

Social Media and Adolescent Health

Jon-Patrick Allem, Ph.D., M.A.

April 15, 2024

STUDENT OPINION

Does Social Media Harm Young People's Mental Health?

The United States surgeon general issued an extraordinary warning that could bring changes to how young people use social media. What is your reaction?



Headlines and congressional hearings

Social Media's Impact on Mental Health, New Study Finds

Social media is bad for people's mental health in a variety of different ways, a new research study has found.

A meta-analysis of data from hundreds of published research papers finds a strong association between heavy social media use and mental health issues ranging from depression and anxiety to feelings of social inadequacy.

"The greatest factor seems to be that social media tends to make users believe that their lives are less interesting and less successful compared with those of others," said the lead researcher.

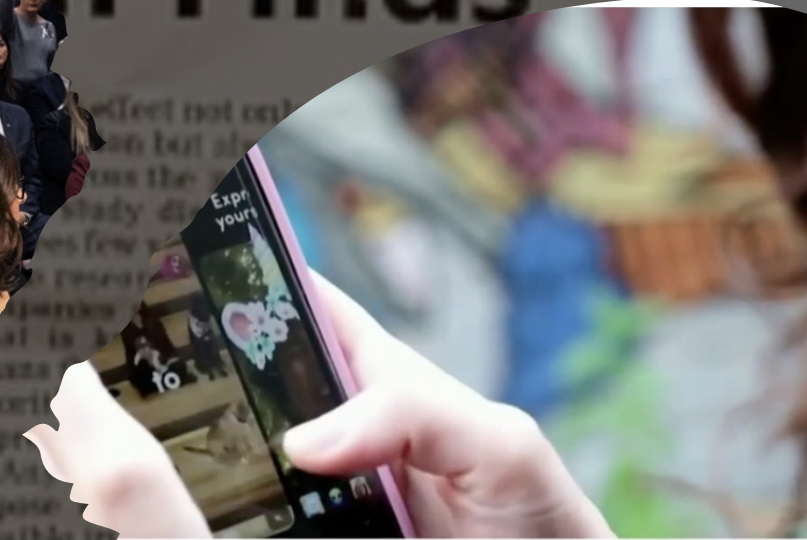
"This is known as the 'showers' effect', the phenomenon whereby people display

the best and most interesting parts of their lives. Average users are more likely to believe that their lives are less interesting and less successful than those of others.

"But social media is not inherently bad. It can be a great tool for staying connected with friends and family, and for finding support groups for people with similar interests and challenges.

"This may be why social media networks' algorithms are designed to show users more of the same. However, media reports displayed to users on social media, and sent on by users to others, tend to be selected by the algorithms for sensationalism and shock value.

"However, media reports displayed to users on social media, and sent on by users to others, tend to be selected by the algorithms for sensationalism and shock value.



SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT ON TEEN GIRLS' MENTAL HEALTH



Social Media and Adolescent Health

Consensus Study Report

The National Academy, is a congressionally chartered organization in the U.S.

