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‘It can also be a really positive place’: co-research on young people’s health information literacy practices in social media

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Abstract

Introduction. This study investigates health information literacy practices of young people navigating their social media environments to enhance mental health, and the role of peer support within these practices. While previous studies have focused on the negative effects of social media on youth mental health, this study highlights its potential positives and offer an inclusive perspective into information literacy research.

Method and data. The study employs a co-research strategy where young people actively engage as equal partners in data production. Produced in collaboration with a students’ mental health organisation, the data includes two focus group interviews, two co-research workshops, two peer interviews and one group interview with participants aged 18 to 29.

Findings. The findings reveal young people actively navigating and shaping their social media environments to support their mental health. The construction of a *positive social media bubble*, involving, often algorithm-mediated information practices like seeking positive content and avoiding the negative, and creating supportive content emphasise the adaptability of youth health information literacies.

Conclusion. Understanding of the embodied, interconnected, social, and transformative nature of youth health information literacies may inform initiatives promoting positive mental health among youth in the digital age.

Introduction

The impact of social media on young people's mental health has been widely studied across various fields, but the research has mainly focused on its negative effects. However, it is clear that social media is an important part of young people's lives and often serves as a key channel for building and maintaining social relationships, seeking and creating information, and finding peer support (Abidin, 2015; Multas and Hirvonen, 2022; Naslund et al., 2020). Thus, it can also offer a significant opportunity to promote young people's wellbeing. Through various interconnected and embodied information practices (see e.g. Multas and Hirvonen, 2022; Olsson and Lloyd, 2017), social media can empower young people to master their information environments. However, the role of peer support as part of these practices and its contribution to health information literacies among youth in online contexts has remained unexplored.

This study challenges the adult-driven and concern-based discourse surrounding the negative effects of social media by examining its positive effects on youth mental health through co-research, i.e. research conducted together with young people (e.g. Kulmala et al., 2024). Our aim is to explore the information literacy practices of young people navigating their social media environments and the role of peer support within these practices. Here, the focus is placed on those information literacy practices that young people describe to benefit their mental wellbeing. The study builds on a sociocultural understanding of health information literacies, which are defined as a set of information practices related to seeking, finding, evaluating, understanding, creating and sometimes even avoiding information enacted in the social settings and everyday environments of people, including online contexts (see e.g. Hicks et al., 2024; Multas, 2022; Zhao et al., 2020). In this study information practices are viewed as a set of social actions mediated through semiotic and material cultural tools (mediational means), such as language and technological applications (Wertsch, 1991). The research questions are as follows

RQ1: What kinds of information practices do young people engage in on social media to enhance their mental wellbeing?

RQ2: What role does peer support play in these practices?

The significance of this study builds upon its new and inclusive perspective on both mental health-related social media research as well as research on information practices. It also has significant implications for information literacy research, especially because it is built on the perspectives of young people themselves. The research is part of the TUBEDU research project (YouTubers as Peer Mental Health Educators for Adolescents' Social Environments), funded by the Research Council of Finland (2023–2026) in collaboration with the Universities of Turku, Tampere and Helsinki, as well as the student mental health organisation Nyyti ry, the youth mental health organisation Yeesi ry, and Aseman Lapset ry.

Theoretical background

Health information literacies

Theoretically, this study builds on the sociocultural understanding of health information literacies and information literacy practices in digital contexts emphasising the social, embodied and material nature of information literacies enacted in everyday life (Lloyd, 2010, 2017; Multas, 2022). Broadly viewed, health information literacies connect to the ways we interact responsibly, sustainably and critically with health-related information (Grizzle et al., 2014). More specifically, health information literacies are constructed of a set of interconnected, social, material and embodied information practices related to, for example, seeking, finding, evaluating, understanding and creating health information that we utilise in our everyday environments, digital contexts included (Multas, 2022).

In the context of health, embodied information practices are often highlighted, as the body itself serves as a significant source of health information (Lloyd, 2010; Olsson and Lloyd, 2017). In this study, the health-related information literacy practices of young people in social media are considered as socially constructed and shaped by young people themselves to support their wellbeing (Lloyd, 2010; Multas, 2022; Multas and Kulmala, 2024). Health information literacy practices, therefore, are not merely individual acts but are embedded in the social, cultural and material contexts where they occur (Anderson, 2007).

