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Social Media Counseling as an Effective Channel for Youth Mental Health Support

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Abstract: Stress, anxiety and depression are among youth mental health issues that are on the rise all over the world, but access rates to traditional counselling services are still limited due to stigma, cost, and geographical issues. The study used quantitative survey design focusing on the youths in the state of Anambra in Nigeria. The virtual method was used to collect data through Google Forms, which ensured convenience and anonymity. A questionnaire in a structured form that included a four-point Likert scale was used to measure perceptions of social media counselling on dimensions of accessibility, confidentiality, professional involvement and mental health support. The questionnaire was confirmed by expert review and pilot test. Systematic compilation, coding and preparation of responses were done to undergo statistical analysis, with ethical concerns and privacy of the participants being considered in the research process. According to the study, female youths (69.7%) were the majority in the sample, as males (30.3%) followed, and 26.7 did not have gender data. There is a high perception of social media counselling as being extremely accessible and thought to involve youth engagement although there were low ratings of professional involvement and information reliability. Social media counselling is a proven method of supporting youth mental health, as it helps manage stress, anxiety, and personal challenges, as well as encourages emotional support. However, awareness-making is minimal. The correlation was found to be strong ($r=0.664$, $p < 0.01$) and showed that the more youths engage in social media counselling, the better their mental health outcomes were, which supports the idea that this intervention can be helpful to them. The results suggest that social media counselling is an accessible, flexible, and supportive source of mental health advice for youths, and thus it has the potential to supplement traditional services.

Keywords: Social media counselling, youth mental health, accessibility, virtual counselling, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The digital age has witnessed the emergence of a new and effective avenue of dealing with the mental health issues of youth through social media counselling. Online space is becoming a more frequent home and communication zone of adolescents and young adults, making social media platforms a convenient location to provide mental health care, psycho-education, and early intervention services. Youth mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness, and cyberbullying persist in growing globally, and most youth fail to receive formal mental health care because of stigma, cost, inaccessibility, or fear of judgment (Kruzan et al., 2022). Social media counselling, therefore, presents a more affordable youth-friendly mental health service.

Youth mental health conditions are a high-priority health issue, and the majority of them develop before the age of 25 (Tibbs et al., 2022). Although the demands on the services are increasing, numerous young people do not obtain the necessary assistance in time due to stigma, the lack of mental health professionals, and inadequate access to services. Teenagers tend to use informal support structures and go online; however, these platforms may make them vulnerable to misinformation, cyber-bullying, and inappropriate content. Thus, a deep-seated necessity in organized professionally directed social media counselling to embrace the utility of digital connectivity and guarantee safety and effectiveness. Access and anonymity is one of the primary strengths of social media counselling. Digital counselling Digital counselling platforms such as chat-based counselling and moderated messaging services give young people an opportunity to access help at any time and without any constraints on location. Synchronous chat counselling on the internet has become more popular, especially in younger demographics who hesitate to get face-to-face therapy because it is cheaper, more convenient, and not as stigmatizing (Tibbs et al., 2022). Digital communication perceived anonymity allows adolescents to be more open in showing their emotions, thus enhancing help-seeking behaviours.

Online social support and connection with peers is another enormous advantage. Peer-support forums and social media groups enable young people to exchange experiences and get support and alleviate isolation. In a systematic review, online social support was also linked to higher self-esteem, lesser loneliness and higher life satisfaction among adolescents (Zhou and Cheng, 2022). On the same note, peer-support discussion boards and internet communities offer secure environments wherein adolescents are able to attempt to find emotional confirmation and coping mechanisms (Achar et al., 2024). In the hands of professionals, these websites foster safety and make information shared there supportive and accurate. Mental health literacy and early intervention are also of vital importance to social media counselling. Mental health organisations and counsellors make use of communication apps like messaging and social media networks to promote psychoeducational materials, coping mechanisms, and self-help measures. Interventions based on social media have already demonstrated that they can be used to enhance adherence to and attendance of treatment in depressed or anxious adolescents (Pretorius and See, 2025). Additionally, conventional counselling microskills, such as empathy, validation and structured questioning, can be transported to digital contexts by counselors, where they can create meaningful therapeutic relationships with clients online (Peart et al., 2023).

The social science education knowledge is generally known to be a driver of employability and national development in Nigeria. Social science education makes graduates competent in analytical, civic, and problem-solving roles necessary to engage in efforts of governance, environmental management, and sustainable development solutions (Morah et al., 2022). Other environmental issues further indicate the necessity of interdisciplinary skills to sustain practices (Okafor et al., 2022).