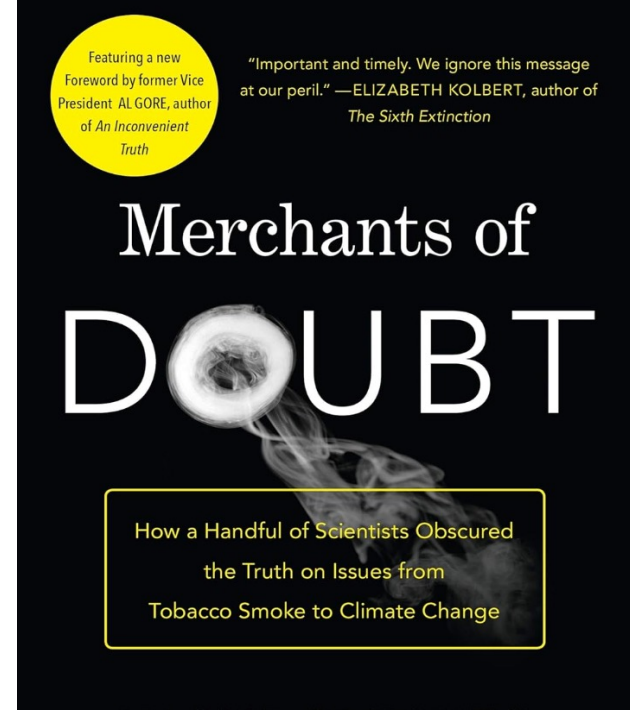
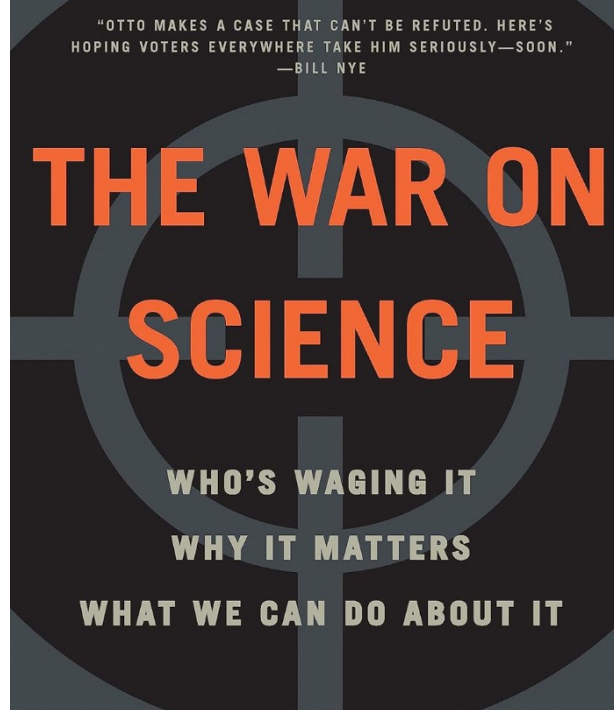
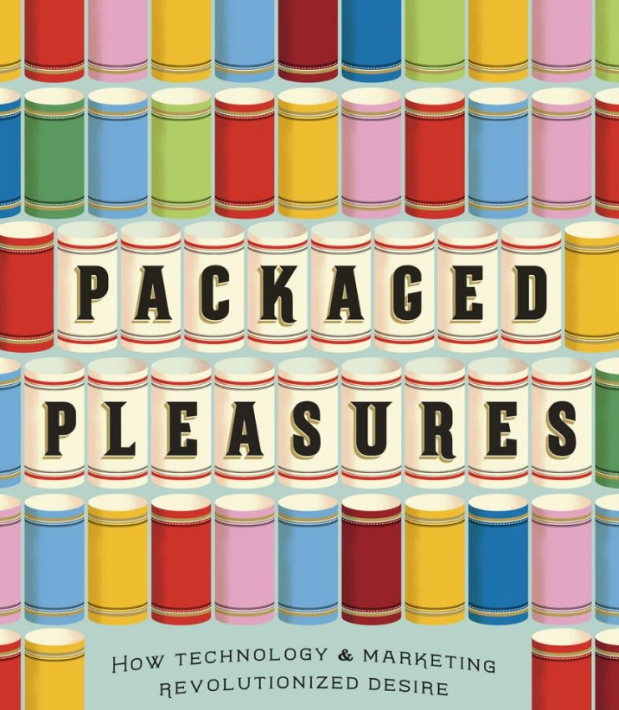
Published in December 2023, reports like this are authored by a committee of experts and include findings, conclusions, and recommendations based on the extant literature gathered by the committee.

The committee’s review of the literature, “did not support the conclusion that social media causes changes in adolescent health at the population level.”

Got me thinking

- Who comprised the evidence?
- What was the evidence?
- How was the evidence selected?
- What evidence was excluded?





