

**Connectivity at a cost: Adolescents' use of social
media
and its effect on their mental health.**

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Abstract

Since the advent of social media, young age groups in particular have increasingly embraced these internet platforms and smartphone applications as a means of communication. Just how this trend has impacted upon the mental health of adolescents has been a subject of much research, with varying results. This Journalism Project aims to explore what is the New Zealand experience in relation to this topic. Results of a survey reveal an essence of teenagers experiencing a transforming connectivity with inherent emotional pressure. A journalism investigation provides an up-to-date experiential dimension to the topic and further shows a reality of New Zealand adolescents experiencing harm due to their high use of social media. Further research, alongside education curriculum changes and more guidance in the public domain over what is the right age to join social media sites, is recommended.

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1. Introduction

Social media use has undergone explosive growth throughout the last decade, empowering individuals throughout societies and across the world to become publishers in their own right. It is within the fields of academic and journalistic inquiry surrounding this evolving communication phenomenon that this Journalism Project is placed. The project is presented in three parts. The first is a long-form journalism feature which investigates the extensive use of social media by adolescents, and questions a lack of guidance in the public domain on what is the right age to join social media sites. It is presented under the heading Feature Story, and is entitled *Kids and the Drug of the Internet*. The second part is a review of literature on the topic, which encompasses a research project after revealing a gap in the literature around what is the experience of New Zealand adolescents. In an effort to help fill this gap, and with the goal of informing the long-form journalism feature, the research question is formulated - “What has been the experience of New Zealand adolescents growing up with social media, in the wider context of their mental health?” Results of an online survey are presented in the third part of the Journalism Project, alongside a discussion of how they build on literature review findings, and long-form journalism feature insights, and how they may inform future research. The two main findings from the Journalism Project are that New Zealand adolescents enjoy life-transforming connectivity as a result of their use of social media, but it comes with inherent emotional pressures, and that cyberspace has many mental health risks for children, and is thus an environment from which they require some protection. In conclusion, there is support for education system improvements and a call for stronger guidance in the public domain on what is the right age to join social media sites.

The first two parts of the Journalism Project necessitated attention to ethical considerations. For the long-form journalism feature, my role was journalist, and for the literature review, my role was researcher. Both of these roles require a thorough adherence to ethical principles, particularly due to there being a potential for children or vulnerable people to be involved (Massey University Human Ethics Committee, 2015). For the role of journalist, the “power of unwritten codes – conventions of practice absorbed through training and experience in the workplace” are an important consideration (Tully, 2014, p. 319). I am employed as a journalist,

and unwritten codes to which my employer's newsroom adheres include respecting societal, cultural and individual values of interview subjects and news article participants. At the same time, it is considered important to be true to one's own values and one's role as a journalist to inform the public. Interviews are thus conducted with informed consent, and written transcripts of the quotes which are going to be used are, in special cases, sent back to the interviewee to check. These special cases include in the instance of the material the interviewee is sharing being of a personally sensitive nature, as was the case for this long-form journalism feature. As a result I sent transcripts of information gained from interviewees who shared their own personal stories, back to them for checking, and any changes made were actioned. In addition, interview subjects chose whether they wished to have their own name or a pseudonym used, they were contacted confidentially, and interviewed in private settings. Interviewees were informed of the purpose of the project and in the case of the article being accepted for publication I am to let them know where and when it will be published. For the role of researcher, ethical principles needed to be paramount due to the research involving human participants (Massey University Human Ethics Committee, 2015). Major ethical principles outlined by Massey University Human Ethics Committee (2015) include respect for persons, minimisation of harm to participants, informed and voluntary consent, respect for privacy and confidentiality, the avoidance of unnecessary deception, and social and cultural sensitivity to age, gender, culture, religion and social class. The research tool used for this project was an online survey. The online nature of the survey ensured anonymity, and potential participants aged 16 to 22 were confidentially asked if they might be able to voluntarily complete it at a time that suited them. While not children, older teenagers could still be considered to be quite young, and it is important to take into account a natural power imbalance which could exist between teenagers of this age and myself as an adult (Massey University Human Ethics Committee, 2015). Harm includes emotional distress, and the young age of participants combined with the sensitive subject matter meant I was particularly sensitive to ensuring harm minimisation. Participants were informed prior to starting the survey what it was about and what the results were for, with a qualifying statement and introduction paragraph under the survey title. There were helpline service numbers provided in the survey, in the case of it raising any issues for participants. There were contact details for myself as the researcher and the Massey University ethics director in the case of anyone having concerns about the ethics of the survey. The latter was provided in the case of a participant having concerns they wished to air to someone other than the researcher. The project was evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk.

2. Feature Story

Kids and the Drug of the Internet

Adolescents are negotiating a complex social landscape as the digital revolution combines with the intoxicating effect of social media. Susan Sandys investigates the stories of parents, professionals who work with children, and cyberbullying survivors about the harm which can result from sites such as Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. She finds little is being done to reinforce the message that the sites are, officially, illegal for under 13s.

Who knew that we could have such power at our fingertips? Hovering over a shiny-screened device in the palm of our hand, we tap and scroll, scroll and tap, conjuring up magic from the uncharted two-dimensions beyond. Brightness, colour, symbols, words. Pictures, sound, faces and smiles.

In three-dimensions we move from one mundane commitment to the next, but everything and everyone that matters is just a touch away.

Social networking in particular has us entranced, and perhaps even addicted. But how are our kids coping? Not well, if you consider the latest cases of alleged cyberbullying leading to suicide. This year alone there has been at least three - Mallory Grossman, 12, in the United States, who killed herself after being bullied on Instagram, Snapchat and by text messages, and 14-year-old Brits Sam Abel, bullied on Snapchat, and Megan Evans, bullied on Snapchat and Facebook. They follow Kyana Vergara, aged 12, last year in Palmerston North.

Cyberbullying is among the more serious risks which can arise from use of social media, alongside accessing harmful content. But it is more than these which have parents and professionals worried. There is the pressure of constant communications causing sleep deprivation and anxiety, as well as a risk of body image and life quality comparisons leading to feelings of low self-worth.

The digital revolution mixed in with the intoxicating effect of social media has created a complex landscape, one which many believe has contributed to the dire state of youth mental health. There are even calls for legislation to stop allowing preteens on networking sites, amidst

widespread conviction that a new digital technologies curriculum and further mental health education cannot come soon enough.

At the same time, social media companies, while setting an age limit of 13 in accordance with United States law, appear to entice children onto their sites. And New Zealand's internet safety organisation, Netsafe - which receives some funding from Facebook, Instagram and Google - does not strongly reinforce the message that the sites are not suitable for under-13s.

Ashburton youth worker Juanita Richards, who works with disengaged youth, believes making social media illegal for under-13s would drastically reduce numbers of youth suffering severe sleep deprivation. She likens it to legislation around the age of consent, where it would not stop everyone, but it would provide a strong signal to parents that they need to take responsibility for their children's internet use.

Joining social media sites before 13 is in violation of the age of eligibility for most networks, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube and Musical.ly. The corporate owners of these networks are domiciled in the United States, so have to set the age limit at 13 in order to abide by the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), which prohibits commercial websites from capturing data on children without parental permission. However, the privacy law does not hold companies responsible for members who lie about their age. And with there being no legislation in the majority of countries, including New Zealand, to preclude under 13s, it is easy for children to sign up with a fictional birthdate.

Many of the young teenagers Juanita sees in her work go online when they get home from school, and are still glued to their devices at 2am.

"These kids don't get bored," she says. "They don't have time in their lives to get bored because they are constantly being entertained."

Her experience suggests it is financially-stressed families whose children are the most vulnerable, as often the parents are at work in the evenings. She knows of children as young as eight with Facebook accounts, and many parents unfortunately have an "oh-well" attitude, believing that they are going to join one day, so why not now. YouTube becomes the most popular site with children around 14- to 15-years-old, and they can get 100 notifications per day from the people they are following with new videos to watch.

Parents often model the same behaviour, spending a lot of time following their Facebook and Instagram feeds.

The switch from television viewing to internet entertainment has not only extended the screen-time boundaries that families may once have adhered to. It has also enabled the viewing of harmful content such as pornography, and this is feeding into promiscuous behaviours and unrealistic concepts of what sex should be like, Juanita says. One youth told her recently about a girl-on-girl video he and some friends watched at his home at midnight, while his parents were in bed asleep.

In schools, guidance counsellors are dealing with teenagers who are logged in 24/7, and suffering all the associated harms that come with it.

Kathryn, a guidance counsellor at a low decile high school in South Auckland, says she recently had one of the college's more studious pupils in her office, telling her he believed Instagram had taken over his life. After the 17-year-old talked to her about the problem, he decided to delete his account, and did this in front of her.

“He spent between eight and 10 hours per day on Instagram, his mind was constantly on it,” Kathryn says.

“He said 'What was the world like before social media?’”

She gave only her first name as she does not want her school, with less than 1000 pupils mainly of Pacifica heritage, identified, believing the problems she talks about are encountered by most schools.

Bullying and suicide ideation are some of the more serious issues. In her job she regularly sees students who self-harm, and one of them said to her recently that she just had to get off Facebook, mainly because of posts from a depressed friend who hated her life and was thinking of committing suicide. This had made the girl start to think the same way. Social media is contributing to the mental distress experienced by such vulnerable youth, Kathryn says.

She says pupils in Years 9 and 10 mainly use Facebook and Facebook Messenger, and the two platforms have been causing problems for years. Abusive and insulting exchanges escalate into physical violence, and fights are caused from misunderstandings around comments. Sometimes parents become involved, making abusive posts in defence of their children. Cyberbullies create fake accounts to comment or privately message their victims, and accounts get hacked by former friends or romantic partners who have fallen out.

Many kids are not developing the skills to talk face to face, and are building their social statuses around how many comments, likes, friends and followers they have. They are constructing

their identities online, uploading photos which may not relate to their real lives and how they are feeling, but more so in response to trends and peer pressure. Small numbers of pupils are also affected by pornography addiction and online gaming addiction, she says.

“There are positive sides of social media, but I think the amount of time young people spend on it is hugely detrimental,” Kathryn says. “For young people there's more negatives than there are positives.”

Annually, she is among teachers leading a school camp, where students have to hand their phones in before they go to bed. The rule was introduced after staff were up in the night dealing with emotional fallouts from pupils reacting to their latest social media updates.

“I think it's crazy, out of control really, for quite a few kids,” she says.

In the relatively affluent rural hinterland of the South Island, the lush green of a wet spring in the spacious grounds of the 480-pupil Mount Hutt College is backdropped by postcard-pretty snow-capped mountains. Here the problems may be slightly different, but they are problems nonetheless.

Paul Wilkins, a 61-year-old dad of two, has been a school guidance counsellor for almost 30 years, including the last 10 at the college. He has recently himself just upgraded to a smartphone, and can only reminisce about what things were like before these ubiquitous little devices arrived on the scene. Less than a decade ago, his guidance role focussed on mediation, helping students with personal problems, family counselling and sorting out bullying.

“But in more recent times, one half to one third of my role is in some way related to social media,” he says. He rues just how serious things have become in the last five years in particular, and wants to see parents take more control of their children's internet use, and education around the topic to increase in schools.

A recent survey he did at the school suggested students are spending up to eight hours per day interacting on social media, and checking their phones up to hundreds of times throughout the day. Those in intense relationship situations, either romantic or friendship alliances, can be highly sensitised to any notifications coming through.