In the same fashion, research on the noise pollution and urban environmental stressors highlight the significance of social awareness and policy participation in enhancing the living conditions (Onwuka et al., 2017). Telecommunications infrastructure and smart city development in urban development create a positive impact on economic opportunities and consumer involvement (Anyakora et al., 2021), whereas green maintenance and climate change education create a positive impact on environmental resilience (Anyakora et al., 2025; Odimegwu and Ikeotuonye, 2023). Social science also contributes to housing development and neighbourhood planning by enabling the inclusion of professionals and moderately sustainable communities (Ikeotuonye and Efobi, 2022; Okafor et al., 2022).

It has been found that the great moderation of professionals, ethics and privacy protection are crucial to the protection of healthy digital counseling conditions (Asare et al., 2023). Although online support may improve wellbeing, it must not substitute professional mental-health care, especially targeting severe disorders which may only be treated under clinical care. The increase in the number of anxious, depressed and emotionally troubled youth demand innovative mental-health support systems. Many youths do not receive traditional counseling due to stigma, affordability, and inaccessibility of a professional despite the increased demand (World Health Organization, 2022). Peer support and online interventions are available on social media platforms, but issues of misinformation, privacy, and the lack of professional control are still present (Kruzan et al., 2022). Available literature points to positive aspects and demonstrates the lack of order in systematic execution and ethical governance, which underscores the necessity to consider social media counseling as a secure, reliable, and scalable channel of youth mental-health support.

Research questions

1. What is the level of social media counseling among youths?
2. What is the level of youth mental health support through social media counseling?
3. What is the relationship between social media counseling and youth mental health support?

METHOD

The research used a quantitative research design to examine social media counseling as a means of providing youth mental-health counseling. The target population included youths who live within Anambra State, Nigeria. A sample of 90 respondents was used to ensure representative sampling of both male and female young people, and demographic information (gender) was also obtained to give the study some contextual information. The data were collected online with the help of Google Forms, which also enabled the participants to fill in the survey at their convenience and anonymously. The virtual model enabled wide coverage of different places in the Anambra State and ensured confidentiality as well as minimizing the logistical limitations that come with physical surveys.

The research adopted a structured questionnaire as the main data-collection tool. The questionnaire was created to focus on the perception of the participants regarding social media counseling and its use in mental-health support. It consisted of several questions that were grouped into particular themes, such as access to counseling services, confidentiality, professional involvement, timeliness, and perceived support of emotional and mental wellbeing. A four-option Likert scale was utilized, and the potential response choices included the options strongly disagree, strongly agree. The four-point scale was chosen to do away with a neutral mid-point, which would have prompted the respondents to take a definite route and more accurate answers about their experiences and perceptions.

The questionnaire was also checked regarding clarity, relevance, and validity before distribution and that every item could be understood and corresponded to the aims of the

study. A pilot test was done using a limited participant sample of youths to ensure the functionality of the Google Forms survey, as well as to uncover ambiguous questions or other technical aspects. Pilot responses led to slight changes to the questionnaire. Data handling was associated with the systematic summary of the virtual survey results and the subsequent preparation to statistical analysis. All answers were anonymized, properly kept and coded to enable order.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	46	51.1	69.7	69.7
	Male	20	22.2	30.3	100.0
	Total	66	73.3	100.0	
Missing	System	24	26.7		
Total		90	100.0		

The gender distribution of the respondents in Table 1 shows that female participants (46; 69.7%) form the majority, while male participants (20; 30.3%) constitute a smaller proportion. Out of the total sample of 90 respondents, 66 (73.3%) provided valid responses for gender, whereas 24 respondents (26.7%) did not indicate their gender, resulting in missing data. The cumulative percentage indicates that females dominate the dataset, which may influence gender-related patterns in responses and should be considered when interpreting the study results.

