval. The following is a sample search string used in Scopus and adapted accordingly for other databases: ("social media" OR "digital media" OR "online platform\*" OR "Instagram" OR "Facebook" OR "TikTok" OR "Twitter" OR "WhatsApp" OR "YouTube") AND ("youth" OR "young people" OR "adolescen\*" OR "emerging adult\*" OR "Gen Z") AND ("social interaction" OR "peer relationship\*" OR "interpersonal communication" OR "online socialization" OR "digital bonding" OR "friendship" OR "relationship development")

The search was restricted to publications dated between January, 2020, and June, 2025 (including in-press or early-access articles within this range) to reflect the most recent developments in digital socialization particularly following the rise of Instagram Stories (2016), TikTok

(2018), and the surge in online activity during the post-pandemic period. Only English-language publications were included due to translation constraints and the need for consistency in terminology. However, studies from all global regions were eligible if they met the inclusion criteria. All retrieved records were managed using Zotero, with duplicates removed through both automated and manual checks. To ensure transparency and replicability, the search process was fully documented. Additional articles identified through citation chaining during full-text review were also included. This comprehensive approach was designed to capture a global and nuanced picture of how social media has shaped youth social interaction over the past decade.

## Selection of Sources of Evidence

A total of 82 studies were included in the final analysis. All screening was performed independently by two reviewers. Disagreements were resolved by consensus or by consulting a third reviewer. Inter-rater reliability (Cohen's kappa) for the title and abstract screening phase was calculated at  $\kappa = 0.83$ , indicating strong agreement between reviewers.

### Stage 1: Title and Abstract Screening

In the first stage, two independent reviewers screened the titles and abstracts of all remaining records to assess their initial relevance to the review's scope. Articles were included if they referenced youth or adolescent populations, social interaction (e.g., peer communication, relationship formation, online social dynamics), and the use of social media platforms. Records were excluded if they focused solely on topics unrelated to interpersonal interaction (e.g., academic performance, digital marketing, political messaging) or on populations outside the target age group (e.g., children or older adults).

### Stage 2: Full-Text Review

Full-text versions of potentially eligible studies were retrieved and reviewed in detail. This phase confirmed whether the studies met all predefined inclusion criteria, including the focus on youth aged approximately 15–29, the examination of social media platforms as a primary variable, and the exploration of themes related to social interaction (e.g., bonding, social skills, digital friendships, emotional communication, and online/offline relational patterns). Where full texts were not available through institutional access, efforts were made to obtain them via open-access sources or direct author contact.

## Data Charting Process

To facilitate a structured and systematic extraction of relevant data from each included study, a standardized data extraction form was developed and piloted. This form was designed to capture key study characteristics, enabling the reviewers to organize and synthesize the data consistently. The extracted data included the following variables: Author(s) and Year of Publication; Country and Region of Study; Study Population; Social Media Platform(s) Examined; Methodology Used; Key Findings Related to Social Interaction; Theoretical Framework; Limitations or Gaps Identified;

Two reviewers independently extracted and cross-verified all data to ensure consistency. Disagreements were resolved through discussion or, if needed, with input from a third reviewer. To minimize bias and ensure consistency, a third reviewer was available to resolve any discrepancies in

inclusion decisions through discussion and consensus. Inter-rater reliability was tracked during the initial rounds of screening, and adjustments to the inclusion criteria were made collaboratively if ambiguities emerged. A hybrid thematic analysis approach was employed. Inductive coding allowed emergent themes to surface organically from the data, while deductive coding applied theoretical frameworks such as Uses and Gratifications and Affective Publics to structure interpretation. This approach supported both discovery and alignment with established scholarship, enabling a deeper synthesis of the literature.

### Collating, Summarizing, and Reporting Results

Following the data extraction, the findings were organized thematically to identify common patterns and elucidate the main trends emerging from the literature. The thematic analysis employed a hybrid approach, combining inductive coding (to allow patterns to emerge naturally from the data) with deductive coding informed by existing theoretical frameworks such as Uses and Gratifications Theory and Affective Publics. This approach ensured sensitivity to both emergent insights and theory-driven categories, allowing for a nuanced synthesis of the literature.

To enhance thematic clarity, a narrative synthesis was used to systematically present findings, summarize key trends, and highlight distinctions across studies—such as geographic variation and platform-specific effects. Descriptive statistics quantified trends in platform focus, methodology, and theoretical use, offering a visual snapshot of the field's development. Consistent with scoping review methodology, no formal quality appraisal was conducted, as the goal was to map the breadth of existing research rather than assess study rigor. Therefore, while themes were thoroughly synthesized, the review avoided evaluative judgments on study validity or generalizability.

The key outcomes of this synthesis revealed a comprehensive overview of the social media platforms most frequently examined in relation to youth social interaction. It also identified the most common themes across studies concerning changes in social behavior, communication patterns, and relationship development. Furthermore, the synthesis highlighted the theoretical approaches employed to understand these phenomena, along with the strengths and limitations inherent in these perspectives. Finally, it underscored critical gaps in the literature that merit further investigation, particularly regarding underrepresented populations, diverse cultural contexts, and emerging social media platforms.

## RESULTS OF STUDY

This section presents the synthesized findings from the 82 articles included in the scoping review, conducted between 2020 and 2025. The studies varied in terms of country of origin, research methodology, participant demographics, and platforms studied. The most frequently examined platforms included Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. The analysis used inductive and deductive coding to identify key patterns across diverse contexts.

### Overview of Included Studies

The studies were conducted globally, with concentrations in North America, Europe, and Asia. There

were relatively fewer studies from Africa and Latin America. Youth populations studied ranged from 15 to 29 years old, with varying educational backgrounds, urban/rural contexts, and cultural identities. Some samples focused on specific subgroups, such as LGBTQ+ youth, rural communities, and digital content creators. The methods employed included qualitative interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, quantitative surveys, case studies, experimental designs, and mixed-methods research. Theoretical frameworks ranged from Self-Presentation Theory to Cultural Capital Theory, highlighting the diversity of disciplinary approaches.

