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# The important impact of social media

When I was younger, my parents told me that I could always talk to them about what I was going through, because they had been through it all before. I couldn't shock them or surprise them, because they had been young too, and had the same experiences. Recently, I read an interesting piece of research that made me think about what is not the same for my generation, and future generations, as it was for my parents. The article was on the impact of social media influencers on the experience of having a child (Chee et al, 2023).

Chee et al's (2023) literature review concluded, perhaps unsurprisingly, that there are both beneficial and harmful effects when engaging with influencers on pregnancy, birth and parenting. While this platform can encourage information sharing and provide support, it can also lead to the spread of misinformation and combative behaviour.

Social media is increasingly being investigated by researchers, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, where digital communication became even more prevalent. A review published in our April issue this year examined the effect of social media generally on childbirth (Lawrence et al, 2023). It concluded that 'social media is now an integral part in how women learn about childbirth'.

Despite the important role of social media in pregnancy, birth and parenting, there is evidence that the potential benefits of this tool may be being missed by maternity services (Marsh, 2022). Anna Marsh published a review and analysis of social media use by midwives, finding that 'midwives are reluctant to engage with [social media]...but literature suggests that social media training could positively influence communication with people using maternity services'.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (2022) has guidance on using social media for its members, which notes that 'if used responsibly and appropriately' social media



**Suzannah Allkins**  
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can be used to effectively build and maintain professional relationships, establish or access support networks and provide access to resources for continuing professional development. However, it does not explicitly address how it can be used to communicate with patients or, in the case of maternity services, women who have already or are about to give birth.

Social media can be a minefield, but it can also provide support and guidance to those who need it. Social media appears to already play an important role for women looking to inform themselves about having a baby, and it therefore seems likely that it will come to play a larger part of midwives' roles in future. **BJM**

Chee RM, Capper TS, Muurlink OT. The impact of social media influencers on pregnancy, birth, and early parenting experiences: a systematic review. *Midwifery*. 2023;120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2023.103623>

Lawrence V, Richardson S, Philp L. How does social media influence expectations, decision making and experiences of childbirth? *Br J Midwifery*. 2023;31(4):210–219. <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjom.2023.31.4.210>

Marsh A. Social media use by midwives – an untapped potential? 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/yaeu8zh4> (accessed 22 June 2023)

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