Research question 1: What is the level of social media counseling among youths?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Counseling among Youths

		Statistic	Std. Error	Bootstrap ^a			
				Bias	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Social media platforms provide easy access to counseling and mental health support services.	N	90		0	0	90	90
	Mean	1.78		.00	.13	1.52	2.02
	Std. Deviation	1.243		-.010	.079	1.052	1.366
	Variance	1.546		-.019	.192	1.107	1.866
	Skewness	1.117	.254	.027	.275	.675	1.747
	Kurtosis	-.613	.503	.149	.723	-1.468	1.329
Counseling services on social media are easily accessible to young people.	N	90		0	0	90	90
	Mean	3.44		.00	.08	3.29	3.59
	Std. Deviation	.721		-.006	.048	.620	.802
	Variance	.519		-.006	.067	.385	.644
	Skewness	-.907	.254	-.007	.195	-1.322	-.541
	Kurtosis	-.510	.503	.069	.430	-1.154	.471
Social media allows confidential communication between youths and counselors.	N	90		0	0	90	90
	Mean	2.87		.00	.11	2.62	3.07
	Std. Deviation	1.073		-.004	.056	.953	1.179
	Variance	1.151		-.006	.120	.909	1.391
	Skewness	-.566	.254	.001	.158	-.855	-.244
	Kurtosis	-.919	.503	.038	.296	-1.393	-.244
I find it easier to seek counseling support	N	90		0	0	90	90
	Mean	2.89		.01	.11	2.68	3.10

through social media than	Std. Deviation	1.011		-.007	.055	.889	1.108
through traditional	Variance	1.021		-.010	.109	.791	1.228
counseling channels.	Skewness	-.374	.254	-.006	.165	-.706	-.073
	Kurtosis	-1.049	.503	.036	.193	-1.326	-.583
Professional counselors	N	90		0	0	90	90
actively use social media	Mean	1.54		.00	.11	1.34	1.77
to support youths' mental	Std. Deviation	1.029		-.011	.089	.827	1.181
health.	Variance	1.060		-.014	.181	.684	1.394
	Skewness	1.521	.254	.016	.321	.984	2.214
	Kurtosis	.651	.503	.159	1.112	-.778	3.356
Social media counseling	N	90		0	0	90	90
provides timely responses	Mean	3.06		.00	.11	2.83	3.26
to mental health concerns.	Std. Deviation	1.064		-.009	.068	.914	1.185
	Variance	1.132		-.014	.144	.836	1.403
	Skewness	-.914	.254	-.004	.176	-1.266	-.563
	Kurtosis	-.397	.503	.082	.496	-1.154	.791
Information and advice	N	90		0	0	90	90
shared by counselors on	Mean	1.63		.00	.12	1.41	1.88
social media are reliable.	Std. Deviation	1.136		-.012	.087	.944	1.277
	Variance	1.291		-.019	.194	.892	1.631
	Skewness	1.377	.254	.031	.304	.868	2.088
	Kurtosis	.117	.503	.194	.964	-1.094	2.711
The use of social media	N	90		0	0	90	90
encourages more youths	Mean	3.00		.00	.10	2.79	3.19
to seek mental health	Std. Deviation	.960		-.011	.072	.791	1.086
counseling.	Variance	.921		-.015	.137	.625	1.180
	Skewness	-.936	.254	-.002	.140	-1.187	-.633
	Kurtosis	.096	.503	.106	.585	-.825	1.485
Valid N (listwise)	N	90		0	0	90	90

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

The results in Table 2 indicate varying levels of social media counseling practices among youths. Items such as “Counseling services on social media are easily accessible” (Mean = 3.44) and “The use of social media encourages more youths to seek counseling” (Mean = 3.00) suggest high accessibility and engagement. Conversely, items like “Professional counselors actively use social media” (Mean = 1.54) and “Information shared by counselors is reliable” (Mean = 1.63) indicate low perceived professional involvement and reliability. The findings show that while youths frequently access social media for counseling, there are concerns regarding the professionalism, timeliness, and trustworthiness of services.

Research question 2: What is the level of youth mental health support through social media counseling?

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Youth Mental Health Support through Social Media Counseling

		Statistic	Std. Error	Bootstrap ^a			
				Bias	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Social media counseling	N	90		0	0	90	90
helps reduce stress among	Mean	3.00		.00	.12	2.76	3.24
young people.	Std. Deviation	1.199		-.011	.062	1.055	1.300
	Variance	1.438		-.022	.146	1.114	1.691