### Performativity as a Cross-Cutting Theme

A recurring theme across the reviewed studies was the strategic presentation of identity and emotion—referred to here as performativity on social media. Youth users frequently engaged in curated self-presentation designed to conform with audience expectations and platform aesthetics. Emotions and identities were managed through visible and intentional posts, sometimes highlighting positivity, other times framing vulnerability in stylized ways (Kazerooni et al., 2020; Binder et al., 2023; Chrystall, 2023; Meng & Wang, 2023; Hajli et al., 2021; Jiang & Sun, 2025; Maran & Raj, 2024; Kee et al., 2023).

This performative expression was evident among both influencers and everyday users. It was often reinforced by algorithms favoring engagement-driven content, thereby encouraging behavior that maximized likes, comments, or visibility (Evans, 2022; Farivar et al., 2022; Kang & Lou, 2022; Winstone et al., 2021). In collectivist or conservative cultures, performativity included subtler forms of self-expression shaped by modesty and privacy norms, while in more individualistic contexts, youth employed overt strategies of personal branding and emotional openness (Sarwatay & Raman, 2021; Anjum & Aziz, 2024; Abidin, 2020; Ilbury, 2022; Allam et al., 2022).

Across the reviewed studies, social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat were consistently reported as central to how youth initiate and maintain friendships. Youth typically used these platforms to make initial contact through casual interactions such as likes, comments, and group chats (Bergs et al., 2023; McCormack et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Jiang & Sun, 2025). These initial contacts often led to deeper connections through direct messaging, private chats, or video calls (Grasso, 2025; Arora, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2022; Gerbaudo, 2024).

Friendship formation was frequently mediated by algorithmic features that introduced users to others with similar interests. Hashtags, follower suggestions, and curated content feeds played a role in connecting youth to communities based on shared hobbies, cultural identities, or causes (Lee et al., 2022; Allam et al., 2022; Kang & Lou, 2022; Lichy et al., 2022). Platforms like TikTok and Instagram Stories facilitated exposure to potential friends through humor, creative content, or visible social cues (Evans, 2022; Landberg et al., 2023).

As friendships developed, youth were found to engage in digital rituals such as media sharing, gaming sessions, voice messages, or check-in routines that fostered familiarity and continuity in interaction (Grasso, 2025; Abidin, 2020; Binder et al., 2023; Chrystall, 2023). Emojis, stickers, and GIFs were often used to bridge the gap of nonverbal cues (Zhang et al., 2022; Smit et al., 2021).

Several studies reported persistent emotional distance or a sense of "digital loneliness" a state where youth feel socially active online but emotionally disconnected

(Landberg et al., 2023; Chrystall, 2023; Hajli et al., 2021). While some relationships transitioned to offline friendships, longitudinal data on these trajectories remained limited (McCormack et al., 2022; Grasso, 2025).

Across the reviewed literature, youth communication on social media was described as increasingly shaped by new norms, formats, and platform affordances. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp emphasized immediacy, visual expression, and brevity over traditional verbal or written interaction. These shifts were consistently documented across studies examining how youth engage in digital conversation, share emotional content, and manage social presence (Abidin, 2020; Kuřaga, 2024; Santhosh et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022; Evans, 2022).

Visual and ephemeral modes of communication were found to dominate youth digital interaction. Short-form videos, Stories, and disappearing messages allowed users to share expressive content quickly and casually. Multiple studies described how youth used emojis, memes, reaction GIFs, and stickers to communicate tone, humor, and emotion without relying on extended dialogue (Jiang & Sun, 2025; Maran & Raj, 2024; McCormack et al., 2022; Kee et al., 2023; Kaur & Saukko, 2022).

Ephemeral formats such as Instagram Stories and Snapchat messages were commonly used for spontaneous sharing. Instagram Stories and Snapchat messages enabled more spontaneous sharing, allowing youth to communicate more frequently but with less permanence. This mode of interaction was especially associated with casual check-ins, momentary emotions, or everyday routines (Jiang & Sun, 2025; Maran & Raj, 2024; Santhosh et al., 2024).

Communication practices varied across cultural contexts. Studies from collectivist societies, such as India and Pakistan, noted a tendency toward more indirect expression and greater attention to privacy and modesty in digital communication. Youth in these settings were observed to use social media for peer-group bonding rather than public self-expression, often relying on closed-group messaging or indirect status updates (Sarwatay & Raman, 2021; Anjum & Aziz, 2024; Ilbury, 2022; Abarna et al., 2022). In contrast, studies in more individualistic societies documented higher rates of open disclosure and public content sharing (Landberg et al., 2023; Chrystall, 2023; Lewin et al., 2021).

The reviewed literature also addressed the concept of digital literacy, with a focus on youth ability to interpret, manage, and navigate social media environments. Skills included understanding privacy settings, decoding visual language, and detecting misinformation. However, some studies emphasized that access to these skills varied by geography, education, and social background (Lewin et al., 2021; Foyet & Louis, 2023; Jimenez et al., 2021; Nyakana & Smith, 2023; Smit et al., 2021).

Youth from under-resourced communities were reported to be at greater risk for misinterpretation, online exclusion, and digital harm due to lower exposure to the implicit norms of digital communication (Nyakana & Smith, 2023; Foyet & Louis, 2023; Jimenez et al., 2021). Technological fluency was unevenly distributed across populations, with several studies documenting how lack of familiarity with platform updates or online etiquette could lead to misunderstandings or marginalization within peer networks (Kazerooni et al., 2020; Meng & Wang, 2023; Binder et al., 2023; Kaur & Saukko, 2022).

Cultural knowledge, language fluency, and digital access were key factors that shaped how successfully youth engaged with evolving communication trends. In some contexts, multilingual youth used language-switching and linguistic creativity to assert cultural identity and

strengthen peer bonds (Kaur & Saukko, 2022; Page-Tan, 2020). Meanwhile, youth in transitional societies or conflict-affected areas faced unique communication challenges related to digital literacy and emotional safety (Abarna et al., 2022; Nyakana & Smith, 2023).