“They are unlikely to ignore their phone because there might be an update. Their boyfriend might message to say 'Let's get back together'.”

There is a tendency for youth to follow the latest trends exemplified by celebrities, and early on in a developing romance something a boy might ask for is a revealing photo. Those photos

might later end up on a networking site, causing much anguish for the girl. And he has counselled those in despair after finding out they are dumped from a romance upon checking their partner's Facebook and seeing that 'In a Relationship' has changed to 'Single'.

An analysis of the latest data from Auckland University Department of Statistics' CensusAtSchool backs up the concerns of Kathryn and Paul, revealing social media has widened its reach among pre-teens in the last eight years. One third of 11- and 12-year-olds use Snapchat, and about 40 per cent of this age group are on Instagram. This climbs to more than half of 12- and 13-year-olds and more than 80 per cent of 17- and 18-year-olds. Snapchat and Instagram have taken over from Facebook which was at similar levels of popularity in 2013, however Facebook is still in high use, particularly among older teenagers, with more than 90 per cent belonging to the site. In 2009, Bebo was the more dominant platform, however only about 23 per cent of 11- and 12-year-olds were on the site.

Parents “overwhelmed”

Among those negotiating the intricacies of our brave new hypersocial cyberworld are Robyn Hood and her daughter Piper, 13, who live in Canterbury.

“Sometimes I wish I didn't have to worry about it,” Piper says about social media, as she sits next to her mum at their home dining table. She appears very much the child, in school uniform after just getting home, her long brown hair tied back from a makeup free-face.

Piper has her own smartphone and has been on Instagram, Snapchat and Musical.ly since the age of 11, but last year shut her Instagram down for a few months when there was some bullying in a message group she had with school friends.

Robyn noticed what was going on because she is logged into Piper's account on her own phone, which was a condition of her joining Instagram. A girl pretending to be Piper was sending intimidating messages to another member. Robyn messaged and said she knew a “tech guy” who would be able to find out who they were. The girl ended up owning up and apologising.

The reason Piper wishes she sometimes did not have to worry about social media, is because she does not always feel like reading her messages and responding. However, she stays on her Snapchat and Instagram throughout the day, because she does not want to miss anything. And generally her experience is a good one, but she likes that her mum is logged into her Instagram account, and at this stage does not want any more freedom than she has already.

“I like that you can talk to your friends online, and you can post pictures for everyone to see

and that,” she says.

Piper was recently at a hockey tournament and on the way back her team bumped into rugby player Sam Cane at the airport; they took a photo with him and she posted it on Instagram, where she has 343 followers, and it got 91 likes. She has a number of Snapchat 'Streaks' going with friends, and the longest is 120 with her friend Brianna. Streaks are a feature on Snapchat, popular with kids, which illustrate the number of consecutive days you can send a snap to the same friend.

Piper takes her cellphone to class, where pupils are not allowed to use them, but they hide them and use them anyway, sending messages to friends and parents.

Robyn says sometimes she will hear Piper's phone buzz after midnight with messages being sent in her friend group. However, for Piper her phone is out of bounds overnight and she is not allowed to message or text this late.

Robyn is a photographer who is also on Instagram, as well as Snapchat and Facebook, and like her daughter always has her phone with her. She says social media has its place, and she follows some of Piper's friends and they follow her on Instagram. In retrospect, perhaps last year had been too early for Piper and her friends to be on Instagram, she says, as the bullying incident had shown they were not mature enough to act responsibly.

Canterbury mum Elizabeth* believes parents have been overwhelmed to some degree by the growth of social media. She is friends and followers with her children on Facebook and Instagram, yet it is not possible to be aware of all the different exchanges they are involved in, she says.

She has three teenage daughters, and for one of them, 14-year-old Tia*, social media is not a big deal. She has a Facebook but prefers to doodle in her sketch pad. However, she believes 13-year-old Jessica* and 18-year-old Rose* are addicted.

For Rose, a high-achieving creative young woman, there is a “constant stimulation of the dramas of life” as her phone is rarely out of her hand. She will often either be posting about what has happened in her own life or commenting on what has happened in someone else's. Jessica on the other hand spends about five hours per day on social media, often while doing other internet-based activities such as watching a movie.

“It can create a lot of tension for them, they get more upset in friendships and relationships because they are blurting and not thinking about what they are saying,” Elizabeth says.

Elizabeth believes a house rule to turn off phones at night probably does not go far enough. In

hindsight she wishes she had of introduced tougher screen-time limits as a condition of getting their first phones when they were 11. She feels it is too late to do this now, and even having discussions about any concerns she has is difficult.

“If you try and have a discussion with them, even in the most general terms, they can get very defensive, they won't talk about it,” she says.

Elizabeth is concerned about inappropriate material which can be accessed, such as self-harm pages, pornography, violence and unedited graphic news reports, and she has blocked sites from the home laptop in the past. She has not been able to do this on her children's personal phones because she believes if she tried, they would just be able to unblock it.

Illegal underagers

The COPPA law has more to do with protecting the privacy of children than protecting them from inappropriate content, and it is a law that social media companies themselves do not appear to agree with. Neither Snapchat, Instagram nor Facebook replied to this author's request for information, but Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has mentioned wanting to open up membership to children in the past, while the animation and pictorial features of other platforms make them an obvious drawcard.

Most child psychology and parenting experts believe parents and children should stick to the 13-and-over rule.

Parenting Place creative and development director Dave Atkinson says the preteen years are a unique age in which use of such platforms is driven by a desire to connect with peers, and there is a lot of pressure on both adolescents, to be on the sites, and parents, to allow their children to join. He visits intermediate and high schools regularly, and says it is now the norm for preteens to be on social media.

“It's socially accepted now, but the question is - does that make it right?” he says.

The answer to that is no, he says. Parents allowing children to sign up before the age of 13 are sending a “dangerous message”, as they are implicitly saying it is okay to follow friends and not obey the rules of the sites.

“At that age you do need to put boundaries in place,” Dave says.

Additionally, youngsters are unwittingly creating a digital footprint they may later regret, are potentially exposing their lives to strangers, and face inherent difficulties in navigating the social complexities of the online world.

Dave's main concern, however, is around the potential for social media to be a window to inappropriate content, particularly pornography. Access to sexual material targeted at youngsters is a persistent problem online including on social media sites, despite moderators trying their best to keep on top of it. This represents a unique challenge, due to the effect such content can have on a young person's development, how they construct their identity and form Platonic and sexual relationships.

In the United States there is a residential rehabilitation facility, reSTART Life in Washington, dedicated solely to internet addiction.

The chief clinical officer there is Hilarie Cash. She sees the worst of how internet addiction can take over children's lives, and via Skype talks about how this has become an increasing problem. In January the facility's operators responded to demand to treat younger clients, and extended to include a unit for 13- to 18-year-olds.

Hilarie says she is shocked at generally how little parents monitor their children's use of the internet. She believes they should be delaying when they allow their children to go online for anything other than schoolwork, and personally she wants to see the age for joining social media sites higher than 13. However, it comes down to each child as to when is the right age for them.

“It's like driving a car, a child has to be old enough and mature enough to handle the responsibility,” Hilarie says.

“The drug of the internet is pretty intense, in terms of how it stimulates the region of the brain that we find rewarding. It's just putting a drug in the hands of a child,” she says.

Children's brains develop from the back to the front, with the pre-frontal cortex behind the forehead not reaching full maturity until 25 years or older, she says. This is the area which controls impulses, considers consequences, and is responsible for planning, organising and managing time.

The new unit currently has eight male patients, who are mostly addicted to gaming, with social media and viewing pornography being problematic as well. Social media addiction is more likely to be an issue for girls, Hilarie says, but they are less likely to present at the clinic as they are generally able to keep functioning in their lives.

Victoria University School of Psychology professor Marc Wilson in Wellington says joining earlier than the age of 13 is not only breaching the terms of service, but children's brains are

not developed enough to manage interacting on the sites.

However, Auckland psychologist and author Gwendoline Smith, who has seen a swell of anxiety in her Ponsonby clinic with half of her patients battling the disorder, is not so sure that a set age limit is a good idea.

“I think families have their own cultures, some parents do use screens as baby sitters and you are not going to stop that,” she says.

Rather than social policy to enforce an age-13 limit, she wants to see a New Zealand-wide programme introduced to teach resilience in all schools.

“You can't keep relying on the one-to-one interventions that mental health services are going to offer, it has to be an education initiative.”

And it is “reductionist” to blame social media for mental health issues, she says. However, she will often discourage teenagers who are suffering social anxiety and a fear of negative evaluation, from such sites. This is at least until they can handle them better, and not get upset by too few likes or comments on their posts.

“Don't force kids off-line”

New Zealand's internet safety organisation, Netsafe, does not want parents to force children under the age of 13 off social media.

As an independent non-profit organisation, Netsafe receives funding from a variety of strategic and working partners. International partners include social media companies, which are highly commercial entities raking in hundreds of millions of dollars per quarter in advertising revenue, and as such are motivated to keep users on their sites. Netsafe is mainly funded by the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Education, but also receives small targeted portions (less than one per cent of turnover in the last 15-month financial year) from social media companies such as Facebook. It declares its partners on its website, and they also include Instagram and Google, which owns YouTube.

Netsafe is the approved agency appointed by the Minister of Justice under the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015. As well as sorting out cyberbullying complaints, it has a role of providing education and advice about online safety. It produces a number of guides for parents, in which it informs of the 13-and-over rule, but does not recommend parents strictly enforce this nor close their children's social media accounts. For example, it advises “don't take away the technology” in the case of online bullying, as this can alienate children from the support

network of their peers. In its A Parents' Guide to Instagram, Netsafe warns of a risk of “social marginalisation for kids who are not allowed to socialise” on the app.

Netsafe's advice is in contrast to parenting experts such as Dave Atkinson, and its acceptance of funds from social media corporates appears to create a conflict of interest, and as such undermine its role providing parental guidance. However, Netsafe refutes any link between funding sources and the advice it provides.

Chief executive Martin Cocker says the organisation's advice is based on common sense. The main reason young people give for not discussing online challenges, he says, is fear of having the account or technology removed from them.

“We don't recommend young people join social media before the recommended age, typically 13, but we know that lots of young people join before that, with or without their parents' knowledge,” Martin says.

“Rather than saying 'don't let them', which drives behaviours under the parent radar, we explain why it is unsafe to allow it and advise on strategies to co-inhabit and manage social media,” he says.

“We do recognise the concern about conflict of interest. All industry sponsorship and advertising grants are linked to events or products with specific and clearly defined deliverables. It is clear what the money is buying, and what it isn't,” he explains.

Cyberbullying survivor Bella Prichard agrees that parents talking to their children is better than enforcing rules.

“I have seen parents ban their children from using it and all they do is find ways around it,” Bella says.

The 17-year-old self-harmed as a young teenager, and while her membership of sites such as Ask.fm, Facebook and Instagram did not cause her to do this, it contributed to distress she faced at the time.

“When people post really personal things it just leaves them open for judgement, it just causes people to be in such pain and they can fall into a darker and darker place,” she says.

“Raise age to 16”

Mental health blogger Tori Amstad wants to see the age at which children are allowed to join social media sites raised to 16, or at the very least have children prove they are 13.