	Skewness	- .760	.254	-.015	.207	-1.198	-.398
	Kurtosis	-1.035	.503	.090	.414	-1.539	-.004
Access to counseling through social media improves youths' emotional well-being.	N	90		0	0	90	90
	Mean	2.93		.00	.10	2.76	3.12
	Std. Deviation	.922		-.011	.063	.784	1.028
	Variance	.849		-.016	.115	.615	1.057
	Skewness	-.658	.254	.012	.140	-.915	-.371
	Kurtosis	-.272	.503	.046	.388	-.858	.667
Social media counseling helps youths cope better with anxiety and depression.	N	90		0	0	90	90
	Mean	3.30		.00	.10	3.10	3.48
	Std. Deviation	.965		-.013	.083	.793	1.111
	Variance	.931		-.019	.158	.629	1.234
	Skewness	-1.330	.254	-.004	.210	-1.742	-.947
	Kurtosis	.752	.503	.137	.812	-.469	2.587
Youths who engage in social media counseling feel emotionally supported.	N	90		0	0	90	90
	Mean	3.09		.00	.11	2.84	3.29
	Std. Deviation	1.098		-.010	.071	.939	1.220
	Variance	1.205		-.016	.155	.882	1.489
	Skewness	-.961	.254	-.007	.198	-1.359	-.585
	Kurtosis	-.438	.503	.095	.545	-1.233	.893
Social media counseling contributes positively to youths' mental stability.	N	90		0	0	90	90
	Mean	3.11		.00	.12	2.87	3.34
	Std. Deviation	1.175		-.012	.074	1.006	1.291
	Variance	1.381		-.022	.169	1.013	1.668
	Skewness	-.985	.254	-.019	.227	-1.472	-.584
	Kurtosis	-.628	.503	.124	.594	-1.396	.870
Counseling through social media helps youths manage personal and social challenges.	N	90		0	0	90	90
	Mean	3.36		.00	.11	3.13	3.57
	Std. Deviation	1.105		-.011	.087	.902	1.247
	Variance	1.220		-.016	.188	.814	1.556
	Skewness	-1.414	.254	-.030	.290	-2.066	-.939
	Kurtosis	.351	.503	.200	.996	-.902	2.950
Regular exposure to counseling content on social media improves mental health awareness among youths.	N	90		0	0	90	90
	Mean	1.61		.00	.12	1.40	1.84
	Std. Deviation	1.129		-.011	.090	.935	1.275
	Variance	1.274		-.016	.198	.874	1.625
	Skewness	1.491	.254	.031	.314	.986	2.210
	Kurtosis	.453	.503	.215	1.101	-.878	3.454
Social media counseling enhances mental health support for young people.	N	90		0	0	90	90
	Mean	3.30		.00	.10	3.10	3.48
	Std. Deviation	.965		-.013	.083	.793	1.111
	Variance	.931		-.019	.158	.629	1.234
	Skewness	-1.330	.254	-.004	.210	-1.742	-.947
	Kurtosis	.752	.503	.137	.812	-.469	2.587
Valid N (listwise)	N	90		0	0	90	90

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

The findings in Table 3 indicate that social media counseling contributes positively to youth mental health support. Items such as “Counseling through social media helps youths manage personal and social challenges” (Mean = 3.36) and “Social media counseling helps youths cope better with anxiety and depression” (Mean = 3.30) reflect high perceived effectiveness. Similarly, “Youths who engage in social media counseling feel emotionally

supported” (Mean = 3.09) and “Social media counseling enhances mental health support” (Mean = 3.30) suggest positive outcomes. However, items like “Regular exposure to counseling content improves mental health awareness” (Mean = 1.61) indicate low awareness-building effects, highlighting areas for improvement.

Research question 3: What is the relationship between social media counseling and youth mental health support?

Table 4: Correlation between Social Media Counseling and Youth Mental Health Support

		Social media counseling	Youth mental health support
Social media counseling	Pearson Correlation	1	.664**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	90	90
	Bootstrap ^b Bias	0	.002
	Std. Error	0	.077
	95% Confidence Lower	1	.499
	Interval Upper	1	.794
Youth mental health support	Pearson Correlation	.664**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	90	90
	Bootstrap ^b Bias	.002	0
	Std. Error	.077	0
	95% Confidence Lower	.499	1
	Interval Upper	.794	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

b. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

The Pearson correlation analysis in Table 4 shows a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between social media counseling and youth mental health support ($r = 0.664$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that higher levels of social media counseling are associated with improved mental health support among youths. The 95% bootstrap confidence interval (.499 to .794) confirms the robustness of this relationship. In practical terms, this suggests that youths who frequently engage with social media counseling services are more likely to experience emotional support, reduced stress, better coping with anxiety, and overall improved mental health outcomes.