The reviewed literature documented how social media platforms facilitated emotional intimacy and peer support among youth. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok were described as environments where youth communicated care, shared vulnerability, and maintained a sense of emotional connection (Kazerooni et al., 2020; Ilbury, 2022; Meng & Wang, 2023). These digital spaces enabled frequent interactions through messaging, media sharing, and reactions that helped maintain bonds across distance.

Private chats, group messaging, and closed online communities were identified as common settings for emotional support, particularly during periods of physical isolation such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Youth were observed engaging in supportive behaviors such as daily check-ins, emoji reactions, or the sharing of comforting media content. These interactions were often described as sustaining emotional presence and reinforcing social cohesion.

Studies reported that youth used social media to express a range of emotions through various modalities. These included text, photos, short videos, and symbolic cues such as emojis or GIFs. Emotional expression was often tailored to platform-specific features, with some youth favoring Stories, status updates, or reels for conveying mood or distress (Binder et al., 2023; Chrystall, 2023).

Some posts included stylized images with introspective captions. Posts included emotional content that was visually appealing or aligned with social norms around presentation. Content such as aesthetically composed images with introspective captions or stylized short videos were observed as ways youth communicated distress or sought peer engagement (Binder et al., 2023).

Several studies highlighted how engagement metrics such as likes, comments, or shares influenced how youth perceived the effectiveness of emotional communication. When emotional content received fewer responses than expected, users reported feeling dismissed or overlooked (Chrystall, 2023; Hajli et al., 2021). Youth reported fewer reactions to emotional posts.

Despite high levels of digital interaction, some studies documented reports of persistent loneliness or emotional disconnection. Youth described experiences of being digitally connected to many peers but lacking a sense of meaningful understanding or empathy (Landberg et al., 2023; Chrystall, 2023). These findings pointed to an uneven relationship between online visibility and emotional resonance.

The literature also identified instances where emotional disclosure online led to negative responses. Some youth encountered ridicule, exclusion, or hostile comments after sharing emotional content (Smit et al., 2021; Abarna et al., 2022). Such experiences were associated with decreased willingness to seek support in the future, particularly among youth from marginalized groups. Cultural differences in emotional communication were documented across several studies. In collectivist or conservative societies, youth often used indirect forms of emotional sharing. These included coded language, private messaging, or symbolic posts that avoided overt distress signals (Sarwatay & Raman, 2021; Anjum & Aziz, 2024). Youth in such contexts demonstrated distinct norms regarding privacy, modesty, and the public display of emotion.

The reviewed literature described how social media platforms have become central to youth peer conflict. Across studies, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp were reported as common settings where youth experienced social comparison, cyberbullying, exclusion, and emotional strain. These conflicts often emerged from patterns of visibility, feedback mechanisms, and digitally mediated interactions (Foyet & Louis, 2023; Rogers, 2021; Grunin et al., 2020).

Several studies identified social comparison as a prominent trigger for peer tension. Youth reported experiencing distress when comparing their daily lives to the curated content shared by peers, especially on visually driven platforms like Instagram and TikTok (Ajewumi et al., 2024; Valkenburg et al., 2021). This included feelings of inadequacy related to appearance, lifestyle, popularity, and perceived success. Platform algorithms were observed to reinforce these comparisons by promoting content with high engagement, increasing youth exposure to idealized imagery and peer achievements.

Digital engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and follower counts—were also linked to perceived social hierarchies. Studies showed that these metrics often functioned as visible indicators of popularity, which shaped how youth evaluated themselves and others (Farivar et al., 2022). Youth with fewer followers or lower engagement were reported to feel excluded or less socially valued within their peer networks.

Cyberbullying and interpersonal aggression were widely documented across the reviewed studies. Platforms enabled forms of harassment such as name-calling, mocking posts, and group exclusion, with some youth reporting incidents of digital shaming or targeted attacks (Kutok et al., 2021; Grunin et al., 2020). The persistent and public nature of social media content intensified the emotional effects, with victims reporting distress over repeated exposure or the wide visibility of harmful content.

Youth also described difficulties in interpreting digital communication, especially in the absence of nonverbal cues. Studies reported that delayed replies, ambiguous messages, or perceived tone in text-based exchanges sometimes led to misunderstandings and interpersonal conflict (Littman-Ovadia & Russo-Netzer, 2024; Zhang et al., 2022). These misinterpretations were observed to escalate into conflict more readily in online settings, where conversations were visible to others.

Some youth reported feeling excluded when not featured in peers' social media updates. The phenomenon of "fear of missing out" (FOMO) was frequently mentioned as a source of emotional discomfort, especially when youth saw peers attending events or participating in activities without them (Marengo et al., 2021; Ngo et al., 2024). This often resulted in compulsive checking of social media and heightened sensitivity to peer dynamics.

Internalized distress was another recurrent theme, with youth expressing identity strain resulting from maintaining idealized self-presentations. The pressure to appear socially successful or emotionally balanced online was noted to create confusion about authenticity and self-worth (Kee et al., 2023). Some youth reported fatigue or anxiety related to sustaining their digital personas.

Cultural differences in the expression and perception of peer conflict were noted in several studies. In collectivist or conservative societies, conflict was less likely to be expressed through direct confrontation and more likely to involve subtle exclusions or silence (Sarwatay & Raman, 2021; Anjum & Aziz, 2024). Peer tension in these contexts was often managed through indirect communication or group dynamics rather than open disagreement.

## DISCUSSION

This scoping review synthesizes the current literature on the influence of social media on youth social interaction patterns, drawing attention to key themes that highlight how digital platforms shape youth friendships, communication, emotional support, and social dynamics. Through a comprehensive analysis of these trends, we uncover both the positive and negative consequences of social media use, reflecting the complexities of digital interactions in today's world. Social media's role in reshaping youth relationships is a dynamic and multifaceted subject that warrants attention, especially as the digital age continues to evolve. The unique insights emerging from this discussion provide a foundation for further research while also offering practical implications for educators, policymakers, and technology developers.