“The benefits of using social media don't come in until you hit later teens, early 20s. For the younger generation I don't think it's helpful at all. I definitely think social media is playing a huge part in the mental health state of young people today,” Tori says. She herself was cyberbullied, and believes social media also magnified body image insecurity she had when she was younger.

In 2015, the European Parliament backed down on introducing data protection rules which would have made it illegal for anyone under 16 to join social media sites without parental permission. Even child-safety experts had opposed the proposal, arguing it would deprive youth of education and social opportunities while also encouraging them to lie about their age.

In South Korea and Spain the age is 14 due to individual laws in those countries. Social media companies have ‘Report an Underage Child’ forms on their websites, however, neither Snapchat, Facebook nor Instagram responded to this author's requests for information on how many reports they receive or accounts they delete each year.

The Ministry of Health does not have much to say about making it illegal for under-13s, although is not ruling out legislation in the future.

Deputy director of mental health Ian Soosay says the ministry “is considering scientific evidence in this area as it emerges”.

Schools playing catch-up

“It's impossible for them to build a curriculum as quick as what social media is changing, it's impossible for them to keep up with social media,” says Lucy McSweeney.

The Auckland university student has submitted a petition to the Ministers of Health and Education calling for better mental health education in New Zealand schools. It has more than 10,000 signatures and is before a select committee, which is to give it consideration at its next meeting later this year.

Among signatories is 22-year-old Jeff*. The University of Canterbury student wants to see robust mental health education in schools, and to have this tied in with education around the risks of social media.

“In Year 9 and 10 we had health lessons but there wasn't a big focus on mental health. I guess it's a big topic that's not talked about much,” Jeff says.

He was bullied at school, in both the school playground and cyberspace. He recalls one incident, when he was about 16, a fellow pupil picked a fight with him outside. Jeff walked

away but was punched several times in the back of the head.

“There was no-one willing to stand up and try and pull him off me,” Jeff recalls.

The boy was stood down for three days. His family confiscated his phone, but he gained access to his aunt's computer and broadcast his side of the story via Facebook. The boy was a popular student, and soon there were other students commenting in support of him.

“Young people making comments on social media don't understand the effects they are having on others, and how it contributes to overall declined feelings of self worth,” Jeff says.

The Ministry of Education says it is addressing the risks of increased online access in its new digital technologies curriculum.

Head of early learning and student achievement Ellen MacGregor-Reid says the ministry plans to work with schools to look at how the focus on young people growing up safe and responsible digital citizens can be strengthened.

New Zealand Secondary Principals' Council chairman James Morris, who is principal at Darfield High School, says schools can struggle with integrating education on digital citizenship across the curriculum within all subjects. Many schools do an education exercise such as getting students to sign an agreement, but this can be a relatively ineffective way to teach such skills.

When considering concerns around increased anxiety levels in teenagers, social media can be “an easy target”, he adds. It is difficult to know whether or not it is exacerbating such issues, but he believes there is a stronger relationship between anxiety levels and ongoing NCEA assessment throughout the year.

Thriving on social media

“Love you bruv xx”, “Wooowww” (love heart emoticon + smiley-face emoticon), and “Tbh love your statuses!” These are some of the comments a South Auckland teenager has received on his Facebook page.

Paul Lesoa could be considered the poster boy for social media. At the age of just 16, he has 4788 friends on Facebook, connected to his Instagram, with an additional 1137 followers, and has about 1000 friends on Snapchat.

“All the kids back in the day didn't have the technology, everything is in your back pocket, a phone can do a lot to be honest,” he says. “Just how easy social media makes it to

communicate.”

Paul hopes to be a prefect at his South Auckland decile one school, Mangere College, in Year 13 next year, and he plans to study law at university. His leadership qualities are already evident on his Facebook page, where he posts insightful messages.

In September he received more than 440 likes, 64 shares and 28 comments, in support of a post he wrote in defence of South Auckland.

“...the only thing that's dirty in south is our parents' hands who worked hard to give us the opportunities they didn't have,” he wrote.

Last year a post encouraging boys to “pick up our game” and treat potential girlfriends better received over 2500 likes.

He writes his posts in the 'Notes' area of his phone, then proof-reads them to check they make sense. He sprinkles emoticons throughout, and generally ends with the line “All due respect to everyone that reads this”.

Paul is a facilitator for a youth suicide prevention group, and acknowledges social media has a bad side, in its capacity to be used by cyberbullies. However, he believes it offers a good way to help anyone who is depressed, as friends can pick up on their negative posts and direct them to the help they need.

His positive experience reflects all the good things adolescents get from using social media. A report by the Royal Society of Public Health in England this year found youngsters value being able to express themselves, build identity and find emotional support. However, the researchers also found the negative effects such as impact on sleep, body image, fear of missing out and bullying outweighed the good effects, on the platforms of Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter. Only YouTube had an overall positive effect on wellbeing and mental health, as opposed to an overall negative effect.

In New Zealand the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 is proving to be a useful weapon against the worst effects, such as those involving cyberbullying and revenge porn. At least seven people have been sent to prison under the act, and complaints are up this year, with 84 proceedings against offenders to August 31, compared to 62 the previous year.

The climb in cases reflects the capacity for harm to result from internet use, and common sense dictates that it is an environment from which children require some protection.

Just how much protection is something parents have the daunting prospect of considering on

their own, with there being little guidance in New Zealand around the importance of enforcing the 13-and-over age of eligibility on social networking sites.

It's a question Robyn is now giving thought to as Piper's younger brother, Cooper, aged 10, is to get a phone for Christmas. He has already asked if he can open Snapchat and Instagram accounts, as his friends have them.

“I said - what do you want it for?” Robyn says. “I told him I would think about it.”

Keeping kids safe (*Breakout box with advice for parents*)

- Talk to children about rules around when they can join social media sites. The age of eligibility for most sites is 13, and it goes against the advice of parenting experts to join before this.
- Use privacy settings to keep personal information private.
- Teach your children to think before posting, and explain they must gain permission from their friends or family before posting pictures, videos or any other content that does not involve them directly.
- Inform them about the risks of being online, including cyberbullying, sexting and strangers making contact.
- Don't be afraid to talk about peer pressure and how they should not be persuaded to post inappropriate content, and let them know they can talk to you if they feel uncomfortable about something.
- Consider parental controls and filtering software.
- Set down rules around screen time.

Need to talk? (*Breakout box with information on where to get help*)

Free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor.

Lifeline – 0800 543 354 or (09)522-2999 within Auckland.

Suicide Crisis Helpline – 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO).

Healthline – 0800 611 116.

Samaritans – 0800 726 666.

** Names have been changed.*

3. Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Young age groups in particular have embraced social media platforms, and using these has become a big part of their daily lives. Despite the many studies which have been conducted on the potential mental health consequences resulting from this trend, the field continues to be very much an emerging one. This is mostly due to social media remaining relatively new, while its applications and how they are used have rapidly evolved and changed. This review of the literature begins with a brief definition of social media. A background to the topic is then presented, including information on the legislative environment in New Zealand. This is followed by the main body of the literature review, where first of all the underlying concept of adolescence, in relation to mental health, is defined, followed by an outline of the hyperpersonal model of computer-mediated communication, which provides a framework. Due to the body of research conducted to date being large, and the field being an emerging one, there has been a particular focus on the latest research in this literature review. This has been alongside studies featuring the most comprehensive data, such as other literature reviews and meta-analyses. Additionally, with the focus of this project being the New Zealand situation, there has been an effort to include any relevant research from this country. The emerging body of literature reveals little definition around what has been the experience of New Zealand adolescents growing up with social media. A research project, using the method of an online survey, is conducted in order to go some way towards filling this gap in the literature.

3.2 Defining social media

Social media is loosely defined as internet-based applications which “allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 60, cited in van Dijck, 2013). Elaborating further on this definition in my own words, at its most basic level social media is internet platforms or smartphone applications which attract users who register under an identity, which is either their own or a pseudonym. Members then operate on these platforms as that identity, and provide most of the platforms' content by electronically interacting with each other and the wider public. Members use the media of keyed-in text, symbols and numbers, as well as still and moving images and audio.

3.3 Background

Social media as we know it today had its beginnings in the new millennium (van Dijk, 2013). It has since enabled a “whole constellation of obviously empowering activities” to be performed online, transforming the media ecosystem (Cotrau, 2015, p. 176). Facebook has become the dominant platform, with 2.01 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2017), representing over one quarter of the global population. Other giants include Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and YouTube, with users numbering around 700 million, 255 million, 328 million (Constine, 2017) and 1 billion (YouTube, 2017) respectively. They are generally run by companies which profit through advertising published on their sites, and as such are commercially motivated to increase the number of users and the time those users spend on the sites.

In New Zealand in 2015 an estimated 85% of internet users aged 16 and over visited social networking sites, with the youngest age group of 16- to 29-year-olds had the highest usage, at more than 90 per cent (Crothers et al, 2015). This is similar to levels for this general age group in Britain (Cramer & Inkster, 2017) and the United States (Liu et al, 2016). Content creation is the main activity undertaken in New Zealand, with 82% of people on the sites posting messages or comments, and 73% posting pictures, photos or videos (Crothers et al, 2015).

At the same time mental health is a growing concern in New Zealand, particularly in relation to young people. Provisional suicide figures released by the Chief Coroner for the 2016-17 year show 606 people took their own lives, the highest number of suicide deaths since the statistics were first recorded in 2007-08 (Marshall, 2017). The highest number of deaths occurred in the 20 to 24 year old age group (Marshall, 2017), while New Zealand has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the OECD, and for the year to June 30, 2017, 238 12- to 24-year-olds took their own lives (Gluckman, 2017). Latest statistics from the Ministry of Health (2016) show 162,222 people, representing 3.5% of the population, accessed mental health services in 2015, compared to 158,233 in 2014 and 154,523 in 2013. Prior to General Election 2017, the government denied there was any need for a review of mental health services (Kirk, 2017). However, the new Labour-led government has begun discussions on a mental health inquiry, having campaigned strongly on the issue and claiming the country has a mental health crisis

(Kenny & Walters, 2017).

Whether the development of social media has contributed to these growing numbers is unknown, however, there is much concern around the topic. Cramer and Inkster (2017) explain “social media has become a space in which we form and build relationships, shape self-identity, express ourselves, and learn about the world around us; it is intrinsically linked to mental health” (Cramer & Inkster, 2017, p. 5); and they suggest adolescents' use of social media may be fuelling a mental health crisis. In a discussion paper on reducing youth suicide, the New Zealand Prime Minister's chief science advisor Sir Peter Gluckman (Gluckman, 2017) raised concern about the pace of sociological and technological change, and suggested the social media environment was impacting on adolescents' inherent need to develop dependency on “strong and robust peer support” (Gluckman, 2017, p. 6). He noted current evidence pointing to the possibility that cyberbullying can have a greater impact on suicidal thinking compared to face-to-face bullying. And upon remarking that guidelines about how suicide is reported in the media are important, he said this should also include for social media if possible.

