

A Qualitative Study on the Impact of Excessive Social Media Use on College Students

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Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Bachelor of Arts (Hons)
Degree in Psychology, Submitted to the National College of Ireland, March 2025.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland
Research Students Declaration Form
(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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Degree for which thesis is submitted: B.A. (Hons) in Psychology

Title of Thesis: A Qualitative Study on the Impact of Excessive Social Media Use on College Students

Date: 14/03/2025

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, thank you to every person who took the time to participate in this study.

I would like to thank my wonderful mom, Dayane, you lifted me up and walked beside me throughout these 4 academic years. I would not have been here without your love and support. To my incredible dad, thank you for listening to me and for having the patience to guide me through my times of struggle. You were both essential throughout the whole process, guiding me and helping me through every step of the way, thank you for being my anchor.

To my friend Gio, thank you for listening and supporting me. You are very special, and I am grateful to have had such a good friend by my side.

Finally, to my incredible supervisor Eden Bryan. I am grateful to you for believing and encouraging me from the very start. You are wonderful and I will never forget your support.

Thank you for believing in me, I couldn't have done it without you all.

Abstract

Background and Aims: It is evident from past literature that social media frequent use has a grater negative impact on users' lives in comparison to the existent positive effect, and understanding the impact of excessive social media use on college students is essential to provide support and promote a healthier social media use. However, few research has explored the depth and complexity of students perception and experiences. The present study aimed to understand students experiences and the impact of social media excessive use during college. **Method:** The study utilized a qualitative design and an inductive approach to thematic analysis through semi-structured interviews to examine the impact of excessive social media use on various aspects of students personal and academic lives. A number of 8 students participated in this study, including 1 pilot. **Results:** Participants' responses to questions about their social media use were grouped into three meta-themes and seven subthemes; participant statement excerpts were presented. These themes highlight the complex impact of social media in students' academic and personal lives, and well-being. **Conclusions:** Social media significantly affects college students, offering both benefits like enhanced learning and networking opportunities, and drawbacks such as distraction and mood irregularity. Findings revealed a predominant negative effect of students' social media overuse. Future research should explore additional variables to further to understand social media's role in students' lives.

Keywords: social media; college students; thematic analysis

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Introduction

Social media has evolved over the years to accommodate a record number of more than a billion users. According to a Global Overview Report (Kemp, 2025), as of January 2025, approximately 5.24 billion people worldwide are active on social media, representing over 50% of the global population and a percentage of 86.3 of adults aged over 18. Based on constantly increasing data provided by additional statistical reports, the number of active social media users is estimated to exceed six billion by 2028, representing seven out of ten people worldwide (Dixon, 2024). With a percentage of 45.4% male and 54.6% female social media users, the average daily usage of social media is approximately 2 hours and 21 minutes (Chaffey, 2025). A concerning approximate of 98% of college students are reported to be active on social media (Elis, 2024), which highlights the importance of understanding the social media use habit to further support and enhance students' academic performance. Studies suggest that college students' use of social networking can be effective in communication, maintaining social ties, and introducing academic resources (Kim et al., 2016). However, in circumstances where the platform use is problematic, it may directly cooperate to academic procrastination, distractedness from responsibilities and poor time management (Meier et al., 2016; Nwosu et al., 2020). According to Rahmawati et al. (2019), a daily screen time of more than 2 hours is positively associated with excessive social media use. These platforms use vary from individual interests, such as entertainment, information sharing and/or seeking, convenient social interaction and connecting with the world surrounding them (Al-Menayes., 2015; Ewing et al., 2023). However, there is a rising concern over the use of social media and the impacts it may have on its users. Although these platforms can lead to positive outcomes, including enhanced social skills and social connection, health promotion strategy, and psychosocial well-being (Allen et al., 2014; O'Reilly, 2020; Mehmet et al., 2020), the use of social media has also been consistently associated with adverse outcomes such as reduction of physical social involvement, emotion regulation difficulties, body image issues, depression, and anxiety (Huang et al., 2019; Fardouly et al., 2020; Karim et al., 2020; Keles et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2021; Purohit

et al., 2024), which are effects that cannot be ignored. It is essential to knowledge the need for a balance between online and offline interactions to ensure social media's function as a mean for connection and knowledge other than an impediment for meaningful engagement and well-being disturbance.