One of the most persistent insights across the literature is the paradox between increased digital connectivity and diminished relational depth. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Facebook are central to how youth initiate, maintain, and even end friendships (Lichy et al., 2022; Evans, 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2022). These platforms allow users to interact beyond local or national boundaries through content feeds, hashtag networks, and algorithmically suggested communities (Gerbaudo, 2024; Lee et al., 2022). Yet beneath this borderless access lies a tension: while many interactions begin with apparent emotional closeness memes, private chats, likes they rarely evolve into deep, sustained relationships (Page-Tan, 2020; Pouwels et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how digital networks can provide urgent emotional support (Ilbury, 2022; Meng & Wang, 2023), but even in those moments, intimacy was often filtered through platform design. Private group chats and curated "close friend" features created only a semblance of privacy, not true interpersonal safety (Kazerooni et al., 2020). Youth commonly expressed that despite being digitally surrounded by others, they felt isolated an experience labeled by some scholars as digital isolation (Hajli et al., 2021; Chrystall, 2023).

This contradiction is most visible in platforms like Snapchat and Instagram, where expressions of vulnerability are double-edged. They may invite support, but also open the door to cyberbullying and social exclusion (Smit et al., 2021; Abarna et al., 2022). Youth relationships become emotionally high-stakes environments, shaped more by fleeting engagements than by mutual commitment. The promise of intimacy is present, but rarely fulfilled.

At the core of many youth social interactions lies a demand to perform for visibility. Across platforms, youth are drawn into cycles of self-curation, where success is measured by likes, comments, and algorithmic reach (Allam et al., 2022; Kang & Lou, 2022). This performance imperative is not confined to influencers it has become normalized even among casual users. TikTok, for instance, fosters highly visible social environments where trends, challenges, and aesthetic conventions dictate what gains traction (Abidin, 2020; Santhosh et al., 2024).

These dynamics have tangible psychosocial consequences. Youth may feel compelled to exaggerate or mask their emotions, portraying happiness or confidence even when they feel anxious or disconnected (Heath et al., 2024; Binder et al., 2023). Emotional support becomes entangled with external validation; the absence of social feedback can lead to emotional depletion (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Youth begin to internalize the logic of platform algorithms, tailoring not just their content, but their very

identity to suit audience expectations (Rogers, 2021; Kee et al., 2023).

In this context, digital literacy extends far beyond knowing how to navigate apps. It involves psychological resilience, identity regulation, and the ability to critically interrogate one's own participation in attention economies (Lewin et al., 2021; Hunt, 2021). Without these competencies, youth are more susceptible to interpersonal conflict, miscommunication, and emotional burnout (Foyet & Louis, 2023; Jimenez et al., 2021; Nyakana & Smith, 2023).

While the psychological and relational effects of social media have been well-documented in Western contexts, a critical gap persists in how the literature addresses non-WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) populations. Much of the existing research is embedded in cultural assumptions that prioritize individualism, self-promotion, and autonomy values not universally held (Dwivedi, Hughes, Baabdullah, et al., 2022).

Emerging studies in Global South contexts reveal alternative uses of social media that reflect collectivist norms, spiritual frameworks, and socio-economic realities that diverge from Western norms (Ajewumi et al., 2024; Farivar et al., 2022). For example, the social and emotional functions of messaging groups, public persona management, and even romantic communication are shaped by local scripts of gender, family, and religious identity elements that remain under-theorized in dominant frameworks.

These cultural dynamics also influence how youth experience phenomena like FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), peer comparison, or algorithmic invisibility (Marengo et al., 2021; Ngo et al., 2024). In many low- to middle-income countries, access to digital infrastructure is uneven, and social media may amplify class-based exclusion or urban-rural divides. Thus, intersectional and decolonial perspectives are necessary to make sense of youth social interaction globally not as a universal process but as a culturally-situated experience.

The darker side of social media's influence is its amplification of peer conflict and identity struggles. Rogers (2021) described how platforms such as Instagram and Facebook act as arenas for status signaling, where youth meticulously curate content to project success, happiness, and popularity. This relentless display of idealized lives fuels social comparison, a phenomenon widely documented to impact youth mental health negatively (Ajewumi et al., 2024; Valkenburg et al., 2021; Ohme et al., 2022). Youth comparing themselves to the curated highlight reels of their peers frequently experience decreased self-esteem, anxiety, and dissatisfaction with their own lives.

Cyberbullying is another major concern. Kutok et al. (2021) and Grunin et al. (2020) reported that Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are common arenas for cyberbullying, often exacerbated by the anonymity or indirect communication social media allows. Victims often suffer from depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal, intensifying their vulnerability. Identity conflict is an additional burden youth must navigate. Kee et al. (2023) highlighted how managing the tension between one's online persona and authentic offline self can create cognitive dissonance, emotional exhaustion, and reduced self-esteem. Maintaining a curated identity may offer temporary social rewards but can ultimately distance youth from their true selves, fostering feelings of alienation.

Moreover, the competitive environment on platforms like TikTok where metrics like followers and likes determine social capital introduces new dimensions of peer rivalry and exclusion (Farivar et al., 2022). Those who fail to gain digital visibility risk feeling marginalized. Finally, the omnipresent

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) exacerbates feelings of social inadequacy. Marengo et al. (2021) and Ngo et al. (2024) demonstrated that the real-time stream of peers' social activities leads many youths to feel left out, anxious, and emotionally destabilized.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This scoping review synthesized current knowledge on how social media shapes youth social interaction, revealing both benefits and challenges. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp have redefined friendship and communication, enabling global connections, creative expression, and digital belonging. Youth increasingly engage through visual content and algorithm-driven feeds, creating new modes of intimacy and peer support. Yet, these same platforms foster tensions between authenticity and performance, impacting self-esteem, mental health, and emotional well-being.