Gluckman's (2017) reference to cyberbullying harm reflects societal concern around the potentially more serious mental health impacts of social media use. Cyberbullying is a well-recognised problem in New Zealand, particularly among adolescents (Stretton, 2015). The internet has been referred to as a wild west and lawless land when it comes to rules and regulations around what people can say to each other, and the type of material they can distribute. New Zealand has legislated in order to introduce controls with the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015. Prior to the act's introduction there was a gap between the protections existing laws could offer and the self-regulatory systems operated by website owners who moderate content according to their own standards. The law had its genesis in an examination by the New Zealand Law Commission into the issue of harmful digital communications, as part of a wider review the commission was undertaking on news media regulations in the evolving digital era. The Minister Responsible for the Law Commission at the time, and who was also the Minister of Justice, Judith Collins, requested fast-tracking of this examination. The urgency afforded the project was indicative of the dilemma police faced with growing numbers of complaints about harmful digital communications and no robust legal framework to deal with them. In its Ministerial Briefing Paper, the Law Commission (2012)

states while “mental distress alone” (Law Commission, 2012, p. 81) was not something traditionally recognised by the country's laws, there was now less of a distinction legally between physical harm and emotional harm. This, combined with the increased capacity for harmful communications in the digital age, made new legislation pertinent. “As context and society change, and the harms to which people are subjected change, the law must change to” (Law Commission, 2012, p. 98). The resultant law of the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015 included a range of principles such as that people sending digital messages should not: disclose sensitive personal facts about an individual; be threatening, intimidating or menacing; be grossly offensive; be indecent or obscene; harrass or fake false allegations; encourage an individual to commit suicide.

3.4 The vulnerability of adolescence

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2015), adolescents are generally aged from 11- to 21-years-old. Today in 2017, this represents a similar age range to those who are referred to as digital natives, that is those considered technologically savvy after being brought up in the modern era of electronic communication. Adolescence is a phase of life marked by cultivating a sense of identity, and with a significant proportion of adolescents' socialising occurring online, feedback within this domain can help shape identity (Price et al, 2016). Peer relationships begin to assume more importance over family relationships in early adolescence (Antheunis, Schouten & Kraemer, 2014). Boys and girls of this age can be acutely aware of how they appear to others, thus public evaluations on social media sites can affect their self-esteem (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006). Teenagers' self-esteem is inextricably linked with their wellbeing, and this is particularly the case for those in early and middle adolescence (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006). Adolescence can be a vulnerable phase for the development of mental disorders, and these occur at the highest rates in people aged 10 to 29 (Wei et al, 2016).

3.5 Computer-mediated communication

As people seek to fulfil social needs through computer-mediated communication, they are not necessarily choosing a form of communication which is inferior to face-to-face communication. If they are aiming to build social bonds, for instance, this can be done effectively through computer-mediated communication. Features which were traditionally seen

as limitations, for example lack of social context cues and increased opportunities for self disclosure, can also operate as advantages. Under the hyperpersonal model of communication media proposed by American communications studies professor Joseph Walther, communication is hyperpersonal in that the outcome depends on the context and people involved. Citera (2016) explained that, under this theory, anonymity can build strong bonds as members of a group are more willing to share their ideas and opinions. An example of the value of computer-mediated communication is provided in the results of a study by Chan and Cheng (2004) which found online friendships which last more than one year have can be just as good quality as off-line friendships, suggesting social media can help form strong bonds.

3.6 The rewards of socialising online

Bolton et al (2013) noted research to date had shown that Generation Y, born after 1981, used social media for the same reason as other age groups, and that was for socialising and a sense of community, for keeping in touch with friends and for information, leisure and entertainment. Meshi, Tamir and Heekeren (2015) described that from a neurological perspective the two main needs being fulfilled by individuals using social media are those of connecting with others and managing one's reputation and social impressions. They explain that being part of a social group increases the potential for survival from an evolutionary perspective, and strong bonds within such groups enhance psychological wellbeing and protect against feelings of loneliness and depression. Managing reputations and the impressions people make has been shown to enhance survival rates as it helps to strenghten social bonds. Being sociable is generally considered good for humans, and social isolation is among risk factors leading to neurobiological changes and poor health (Dhand et al, 2016).

High quality social networks in the real world are positively associated with subjective wellbeing (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2000). And social networking online is effective at enhancing social capital, that is relationship benefits such as emotional support and exposure to ideas and information, as well as friendship quality in early adolescence (Srivastava & Bhardwaj, 2014; Antheunis, Schouten & Kraemer, 2014). Valkenburg, Peter and Schouten (2006) found social media use affected social self-esteem and wellbeing in adolescents, with positive feedback on sites increasing these factors and negative feedback leading to decreases. They define social self-esteem as the “evaluation of their self-worth or satisfaction with three dimensions of their

selves: physical appearance, romantic attractiveness, and the ability to form and maintain close friendships” (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006, p. 585), while wellbeing refers “to a judgement of one's satisfaction with life as a whole” (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006, p. 585). Valkenburg and Peter (2008) showed lonely adolescents' social competence benefitted from experimenting with identity online. In building on the findings of previous studies which showed a correlation between social self-esteem and social network site use, Valkenburg, Koutamanis and Vossen (2017) investigated the direction of any potential causality, and found adolescents high in social self esteem had higher social media use, and using social media sites improved self-esteem in the short-term as they received positive feedback from friends and acquaintances. Social self-esteem is one of the major components of overall self-esteem, which has been previously found by researchers to be an important predictor of psychological wellbeing (Valkenburg, Koutamanis & Vossen, 2017).

Social media can also offer emotional support for people going through difficult situations, for example becoming a victim of sexual abuse (Smith, 2010, cited in Swist et al, 2015) or suffering the death of a friend (Hobbs & Burke, 2017). Disenfranchised, vulnerable and under-represented groups can attain equality of communicative power and access the benefits of societal participation through social media (Abbas & Mesch, 2016; Citera, 2016; Humphry, 2014, cited in Swist et al, 2015; Third & Richardson, 2009, cited in Swist et al, 2015). It can also be a valuable place for youth to find public health information, and alongside the internet in general, can present therapeutic opportunities (Cramer & Inkster, 2016; Stanton et al, 2015).

At a physiological level, social media use can stimulate the brain's reward network in the same way that socialising in the real world can. For example, receiving positive social feedback is mirrored in the online world by receiving a 'Like' on Facebook (Meshi, Tamir & Heekeren, 2015). Ephemeral social media, such as Snapchat, may contribute to increased emotional rewards similar to that derived from face-to-face interaction, and it is associated with more positive mood than other platforms, although less emotional support (Bayer et al, 2017). Vaterlaus et al (2016) found young adults using Snapchat liked the ephemeral nature of shared content which was a feature of the app, and that using it helps strengthen personal friendships, romances, and family relationships, but can also create more jealousy and tensions in these relationships, and has potential to be used for deviant behaviours such as cheating and bullying.

Orehek and Human (2017) showed that self-expression on Twitter can create positive perceptions, and previous studies had shown being perceived in this manner in first-impressions settings was associated with positive social consequences and better psychological functioning. Findings from a study of 475 college students by Punyanunt-Carter (2017) supported evidence from an earlier study by Bayer et al (2016, cited in Punyanunt-Carter, 2017), that positive mood is associated with interacting on Snapchat.

3.7 The risks of socialising online

That there are aspects of using social media which can be considered intrinsically beneficial for mental health, does not discount that there can also be negative effects. Risks are discussed in this section under the headings of Addiction, Sleep Interference, Cyberbullying, and Emotional and Psychological Effects.

3.7.1 Addiction

Leading authors in the field disagree on whether addiction to internet-connected devices and their applications is possible. Alter (2017) states behavioural addiction has been recognised by major psychological bodies around the world, and it is considered just as real as addiction to substances. “They arise when a person can't resist a behavior, which, despite addressing a deep psychological need in the short-term, produces significant harm in the long-term” (Alter, 2017, p. 20).

However, Boyd (2014) is critical of the concept, and in her book focussing on teens and social media, she said “the language of addiction sensationalizes teens' engagement with technology and suggests that mere participation leads to pathology” (Boyd, 2014, p. 78). She acknowledged high internet use can come under the heading of impulse-control disorders, but was sceptical about the existence of “internet addiction disorder”. This term, she explained, was coined by psychiatrist Ivan Goldberg in 1995 in a satirical manner as he parodied “society's obsession with pathologizing everyday behaviours” (Boyd, 2014, p. 81). She believed instead what drove teenagers to network online was not an uncontrollable addiction but their desire to be sociable, and they were compensating for a decreased number of socialising opportunities in the real world, due to increased time constraints and more restrictions on their activities outside of the home.

Nevertheless, there has been much research suggesting the capacity for social media use to become a compulsion (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011; Moeller et al, 2012; Hoffman, Vohs & Baumeister, 2012). Hoffman, Vohs and Baumeister (2012) undertook a study of mainly young men and women (n=205) from Wurzburg, Germany, and quantitatively analysed their episodes (n=7,827) of desiring things. They found desires for media use, alongside working, were more likely to be acted upon, over food, sleep, sex, tobacco, alcohol and coffee, despite conflicting with other goals. Their research was cited by Cramer and Inkster (2017) in claiming social media had been “described as more addictive than cigarettes and alcohol” (Cramer & Inkster, 2017, p. 6). Griffiths and Kuss (2017) reported that six years ago only three studies had been undertaken on social networking addiction, but since there had been hundreds of studies on adolescents' use of social media. In an examination of research to date, they concluded youngsters who experienced symptoms such as withdrawal and mood modification “may be addicted” (Griffiths & Kuss, 2017, p. 51). However, they did not see this as a highly problematic, and believed it simply contributed to the fact social media use “has become a way of being and is contextual, which must be separated from the experience of actual psychopathological symptoms” (Griffiths & Kuss, 2017, p. 51).

3.7.2 Sleep interference

Hale and Guan (2015) reviewed the literature to date on the association between screen time and sleep in children and adolescents, and found time viewing television, computers and devices was negatively associated with sleep outcomes. The 67 studies involving participants from around the world, including New Zealand, mainly showed a shortened duration of sleep and delayed sleep onset. In the two years since this literature review, there has been further research, with social media having become more of a focus.

Research on whether screen time delays sleep onset remains inconclusive (Galland et al, 2017), and many studies which show an association do not prove a causal link (Hale & Guan, 2015). Nevertheless, Hale and Guan (2015) found the correlations revealed in studies examined in their literature review were strong enough to suggest that youth should “limit or reduce screen time exposure, especially before or during bedtime hours to minimize any harmful effects” (Hale & Guan, 2015, p. 50). The value of this advice has only been reinforced by further research. For instance, Woods and Scott (2016) found in a survey (n=467) of 11- to 17-year-olds in Scotland that those who used social media the most in the evening were the ones who

had poorer quality of sleep. And those who had the most emotional attachment to social media, for example, feeling upset at not being able to access their accounts, were the ones who were most likely to have both poorer quality of sleep and lower self-esteem, and higher anxiety and depression. Xanidis and Brignell (2016) statistically analysed results from surveying 18- to 58-year-olds (n=326) from various countries, and their results indicated increased dependence on social networking sites was associated with lessened quality of sleep and a higher number of daily cognitive failures. In a comprehensive analysis of data from national cohort studies in Wales, Power, Taylor and Horton (2017) found over one third of 12- to 15-year-olds (n=966) woke up during the night at least once per week to use social media. This was associated with subjective wellbeing, with their results indicating serious implications for “levels of tiredness and wellbeing” (Power, Taylor & Horton, 2017, p. 957). Galland et al (2017) quantitatively analysed survey results from 692 New Zealand adolescents aged 15- to 17-years, and found 56% had poor sleep quality, with girls (63.1%) being most effected. They found while the odds of poor sleep efficiency were increased by technology time in the evening, very little as well as a lot of time was associated with respondents taking longer to get to sleep.

