



# CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

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## INTRODUCTION

The growing use of **Social Media** within popular culture has shown that today's society is more willing to share with others on a public **forum** their personal and social activities such as shopping, eating out and watching films.

Unfortunately, **Mental Health Issues** are rarely brought up online on social media platforms however many awareness groups, education institutions and healthcare providers around the world are starting to create and utilise the social media platforms to provide support and advice for those who require it. For example, the Birmingham City University Student's Union (BCUSU) created and formed a mental health awareness society within the university. The Birmingham City University Mental Health Awareness (BCUMHA) Society's mission is stated on Facebook.

*“Raising awareness, tackling stigma, and enhancing the student experience for those who suffer from a mental health illness at Birmingham City University”*

*(Birmingham City University Mental Health Awareness et al., 2016)*

Since the formation of BCUMHA and similar societies at other universities, students have been discussing and raising issues within their university and provided feedback on the support they have been offered.

## OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Table 1 (shown below) contains all journal articles the author has selected surrounding the topic of the use of social media within mental health services.

Authors	Year	Paper Title	Paper Summary
Moorhead et al	2013	A New Dimension Of Health Care: Systematic Review Of The Uses, Benefits, And Limitations Of Social Media For Health Communication	This paper researches into the uses and effects of using social media platforms to communicate between healthcare provider and patient. The paper identifies recommendations to enable general health communication to become more effective.
Hoge et al.	2006	Mental Health Problems, Use Of Mental Health Services, And Attrition From Military Service After Returning From Deployment To Iraq Or Afghanistan	This paper looks into the mental health care provided to military personnel coming back from combat areas and how the use of mental health screening has allowed the care provided to be of a higher standard.
Maulik et al.	2009	The Role Of Social Network And Support In Mental Health Service Use: Findings From The Baltimore ECA Study	This paper examine the possibility and the effects of using social media to treat mental health issues.
Orlowski et al.	2016	The Promise And The Reality: A Mental Health Workforce Perspective On Technology-Enhanced Youth Mental Health Service Delivery	Similar to the previous article, this paper examines the effects of using social media to treat mental health issues however this paper focuses on mental health issues faced by younger people and how social media can be used.
Rosenbaum et al.	2012	The Effect Of Instant Messaging Services On Society's Mental Health	This paper shows how <b>instant messaging services</b> affect societal mental health within this 18-30 age group. It also looks into the issues of internet addiction within this age group and its effect on their mental health.
Blanchard	2011	Navigating The Digital Disconnect	Blanchard looks into the strategies and their effectiveness of using new technologies to impact the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25.

Crown copyright	1983	<b>The Mental Health Act 1983</b>	This legislation defines all circumstances for admission for mental health issues and guidelines and policies for the care of patients with mental health issues.
Great Britain. Department of Health	1999	Mental Health: Modern Standards And Service Models: Executive Summary	This book issues the standards that all NHS trusts within the United Kingdom should follow and adhere to. It includes guidelines on treatment and care.

**Table 1 – An Overview of the Academic Literature Surrounding the Effectiveness of Social Media within Mental Health Services**

## THEMATIC COMPARISON OF LITERATURE ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

### THE DEPLOYMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mental health services differ within each country; this critical literature review will focus mainly on the services provided within the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

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#### MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Mental health services within the United States of America (USA) are provided by private companies who require payment from each recipient of their services.

The United States Military provides a service for personnel that assesses them for possible health issues created from working within the **combat zones**. This service begins with a form called the Post-Deployment Health Assessment form (PDHA). This allows the military to arrange and deliver specific healthcare treatments, including any mental health services to their staff. This service has a positive effect on the users of the service within the first year however statistics for after the first year of service are incomplete as stated in Hoge's paper,

*"This study provides new data showing the strong relationship between combat duty and a variety of mental health outcomes and most importantly high mental health care utilization in the first year after deployment. ... Additional research is needed beyond a year after deployment to determine the long-term burden that this war will have on the mental health care system."*

(Hoge et al., 2006)

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#### MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Mental health services within the United Kingdom is generally funded by the **National Health Service (NHS)**. The NHS is currently aiming to cut down operational costs for these services. In 1999, the then Secretary of State for Health Frank Dobson MP, announced

*"The Government is committed to do whatever is necessary to deliver a modern and dependable health service ... Mental health services and the professionals who provide them will get the attention and resources they deserve"*

(Great Britain. Department of Health, 1999)

These commitments have not been fulfilled as the country has since experienced several recessions that have overshadowed the improvement to mental health services.

There is however stricter guidelines on providing efficient and quality mental health services. The Mental Health Act 1983 states all guidelines for the delivery and protection of mental health services.