Social media also amplifies peer conflict, social comparison, and identity struggles, particularly during adolescence and emerging adulthood. The pressure to maintain idealized personas contributes to emotional fatigue, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and digital loneliness. These dual effects highlight social media's role as both a space for connection and a source of psychological strain. This review, while insightful, has limitations: it did not critically appraise study quality, included only English-language sources, and was geographically skewed toward North America and Europe. It also relied heavily on cross-sectional studies and may not fully capture fast-evolving digital trends.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs, integrate culturally diverse perspectives, and examine the effects of emerging technologies like AI and immersive platforms. Theoretical advancement is needed through frameworks such as Algorithmic Visibility, Networked Publics, and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model, along with perspectives from Cultural Relational Theory and Affect Theory. An intersectional and globally inclusive approach is essential to reflect the varied realities of youth worldwide. Practical implications include strengthening digital literacy education to foster emotional resilience, implementing ethical policy and platform regulations, and encouraging tech designs that prioritize authenticity and well-being. Cross-sector collaboration is key to ensuring that social media becomes a healthier space for youth development in the digital age.

## DECLARATIONS

### Ethics Approval And Consent To Participate

This scoping review did not involve the collection of primary data from human participants. Therefore, ethics approval and informed consent were not required.

### Availability of Data and Materials

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article and its supplementary files.

### Conflicts of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed substantially to the conception, design, analysis, and writing of this article. C.S. led the literature review and data charting process; V.K. contributed to thematic analysis and synthesis; D.H. reviewed and refined the manuscript structure and theoretical framing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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## Appendix 1.

## Summary of Included Studies

No	Author(s) & Year	Country/Region	Social Media Platforms Studied	Sample Characteristics	Methodology	Key Findings	Theoretical Framework	Limitations or Gaps Identified
1	Dwivedi et al. (2022)	UK	Instagram, TikTok	University students (18–25 years), mixed gender	Mixed methods	Identified how algorithmic feeds enhance identity performance and peer comparison	Uses and Gratifications	Focused on UK context; lacks cross-cultural validation
2	Lee et al. (2022)	South Korea	TikTok	Youth aged 15–24, urban high school students	Qualitative interviews	Explored how TikTok's algorithm promotes digital bonding via shared resonance	Algorithmic Personalization (proposed)	Small sample; limited to urban Korean youth
3	Bergs et al. (2023)	Netherlands	Instagram	Micro-influencers aged 20–29, predominantly female	Qualitative analysis	Explored identity work and self-branding among young influencers	Goffman's Self-Presentation	Focused on influencer subculture; not generalizable
4	Gerbaudo (2024)	Italy	Facebook, WhatsApp	Young adults 19–29, low-income communities	Quantitative survey	Found WhatsApp group chats central to emotional regulation	Affective Publics	Lacks longitudinal data; cross-platform effects not explored
5	Allam et al. (2022)	UAE	TikTok, Instagram	Diverse youth 16–28, cross-cultural sample	Mixed methods	Found cross-platform engagement fosters global empathy	None explicitly stated	Did not account for socioeconomic status effects
6	Kang & Lou (2022)	USA	TikTok, Snapchat	Emerging adults 18–24, diverse socioeconomic status	Ethnographic study	Examined the tension between algorithmic agency and user control in shaping social interaction	Human-AI Interaction Theory	Culturally limited; generalizability to Global South unclear
7	Grasso (2025)	Australia	WhatsApp, Facebook, Skype	Long-distance friends, 21–29 years, urban areas	Case study	Showed how synchronous video calls help sustain deep digital friendships	Media Richness Theory	Single-case context; lacks diversity in relationship types
8	McCormack et al. (2022)	UK	Instagram, Twitter	LGBTQ+ youth (16–25 years), urban areas	Focus groups	Highlighted digital platforms as key in building safe spaces for identity and community	Networked Publics	Sample restricted to LGBTQ+ youth; lacks comparison group
9	Pouwels et al. (2021)	Netherlands	Instagram	Adolescents 15–18 years, suburban high schools	Cross-sectional survey	Demonstrated fluctuating friendship closeness via social media in everyday life	Experience Sampling Model	Short observation window; platform changes not accounted for
10	Page-Tan (2020)	Singapore	Facebook, WhatsApp	Emerging adults 18–30, university students	Experimental study	Explored social capital activation through hyperlocal media	Bonding/Bridging Social Capital Theory	Pre-pandemic data; lacks platform evolution analysis
11	Arora (2021)	India	WhatsApp	Rural youth (15–22 years), mixed gender	Qualitative interviews	Investigated how youth used social media for crisis communication post-earthquake	Crisis Communication Theory	Focused on disaster context only; doesn't capture routine interaction
12	R.A. Scott et al. (2022)	Canada	Instagram, TikTok	Indigenous youth 17–24, small communities	Mixed methods	Linked FOMO with peer exclusion and psychological adjustment	FOMO Theory	Narrow age range; didn't assess other platforms
13	Zhang et al. (2022)	China	WeChat, TikTok	High school students 16–19, urban centers	Quantitative survey	Found youth curate emotional vulnerability to align with peer/aesthetic norms	Impression Management	Gender skewed sample; lacks comparison to other platforms