3.7.3 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is so predominant in online life today, that one United Kingdom study of 9- to 19-year-olds found while respondents said it was undesirable, they saw it as a relatively routine part of their online lives (Bryce & Fraser, 2013). Results presented by Steiner-Fox et al (2016) show 46% of 18- to 19-year-olds report having experienced it. Women were the most likely victims, with about three in five having experienced it. Cyberbullying can have detrimental effects on mental health, as shown in research meta-analysed by Fisher, Gardella and Teurbe-Tolon (2016). The authors analysed 55 studies, representing responses from 257,678 adolescents, and found peer cybervictimisation was associated with internalising problems such as depression, anxiety and anger, as well as externalising problems such as aggression, substance abuse and risky sexual behaviour. A large survey by Henry, Powell and Flynn (2017) found one in three 16- to 19-year-olds in Australia had been victims of sexual image-based abuse, and this was associated with suffering depression and anxiety as a result.

Dozens, if not hundreds, of news items have reported cyberbullying as a contributing factor in the suicide of adolescents, and these anecdotal concerns are echoed in emerging research.

Dimitrios (2017) found there had not been enough individual-level data to date in order to show a causal link between cyberbullying and suicide. Dimitrios (2017) thus analysed the 1991 to 2015 Youth Risk Behavioral Survey data from across the United States and found cyberbullying had a causal effect on both non-fatal and fatal suicide attempts, increasing overall attempts by 8.7 percentage points. In addition, Dimitrios (2017) found the introduction of cyberbullying laws to various states resulted in a decrease in cyberbullying victimisation, and a 1% drop in cyberbullying resulted in a corresponding decrease in fatal suicide rates of 11 per 100,000. Gorzig (2017) found that viewing of internet content relating to self-harm was higher than normal for both cyberbullying victims and perpetrators. Results from another recent study suggested cybervictimisation may be part of a more complex issue for some teenagers, linking in with self-harm and depressive symptoms. Patchin and Hinduja (2017) found about 6% of students in American middle and high schools, aged 12 to 17, had engaged in digital self-harm, which was anonymously posting hurtful content about oneself.

3.7.4 Emotional and psychological effects

Valkenburg, Koutamanis and Vossen (2017) explain social media sites have a 'positivity bias' characterising interactions between peers, for example they are designed to elicit positive interactions through 'likes' and 'favourites'. Additionally, social media users have a tendency to share positive information about themselves rather than negative, which in turn attracts positive comments. However, as well as increasing social self-esteem, this can also lead to decreases. This is through another mechanism – upward social comparison. Valkenburg, Koutamanis and Vossen (2017) cite a range of studies which have confirmed upward comparison may lead to lowering social, physical and overall self-esteem.

A study by the Royal Society for Public Health in England (Cramer & Inkster, 2017) found the four platforms of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter had an overall negative effect on mental health, as they increased feelings of anxiety, depression and fear of missing out. They also interfered with sleep, and increased bullying and body image issues. The authors surveyed 1,479 14- to 24-year-olds throughout the United Kingdom, who were asked about their use of particular platforms in relation to these and positive health-related factors such as building identity, building community, and finding emotional support. The self-reporting aspect of this study directly linked teenagers' feelings with regard to their emotional experiences, eliminating a weakness of many quantitative analyses in not being able to confirm a causal association

between these and use of social media.

Among some of the more comprehensive quantitative research in the field is a meta-analysis by Hoare et al (2016). Hoare et al (2016) examined 32 studies suggesting a positive relationship between adolescents' time spent on-screen, for leisure, and their experience of depressive symptomatology and psychological distress. Hoare et al (2016) found those spending more than two to three hours per day on-screen for leisure had poorer mental health status than those spending less time. Lin et al (2016) explained multiple previous studies had linked social media use with increased psychological distress and declines in mood and wellbeing, but were limited by their tendency to focus mainly on just one social networking site, Facebook. They were also limited by small and/or localised samples. Lin et al (2016) eliminated these weaknesses in their study by surveying a nationally representative sample (n=1,787) of 19- to 32- year-olds in the United States in relation to use of 11 platforms and found a strong and significant association between leisure time spent using social media and depression. Sampasa-Kanyinga and Lewis (2015) emphasised the vulnerability of younger adolescents in particular. They found Canadian middle and high school students who used social networking sites for more than two hours per day were more likely to have “poor self-rating of mental health and experiences of high levels of psychological distress and suicidal ideation” (p. 380), while similar studies examining university students had found no such correlation. A meta-analysis was undertaken by Liu and Baumeister (2016) of research to date, with many involving adolescents, and found total social network site use higher among those low in self-esteem and with high levels of loneliness and narcissistic traits. Among weaknesses of quantitative analyses is that they generally do not prove a causal link between time online and mental health effects. It is just as possible that those with underlying depression are more drawn to using social media, and there are multiple previous studies which support this possibility (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015).

Qualitative research can provide more of an insight to the phenomena of moods and mental health being affected by use of social media. Robertson et al (2012) analysed the communication which had occurred around a cluster of deaths in a New Zealand city and found there was a risk of suicide contagion spreading through social media. Fox and Moreland (2014) thematically analysed the narratives of 44 adult Facebook users, in focus groups, and found participants reported a range of negative emotional experiences, including social comparison linked with jealousy and anxiety, and relationship conflict and tension. Fardouly et al (2015) found use of Facebook was associated with negative mood and heightened appearance concerns in their study sample of 112 women aged 17 to 25, when compared to use of other

media. In a phenomenological analysis of five gifted and talented female high school pupils in New Zealand, Price et al (2016) found an essence of tension in relation to using Facebook. “Being a talented female student leader living in a social networking media-saturated world means having to live with, and having to manage, an underlying feeling of tension while using Facebook” (p. 167). And from hundreds of interviews with teenagers in America, the researchers Catherine Steiner-Adair and Nancy Jo Sales have both found in separate study projects that teenage girls were immersed in the online world where they suffered negative emotional experiences encompassing bullying, oversexualisation and social turmoil (Alter, 2017). They had chosen to interact this way as they did not want to be socially isolated (Alter, 2017).

These studies show the emotional and psychological side effects which have been associated with use of social media are vast. They include lowered social self-esteem, lowered mood, tension, stress, anxiety, depression, fear of missing out, loneliness, suicide ideation, spreading of suicide contagion, tendency to self-harm and heightened appearance concerns. These effects are in addition to those discussed earlier of cyberbullying, sleep deprivation and addiction. This literature review shows the vast body of research to date supports the commonly-held view that while there are many mental health benefits from using social media, there are also a wide range of very real risks. There is a lack of consensus in the field as to the seriousness of these risks, and most researchers recommend further investigation in order to gain a greater understanding of the topic.

3.8 The Research Project

There is a large body of quantitative analyses among the research to date, while not a great deal of research has specifically addressed the topic from an experiential perspective - asking adolescents themselves how they view their use of social media and how they see this as affecting their sense of wellbeing and mental health. It is in consideration of this gap in the literature, with particular attention to the New Zealand situation, that the research question is formulated - “What has been the experience of New Zealand adolescents growing up with social media, in the wider context of their mental health?” This question is posed with the aim of helping to fill this gap in the literature and adding to the body of research on the topic to date. In addition, in conducting this research project it was hoped the results would help inform

the investigation undertaken for the preceding long-form journalism feature, *Kids and the Drug of the Internet*. A qualitative analysis was considered the best way to answer this research question, in order to return a depth of data to give insight into the experiences of New Zealand adolescents in relation to social media and their mental health.

3.8.1 Method

An online written format in the form of a survey was chosen, this method aligning with the view that "qualitative research methods should be carried out in natural environments" (Clark, 2000, cited in Oolo & Siibak, 2013). Oolo and Siibak (2013) conducted their interviews with adolescents via a messenger service, stating that in addition to many researchers seeing the web as an easy and comfortable forum through which teenagers liked to communicate, they believed it helped ease any concerns interviewees could have about confidentiality. I believe an online survey gives the additional advantage of potentially being able to make any respondents concerned about confidentiality more relaxed and expressive in their answers. The survey, entitled *Teenagers and Social Media*, is in Appendix 1. It was constructed at surveymonkey.com. I confidentially informed people I knew aged 16 to 22 about the survey and what it was for, and if they were interested, I sent them the link. I asked them to both complete it and forward the link to people, in the same age range, they knew who may also be interested in completing it. Being a parent myself helped me with this task, as I knew many adolescents whom I could ask to do the survey. Because they knew me or knew of me or my children, this put me in a relatively privileged position of being someone they trusted and did not mind helping out by participating. The online aspect of the survey guaranteed anonymity, as respondents did not have to give their name.

Two of the survey questions were constructed using findings from the literature review. The literature pointed to specified negative and positive mental health effects adolescents can experience in relation to their use of social media, and these were listed in order to probe for more detail around any experiences adolescents may have had in relation to these. These questions followed a generalised question asking respondents to share their thoughts, relating to what has been their experience growing up with social media. The goal of these three questions was to find out what was the experience of respondents in relation to social media use. By asking respondents what they LIKE and DO NOT LIKE, the aim was to get to the heart

of respondents' experiences in relation to their emotions, feelings and mental health. In addition to these three questions, there were an additional six questions. These were designed to get a brief picture of the extent of participants' use of social media, what sites they belonged to, and brief biographical information such as their age and what region they were from. This enabled construction of a brief biography of each respondent to go alongside their answers, which is presented as part of the survey results in Appendix 2. Undertaking the survey helped me find interviewees for the long-form journalism project. A section for respondents to enter their name and contact details if they did not mind being contacted by the researcher, was filled out by one respondent, and this respondent ended up becoming a valuable interviewee. The results informed my journalism investigation, by giving me insight into the experiences of adolescents in their use of social media. When I interviewed people for the feature, I did so with a growing background knowledge about general adolescent experience of using social media, due to responses from the survey.

There were limitations presented by this research method. While an important aspect of the design was a confidential online questionnaire, this meant there was no way to get back in touch with people whose responses may have been unclear, or to seek any further information. Nevertheless, the qualitative nature of the study meant only a small sample size was required, and sufficient responses proved to be quality reflections. Another limitation was that the makeup of respondents is not likely to be representative of the New Zealand population, due to the snowball sampling method used. There can be gender differences in the effects of social media, as referred to by some studies in the literature review. The sample had twice as many females as males, so the mental health effects described could be weighted towards a female perspective. In addition, the description of social media given in the survey would have steered respondents away from including some platforms in their answers. Interacting on social media was defined as viewing profiles, messaging, posting, commenting, liking and following, and the qualification was given in the first question of "interacting as yourself". "Interacting as yourself" signalled the concept of the type of social media platform which is generally more personal, in that it is used to share media relating to one's own identity and one's own life. Thus the survey responses are unlikely to reflect a thorough picture of all the social media platforms that respondents use.