Social Engagement

For most of the human history, communication was entirely in-person. In the last decade, a form of communication that did not exist before, became as dominant as physical communication, the online communication (Vollrath, 2021). Despite concerns about social media influence on its users, the positive impacts of social media on social engagement contain numerous interesting and controversial points. Studies have shown that social media has the potential to facilitate in-person social engagement in several ways (Lieberman & Schroeder., 2020). In particular, undergraduate students' use of social media can encourage engagement in social activities and positively affect social behaviours (Kim et al., 2016). Research findings showed that one of many social media key benefits is the ability to increase occasion awareness and participation (de Lira et al., 2017). Correspondingly, a study using social network sites (SNS) to promote events (Harb et al., 2019), found that social media effectively increase people's attendance and perceived enjoyment. In this study, Harb et al. assessed social media influence on people's decision to attend events by applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen., 1991), which suggests that human behaviour is influenced by intention. Harb et al. found 'subjective norms' and 'perceived behavioural control' to be strong variables of people's participation events, suggesting that social media marketing can be an effective tool to promote and also influence people to attend to in-person events, simultaneously increasing social engagement. In regards to online social interaction, high levels of interaction on platforms such as Facebook, has shown to be related to creating bonds and higher levels of connectedness with others (Sanchiz et al., 2016). Over nine-in-ten (94%) teens regularly socialize with friends on social media and 64% have also reported making friends on a social media platform according to a report on 789 teens by the Pew Research Centre (2015), illustrating how social media can also play an important role in making new friends, facilitating connection and interaction. These findings can be reflected on the way that college students

utilize social media to enhance social engagement with classmates or make new connections. For instance, research highlighted that an appropriate use of social platforms in the educational context, can serve to enhance student's sense of community between classmates (Hurt et al., 2012), and build relationships (Burke et al., 2010).

While social media use (SMU) offer opportunities to connect with others, its excessive use may also contribute to adverse effects on social interaction. A research assessing both time and frequency of SMU and social isolation among adults, found that higher SMU was strongly associated with increased social isolation (Primack et al., 2017). Problematic social media use was also associated to higher social isolation in older adults (Meshi et al., 2020), and adolescents (Serrano et al., 2014). Whether online social interaction replaces face-to-face interaction is a concerning debate which have been raising questions on whether social media reshapes social norms and causes long-term societal effects. Researchers conclude that the use of social media affects people's interactions with others in person due to excessive dependence on technology, which has led people to lower social skills and difficulty engaging in meaningful conversations, a result from the never ending need of online connection, resulting in decreased attention span, negative effect on memory skills, and increased loneliness (Turkle., 2013; Turkle., 2015). Data from a cross-sectional study conducted in 2021 on female undergraduate students (Kolhar et al., 2021), indicated that out of 97% of students reported using social media, as little as 1% of them utilize it for educational purpose; and 59% of students recognize the negative effect of its use on their social interactions. Adverse consequences of problematic use on social engagement may have different levels of effect based on factors such as age. The younger generations, for example, have been found to have much more interest in social media interactions, while the old generation has a grater interaction interests in in-person meetings (YouGov, 2024). This suggests that while older adults are adopting social media, they still prioritize face-to-face interactions. Younger generations, who are more immersed in social platforms, often experience a phenomenon called *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO), defined by Przybylski et al (2013, p. 1841) as “*a pervasive apprehension that others might be having a rewarding experience from which one is absent*”. Przybylski findings reenforced that

young people experience higher levels of FOMO, and it has a major role in higher social media engagement. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has also been noticed to encourage college students to excessively scroll on their phones and distress over missing events their peers are taking part in (Ellis, 2024). Often linked to decreased social connection and well-being, this phenomenon was also found to have an indirect positive impact on social connection when manifested through high social media intensity (Roberts & David, 2019).

