



NEVERMIND

# Newsletter

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Issue 6

## ***The Impact of Social Media on Mental Health***



*cnet.com*

Statista reports that in 2018, around 2.62 billion people used social media. This number is expected to continue to rise, with 2019 expected to have 2.77 billion users on social media.<sup>1</sup> This is a very large percentage of the global population, so what kind of impact is it having on our mental health?

Sites such as Facebook and Instagram have seen a rise in popularity, with Facebook itself even acknowledging that social media can be bad for mental health.<sup>2</sup> The BBC reported that digital media producer, Paul Allen, felt that Facebook left him “feeling low

and vulnerable every day” and that it made his anxiety and panic attacks worse.<sup>3</sup>

A UK survey conducted by the Royal Society for Public Health asked 1,479 people aged between 14-24 to rank social media apps relative to issues such as anxiety, depression and loneliness<sup>4</sup>. Rankings of social media sites were as follows (having most positive to most negative impact on mental health): YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram.

Although social media tends to be used by younger generations, older people are starting to access the internet more and more. As such, many are at risk of developing a mental health problem related to the pressures and constant exposure to information and

### **Recent activities from the NEVERMIND Team!**



The NEVERMIND consortium held their sixth technical meeting on October 22-23<sup>rd</sup> 2019 at the Polytechnic University of Madrid.

news via social media. The Office for National Statistics researched internet usage in the UK and obtained the following information<sup>5</sup>:

- In 2018, 89% of adults in the UK used the internet at least once a week, with 9 out of 10 households having internet access.
- From May-July 2018, around 70% of 55-64 year olds accessed the internet using a

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278414/number-of-worldwide-social-network-users/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/dec/15/facebook-mental-health-psychology-social-media>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-46235392?intlink\\_from\\_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cw1w3xz04egt/mental-health&link\\_location=live-reporting-story](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-46235392?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cw1w3xz04egt/mental-health&link_location=live-reporting-story)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/news/food-and-diet/instagram-ranked-worst-for-mental-health-in-teen-survey/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2018>

smartphone, in comparison with ~85% of 45-54 year olds, ~95% of 35-44 year olds, ~98% of 25-34 year olds and ~96% of 16-24 year olds.

Forbes (2017) suggest that there are several ways that social media affects our mental health<sup>6</sup>:

*Addiction* – reviews from Nottingham Trent University found that users of social media saw it as a method of escapism or a way to alter mood.

*Sadness* – it was found that Facebook use was linked to less life satisfaction and that the more it was used, the lower it became. It has, rather ironically, also been linked to social isolation.

*Comparison of our lives to other peoples* – judging and viewing other people's social media has been linked to depressive symptoms. Furthermore, sites such as Instagram have previously been criticised for promoting

unrealistic body images, a feature which could lead to depression or eating disorders amongst social media users. Studies have also shown that using social media can trigger jealousy.

*Misconceptions about the effect of social media* – many people believe that using social media will make them feel better, however studies have shown that most of the time, people usually felt worse after using sites such as Facebook.

*Loneliness* – it has been determined that more friends or followers on social media doesn't necessarily mean that the individual has a good social life, in fact, quite often the opposite. Virtual friendships are often cited as a method of seeking acceptance from others, an unhealthy habit linked to loneliness.

In the United States, research conducted for the Depression & Anxiety Association of America, (2016), surveyed 1,787 adults between the ages of 19 and 32.<sup>7</sup> It concluded that the use of social media was "significantly associated with increased depression" and that "the incidence is increasing". It was surmised that this is because young adults, in particular, tend to be at critical junctures as far as identity development and social norm establishment are concerned.

Going forward, as it is unlikely that people will leave social media in the near future and the reported forecast is set to only see an increase in users, it is critical that there is a strategy in place for mitigating the consequences associated with social media use and the potential for mental health problems.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2017/06/30/a-run-down-of-social-medias-effects-on-our-mental-health/#9ae485e2e5af>

<sup>7</sup> Lin et al. (2016), Association between social media use and depression among U.S. young adults. <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22466>

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