Information practices

Building on the foundational work of Lloyd and Savolainen, Zhao et al. (2020, p. 229) describe information practice as '*a set of socially, culturally, and historically constructed, materially mediated actions to identify, create, seek, manage, use, and share information*' (Lloyd, 2010; Mckenzie, 2003; Savolainen, 2007, 2008; Talja and Mckenzie, 2007). This perspective considers information practices as a set of mediated actions taking place in the everyday activities of people. The notion on mediated action highlights the material, semiotic and sociocultural aspects of social action (see e.g. Wertsch, 1991, 1998). According to the mediated action theory, coined by Wertsch (1991), all action is considered social and mediated by cultural tools. These tools, also referred to as mediational means, include semiotic resources, such as language, and physical and material tools, such as technological applications (Lane, 2014). From this perspective, the health information literacy practices of young people enhancing their mental health in social media are constructed of a set of repeatedly taken and, thus, habitual social actions (Scollon and Scollon, 2004) related to, for example, finding experience-based information or encountering content recommended by algorithms on different social media platforms (see Figure 1).

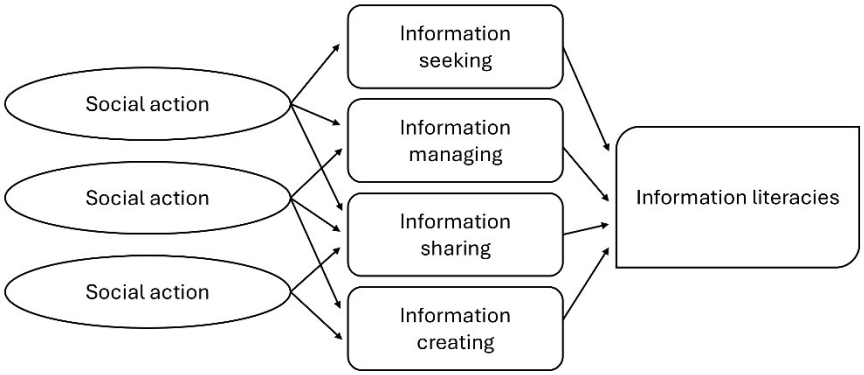

Figure 1. The conceptual model of information literacies in the study.

A recent systematic review argues that the core information activities are information seeking, sharing and use, with less focus on practices like information creation or avoidance (e.g. Zhong et al., 2023). Building on Savolainen's (1995) influential model of Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS), McKenzie (2003) categorises information-seeking practices into distinct modes of active seeking, active scanning and non-directed monitoring, for example. Here non-directed monitoring is related to serendipitously coming across information while not seeking it all, also conceptualised as information encountering by Erdelez (2005). While information creation is a central social media activity, it has only recently gained attention in information research (Ju et al., 2022). Empirical studies have variously described information creation, for instance, as '*making contributions to the information world*' (Koh, 2013, p. 1826) and bringing information into existence (Trace, 2007). On social media creation of content is often closely linked to information sharing, as created content is often repeatedly shared to other users (e.g. Harlan et al., 2014). Information avoidance, defined by Hicks et al. (2024, p. 326) as '*practices that moderate interaction with information by reducing its*

intensity, restricting control over it, and/or excluding it based on perceived properties' has gained attention in research, particularly due to global crises and their prominent visibility in the media, which has led, for example, to young people consciously ignoring and avoiding content that triggers negative emotions (Soroya et al., 2021).

Youth information practices in online contexts

Research on youth information practices remains surprisingly limited, with only a few studies exploring young people's information practices in online contexts. For instance, Hirvonen (2022) and Kitzie (2019) examine youth information practices in online discussion forums, where young people engage in seeking, sharing and creating information, pooling opinions and peer experiences, aggregating advice and negotiating the credibility of information. These practices are facilitated by the forums' affordances, such as searchability, visibility, anonymity and social connections. In contrast, Jylhä et al. (2024) highlight how algorithmic recommendation systems encourage more passive information practices, reducing the need for active searching and critical evaluation of information. Vacca's (2024) study on Afro-Latino youth engaging with social media mental health content reveals how young people use platform features to shape their information practices, creating algorithmically mediated spaces to promote alternative narratives, foster identity and community resilience and avoid negative content.