4. Discussion

4.1 Survey results

Of 26 responses to the *Teenagers and Social Media* survey, 22 represented meaningful engagement, while the remaining four were discounted due to not providing enough information. The 22 respondents were aged 16 to 22, and comprised 14 females, seven males and one agender. They were located throughout New Zealand and spent from less than one hour to more than three hours on average each day interacting on social media. The respondents had from less than 200 to more than 1000 friends/followers, and checked their social media accounts from just once or twice to more than 30 times per day. More than one third had more than 500 friends and followers, and almost half, 12, checked their accounts more than 15 times per day, and 15 of the 22 were active on at least three platforms. They spent from less than one hour to more than three hours interacting as themselves on social media each day. Interacting was defined as viewing profiles, messaging, posting, commenting, liking and following. The majority first joined a social media site at the age of 13 or 14, but some joined at the age of 12 or younger. The majority were on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, while Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest and Reddit also featured. These results reinforced the anecdotal reports given by people interviewed for the long-form journalism feature, as well as results of the literature review, that adolescents are heavy users of social media, and that the main platforms being used for interacting as oneself are Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

For the sake of clarity in presentation of the results, each of the 22 have been given a pseudonym. This is presented alongside survey results in Appendix 2, and appears alongside their significant statements extracted for discussion below. A summary statement was crafted with the goal of describing my overall feeling for each participant's experience, and is presented with the survey results in Appendix 2. The summary statements are useful for giving an understanding of each participant's experience, and reading these along with the individual comments of respondents shows that the majority of respondents experienced both positive and negative effects of using social media. In fact, 21 of the 22 respondents expressed what they both liked and disliked about social media, while the remaining one said there was nothing he liked and he had only dislikes. The significant statements from the 22 responses were collated into sub-themes. There was particular attention paid to phrases which appeared to be most

reflective, for example, using words such as “I feel”, “for me”, “personally”, or those relating to their feelings and or experiences, such as “it is hard” or “it has been”. The intention was then to categorise the sub-themes into wider themes, with the aim of giving an essence of what is the overall experience of New Zealand adolescents. There was just one sub-theme in relation to what respondents did like, and it was Connection and Self Discovery. There were four sub-themes in relation to what respondents did not like, and they were Feeling Left Out, Image Pressure, Stress and Anxiety, Sleep Interference, and Cyberbullying. The two main themes these sub-themes were considered representative of are life-transforming connectivity, which encompasses what adolescents like about social media, and emotional pressures, which encompasses what they do not like. The research project thus revealed the experience for New Zealand adolescents is that they enjoy life-transforming connectivity thanks to social media, however, its use is associated with inherent emotional pressures. Identification of the sub-themes in relation to the New Zealand experience of adolescents has supported findings in the literature to date which have previously identified them as factors relating to mental health. In addition, identification of the sub-themes builds on the literature in showing them to be part of the experience of New Zealand adolescents in relationship to their use of social media in the wider context of their mental health. Each of the sub-themes is presented below with examples of associated significant statements, with a discussion of how the comments support the literature to date. Further discussion follows in relation to future research implications, and a reflection upon investigations for the long-form journalism feature.

Connection and Self Discovery

“Personally I’m extremely grateful to have been a part of today’s technology.” - *Tom, 16.*

“Easily connecting with family and friends through social media really is a big thing for me and I really like it because it’s fast and easy, and people from a variety of ages and backgrounds can use social media to their advantage.” - *Tom, 16.*

“I am from a small community and it was hard making friends as no-one there had the same interests as me. Through social media I connected with people across the world who I shared interests with and became very close to them.” - *Michelle, 17.*

“Social media helped me discover who I was as a person in many ways and helped me create and maintain unforgettable relationships with all kinds of people. When used right it can be an amazing learning experience and help people in many ways.” - *Michelle, 17.*

“I wouldn’t leave social media because of the pluses, staying in touch with friends and seeing

what everyone is up to.” - *Amber, 19*.

“I feel like social media has helped me boost my self-esteem through figuring out who I am.”
- *Sally, 18*.

These comments support a wide range of literature which has linked use of social media with positive effects in relation to mental health. Some of the findings from this literature, which was summarised in the literature review, follows. Adolescence is a period in which self-esteem is inextricably linked with wellbeing, and positive interaction on social media sites can boost self-esteem levels (Valkenburg, Peter & Schouten, 2006; Valkenburg, Koutamanis & Vossen, 2017); managing reputations, impressions and experimenting online with identity fulfil an important psychological function and can protect against feelings of loneliness and increase social competence (Meshi, Tamir & Heekeren, 2015; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008); and social media has a capacity to lead to equality of communicative power for disenfranchised, vulnerable and under-represented groups (Abbas and Mesch, 2016; Citera, 2016; Humphry, 2014, cited in Swist et al, 2015; Third & Richardson, 2009, cited in Swist et al, 2015). In addition use of social media is valuable for strengthening personal friendships, building social capital, and shaping identity (Antheunis, Schouten & Kraemer, 2014; Boyd, 2014; Price et al, 2016; Srivastava & Bhardwaj, 2014; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008; Vaterlaus et al, 2016).

Feeling Left Out

“One of my friends recently told me that they were really depressed as they did not feel as if people wanted him around because he always saw that they were doing things (on social media), yet he was not getting invited.” - *Jane, 17*.

“Personally I do get really bad FOMO from seeing everyone else's posts when they are spending time with friends in a group.” - *Petra, 22*.

“Seeing what others are up to when you're not around can really get you in a negative headspace.” - *Mary, 19*.

“(I have seen) exacerbated feelings of loneliness in a lot of people (due to being connected via technology as opposed to face to face).” - *Toby, 22*.

Respondents reporting feeling left out as something they experience supports literature to date on this topic. Feeling left out may sometimes be referred to as FOMO, or Fear of Missing Out. As summarised in the literature review, this was reported by adolescents surveyed by Cramer

& Inkster (2017) in the United Kingdom. FOMO is a relatively newly-coined phrase (Cramer & Inkster, 2017), and can refer to a fear of missing out on other things besides being part of a friend group. For example it could refer to a fear of missing out on the latest news or shop sale. From reading research summarised in the literature review, it is my interpretation that feeling left out has been described in other ways within studies, such as social comparison linked with jealousy and anxiety, which was found by Fox and Moreland (2014) to be associated with use of Facebook. Feeling left out as a concept in and of itself does not appear to have received a great deal of attention from researchers.

Image Pressure

“I always wanted to be like the celebrities I saw on social media, I classed them as being beautiful and everything I was not.” - *Aleisha, 19.*

“It has definitely skewed my perspective on things, not only do you have to think about your appearance in person, you now have to think about your online appearance and how you come across through your social media platforms.” - *John, 21.*

“Everybody tries to display the perfect life on social media, especially Instagram, and it is hard not to compare your life to these, even though they are pretty much on the same boat as you.” - *Amber, 19.*

“We can be so affected from comments that people we may not even know make...I think that it can become unhealthy to live in this constant 'fear'.” - *Jane, 17.*

“I think it (social media) is negatively impacting our mental health, as we only see the positive aspects of others' lives which seem better than our own.” - *Katrina, 22.*

“My online experience on social media can be frustrating, as I am constantly exposed to a highly materialistic culture. I can feel left out because I am part of a community who seems to constantly display the latest; makeup, clothing, shoes, food, jewellery, cars, ability to travel.” - *Greta, 19.*

“I know this (people putting only their best side on social media) has a negative effect on a lot of younger people. I once saw it described as 'comparing your behind-the-scenes to someone else's highlight reel' which I think is exactly what it is like.” - *John, 21.*

“Some people have their whole teenage lives being dominated by this idea that your worth is based on how many likes or followers you have.” - *Jane, 17.*

These comments support literature which has referred to the negative impact of image comparison on social media in relation to mental health. As shown in the literature review, Valkenburg, Koutamanis and Vossen (2017) theorised that social media has a positivity bias with likes and favourites designed to elicit positive interactions. Upward comparison can result from this, and researchers have found this has the capacity to lead to lowered social, physical and overall self-esteem, self-consciousness and anxiety (Valkenburg, Koutamanis & Vossen, 2017). Social media's emphasis on picture-based communication draws teenagers, particularly females, into body image comparisons (Cramer & Inkster, 2017), and negative mood and heightened appearance concerns have been associated with use of Facebook (Fardouly et al, 2015).

Stress and Anxiety

“There aren't really limits on who can message, you also feeling bad for not messaging back, which puts quite a lot of stress on that person.” - *Amber, 19.*

“Social media makes lots of people anxious, more prone to bullying and loss of sleep.” - *Matthew, 17.*

“I experience anxiety, although it isn't linked to social media, it doesn't help.” - *Amber, 19.*

These comments support literature showing increased feelings of stress and anxiety from using social media. Adolescents surveyed by Cramer and Inkster (2017) reported anxiety in relation to their use of the four social media platforms of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. Psychological distress, which encompasses symptoms of anxiety and depression, have been found in a wide range of quantitative studies to be associated with increased leisure time spent on-screen (Hoare et al, 2016), particularly for younger adolescents (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015). Relationship conflict and tension and social comparison linked with anxiety was reported as a result of Facebook use by participants in a qualitative analysis by Fox and Moreland (2014). An underlying feeling of tension was found to be associated with use of Facebook by female student leaders in New Zealand (Price et al, 2016). The intrusiveness of the online world into girls' lives in particular and its capacity to cause negative emotional experiences has been highlighted by researchers in the United States (Alter, 2017).

Sleep interference

“When I already can't sleep, I often go through Facebook on my phone, and the light and activity keep me awake for longer than if I'd just tried to sleep.” - *Jamie, 19.*

“I definitely lose sleep at night checking social media.” - *Katrina, 22.*

Respondents reporting loss of sleep as among their negative mental health experiences of using social media supports the literature linking social media use and sleep interference. A wide range of studies, as summarised in the literature review, point to social media causing sleep interference (Hale & Guan, 2015; Galland et al, 2017; Woods & Scott, 2016; Xanidis & Brignell, 2016; Power, Taylor & Horton, 2017; Galland et al, 2017), and an association between sleep interference and other mental health factors such as higher anxiety and depression and lowered subjective wellbeing (Woods & Scott, 2016; Power, Taylor & Horton, 2017).

Cyberbullying

“In my early years of being a teenager there wasn't much positive things coming out of social media...using social media just opened up another platform for bullying and negative influences. I believe that this is still the same for young teenagers today.” - *Petra, 22.*

“People hide behind anonymity, on sites such as Ask.fm and Tumblr, to bully others...the damage to an individual's self worth and confidence is horrible.” - *Ben, 22.*

Comments from respondents mentioning cyberbullying support findings in the literature to date. Research, as summarised in the literature review, has shown cyberbullying is a common feature of online life (Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Steiner-Fox et al, 2016), and that it is associated with problems such as depression, anxiety, anger, and substance abuse (Fisher, Gardella & Teurbe-Tolon, 2016; Henry, Powell, & Flynn, 2017). It has even been shown to lead to increased non-fatal and fatal suicide attempts (Dimitrios, 2017).

4.2 Implications for future research

There are some findings of this research project which are worth further discussion, as they may be able to add a new perspective to the literature, and provide direction for future research. These include those which come under three of the sub-theme titles, those being Connection and Self Discovery, Feeling Left Out, and Image Pressure. With regard to Connection and Self-Discovery, the research project suggests these beneficial aspects can be a particularly powerful force in the lives of New Zealand adolescents. The comments of survey respondents hint at just

how transformative social media has been for them, suggesting the effects are major ones in their lives, and have had a highly positive influence on their mental health. Further research on this topic would help add to a deeper understanding of these factors and how they benefit the mental health of adolescents in New Zealand. With regard to Feeling Left Out, I believe defining this as a concept in relation to use of social media and examining its prevalence and causal factors, could further add to the understanding of social media's effect on the mental health of adolescents. Recognising feeling left out as a concept in its own right, could help researchers examine any links this feeling may have to other negative social media effects, such as cyberbullying. Bullying can encompass a range of behaviours including exclusion of members of one's peer group, and it is possible that a feeling of being left out could be associated with cyberbullying. With regard to Image Pressure, the high number of respondents reporting this and negative feelings as a result point to the importance of further research on this topic in relation to New Zealand adolescents. In terms of body image issues, there has been little research on the mental health impact of this in relation to social media (Cramer & Inkster, 2017). Further research on this topic would thus go a long way towards fulfilling this deficit of understanding, and further inform on what is the experience of New Zealand adolescents.