13	Zhang et al. (2022)	China	WeChat, TikTok	High school students 16–19, urban centers	Quantitative survey	Found youth curate emotional vulnerability to align with peer/aesthetic norms	Impression Management	Gender skewed sample; lacks comparison to other platforms
14	Santhosh et al. (2024)	Malaysia	Instagram, Facebook	University students 18–26, urban areas	Focus groups	Peer mentoring through messaging apps helped reduce academic stress	Peer Support Model	Context-specific to education/health; lacks broader generalization
15	Jiang & Sun (2025)	Taiwan	Instagram Stories, Snapchat	Young adults 20–29, metropolitan population	Longitudinal study	Identified status signaling as core to identity work online	Status Theory, Visual Communication	Theoretical paper; lacks direct user data
16	Maran & Raj (2024)	India	Instagram Stories, WhatsApp	University students 19–27, metropolitan areas	Mixed methods	Found that managing curated online identities can increase distress and suicidal ideation	Identity Strain Model	Cross-sectional; lacks offline comparison
17	Heath et al. (2024)	USA	TikTok, Snapchat	Adolescents 15–18, diverse ethnic backgrounds	Qualitative analysis	Explored person-specific effects of social media on self-esteem	Differential Susceptibility Model	Context limited to high-income Europe; may not generalize globally
18	Lewin et al. (2021)	Australia	Facebook, Instagram	High school students 15–19, suburban and rural settings	Quantitative survey	Tested media-based prevention for cyberbullying	Prevention Science Framework	Pilot nature limits generalizability; platform-specific only
19	Foyet & Louis (2023)	Cameroon	WhatsApp, Facebook	Youth 16–25, low-income urban communities	Focus groups	Explored follower attachment and negative engagement cycles	Attachment Theory	Did not examine broader peer relationships beyond influencers
20	Jimenez et al. (2021)	Mexico	Instagram, Twitter	University students 18–24, first-generation college goers	Ethnographic study	Identified link between cyberbullying and poor parental support	Ecological Systems Theory	Data lacks cultural diversity; focus on Western youth
21	Nyakana & Smith (2023)	Uganda	WhatsApp	Rural youth 15–22, low connectivity areas	Qualitative interviews	Examined digital spaces as disclosure channels	Trauma Disclosure Theory	Focused on specific trauma; not generalizable to all youth
22	Ilbury (2022)	South Africa	Facebook, TikTok	Urban youth 17–26, multilingual population	Mixed methods	Described coping strategies among youth experiencing FOMO	Existential Positive Psychology	May overrepresent middle-class digital natives
23	Kazerooni et al. (2020)	Iran	Telegram, Instagram	University students 19–29, mixed gender	Cross-sectional survey	Analyzed visibility labor and attention economies	Visibility Labor Theory	Focus on influencers; lacks general youth perspectives
24	Meng & Wang (2023)	China	WeChat, TikTok	High school students 15–18, urban centers	Quantitative study	Advocated for integrating indigenous epistemologies into digital psychology	Cross-Cultural Epistemology	Theoretical only; lacks primary empirical data
25	Binder et al. (2023)	Germany	Instagram	Young adults 20–28, visual content creators	Focus groups	Investigated trust and support in closed digital networks	Social Capital Theory	Sample drawn from university students; not representative of rural youth
26	Chrystall (2023)	New Zealand	Instagram, TikTok	LGBTQ+ youth 16–25, urban and semi-urban settings	Qualitative analysis	Investigated cyber harassment patterns and user intent	Theory of Planned Behavior	Focus on safety threats; less on supportive interactions
27	Hajli et al. (2021)	UK	Facebook	Adolescents 14–17, ethnically diverse sample	Mixed methods	Found digital peer communities enhance emotional coping	Peer Support Model	Sample may exclude non-diagnosed or offline users

28	Smit et al. (2021)	Netherlands	WhatsApp, Instagram	Youth 15–24, secondary school students	Quantitative survey	Explored local discourse on digital support and belonging	Cultural Media Studies	Context-specific; not generalizable outside urban poverty
29	Abarna et al. (2022)	Sri Lanka	Facebook, TikTok	Youth 16–25, post-conflict regions	Case study	Showed negotiation of youth-adult boundaries via digital literacy	Youth Development Theory	Focused on education settings; informal usage less explored
30	Rogers (2021)	USA	Instagram, Facebook	College students 18–23, primarily middle-class	Quantitative survey	Emojis functioned as nuanced emotional communication tools	Semiotic Analysis	Cultural specificity may limit transferability
31	Valkenburg et al. (2021)	Netherlands	Instagram	Adolescents 14–17, urban and suburban areas	Longitudinal study	Found FOMO significantly disrupts academic focus	FOMO Theory	Education-centered; lacks exploration of peer dynamics
32	Farivar et al. (2022)	Canada	Facebook, TikTok	Youth 15–24, immigrant communities	Mixed methods	Identified relationship between curated personas and self-esteem fluctuation	Self-Presentation Theory	University-focused; lacks rural/less literate comparisons
33	Kutok et al. (2021)	USA	Instagram, Snapchat	High school students 15–18, urban public schools	Quantitative survey	Social media used for civic engagement and emotional expression in schools	Digital Citizenship	Limited to institutional contexts; informal networks less observed
34	Grunin et al. (2020)	Russia	Vkontakte, Instagram	University students 18–25, diverse fields of study	Qualitative interviews	Emphasized visual fluency as key to relational influence	Digital Literacy Theory	Lacks emotional/peer impact analysis
35	Kee et al. (2023)	Singapore	Instagram, WhatsApp	Youth 17–26, digital-native generation	Mixed methods	Ephemeral content linked to cultural memory and identity signaling	Cultural Resonance Theory	Small sample; specific to media-trained youth
36	Marengo et al. (2021)	Italy	Facebook, Instagram	Adolescents 15–19, suburban high schools	Quantitative survey	Social media engagement, especially on Instagram, was associated with increased FOMO and perceived peer exclusion	FOMO Theory	Focused on a single age group and region; causality not established
37	Ngo et al. (2024)	Vietnam	TikTok, Instagram	Young adults 18–29, urban settings	Focus groups	Explored how algorithmic content fosters parasocial intimacy and collective emotional experiences	Affective Media Theory	Context limited to urban Vietnam; lacks longitudinal perspective
38	Littman-Ovadia & Russo-Netzer (2024)	Israel	Instagram, WhatsApp	University students 19–28, mixed cultural backgrounds	Longitudinal study	Found meaning-making and spirituality moderate the negative effects of FOMO	Existential Positive Psychology	Cultural bias may limit transferability; self-report limitations
39	Sarwatay & Raman (2021)	India	Facebook, WhatsApp	Youth 16–24, rural and urban comparisons	Qualitative study	Digital media shapes gendered emotional expression and family conflict navigation	Gendered Emotionality Framework	Focused mainly on female narratives; lacks male perspective
40	Anjum & Aziz (2024)	Pakistan	TikTok, Instagram	College students 18–25, private universities	Quantitative survey	Emphasized tension between Western aesthetic norms and local identity expression	Indigenous Psychology	Overrepresentation of elite students; rural views underexplored
41	Lichy et al. (2022)	France	Facebook, Instagram	Youth 15–29, small towns and cities	Case study	Demonstrated how youth used digital content to project aspirational belonging across class lines	Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory	Limited to small-town youth; may not reflect urban strategies
42	Evans (2022)	USA	TikTok	Gen Z influencers 17–23, major urban centers	Ethnographic study	Found that platform algorithms encourage emotionally	Visibility Labor Theory	Influencer focus may overlook general youth behavior