Like Kitzie's (2019) findings on LGBTQ+ youth, Vacca's study demonstrates that young people are adept at shaping and navigating their online environments to meet their information needs. Multas and Hirvonen's (2022) study on young video bloggers' information creation practices supports this view and shows that young people engage in various interconnected and embodied practices, such as planning, organising, seeking, editing and presenting information. Their research highlights the importance of genuineness, authenticity and experience-based competence in social media information creation.

Methodology

The research data was produced in a co-research project as part of the TUBEDU research project. Co-research is a participatory and multi-perspective research strategy that aims to increase the inclusivity of research by inviting people whom the research concerns to participate as active and influential agents throughout the research process. These people are valued as experts in *the studied world*. Knowledge generated through lived and felt experience is, thus, at the heart of co-research and guides the co-research process from designing research to its implementation and reporting in appreciation of different skills, perspectives and therefore different forms of knowing. (Kulmala et al., 2024; James and Buffel 2022; Liddiard et al. 2022). The co-research participants, thus, with support from professional researchers, play a significant role in defining the research design, including the research questions and methods for data production and analysis. For example, in our co-research, young people engaged in producing new knowledge on various aspects of peer support in social media through peer-to-peer interviews, focus group interviews, autoethnography and a questionnaire.

Despite the development of information research towards sociocultural thinking and so-called user-centred research, the use of participatory research strategies in the field remains limited (Nesset et al., 2024). Nesset et al. (2024) recognise a few recent trends towards more human-centred approaches within the field, focusing for example, on participatory design and participatory action research in library settings (e.g. Singh, 2020; Somerville and Brown-Sica, 2011; Turner and Gorichanaz, 2016) and system- or service-based co-design processes with different groups (e.g. Augusto et al., 2018; Bers et al., 2018). However, Nesset et al. (2024) point out that some of these studies do not fully align with participatory principles and end up strengthening the hierarchical power relations in their research. Participatory research strategies such as co-research have the potential to enhance the impact of information research by promoting inclusion

and fostering more democratic data production methods. By actively involving the individuals most affected by the topic, particularly youth, these approaches help ensure that their perspectives are central to the study. As Agosto (2019) emphasises, there is a pressing need for studies that gather data directly from young people and understand their information worlds from their unique cultural and personal viewpoints.

Data and analysis

The data production was conducted in collaboration with students' mental health organisation Nyyti ry from September 2023 to February 2024. Participants in the study were recruited through Nyyti's social media channels and email lists. Nyyti ry is a Finland-wide umbrella organisation, the member organisations of which are mostly large student organisations of different universities in Finland, yet the oldest Finnish mental health organisation Mieli ry is also a member. Via its communication channels, Nyyti has a large outreach of students throughout Finland. However, Nyyti's activities are mainly targeted at students in higher education (i.e. university students, including those in universities of applied sciences), which is why we can assume that it best reaches out to young people who study in Finnish universities.

The participant selection criteria were an age range of 18–29 years and an interest in mental health and social media issues. In the first phase, two focus group interviews were arranged with four young people participating in the first interview and two in the second. Interview questions included questions on social media use and the role of peer support especially related to mental health. The second phase was organised as co-research with five young co-researchers who were compensated for their work by fees. The co-research team included five co-researchers, three researchers from the project and a social media communication expert from Nyyti. The team worked together in five workshops (November 2023 – February 2024) with a goal to discuss scientific research and co-research as a methodology, design individual subprojects, analyse data, and plan the dissemination of findings. The substudies were implemented in researcher-co-researcher pairs focusing on the chosen research questions. Via the different substudies, a total of 21 young people participated in the project. The data for this study consists of a subset of the material collected in the research project including audio recordings and their verbatim transcripts of two focus group interviews [FGI 1&2] (a total of 3h 49min), two co-research workshops [WS 1&2] (a total of 5h 56 min), and two peer interviews [PI 1 & 2] (a total of 1h 25min) and one group interview [GI] (1h 28min) produced by co-researchers. In total, the data includes 133 pages of transcripts.