4.3 Journalism feature insights

The results of the research project build on insights gained from investigations undertaken for the long-form journalism feature, *Kids and the Drug of the Internet*. All of the factors reported by respondents to the survey were reflected in many of the comments made by parents, adolescents, guidance counsellors and experts interviewed for the feature. There were accounts of children being affected by the various factors highlighted in survey responses, such as suffering tension, being driven by image pressures, and being cyberbullied, as well as experiencing positive effects of using social media. There were some factors mentioned by interviewees for the long-form journalism feature which were not touched upon by respondents to the survey. These included addiction to social media and suicide ideation. The fact they were mentioned by interviewees in the feature suggests they are likely to be among the experience of New Zealand adolescents, and both have been highlighted as factors related to use of social media by research as profiled in the literature review (Alter, 2017; Robertson et al, 2012). The fact they were not mentioned by survey respondents does not minimise their potential to be among significant experiences of adolescents, as the responses to a reasonably brief online survey are unlikely to provide an exhaustive account of the whole range of adolescents'

experiences.

5. Conclusion

The main endeavour encompassed by this Journalism Project has been examining stories and experiences of the positive and negative mental health effects arising as a result of using social media platforms. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to these effects. This leads into the question of what is the right age to join social media sites, and this was a thread of investigation throughout the long-form journalism feature.

There could be considered to be two take-away messages from the two separate strands of the Journalism Project involving academic and journalistic inquiry. Respectively, they are that New Zealand adolescents enjoy life-transforming connectivity as a result of their use of social media, but it comes with inherent emotional pressures, and that cyberspace has many mental health risks for children, and is thus an environment from which they require some protection.

The question of how much protection was one which remained unanswered for the long-form journalism feature. Around this topic of protection, the feature was critical about a lack of guidance in New Zealand on the importance of informing about the 13-and-over age of eligibility on social networking sites. This criticism was levelled after showing there are high numbers of preteens on social networking sites, and after showing parents and professionals who work with children feel overwhelmed to some extent by effects on adolescents, and their lack of ability to control these effects. Those interviewed for the feature called for a range of measures, including parents taking more control, a law change prohibiting adolescents under the age of 13 from joining the sites, and nationwide curriculum changes necessitating more attention to social media education in schools.

The understandings gained from the long-form journalism feature, set against the findings of the literature review and research project, lead me to believe that these measures as suggested by interview subjects are worthy of serious consideration. It is promising to see there is already movement afoot with regard to the latter suggestion of education changes, as reported in the long-form journalism feature. The other two suggested measures of parental control and a law change could be considered to be associated with each other. For example, if a law was introduced in New Zealand to prohibit under-13s joining social media sites, then parents would be likely to more strongly control their preteens' use of social media. While I reported support in the long-form journalism feature for introduction of such a law where it was given, many of the others interviewed, including parents, professionals who work with children and cyberbullying survivors, did not support such a proposed law, believing it would be impossible

to enforce. These informed opinions, alongside the similarly informed opinion of parenting experts that social media sites are not suitable for under-13s, lead me to believe that rather than a law, there should be a stronger message within the public domain on what is the appropriate age to join social media sites. The long-form journalism feature highlighted Netsafe as not strongly promoting this message, and it is my recommendation that this organisation, in its parental guidance role, robustly promotes this message. Other organisations could also be given a directive from government to promote such a message, for example, a public health body in the form of a public health campaign. In conclusion, the transforming connectivity of social media has benefitted New Zealand adolescents in immeasurable ways, but has come at a cost. Further nationwide efforts, in addition to what has already been achieved with New Zealand's landmark law of the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015, are warranted.

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Appendix A – Survey

Teenagers and social media

Survey on the effect of social media on the mental health and wellbeing of young people.

This anonymous and confidential survey is for young Kiwis aged 16 and over. It is being carried out by Massey University Master of Journalism student Susan Sandys, sgsandys773@gmail.com

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently it has not been reviewed by one of the university's human ethics committees. The researcher is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research, and if you have any concerns you want to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director (Research Ethics), humanethics@massey.ac.nz

1. Which social media sites are you active on, interacting as yourself?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Twitter
- Other (please specify)

2. What age were you when you first joined a social media site?

- 12 or younger
- 13 or 14
- 15 or 16
- 17 or older

3. How old are you now, and what is your gender and what region of New Zealand you are from?

4. Throughout an average day and across all of your social media accounts, how often would you check them each day?

- More than 30 times
- 15 to 30 times
- Several times
- Just once or twice

5. About how long altogether on average each day would you spend interacting with friends (ie. viewing profiles, messaging, posting, commenting, liking, following) on social media?

- More than 3 hours

2 to 3 hours

1 to less than 2 hours

Less than 1 hour

6. How many friends/followers would you have across all of your social media platforms?

More than 1000

500 to 1000

200 to 499

Less than 200

7. Today's young people are among the first generation to have grown up with social media. Please share your thoughts and experiences on what this has been like. There are no word limits.

8. Studies have linked social media use to maintaining relationships, increasing access to useful information and causes, offering emotional support, community building, and self-expression and self-identity. Please share whether you have experienced positive effects such as these, and any thoughts on what you LIKE about social media.

9. Studies have also linked social media use in young people to anxiety, depression, body image issues, cyberbullying, loss of sleep and fear of missing out (FOMO). Please share any experiences you may have of issues such as these, and any thoughts you may have on what you DO NOT LIKE about social media.

Thanks very much for participating in this questionnaire. If it has raised any issues for you, you can free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor, or phone Lifeline Aotearoa's 24-hour counselling service 0800543354. If you wish to be in touch with the researcher for further information, you can confidentially enter your contact details here, or email sgsandys773@gmail.com

Appendix B – Survey results

Respondent 1

Pseudonym: Amber.

Summary statement: *There are dark sides to social media and it gets crazy for young people today.*

Female, 19, from Canterbury, active on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest. First joined a social media site when aged 13 or 14. Checks her accounts several times per day, spends less than one hour interacting, has 500 to 1000 friends/followers.

Dislike

“I have said to people I don't know if I would like to be going to school with the craziness of social media these days, I feel it would be bad for my mental health, when school life was already stressful enough to have that social side added is crazy.”

“I experience anxiety, although it isn't linked to social media, it doesn't help.”

“Everybody tries to display the perfect life on social media, especially Instagram, and it is hard not to compare your life to these, even though they are pretty much on the same boat as you.”

“In a way social media can be quite an invasion on privacy and intrusive, there aren't really limits on who can message you, also feeling bad for not messaging back, which puts quite a lot of stress on that person.”

Like

“I really like how you can keep in touch with people and see what they are doing. If you had someone really close to you going somewhere, it still feels as though they are close and involved in your daily life as you can video call, comment, etc.”

“It creates awareness and positive movement. Petitions can be shared and opinions can be discussed.”

“There are blogs, etc. on social media which portray real life which are helpful and help many people out, they put things into perspective.”

Respondent 2

Pseudonym: Matilda

Summary statement: *It's been weird growing up with social media, and it's affected me in both good and bad ways.*

Female, 16, from Canterbury, active on Snapchat. First joined a social media site when aged 13 or 14. Checks her account more than 30 times per day, spends two to three hours interacting, has 500 to 1000 followers/friends.

Dislike

“It's been weird, no-one knows the right way to act online.”

“Yes it is easier for people to find out if they are missing out on a party or a sleep over” .

Like

“It has affected me in a positive and negative way.”

Respondent 3

Pseudonym: Greta

Summary statement: *Social media has been a good influence in my life but has its frustrations.*

Female, 19, from Canterbury, active on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. First joined a social media site when aged 13 or 14. Checks her accounts 15 to 30 times per day, spends one to less than two hours interacting, and has 200 to 499 friends/followers.

Dislike

“There is a constant uncertainty over how much time online is appropriate.”

“It's hard to find boundaries as to how open and visible we should be on the internet, while still maintaining enough privacy to avoid negative impacts like cyberbullying.”

“I don't like that trends such as memes or popular ideas can be somewhat aggressively pervasive, it makes me feel like I have less autonomy over my own online experience.”

“I do feel a fear of missing out when I spend periods of time offline.”

“My online experience on social media can be frustrating, as I am constantly exposed to a highly materialistic culture. I can feel left out because I am part of a community who seems to constantly display the latest; makeup, clothing, shoes, food, jewellery, cars, ability to travel.”

Like

“It has been a great place to find inspiration and getting to maintain a social presence.”

“I enjoy being able to use social media such as Instagram to become involved in a community I would not have access to otherwise, such as an alternative community that isn't based in New Zealand. I find this online community welcoming, encouraging and inspiring.”

“I use Instagram as a platform of self expression.”

“I enjoy using Facebook to maintain distance relationships because communication is so easy (video call, call and messages).”

Respondent 4

Pseudonym: David

Summary statement: *You can be more confident in sharing your views on social media, and negative effects are not a big deal.*

Male, 18, from Canterbury, active on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter.

First joined a social media site when aged 13 or 14. Checks his accounts more than 30 times per day, spends one to less than two hours interacting, and has 500 to 1000 friends/followers.

Dislike

“FOMO can be an issue, but it is just a case of as it would be in 'the real world' of surrounding yourself with the right people so that would not happen.”

Like

“Cyber-bullying is obviously an issue but not something I have encountered, and I believe it is something that can be easily countered.”

“The idea of hiding behind a keyboard can also be positive in allowing people to be more confident in sharing their views.”

Respondent 5

Pseudonym: Jamie

Summary statement: *I enjoy new and quality friendships through social media, but it can keep me awake sometimes.*

Agender, 19, from Canterbury, active on Facebook.

First joined a social media site when aged 15 or 16. Checks accounts several times per day, spends one to less than two hours interacting, and has less than 200 friends.

Dislike

“When I already can't sleep, I often go through Facebook on my phone, and the light and activity keep me awake for longer than if I'd just tried to sleep.”

“...more friends equals less time spent with each friend.”

Like

“There's a lot of friends I never would have made without Facebook.”

“...friends are very supportive and have really helped me grow.”

Respondent 6

Pseudonym: Mary

Summary statement: *You can get in a negative head space when you see what others are doing without you, but connecting with online communities brings happiness and comfort.*

Female, 19, from Otago, active on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

First joined a social media site at the age of 17 or older. Checks accounts more than 30 times per day and spends more than three hours interacting per day, and has 200 to 499 friends/followers.

Dislike

“always having a view in others lives can sometimes cause sadness”

“seeing what others are up to when you're not around can really get you in a negative headspace”

Like

“Finding a community online you connect and identify with is nice and adds safety and comfort that you may not otherwise find.”

Respondent 7

(No answers in written section of questionnaire.)