Who comprised the evidence?
Industry funded
scientists

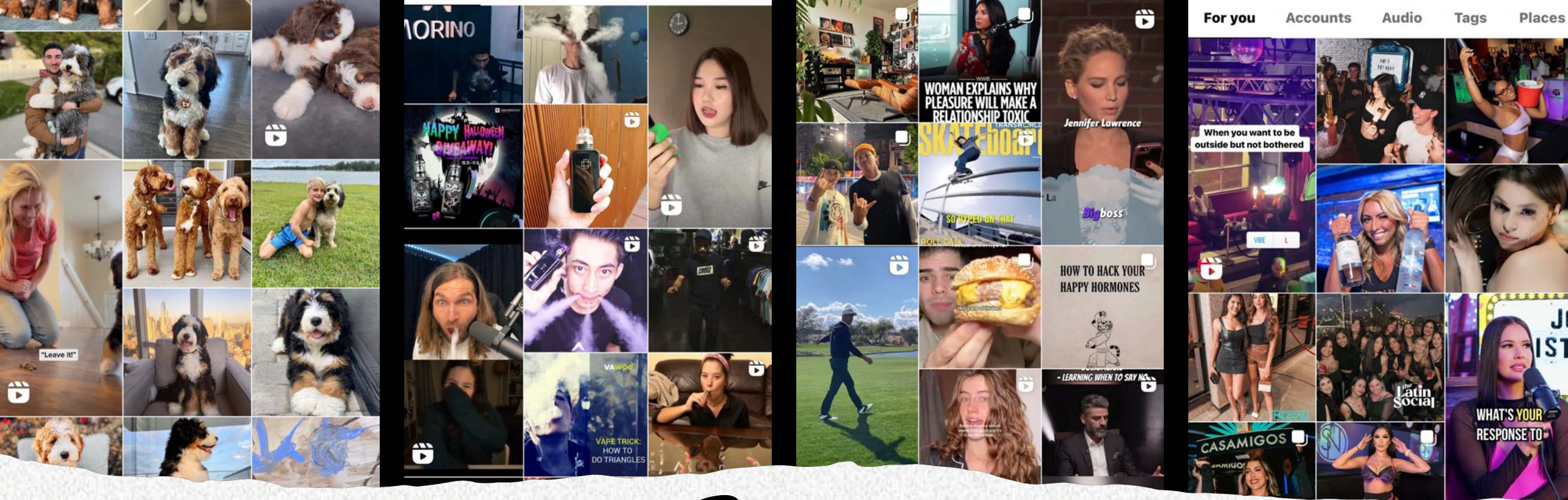
The evidence

COMMITTEE AND STAFF CONDUCTED THREE LITERATURE SEARCHES BETWEEN JANUARY AND JUNE 2023, ADJUSTING SEARCH TERMS EACH TIME WITH INPUT FROM THE COMMITTEE.

THE TERMS AIMED TO FIND LITERATURE REVIEWS, SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS, AND META-ANALYSES WITH A FOCUS ON THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE ON ADOLESCENT HEALTH THAT HAD BEEN PUBLISHED SINCE 2018.