The data analysis was conducted through qualitative content analysis which had both inductive and deductive elements (see e.g. Miles and Huberman, 1994). The coding scheme was built deductively based on the conceptual model of information practices as mediated actions presented previously (Figure 1) and modified along the analysis as new categories emerged inductively (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The unit of analysis was determined as the explication of a mediated action (Wertsch, 1994). The coding began with identifying these explications of actions related to navigating social media and then unitising the citations. The social actions identified in the data were then conceptualised into different information practices. The strategies for verification and validation employed in this research were member checking through the co-research process, seeking saturation in analysis, peer reviewing findings in research seminars and conferences as well as documenting the research process (Morse, 2018).

Findings

The analysis reveals that the central topic occurring in the discussions with young people was the construction of a '*positive social media bubble*' which appears as a strategy that young people employ to enhance their mental wellbeing by for example seeking positive content and limiting negative. To reach this goal, the participants employed several information practices that were

strongly influenced by the platforms' technological features, such as algorithmic recommender systems.

Seeking and encountering useful and relatable information

Most of the participating young people explained that they encounter mental health information on social media on a regular basis. However, they also recognised that encountering certain types of information was impacted by the recommendation system and based on your earlier engagement and reactions on the platform; for example, liking or commenting on posts and searching with certain hashtags. Encountering health information was seen as a good thing if it was perceived as useful, such as posts shared by mental health organisations or those related to specific events. On the other hand, Joni described that continuously coming across similar type of mental health content may get overwhelming:

> *Maybe in terms of mental health content, like on Instagram, and for others as well, there's a lot of self-help material, and it's starting to get a bit much, like 'how to get rid of anxiety in 2 minutes'.* [G1, Joni].

Joni also mentioned that the encountered mental health information is highly gendered, focusing mostly on the female perspective. Encountering mental health information was considered as a means to educate yourself and develop self-awareness, as explained by Sini:

> *Through social media, at least, it's the fact that you can easily access information, and there are accounts that share mental health-related stuff, and everything is presented in a way that you'd assume young people might not know how to search for that information elsewhere. But then, when it comes up on social media, maybe that's how they end up learning to understand themselves better and so on. And they might learn to demand better for themselves.* [FGI2, Sini]

One way that participants ensured they encountered positive mental health information was by actively scanning social media, consciously selecting who to follow and which types of accounts to engage with, as these could provide valuable and supportive content over time. For example, Edith explained that '*I've personally made a conscious choice about the type of content I follow, because I've noticed it has such a big impact on how I feel*' [FGI1, Edith].

Actively seeking mental health information on social media was seen as important for enhancing your mental health but also as hard work. Finding good and positive mental health content and accounts to build your positive social media bubble takes time and involves understanding how algorithms work and managing the overwhelming amount of information to focus on what feels relevant for you, as described by Nina:

> *Then there's also the point that it takes quite a lot of effort to find accounts with good content. They're not really recommended by platforms like Instagram or anything, so you have to spend time going through them to find accounts that work well for you.* [WS1, Nina]

Other participants identified the impact of algorithms as well. For example, when searching for information about ADHD, Aada noticed that '*social media, especially TikTok, kind of adapts the feed. Like, if I see a video from someone talking about ADHD, my feed might change in just an hour to show more videos on the same topic*' [FGI1, Aada].

Evaluation of the content was connected to relevance and authenticity of the content. Especially in relation to mental health information, authentic peer experiences were considered central, as Edith expressed: '*I'm interested in following people who are authentic, and that's the kind of content I consume*' [FGI1 Edith]. Most of the young people searched for fact-based content produced by mental health professionals and organisations as well as experience-based content produced by

peers. The experiences of other young people on mental health struggles and, for instance, about their diagnoses, was seen as important, as described by one participant:

> *And I've also searched for or gotten a lot of information about different mental health disorders, especially, and mental health in general, specifically from Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Especially when I've been wondering, in a way, what's wrong with me, I've found connections when people have shared their own experiences.* [FG1, Minja]

Most participants, especially women, felt that they receive peer support related to mental health through social media. In the group interview with men, it emerged that it is not easy for men to find peer support on social media, partly because mental health content is often presented from a woman's perspective. However, according to the participants, social media provides access to mental health information that is often unavailable elsewhere. This includes information on sensitive topics, such as mental health issues affecting LGBTQ+ youth or severe mental health disorders. Sometimes social media is the only place where young people can find peer support for their mental health challenges.