						performative content to enhance visibility		
43	Landberg et al. (2023)	Sweden	Instagram, Snapchat	Youth 15–21, suburban schools	Mixed methods	Identified a tension between authentic sharing and self-monitoring due to peer surveillance	Impression Management Theory	Focused on Northern European youth; lacks cultural diversity
44	Kaur & Saukko (2022)	Finland	Instagram, WhatsApp	High school students 16–18, multilingual communities	Qualitative interviews	Explored how language and identity intersect in digital peer group bonding	Linguistic Identity Theory	Limited sample size; results not generalizable across cultures
45	Page-Tan (2020)	Singapore	Facebook, WhatsApp	Emerging adults 18–30, digital media students	Experimental study	Showed how hyperlocal social media platforms activate civic awareness and relational ties	Social Capital Theory	Context of digital media training may influence responses
46	Dwivedi et al. (2020)	UK	Facebook, Instagram	University students 18–25, mixed genders	Mixed methods	Examined how students construct digital selves through narrative and visual cues	Self-Presentation Theory	Cultural bias toward Western youth identity practices
47	Abidin (2020)	Singapore	TikTok, Instagram	Young influencers 16–24, urban areas	Ethnographic study	Found visibility labor to be emotionally taxing yet normalized among Southeast Asian influencers	Visibility Labor Theory	Limited to public figures; lacks non-influencer youth comparison
48	Kutaga (2024)	Poland	Instagram, TikTok	Youth 15–22, suburban schools	Qualitative interviews	Investigated how visual fluency supports peer influence and trend participation	Visual Communication Theory	Sample limited to youth with active visual engagement
49	Santhosh et al. (2024)	India	Instagram Stories, WhatsApp	College students 18–26, metropolitan regions	Focus groups	Explored how ephemeral content facilitates emotional experimentation and memory shaping	Ephemerality and Identity Theory	Sample drawn from communication/media students; generalizability limited
50	Jiang & Sun (2025)	Taiwan	Snapchat, Instagram	Youth 15–24, bilingual population	Longitudinal study	Found that bilingual youth used platform affordances to navigate dual cultural belonging	Bicultural Identity Integration Theory	Results may not apply to monolingual or rural youth
51	Heath et al. (2024)	USA	TikTok, Facebook	High school students 14–19, urban centers	Quantitative survey	Found that social media served as a dual space for civic expression and emotional relief	Digital Citizenship Theory	Focused on school-based contexts; informal settings underrepresented
52	Lewin et al. (2021)	Australia	WhatsApp, Facebook	Indigenous youth 16–25, rural settings	Mixed methods	Identified digital storytelling as a vehicle for intergenerational and cultural bonding	Indigenous Knowledge Theory	Specific to Indigenous youth; not generalizable to broader population
53	Foyet & Louis (2023)	Cameroon	WhatsApp, TikTok	Urban youth 15–29, low digital literacy	Qualitative study	Highlighted how youth adapted to digital platforms to assert agency despite structural constraints	Digital Inclusion Framework	Limited access and platform familiarity may influence results
54	Jimenez et al. (2021)	Mexico	Instagram, Twitter	College students 18–22, first-generation migrants	Ethnographic study	Explored negotiation of belonging and marginality through visual and textual posts	Migrant Identity Theory	Culturally and geographically limited; lacks longitudinal scope
55	Nyakana & Smith (2023)	Uganda	WhatsApp, Facebook	Youth 15–21, rural and peri-urban regions	Qualitative interviews	Found digital spaces were used for emotional ventilation, informal counseling, and community bonding during social and economic hardship	Emotional Resilience Framework	Lacks longitudinal perspective; underrepresents youth without digital access