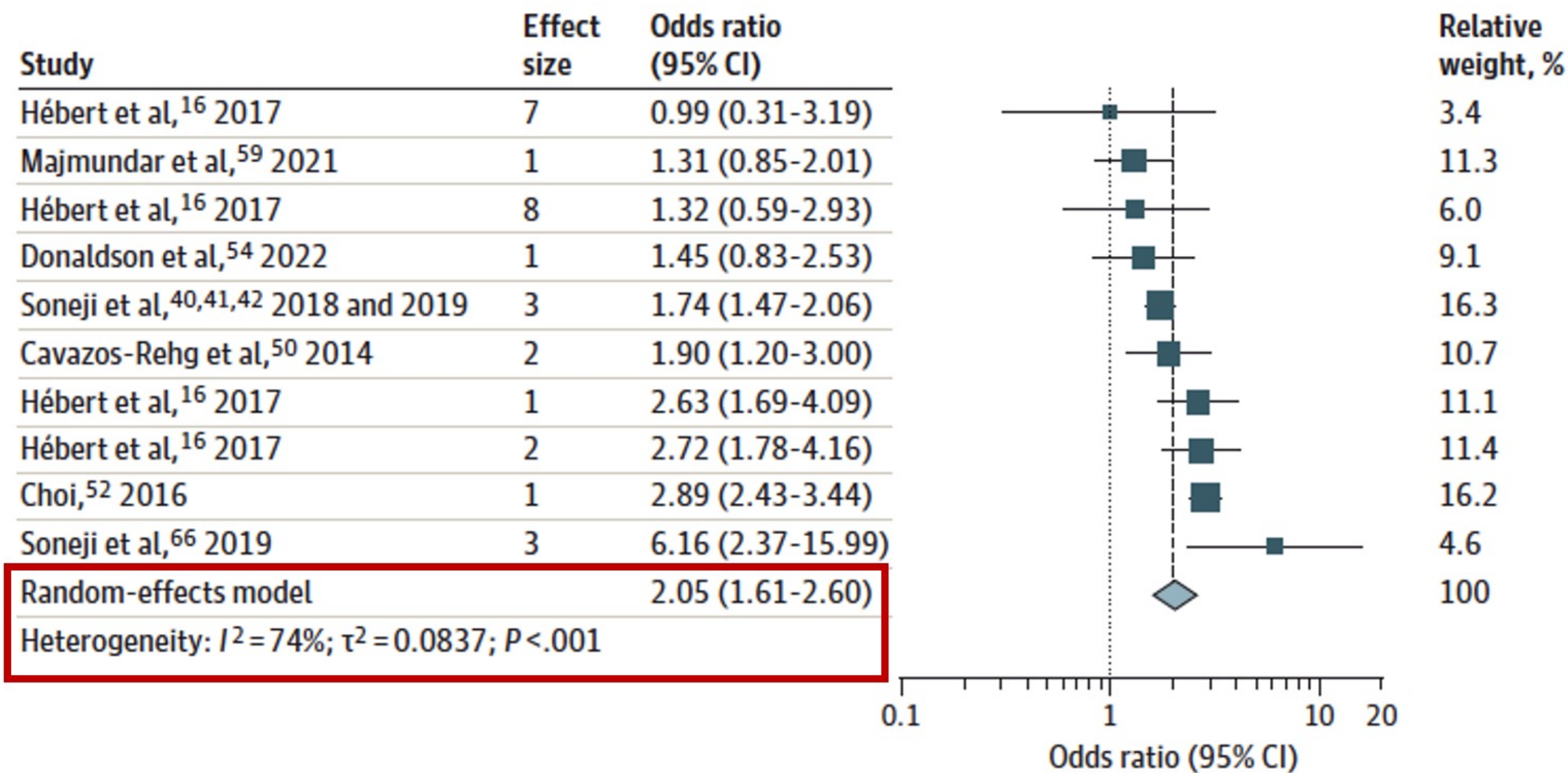
24 OUT OF 25 SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS FOCUSED ON TIME SPENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA AS THE PRIMARY EXPOSURE VARIABLE. TABLE C-1