Filtering and avoiding information to reduce exposure to negative content

A central theme in the discussions on enhancing mental health through social media was filtering and even avoiding content that may be scary or upsetting and thus, evoke negative emotions. As one participant explained

> *we've talked about the algorithms and everything, it's about drawing a line for myself in terms of what content I follow, so I don't get too caught up in any dark places on social media* [FGI, Edith].

Another strategy to avoid negative content is to limit who you follow and who follows you:

> *So, I started to filter out the accounts I follow and removed some, even if they were people I knew, but if they didn't somehow support my mental health or if they were harmful, I'd rather just remove them completely. I only follow those who somehow support me.* [R2, Sini]

Sini continued to explain that some of her followers didn't resonate with the content she posted, so reducing the number of followers became a way for her to better understand herself and discover her own opinions. The participants also expressed that they were able to handle the social media algorithms so that they could actively avoid negative content:

> *It's kind of like, if you don't want to see something, you try to avoid it, and gradually it starts disappearing. Of course, it also depends on the algorithms, but I think TikTok has a system where if you start skipping certain content or give feedback saying you don't want to see that kind of stuff, it stops showing it for you.* [WS1, Kia]

Kia continued and explained that '*the individual is still responsible for setting those boundaries about what they want to see*,' and filtering out and avoiding content as part of building a positive social media bubble was considered as '*a shield against negative things*' [WS1, Kia]. These negative things could be, for example, content that is harmful or offensive regarding ethnicity, life circumstances, gender or sexuality, as described by Arela:

> *some content is the kind you definitely don't want to read, so you just quickly scroll past it, especially since the content you scroll through can sometimes be offensive to ethnicity or life circumstances. For example, memes about unemployed or homeless people are surprisingly common, and there are also really nasty memes about people of all genders. You don't want to watch that, because the idea behind memes is supposed to be that they're funny.* [PI1, Arela]

Sharing and creating information to gain and offer peer support

The data reveal that creating and sharing of mental health related content are often overlapping activities, and the word '*sharing*' in discussion refers to both, creating new content (comments or posts) and sharing content made by others or by yourself. The centrality of content sharing in social media was emphasised in the discussions with young people. The shared content was usually posts including personal experiences or content by mental health professionals and organisations. However, there appeared to be a gender difference in this regard, as one male participant explained that

> *It's not shared directly there, but it's kind of shared indirectly in another way. It might be that someone else's experience is shared, or maybe something more general. That's how it's shared in principle, but not personally, as such.* [P1, Aaro]

Criteria for sharing were for example, the relatability and usefulness of the content; that is, how much the content offers peer support, but also feelings that the content evoked. For instance, mental health related memes were shared if they were funny and resonated with one's own feelings, as described by Rea:

> *I'm probably the kind of person who deals with really difficult things through humour, so I share a lot of bad memes and stuff like that. For me, it's like I might have laughed at something, and then I'll share it on my Instagram story or something like that.* [FG1, Rea]

One participant explained that they share mental health information found on social media to their close friends or relatives, if they see it could be useful and offer peer support:

> *I think what I was trying to say is that when you know a lot of people, actually a lot of people, who are doing poorly, and then if I come across a video on social media that reminds me of someone close to me, I'm like, 'Wow, this is just like that person'. Then I'll send it to them and say, 'Listen to what this person is saying, you're not alone'.* [FGI1, Lilja]

Creating mental health information was linked to sharing personal experiences, such as in Instagram stories, where young people shared posts from mental health organisations with their own comments. Through this, they not only shared information but also received peer support:

> *I follow quite a few expert accounts on Instagram, so I've shared their content or talked about my own experiences. Then people sometimes message me, saying things like, 'Someone in my circle has been through this' or 'I've had similar experiences,' and it's been a way to get peer support through that, as they've felt comfortable reaching out. I also add at the end that people can message me, since I'm quite open and can talk about these things. Through that, I've also received kind of face-to-face peer support.* [FGI1, Minja]