*“(1)It shall be an offence for any person who is an officer on the staff of or otherwise employed in...*

*(a)to ill-treat or wilfully to neglect a patient for the time being receiving treatment for mental disorder as an in-patient ...*

*or*

*(b)to ill-treat or wilfully to neglect, ... a patient for the time being receiving such treatment there as an out-patient.*

*(2)It shall be an offence for any individual to ill-treat or wilfully to neglect a mentally disordered patient who is for the time being subject to his guardianship under this Act or otherwise in his custody or care.”*

*(Crown copyright, 1983)*

## THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has become one of the human rights in some countries with many people who use the internet owning one or more social media accounts.

Social media platforms promote **freedom of speech** also as they are generally ungoverned and have in the past allowed those who are in oppressed countries to publicise the internal events going on.

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## DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

There are approximately 8 different social media platform categories; Social Networking, Video Sharing, Live-Streaming, Microblogging, Blogging, Social News, Photo Sharing and Content Curation. The most popular platforms for each category are Facebook, YouTube, Twitch, Twitter, WordPress, Reddit, Instagram and Pinterest respectively.

## THE USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Many people well known within popular culture gain their popularity and ‘fame’ from using their social media accounts. The most famous case for this is Kim Kardashian who frequently publishes suggestive images of herself online to explicitly gain controversy.

Other users of social media platforms include tutorials, news articles, advertising, gameplay and general ideas for projects.

Many countries security services use these social networks to monitor possible security threats such as suspected terrorists. The United States of America's **National Security Agency (NSA)** utilises social media to monitor security targets as Joseph Verble states in his paper.

*“The NSA became the management system for the ... researchers into new computer technology and communications infrastructure.”*

(Verble, 2014)

## THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA WITHIN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Recently, mental healthcare providers have been trialling the use of social media and online platforms for providing support and advice to their patients. Several journal articles suggest that online treatment would benefit however careful consideration on the design and use of the platforms should be observed. Orlowski states

*While the benefits of technology were seen in the ability to more closely track consumers' progress and level of risk, it was also associated with concerns around an implied level of clinician responsivity and possible increases to workload. These concerns included a perceived lack of processing around information communicated via these modes of communication and unclear guidelines around when and how clinicians should respond to potentially risky information, particularly outside of work hours.*

(Orlowski et al., 2016)

Social media can also be used by the general public to assess someone's mental health although the system is heavily reliant on each person's. This has already been implemented on Facebook where users can report those who are at risk of harming themselves or someone else. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show the advice and guidance Facebook provides its users who can either refer themselves or someone else to a mental health service.



I'm having thoughts about suicide or self-injury

If you're in immediate physical danger, please contact local law enforcement or a suicide hotline for help.

If you're going through something difficult and the threat isn't immediate, we want you to know there are things you can do right now that may help you:

- Talk to someone at a helpline
- Reach out to someone you trust
- Give yourself a break and do something that makes you feel happy and good about yourself

### Talk to someone at a helpline

#### Suicide Prevention

- Find your local suicide hotline by viewing our full list of prevention resources. Facebook partners with over 50 expert organizations around the world.

#### Self-Injury

- In the US, United Kingdom and Ireland, contact Reach Out: 1-800-448-3000; <http://us.reachout.com/facts/self-harm>
- In Australia, contact headspace: 1800 650 890; <http://headspace.org.au/get-info/self-harm>
- In other countries, contact Befrienders: 1-800-448-3000; <http://www.befrienders.org/about-self-harm>

#### Eating Disorders

- In the United Kingdom and Ireland, contact beat (beating eating disorders): 0845 634 1414; 0845 634 7650 (youthline); [help@b-eat.co.uk](mailto:help@b-eat.co.uk); <https://www.b-eat.co.uk/>

### Reach out to someone you trust

Contact someone you trust, like a family member, friend, counselor or teacher, and ask them to let you share what's on your mind. For example, you could say, "I'm going through something difficult and was hoping to talk to you about it. If that's OK with you, can you take some time to listen?"

### Give yourself a break and do something that makes you feel happy and good about yourself

It can be difficult to focus when you're overwhelmed or can't find a solution to a problem right away. Stop for a moment, take a deep breath and give yourself a break from your feelings.

Try some of these tips from self-care experts at Forefront and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

#### Get out for a while:

- Go for a walk, jog or bike ride
- Go to the movies
- Visit somewhere new, like a coffee shop or museum or park you've never been

#### Be creative:

- Draw something simple
- Make a nice meal
- Write a short story

#### Soothe your senses:

- Meditate or do yoga
- Take a hot shower
- Listen to your favorite songs

#### Relax:

- Look at the clouds
- Read a book, magazine or blog post
- Take a nap

If the tips above don't work for you, see more things you can do right now.

You can also learn more about dealing with suicidal thoughts and find local self-care experts.

If you have a friend who's having thoughts about suicide or self-injury, you can share these resources with them as well.