Respondent 8

Pseudonym: Fiona

Summary statement: *I can hang out with my friends online, but don't like it when I see what they are doing things without me.*

Female, 20, from the West Coast, on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

First joined a social media site at the age of 13 or 14. Checks her accounts 15 to 30 times per day, spends two to three hours interacting per day, and has less than 200 friends/followers.

Dislike

“People are more aware of what people think of them.”

“Seeing what my friends do without me.”

Like

“I got to spend time with friends that lived in town when I couldn't drive.”

“I get to keep in touch.”

Respondent 9

Pseudonym: Sally

Summary statement: *Social media has helped me find my identity and boost my self-esteem, but it can cause young people to feel more self-conscious.*

Female, 18, from Christchurch, active on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter.

First joined a social media site at the age of 12 or younger. Checks accounts 15 to 30 times on average per day, spends less than one hour interacting each day, and has less than 200 friends/followers.

Dislike

“If I were young now, I would be much more self-conscious than I am.”

Like

“It has enabled me to connect and reconnect with people.”

“I feel like social media has helped me boost my self-esteem through figuring out who I am.”

Respondent 10

(No in depth response.)

Respondent 11

Pseudonym: Jane

Summary statement: *Social media can be unhealthy for young people putting too much emphasis on their online popularity.*

Female, 17, from Mid Canterbury, active on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter.

First joined a social media site at the age of 12 or younger. Checks her accounts several times per day, spends one to less than two hours per day interacting, and has more than 1000 friends/followers.

Dislike

“I think that some people have their whole teenage lives being dominated by this idea that your worth is based on how many likes or followers you have.”

“...we can be so affected from comments that people we may not even know make...I think that it can become unhealthy to live in this constant 'fear'.”

“One of my friends recently told me that they were really depressed as they did not feel as if people wanted him around because he always saw that they were doing things, yet he was not getting invited...he was almost obsessed with what the 'popular kids' (the ones with the most friends on Facebook) were up to, and not his real friends.”

Like

“...one of my best friends moved schools, but I keep in touch via Facebook messenger, and creating new friends in the area is also cool.”

“...a person may use online therapy, as although you may never have met the person, you may feel as if it is easier to talk to them about things than people in your life.”

“I think that platforms such as YouTube, give us the chance to express ourselves.”

“...there can be strong communities where we can relate ourselves and be supported by others, even if there are not people who support us in our 'real lives' (eg. the online gay community).”

Respondent 12

Pseudonym: Aleisha

Summary statement: *ocial media can be a harsh image-based world, overshadowed by cyberbullying.*

Female, 19, from Auckland living in Dunedin, active on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

First joined a social media site at the age of 13 or 14. Checks her accounts more than 30 times per day, spends two to three hours interacting each day, and has more than 1000 friends/followers.

Dislike

“There is a lot of bullying on social media, and expectations on both males and females to fit a certain image in society.”

“I always wanted to be like the celebrities I saw on social media, I classed them as being beautiful and everything I was not. It gets very easy to cyber bully online.”

Like

“I like that I am still able to see what my friends in Auckland are doing as well as family and speak with them on a regular basis.”

Respondent 13

Pseudonym: Summer

Summary statement: *Bullies commenting on things are dumb, but social media is very useful.*

Female, 19, from Dunedin, active on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

First joined a social media site at the age of 12 or younger. Checks her accounts several times per day, spends one to less than two hours interacting each day, and has 200 to 499 friends/followers.

Dislike

“Only bad thing about social media is the dumb people commenting on news articles or Instagram posts, for example where you can witness bullying.”

Like

“Get to talk to my friends.”

“Use Instagram like a diary (my account is private), so it's nice to look back on.”

“I use Facebook as my primary news source.”

Respondent 14

Pseudonym: Katrina

Summary statement: *Social media impacts mental health as we feel other people's lives are better than our own.*

Female, 22, from the Bay of Plenty, active on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter.

First joined a social media site at the age of 13 or 14. Checks her accounts several times per day on average, spends less than one hour interacting each day, and has 500 to 1000 friends/followers.

Dislike

“I think it is negatively impacting our mental health, as we only see the positive aspects of others lives which seem better than our own.”

“I definitely lose sleep at night checking social media.”

Like

“I recently moved back to the North Island. Social media allows me to keep in touch with friends still in the South Island.”

Respondent 15

Pseudonym: Isabel

Summary statement: *People portray their life as fun and there is a fear of missing out.*

Female, 22, from Canterbury, active on Facebook and Snapchat.

First joined a social media site at the age of 13 or 14. Checks her accounts 15 to 30 times per day, spends two to three hours interacting per day, and has less than 200 followers/friends.

Dislike

“There is definitely a fear of missing out, probably related to why I check my social media so much!”

“It can also be discouraging because everyone strives to portray their life as being fun, exciting... which can place an additional social burden.”

Like

“...keeping in touch with people overseas is probably the main advantage” .

[Respondent 16](#)

(Skipped most of the questions.)

[Respondent 17](#)

Pseudonym: Matthew

Summary statement: *I don't like social media and it makes lots of people anxious.*

Male, 17, from Christchurch, active on Facebook and Instagram.

First joined a social media site at the age of 13 or 14. Checks his accounts several times per day, spends less than one hour on average each day interacting, and has less than 200 friends/followers.

Dislike

“Don't really like social media at all.”

“...social media makes lots of people anxious, more prone to bullying and loss of sleep.”

Like

(No positives mentioned.)

[Respondent 18](#)

Pseudonym: Michelle

Summary statement: *Social media can be life-transforming in that it helps self-discovery and connecting with others.*

Female, 17, from Canterbury on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Tumblr.

First joined a social media site at the age of 12 or younger. Checks her accounts 15 to 30 times per day, spends more than three hours per day interacting, and has between 500 and 1000 friends/followers.

Dislike

“Social media can bring out the worst in people, it's easy to hide behind a screen.”

“...many companies marketing and designing software to make it more addictive and harmful, as it increases their profit” .

Like

“Social media helped me discover who I was as a person in many ways”

“...helped me create and maintain unforgettable relationships with all kinds of people”

“When used right it can be an amazing learning experience and help people in many ways”

“I feel social media has opened doors that have never been opened before. People can connect through things and in ways we have not been able to before, you can talk to someone from somewhere you've never been, and may never be able to go.”

“I am from a small community and it was hard making friends as no one there had the same interests as me. Through social media I connected with people across the world who I shared interests with and became very close to them.”

Respondent 19

Pseudonym: Irene

Summary statement: *I like networking and expressing myself, but beauty standards and expectations are unrealistic.*

Female, 16, from Canterbury, active on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

First joined a social media site at the age of 12 or younger. Checks her accounts 15 to 30 times per day, spends two to three hours interacting on average per day, and has more than 1000 friends/followers.

Dislike

“...beauty standards and certain expectations have been set, especially for teenagers and youth” .

“I do not like how social media allows people to hide behind a screen or persona.”

Like

“I have certainly experienced positive affects of social media such as having the ability to network and self-expression.”

Respondent 20

Pseudonym: Jack

Summary statement: *Unrealistic expectations set on social media can be depressing.*

Male, 19, from Canterbury, active on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

First joined a social media site at the age of 13 or 14. Checks his accounts 15 to 30 times per day, spends two to three hours on average each day interacting, and has more than 1000 followers/friends.

Dislike

“Growing up with social media allows people to see how the better half live and look. They have false hope and their expectations of themselves are too high. Easily depressed.”

Like

(No positives mentioned.)

Respondent 21

Pseudonym: Toby

Summary statement: *Social media can exacerbate loneliness but increase access to useful information and causes.*

Male, 22, from Canterbury, active on Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and Reddit.

First joined a social media site at the age of 17 or older. Checks his accounts once or twice per day, spends one to less than two hours interacting on these each day, has 500 to 1000 friends/followers.

Dislike

“...a lot of people are more connected technology wise, but less so on an intimate personal level (quantity over quality). I feel (and have seen some evidence that) this may have exacerbated feelings of loneliness in a lot of people which is quite possibly contributing to increasing rates of mental health issues.”

Like

“...I can definitely relate to the benefits regarding availability of access to useful information and causes (and the ability to discuss these with a wide variety of people) as this would be the thing I most use social media for.”

Respondent 22

Pseudonym: John

Summary statement: *Social media brings the pressure of managing my online appearance.*

Male, 21, from Canterbury, active on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter.

First joined a social media site when he was 12 or younger. Checks his accounts on average more than 30 times per day, spends one to less than two hours interacting on them per day, and has more than 1000 friends/followers across all these platforms.

Dislike

“It has definitely skewed my perspective on things, not only do you have to think about your appearance in person, you now have to think about your online appearance and how you come across through your social media platforms.”

“I know this (people putting only their best side on social media) has a negative effect on a lot of younger people. I once saw it described as 'comparing your behind-the-scenes to someone else's highlight reel' which I think is exactly what it is like.”

Like

“I have experienced all these things...provides such a platform to connect with like-minded people. Even more so than you can sometimes get in real life interacting.”

Respondent 23

(No real reflection on their own experiences.)

Respondent 24

Pseudonym: Petra

Summary statement: *Social media gives me a fear of missing out on what friends are doing, but helps me connect with others.*

Female, 22, from Christchurch, active on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Tumblr.

First joined a social media site at the age of 13 or 14. Checks her accounts 15 to 30 times per day, interacts for two to three hours on average each day, and has more than 1000 friends/followers.

Dislike

“...in my early years of being a teenager there wasn't much positive things coming out of social media...using social media just opened up another platform for bullying and negative influences. I believe that this is still the same for young teenagers today” .

“Personally I do get really bad FOMO from seeing everyone else's posts when they are spending time with friends in a group.”

“Also through the use people only posting their best pictures on social media, it can create a body image problem.”

Like

“It can be a great place for community building, through the use of pages that have people that have the same interests as you or are struggling with the same issues.”

Respondent 25

Pseudonym: Ben

Summary statement: *Cyberbullying is extremely harmful, but social media is an important avenue for youngsters to rebel and engage with helpful services.*

Male, 22, from Canterbury, active on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat.

First joined a social media site when 12 or younger. Checks his accounts 20 to 30 times per day, interacts for two to three hours per day, and has 500 to 1000 friends/followers.

Dislike

“Some young people will use social media as a way to rebel in an environment where they think they can escape their parents and if a parent tries to look at what they are doing a child might further withdraw because they feel it is a breach of their privacy and threatening their attempts to become independent.”

“Social media websites like Ask.fm and Tumblr (as well as the now no longer used YikYak) that allow people to anonymously submit questions or post publicly are extremely harmful. The damage to an individual's self worth and confidence is horrible. People hide behind anonymity to bully others, don't take responsibility for their actions and don't recognise the consequences.”

Like

“Engaging with young people is often difficult, but using a social media platform works because most young people are willing to engage more so than they would in person.”

Respondent 26

Pseudonym: Tom

Summary statement: *I am grateful for the huge benefits of social media in enabling interaction with lots of people.*

Male, 16, from South Auckland, active on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. First joined a social media site at the age of 13 or 14. Checks his accounts 15 to 30 times per day, spends 2 to 3 hours interacting, has more than 1000 friends/followers.

Dislike

“Social media does have its disadvantages and one of them is how easy it is to scam and bully someone for example, cyber bullying is just as harmful as physical bullying.”

Like

“It's been really good to have a platform to easily interact with friends and family just by a simple click of a button...for me personally I'm extremely grateful to been a part of today's technology.”