A few participants explained that creating mental health content on their own accounts on a regular basis was an important way to gain peer support, as described by Sini:

> *I've used social media myself just to talk there, I've started a few years ago to talk really openly about my life and problems and everything, and I've gotten a lot of peer support through it, and in general it's been a really good and important channel for me to talk about things.* [FG2, Sini]

Aada shared this experience and explained that '*as I started sharing things and telling people there that it's okay, and if you're in this situation, everything will work out, it helped me a lot as well.*' [FGI, Aada]. Aada continued to explain that '*since I got help and peer support through social media, I was able to give it more effectively to others, and it also eased my own feelings a lot*'. Creating mental health content to offer peer support was therefore a meaningful way to benefit not only your own mental health but also that of others.

Creating content on your own was also seen as a way to express your thoughts and feelings on your own terms, helping to build a positive social media space for yourself. However, as Sini explained, this process was not easy:

> *Yeah, it was difficult at first, especially accepting it when I realised that the people who were close to me at the time didn't accept what I started talking about. But I decided to continue anyway, because for so many years, I had tried to be what I was supposed to be in order to fit in with everyone around me. So, as I kept going, the people around me changed. Of course, those people left, but many more came in, people who actually wanted to listen to what I had to say.* [FGI2, Sini]

Sini also explained that creating content by yourself was easier than to talk about these things face to face:

> *Maybe it's the fact that I can do it from home. I don't have to let a big group of people in to listen if I want others to hear what I have to say. And I get to do it on my own terms. If I want to be quiet, I can be quiet, but if I have something to say, I can speak without anyone interrupting, and they just listen.* [FGI, Sini]

However, not all participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences publicly. Those who were hesitant expressed concerns about privacy, judgement and the potential impact on their personal lives. On the other hand, young people who did not create mental health content or share their experiences on social media viewed such actions as both courageous and important. They believed that by doing so, it was possible to, for example, reduce the stigma surrounding mental health.

Constructing a positive social media bubble

The insights gathered from discussions with young people offer a deep understanding of how they actively shape their social media environments to support their mental health. The creation of a '*positive social media bubble*' is a strategy designed to protect and enhance one's own mental wellbeing through peer interactions and peer support, as Sini explained: '*Anyway, I've made my social media bubble one where I only follow accounts that reinforce the feeling that I'm not alone*'. This positive social media bubble becomes especially crucial in times when the world feels overwhelming and full of stress and uncertainty, as one participant expressed

> *I know that many people need that kind of positive content, especially since we live in such a performance-driven society. It's nice to have that positive content that promotes soft values and creates a kind of virtual safe space.* [WS2, Pinja]

The participating youth were aware of the media narrative highlighting the negative effects of social media on youth mental health, and wanted to emphasise that there is another side to this story, as most young people are capable of shaping their social media environments so that it supports rather than hinders their mental health:

> *social media can be really bad for you and quite a toxic place. But I think you can influence it a lot yourself by what you do there and what kinds of accounts you follow. It can also be a really positive place.* [FGI2, Pinja]

Discussion

The analysis highlights how young people are active and capable users of social media and utilise social media to enhance their mental health by creating a '*positive social media bubble*'. This involves actively seeking positive content, especially experience-based information and limiting exposure to negative content, a process mediated by platform algorithms. Participants frequently encounter mental health information on social media, which they find beneficial when it is perceived as relatable and useful, particularly including experience-based information on mental

health. To promote a positive environment, young people consciously modify their social media feeds by following supportive accounts and filtering out harmful content. They also engage in sharing and creating mental health-related content, which serves as a means to gain and offer peer support. The active avoidance of distressing content was seen to maintain emotional wellbeing. Participants noted the importance of setting personal boundaries regarding the content they engage with, which they considered essential for protecting their mental health.

