

Social Support at Your Fingertips: A Meta-Analysis of Students' Social Media Usage and Social Support

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Date : 11 December 2025 (Thursday)
Time : 3:00pm-4:00pm
Zoom Link : <https://cityu.zoom.us/j/89492567945?pwd=lzCSSJMAuFHtruSM7AP5DhuygyHKbT.1>
Meeting ID: 894 9256 7945 Password: 519324
Moderator : Prof. Ben Li (Associate Professor)
Language : English

Abstract

Since the pandemic, social media usage and concerns about the deterioration of students' mental health have both risen sharply. While policymakers are acting rapidly to regulate or even ban social media for students, we still lack strong scientific knowledge about the overall tradeoffs of social media use for this population. This meta-analysis ($N_{\text{students}} = 49,449$, $N_{\text{studies}} = 72$, $N_{\text{EffectSizes}} = 296$) reveals a significant, positive overall correlation ($r = .12$, $p < .001$) between students' social media usage and social support. Moderator analysis showed higher correlations in studies using randomly selected samples; studies using simple regression without covariates; and for students from individualistic (versus collectivistic) cultures seeking online support. Our result signals that social media is not unilaterally negative—an impression one could easily glean from the popular press. Policymakers might consider designing strategic ways to help students access these benefits of social media while minimizing its potential harm.

Biography

Qiyang is an interdisciplinary psychologist and quantitative researcher whose work examines how emerging technologies shape human development, well-being, and behaviour. Her research integrates psychology, education, communication, and data science to understand how digital environments — and increasingly, generative AI chatbots — interact with social-emotional functioning across the lifespan.

Her research focuses on two core questions central to today's digital society: How do social media and digital platforms impact the well-being of young people? How do AI chatbots and companion technologies affect mental health? Using mixed methods, experiments, and evidence synthesis, her work aims to generate actionable insights for healthier human–technology interaction.

She also advances methodological innovation in systematic reviews and meta-analyses and co-developed *Paperfetcher*. This easy-to-use app platform enhances the literature search, rigour, and reproducibility of evidence synthesis.

Qiyang earned her PhD from the Johns Hopkins School of Education. She is committed to building data-driven, evidence-informed practices that support psychological well-being, promote responsible AI integration, and contribute to CityU's strategic priorities in Digital Society, Computational Social Sciences, and AI-health.

ALL ARE WELCOME