Source: (Facebook, 2017)

Figure 1 – Question giving advice regarding mental health issues

I need to find a suicide hotline for myself or a friend. ^

Suicide hotlines provide help to those in need. Contact a hotline if you need support yourself or need help supporting a friend. If you're concerned about a friend, please encourage the person to contact a hotline as well.

Source: (Facebook, 2017)

Figure 2 – Question giving advice regarding mental health issues

How do I help an LGBT person who has posted suicidal content on Facebook? ^

If you've encountered a direct threat of suicide on Facebook, please contact law enforcement or a [suicide hotline](#) immediately.

The Trevor Project specializes in suicide prevention for LGBT youth and offers a lifeline that people in the US can contact by calling 1-866-488-7386. The Trevor Project also offers resources for concerned friends and family members of LGBT youth. Learn more about The Trevor Project on their website: <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>.

How helpful did you find this answer?



[View full article](#) · [Share article](#)

What is the Facebook Network of Support (NOS) and what NOS resources are available for LGBT people? v

How do I help a member of the US military community (ex: active soldier, veteran or family member) who has posted suicidal content? ^

If a friend or family member is planning suicide or you've seen a direct threat of suicide on Facebook, please contact your local emergency services or a [suicide hotline](#) immediately. We also ask that you [tell us](#) if you see something that suggests suicide or self-injury on Facebook.

The Veterans Crisis Line provides customized support to members of the military community, including veterans, active duty service members and their families. Support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

You can contact them by:

- Calling their toll-free hotline at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1
- Visiting <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/> to chat online
- Sending a text message to 838255

Additional resources available to the military community include:

- [The Veterans Crisis Line](#)
- The Wounded Warrior Project [Restore Warriors \(TM\)](#) provides support for veterans and families who are dealing with combat stress, PTSD or TBI
- [TAPS: Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors](#) provides support for families and loved ones who have lost someone who was in the military service

Source: (Facebook, 2017)

Figure 3 – Question giving advice regarding mental health issues

Researchers have also found that the use of social media specifically the reduced contact between friends and family affected the odds of accessing mental health services. Maulik states

*“The effect of social network and social support on general medical service use indicated that a reduced frequency of contact with either friends or relatives was associated with reduced odds of accessing services across different mental health conditions.”*

(Maulik et al., 2009)

This demonstrates that mental healthcare providers should begin advertising and offering support on social media platforms as this would greatly increase the usage of their services and allow more flexibility with appointments. It would also ensure that people suffering with anxiety disorders are able to attend their appointments regardless of being in the provider's facility or not.

The use of social media within healthcare can also be used within general healthcare also. The usage of services such as **WebMD** increase engagement and the awareness of other health conditions. Moorhead states

*“Social media brings a new dimension to health care as it offers a medium to be used by the public, patients, and health professionals to communicate about health issues with the possibility of potentially improving health outcomes.”*

(Moorhead et al., 2013)

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## ADOPTION WITHIN EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Education institutions have been very hesitant to incorporate social media into their wellbeing programmes as there is evidence to suggest that students' conditions may worsen if services are accessed using social media platforms. Rosenbaum demonstrates this saying

*“research shows that internet addiction may exacerbate ADHD symptoms in adolescents”*

(Rosenbaum et al., 2012)

Institutions may also be hesitant due to the cost of implementing such a service and developing procedures and training staff as demonstrated in Blanchard's article.

*“Information communication technologies have great potential in improving young people’s mental health ... However, if this potential is realized, guidelines for their safe and effective use need to be developed. Furthermore, investment needs to be made in securing appropriate technology infrastructure ... and in training staff to better understand young people’s use of technology.”*

(Blanchard, 2011)

## CONCLUSION

The use of social media within mental healthcare allows more organisations to provide a more efficient service without affecting the quality at a lower cost compared to traditional methods such as face to face appointments.

The future of social media and mental health services is very unpredictable as many organisations are incredibly hesitant to start using social media platforms however as more digital devices including **The Internet of Things** devices become popular, the use of social media and mental health services may grow and become the main method for individuals to access these services.

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## GLOSSARY

**Combat Zones** – An area where military forces operate

**Forum** – An online service that allows the views of others to be promoted

**Freedom of Speech** – The concession for someone to speak without restraints from authorities

**Instant Messaging Services** – An online service that provides real-time conversations to take place

**Mental Health Issues** – Defined disorders that affect mood, thinking and behaviour

**National Health Service** – A publicly funded healthcare organisation within the United Kingdom

**National Security Agency** – An intelligence gathering organisation of the United States government

**Social Media** – Online services that allow users to share content with others

**The Internet of Things** – General household appliances that connect to the internet

**The Mental Health Act 1983** – An act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom that covers the delivery of mentally disabled people

**WebMD** – An online publisher of information regarding health and wellbeing