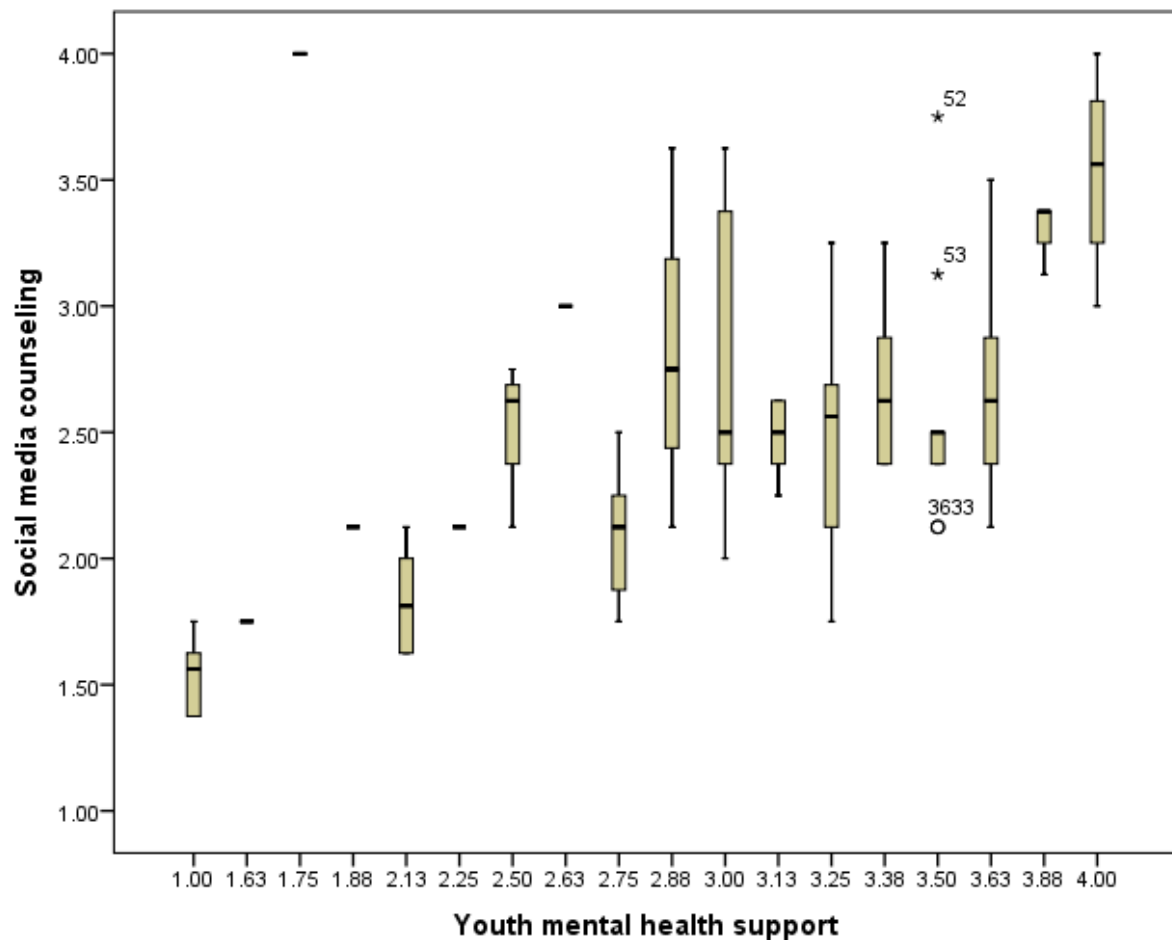


Figure 1: Boxplot Showing the Relationship between Social Media Counseling and Youth Mental Health Support

The boxplot in Figure 1 illustrates a positive relationship between social media counseling and youth mental health support. As youth mental health support scores increase, the median values of social media counseling also rise, indicating that higher engagement in counseling correlates with better mental health outcomes. The indigenous range of data points is concentrated around the interquartile range, indicating a moderate level of consistency in the data points across the observations, albeit with some outliers indicating variability in the personal experiences. The visual depiction supports a strong positive relationship found in the correlation analysis, and this proves the fact that youths who gain more advantage in social media counseling report higher rates of mental-health support.

Discussion

The demographic description indicated that most of the respondents were female (69.7%); males constituted 30.3 percent of the valid sample (see Table 1). The existence of this gender disparity is consequential, as the literature that exists highlights the different effects of social media on mental health between the sexes. As an example, Khalaf et al. (2023) discovered that female adolescents often describe greater emotional impacts of social media use compared to males and, therefore, state that the greater female representation of the study could influence the patterns of engagement and perceived support. On the other hand, it has been proposed by larger longitudinal studies (The Guardian, 2026) that the total volume of usage does not directly foresee negative mental-health outcomes of either sex,

meaning that gender disparities might be mitigated when we only look at the usage metrics. Such conflicting results indicate the need to approach gender distribution in social media counseling studies with caution.