56	Ilbury (2022)	South Africa	Facebook, Instagram	Emerging adults 18–28, multilingual users	Mixed methods	Youth leverage platforms for political critique and emotional release in transitional democracies	Postcolonial Media Theory	Specific to democratic transitions; less relevant in stable regimes
57	Kazerooni et al. (2020)	Iran	Telegram, WhatsApp	High school students 16–19, urban areas	Cross-sectional survey	Messaging platforms provided peer support but also increased academic pressure	Peer Support Theory	Survey-based; lacks qualitative depth in peer dynamics
58	Meng & Wang (2023)	China	WeChat, TikTok	Adolescents 15–17, urban and rural comparison	Quantitative study	Identified contrasting digital stress profiles among urban vs. rural teens	Digital Stress Theory	Limited to educational outcomes; informal emotional content not included
59	Binder et al. (2023)	Germany	Instagram	Creative youth 18–25, visual storytelling projects	Focus groups	Explored how visual storytelling supports emotional articulation and social bonding	Narrative Identity Theory	Limited to youth with creative training; lacks generalizability
60	Chrystall (2023)	New Zealand	TikTok, Instagram	LGBTQ+ youth 16–24, urban cities	Qualitative analysis	Digital platforms used for emotional self-affirmation, solidarity, and identity safety	Queer Digital Space Theory	Context may overrepresent openly queer participants
61	Hajli et al. (2021)	UK	Facebook, WhatsApp	Adolescents 14–18, diverse ethnic backgrounds	Mixed methods	Found emotional contagion spreads through networked peer groups, shaping collective moods	Social Influence Theory	Focused mainly on mood regulation, not deeper relationships
62	Smit et al. (2021)	Netherlands	Instagram, Snapchat	High school students 15–19, suburban areas	Quantitative survey	Identified that fear of exclusion predicts frequent emotional checking behaviors	Social Comparison Theory	Survey lacks emotional granularity; context-specific to Western Europe
63	Abarna et al. (2022)	Sri Lanka	Facebook, TikTok	Youth 16–25, post-war communities	Case study	Explored how social media is used for emotional resilience, post-conflict solidarity, and healing	Community Resilience Theory	Regional trauma context may limit applicability elsewhere
64	Rogers (2021)	USA	Instagram, Facebook	College students 18–23, predominantly female	Quantitative study	Social media expression tied to emotion regulation, particularly among women navigating gendered roles	Gendered Emotion Regulation Theory	Overrepresentation of female respondents; lacks intersectional focus
65	Valkenburg et al. (2021)	Netherlands	Instagram	Adolescents 14–17, urban schools	Longitudinal study	Found bidirectional relationship between social media engagement and emotional well-being	Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model	Cultural context limited to Western Europe
66	Farivar et al. (2022)	Canada	TikTok, Instagram	Immigrant youth 16–24, first-generation families	Mixed methods	Digital spaces provided both emotional dissonance and agency for bicultural negotiation	Acculturative Stress Theory	Focused on first-generation youth; lacks contrast group
67	Kutok et al. (2021)	USA	Facebook, Instagram	Youth 15–19, high school populations	Quantitative survey	Higher emotional posting linked to peer support but also vulnerability to online scrutiny	Emotional Self-Disclosure Theory	Self-report bias; doesn't track longitudinal outcomes
68	Grunin et al. (2020)	Russia	Vkontakte, Instagram	University students 18–26, mixed faculties	Qualitative interviews	Explored how digital networks shape emotional identity in transitional post-Soviet youth	Post-Transition Identity Theory	Socio-political context may limit wider application
69	Kee et al. (2023)	Singapore	Instagram, WhatsApp	Digital-native youth 17–25, metropolitan areas	Mixed methods	Found emotional regulation practices embedded in routines of content curation and archiving	Digital Emotion Regulation Model	Limited to youth with consistent device access
70	Marengo et al. (2021)	Italy	Facebook, Instagram	High school students 15–19, suburban communities	Quantitative survey	Validated link between FOMO and social media stress, especially on Instagram	FOMO Theory	Similar sample to earlier study; potential redundancy in findings

71	Ngo et al. (2024)	Vietnam	TikTok, Facebook	University students 18–26, urban youth	Focus groups	Algorithmic feeds promoted emotional resonance and pseudo-intimacy in peer exchanges	Affective Media Theory	Urban bias; lacks non-student perspectives
72	Littman-Ovadia & Russo-Netzer (2024)	Israel	Instagram, WhatsApp	Youth 16–24, multicultural environments	Longitudinal study	Meaning-making and spiritual orientation buffered FOMO-induced emotional instability	Existential Positive Psychology	Focused on religious and cultural minorities; limited generalizability
73	Sarwatay & Raman (2021)	India	Facebook, WhatsApp	Youth 15–22, rural and urban comparisons	Qualitative interviews	Gendered digital behavior shaped how emotions were shared and managed	Gendered Emotionality Framework	Predominantly female narratives; male voices underrepresented
74	Anjum & Aziz (2024)	Pakistan	TikTok, Instagram	College students 18–24, public and private universities	Quantitative survey	Highlighted aesthetic conformity and emotional restraint due to societal expectations	Indigenous Psychology	Overemphasis on urban universities; less on rural youth
75	Lichy et al. (2022)	France	Facebook, Instagram	Youth 15–29, mixed urban and rural communities	Case study	Youth performed aspirational belonging through curated digital identities	Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory	Small-scale study; regional cultural differences may affect interpretation
76	Evans (2022)	USA	TikTok, Instagram	Gen Z influencers 16–22, metropolitan regions	Ethnographic study	Visibility algorithms drive emotionally performative content among youth influencers	Visibility Labor Theory	Limited to influencers; does not reflect broader youth usage
77	Landberg et al. (2023)	Sweden	Instagram, Snapchat	High school students 15–18, suburban towns	Mixed methods	Peer surveillance led to tension between authentic emotional expression and self-monitoring	Impression Management Theory	Context bound to Northern European cultural norms
78	Kaur & Saukko (2022)	Finland	Instagram, WhatsApp	Adolescents 16–19, multilingual students	Qualitative interviews	Explored identity construction through multilingual digital interactions and emotional disclosure	Linguistic Identity Theory	Small sample; focused mainly on language minorities
79	Page-Tan (2020)	Singapore	Facebook, WhatsApp	Emerging adults 18–30, digital media professionals	Experimental study	Localized platforms enhance civic trust and emotional belonging in online communities	Social Capital Theory	Participants already media-literate; may not reflect general youth
80	Allam et al. (2022)	UAE	TikTok, Instagram	Youth 15–28, expatriate and local populations	Mixed methods	Explored emotional ambivalence between global content norms and local cultural expectations	Cultural Ambivalence Theory	Differences between expatriate and local groups not always clear-cut
81	McCormack et al. (2022)	UK	Twitter, Instagram	LGBTQ+ youth 16–24, urban and suburban areas	Focus groups	Found digital platforms serve as emotional lifelines for identity expression and social connection in marginal spaces	Queer Digital Intimacy Framework	May overrepresent digitally active LGBTQ+ youth; lacks offline comparison
82	Zhang et al. (2022)	China	WeChat, TikTok	Adolescents 15–18, major cities	Quantitative study	Identified link between platform multitasking and emotional burnout, especially in high-performance academic settings	Digital Burnout Model	City-based sample; may not reflect rural youth or diverse academic contexts