These findings align with previous research on youth information practices in online contexts, demonstrating that young people actively shape their social media environments. Similar to Vacca's (2024) study on Afro-Latino youth, participants in this study utilised platform features, particularly algorithmic recommendation systems, as key mediational tools to construct a virtual safe space. However, unlike Jylhä et al. (2024), algorithmic recommendation systems did not lead participants into passive practices but instead encouraged active exploration and innovative approaches to seeking relevant information. Echoing Vacca's (2024) findings, participants viewed creating mental health content and avoiding negative material as ways to boost self-esteem and establish boundaries. In line with Multas and Hirvonen's (2022) study, authenticity played a central role both in content creation and as a key criterion for assessing mental health information. Social connections also emerged as vital, reflecting Kitzie's (2019) study on LGBTQ+ youth information practices. Participants emphasised making conscious choices about who and what to follow, fostering information seeking and continuous active scanning (McKenzie, 2003) of these accounts. This practice often led to serendipitous encounters with valuable information, as well (Erdelez, 2005).

Overall, the findings suggest that while social media can present risks to mental health, young people are adept at shaping their online experiences to create supportive environments that enhance their wellbeing. The health information literacy practices young people enact in social media are dynamic and continuously evolving alongside changes in the technological platforms. Importantly, young people appear capable of adapting to these shifts, engaging in a reciprocal process of transformation with the platforms themselves (Multas, 2022). These health information literacies are also deeply embodied (e.g., Lloyd and Olsson, 2017), interwoven with emotions such as trust, safety, empowerment, fear and uncertainty. Furthermore, they are shaped by the socio-material context in which they occur (Anderson, 2007), highlighting the interplay between technology, social interactions and individual agency. It is important to note that the agency of young people, as agency always, is both facilitated and constrained by wider structural factors (Hitlin and Elder, 2007). Young people are equipped with different resources in their lives which affects their positions and resourcefulness to exert their agency in relation to their health information literacies.

As often in co-research (Kulmala et al., 2024; Nind et al., 2016), the young people who engaged in our co-research can be considered rather resourceful, as all of them had been in, were in or planned to continue to higher education during our study. One of the reasons for that is obvious: the student mental health organisation through which the participants were recruited mostly targets its communication and activities at students in higher education. The fact that participants paid attention to our recruitment call obviously also shows their existing interest in being active in promoting their own mental health or mental health related issues wider in our society. Furthermore, all our participants represented, for instance, the racial and language majority in Finland. All these can be considered, among numerous many other advantages, as resources for the young people to practise their agency for their own (mental) wellbeing. On the other side of the coin, one can assume that there are numerous factors that might place young people in less advantaged positions to practise their agency. For instance, marginalisation, exclusion, lack of supportive social environments, minority stress, active experience of health-related struggles and low education, could be considered as disadvantages to young people in actively shaping their social media environments to support their wellbeing. These dis/advantages are often

intersectional and can cause cumulative inequalities (cf. Crenshaw 1989; Davis 2008). It is, thus, important to pay attention to the societal boundedness of the participants' agency (also Buchert et al., 2023). According to Aaltonen (2013, p. 377), bounded agency refers to agency that is socially situated vis-à-vis social structures, and thus a key dynamic of societal inequalities. The very same structural inequalities that shape our societies generally function in a similar manner in the context of social media and other digitalised platforms (e.g. Buchert et al. 2023; Granholm et al. 2023; Richteric and Abend, 2019). Importantly, one needs to bear in mind that if the algorithms can be taught to feed content promoting positive feelings, they function similarly with harmful content.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that young people actively navigate and shape their social media environments. A key theme emerging from the data is the construction of a '*positive social media bubble*' that supports mental wellbeing. This involves information practices, such as: 1) seeking and encountering content: engaging with algorithms, systems, and people to promote positive interactions and find useful and relatable mental health information, 2) filtering and avoiding content: filtering information to meet information needs, particularly identifying content that provides peer support, while limiting exposure to negative content, 3) creating and sharing content: offering and gaining peer support through content creation, which is both empowering and beneficial for mental health.

These findings indicate that young people's health information literacies encompass highly adaptive information practices, highlighting their embodied, interconnected, social and transformative nature. Such insights can guide the development of health communication initiatives aimed at promoting positive mental health among young people in the digital age. Future research should, however, pay closer attention to how social positions and societal inequalities affect youth health information literacies. This would allow us to better understand the kinds of resources young people need to acquire and maintain their health information literacies necessary to exercise their agency in shaping social media to support their wellbeing.

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