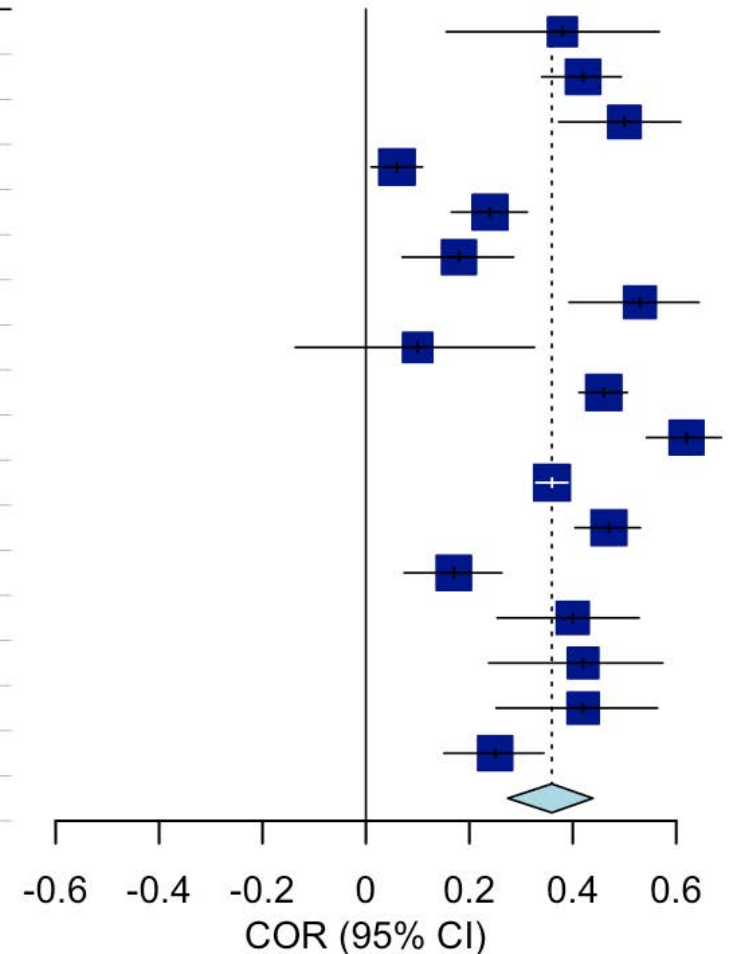
What evidence was missing?

Figure 3. Forest Plot of 3-Level Meta-analysis for Exposure to Tobacco Content on Social Media and Susceptibility to Use Tobacco Among Never Users




- Recreated from “Meta-Analysis of the Association of Alcohol-Related Social Media Use with Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol-Related Problems in Adolescents and Young Adults” by Curtis et al. 2018

Source	COR (95% CI)
Fournier (2011)	0.38 [0.16; 0.57]
Glassman (2012)	0.42 [0.34; 0.49]
Ridout (2012)	0.50 [0.37; 0.61]
Huang (2014)	0.06 [0.01; 0.11]
Hoffman (2014)	0.24 [0.17; 0.31]
D'Angelo (2014)	0.18 [0.07; 0.29]
Miller (2014)	0.53 [0.39; 0.64]
van Hoof (2014)	0.10 [-0.14; 0.33]
Westgate (2014)	0.46 [0.41; 0.51]
Jones (2016)	0.62 [0.54; 0.69]
Geusens (2016)	0.36 [0.33; 0.39]
Cabrea (2016)	0.47 [0.40; 0.53]
Boyle (2016)	0.17 [0.07; 0.26]
Marczinski (2016)	0.40 [0.25; 0.53]
Moreno (2016)	0.42 [0.24; 0.57]
Rodriquez (2016)	0.42 [0.25; 0.56]
Thompson (2016)	0.25 [0.15; 0.34]
Total	0.36 [0.27; 0.44]



Heterogeneity: $\chi^2_{16} = 266.91$ ($P < .001$), $I^2 = 94\%$



"Demonstrates how online content moderation is a global industry that operates in the shadows of human exploitation."
—John Naughton, *The Guardian*

BEHIND THE SCREEN

content moderation in the
shadows of social media

SARAH T. ROBERTS

A primary shield against hateful language, violent videos, and online cruelty uploaded by users is not an algorithm. It is people.

Mostly invisible by design, more than 100,000 commercial content moderators evaluate posts on mainstream social media platforms: enforcing internal policies, training A.I. systems, and actively screening and removing offensive material.

What could be done in the future?

Principle: Company's position on an issue "We do not allow content that...We do allow for certain..."

Policy Group	Policy Rationale	Title	Description/Playbook Rule	Tag	Result
Violent and graphic content involving humans	We do not allow depictions of violent deaths or accidents	Violent death or accident in a real setting	...should have the following characteristics: The victim is visible in the frame; The victim is subjected to a life-threatening injury. Confirmed death is not required.	Human, accident, death	Don not allow General + warning label Hard to find

Thank you!

Jon-Patrick Allem, Ph.D., M.A.

Jon.Patrick.Allem@Rutgers.edu

Disclosure: JPA has received fees for consulting services in court cases pertaining to the content on social media platforms. He reports no other conflicts of interest.