In terms of the youths using social media counseling, descriptive data reflected a variance in experience (Table 2). Mean score of high accessibility (Mean = 3.44) and perceived encouragement to seek counseling (Mean = 3.00) implies that a large number of the youths perceive social media as a readily available source of help. This fact is consistent with systematic reviews that determine online counseling platforms and social media spaces as new sources of mental-health guidance and psychosocial support to adolescents (Asare et al., 2023). Another related study also found a correlation between exposure to mental-health on social sites, and elevated help-seeking behaviors in the youth, consistent with engagement patterns in this study. Conversely, the professional involvement (Mean = 1.54) and reliability of information (Mean = 1.63) means are less than the concerns expressed in the literature about the quality and credibility of mental-health content distributed through social media. These fears are further exacerbated by indications of the prevalence of misinformation in mental-health posts where many trending videos provide misguided or false tips (Guardian, 2026). These ambivalent results support the idea that this access and interaction make social media the means of counseling access and activity, but the quality and genuineness of counseling material is undermined, which is consistent with the broader concerns regarding the safety of mental-health content online.

In relation to the dimension of youth mental-health support based on social media counseling (Table 3), the results showed positive perceived changes in anxiety coping (Mean=3.30), emotional support (Mean=3.09), and coping with personal difficulties (Mean=3.36), and on awareness, the results were low (Mean=1.61). These results confirm the assumption that numerous young people feel supported and resilient because of online counseling interactions, which is in line with the literature that recognizes digital tools as having the capacity to strengthen social support, alleviate loneliness, and boost self-esteem among teenagers (Zhou and Cheng, 2022). The literature also hypothesizes that negative mental-health outcomes like stress and anxiety can be prevented by online social support (Zhou and Cheng, 2022). Nevertheless, other studies state that unregulated or excessively passive social media usage correlates with a high likelihood of depression, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem (Azem et al., 2023). Therefore, the beneficial changes observed in this research could be based on how counseling content and platforms are utilized by youths and not on social media use in general. Deviation between perceived high support and low-awareness improvement can be an indicator of a gap between organized mental-health programming in social media counseling systems. There are also reviews that note that although the use of social media interventions has potential to positively impact well-being, the general evidence is heterogeneous and depends on context and type of intervention (Plackett et al., 2023).

The significant correlation ($r = .664$, $p = .001$) between social media counseling and youth mental-health support (Table 4) is consistent with empirical data of studies on mental-health content engagement. Indicatively, exposure to mental-health content has been reported to have significant positive relations with help-seeking behaviors among youth, thus validating the finding of this study that the more individuals engage with social media counseling, the better the mental-health support outcomes. These findings are in line with systematic reviews that suggest online support mechanisms have the potential to positively impact adolescents with respect to their self-identity and well-being (Zhou and Cheng, 2022). However, the systematic evidence is still complicated; not every social media interaction has positive mental-health outcomes, and other ones can be connected with adverse effects like the development of distress or depression symptoms (Azem et al., 2023). This highlights the

fact that the reported relational strength can be related rather to supportive and counseling-related interactions than to overall social media use. Based on the available literature, these results indicate that accessibility and engagement are good attributes, but professional reliability and systematic awareness programs should be improved to maximize beneficial effects and reduce the risk posed by misinformation and unprofessional counseling content.

CONCLUSION

The research examining the use of social media counseling as an effective channel of mental-health support among the youth reveals that online tools hold a potential to deal with the psychological needs of the youths. The results show that the social media-based counseling improves accessibility, providing access to instant and adaptable counseling that is not restricted by geographical differences or conventional service provisions. Social media platforms are interactive, familiar, and encourage comfort and openness among youths to take on the need to seek help and to ensure that they continuously use mental-health resources. Although some limitations are present, including privacy issues and the necessity to provide professional control, the research highlights the opportunities of having social media counseling supplementary to traditional mental-health services. Through the application of technology, mental-health practitioners can gain access to more youths by the age of the young people, advocate early intervention and diminish the stigma that surrounds seeking psychological assistance. In conclusion, the inclusion of social media counseling in the overall mental-health strategies can reinforce the health of young people and the adoption of a more active and inclusive attitude to mental-health care.

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