How are adolescent mental health outcomes impacted by social media use?

In the Digital Mental Health group, we are interested in how adolescent mental health outcomes are impacted by social media use in many different ways. There are therefore various potential avenues for a PhD in this space, and we love to hear your own original ideas. For inspiration, a non-exhaustive list of some example research areas can be found below:

1) Development: How do developmental processes in adolescence, and potentially childhood, intersect with social media use and mental health? A PhD project could focus on how certain pubertal, cognitive or neural changes during this time impact how adolescents interact with and react to social media and other digital environments.

2) Cognition: What are the cognitive mechanisms linking social media use to mental health (either in clinical or community samples of adolescents)? A PhD project might, for example, take a particular element of social media use or design, match it with cognitive theories/paradigms and then use a range of methodologies to examine whether this change impacts mental health.

3) Computational Approaches: How can we apply analytical or computational methods from across the cognitive sciences to our research questions of interest? A PhD project might, for example, apply computational foraging models to social media behaviours, using data scraped from platforms or collected via data donation (see reference).

4) Assessing and Addressing Social Media Use in a Clinical Context: How does social media use a) predict adolescents receiving a mental health diagnosis, b) impact those living with a mental health diagnosis, or c) determine recovery? A PhD project could, for example, examine whether some concerns about social media use negatively impacting mental health are transdiagnostic (e.g., the ‘always on’ nature of social media) rather than disorder-specific. You could also study how social media use is assessed and examined in a clinical context, and how such processes could be improved and supported.
References and URL(s)

Reference
Development:
https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-29296-3
https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115202
https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-023-00402-9

Cognition:
https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-03126-x
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-018-0261-x
https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2020.0424 [example from a difference field]

Computational approaches:
https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-19607-x
https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsaa037
https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.49547

Clinical context:
https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13190.
https://doi.org/10.1177/13591045221098896

User ID
Fionnuala Murphy