Social Comparison and Mental-Health

Social Comparison Theory, first introduced by Festinger (1954), proposes that individuals are driven to compare and evaluate themselves and their personal development to other people's reality. Social comparisons can be classified as upward, where the individual compares to those perceived to be 'better', which can lead to either motivation or dissatisfaction; and downward, where the individual compares to those perceived as 'worse', which can boost self-esteem and positive self-perception, or create a sense of superiority and complacency (Wills, 1981). These studies established a core principle for contemporary research on social media comparisons, allowing expansion on the effects of SNSs comparisons on mental health. Social media can facilitate and intensify these comparisons to others as a result of life publicizing and social approval on platforms, which can have an extensive impact on well-being. More recent research agrees with that principle of social comparison on SNSs motivating self-improvement, or leading to a cycle of unhealthy comparisons followed by decreased well-being (Verduyn et al., 2020). In line with the positive aspects of social media comparison, research suggests that upward comparisons can motivate people to imitate others' positive behaviour or characteristics in an attempt of self-improvement, leading to positive changes and personal growth (Meier et al., 2020). In contrast, people with excessive use of SNS are constantly exposed to the idealized portrayals of success, beauty and perfection, through other people's online appearance and updates on these platforms, which can have a negative effect on well-being and self-perception (Wang et al., 2017; Gerber et al., 2018; Kleemans et al., 2018; Fioravanti et al., 2022). A meta-analyses research by Valle et al. (2021) found that viewing appearance-ideal posts on social media, caused people to believe they do not fit in the standard created by society, which resulted negatively on body image.

In addition, when individuals perceive other people's success or traits to be unachievable, it can result in feelings of dissatisfaction and inferiority (Cohen et al., 2017; Casale et al., 2021). An example of this was described by Iwamoto and Chun (2020), who found that the student's comparisons to others may lead to unrealistic expectations and mental-health risk. Evidence confirms that people have a stronger tendency to compare upwards (Midgley et al 2020), as a result of a more frequent strategical and manipulated content on social media, where people create personas or unrealistic versions of themselves to fit societal ideals (Cohen et al., 2017). Upward comparison has also been identified to have a greater negative response than downward comparisons, where variables such as body image, well-being and self esteem are more negatively impacted (Verduyn et al., 2020; McComb et al., 2023). These consequences can significantly depend on individuals' content exposure, engagement differences, and coping strategies (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Castellanos & Steins, 2023).

Extending on the discussion of social comparison effects on social media, it is of great importance to consider the impact of social media usage on overall well-being. Research indicates that the use of social media can have a significant influence on users' mental and emotional health, both positively and negatively (Akram & Kumar, 2017). A study of social media's "fitness challenges" (Schlegel et al., 2021), showed that social media can improve well-being by having a positive effect on people's motivation, enhanced physical activity, improved health and consequently, positive body-image. In addition, reduced loneliness and improved social engagement (Burke et al., 2010), entertainment and relaxation (Whiting & Williams, 2013), are possible positive consequences of SNSs use which can improve overall well-being. The social nature of SNSs use was found to be positively related to undergraduate student's well-being (Wang et al., 2014), while entertainment use can also potentially lead to social media addiction (Zhao et al., 2021). Thus, it is important to note that different types of SNSs use and the user's individual differences play a role on the impact of social media use. For instance, personality traits such as extroversion, have been linked to greater positive impact of social media use on individuals' social interactions, while individuals with social anxiety or poor self-esteem, can be more vulnerable to isolation and an unhealthy social comparison (Vogel et al., 2014;

Keles et al., 2020). Research suggests that frequency of use can also be a variable, which in case of excessive use by college students, it can be related to sleep deprivation and decreased academic performance (Al Suwayri, 2016; Abu-Snieneh et al., 2020; Bezerra et al.; 2023; Zhu et al., 2023). A study assessing Facebook use, found that the frequent and excessive use of this SNS can lead to internet addiction and affect overall health (Marino et al., 2018). The problematic use of social media has been extensively studied along the years and have been repeatedly found to be positively associated with depression (Mitra et al., 2019; Kircaburun et al., 2020; Morrison, 2021), anxiety (Lopes et al., 2022; Marino et al., 2023; Du et al., 2024), and stress (Apaolaza et al., 2019). In the context of college students' impact of SNSs, a recent cross-sectional study (Feng et al., 2025), found a strong positive link between social media addiction and academic burnout and mental health issues. Feng et al found that the excessive use of SNSs distract students from academic activities, and also intensify feelings of anxiety and depression. These studies emphasizes the need for awareness on potential risks associated with excessive use of social media, and the importance of promoting healthy social media habits.

The Current Study

The present study will use qualitative methodology to understand students' perception and experiences of social media excessive use on a more human level, since individual experiences will be experienced in words rather than using numbers (Ochieng, 2009). The aim of this research is to understand students' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of their social media use. An inductive approach will assess common themes across students' experiences related to social media and its impact on productivity, social engagement, social comparison tendencies, and well-being. It is evident from past literature that social media frequent use has a grater negative impact on users' lives in comparison to the existent positive effect, and understanding the impact of excessive social media use on college students is essential to provide support and promote a healthier social media use. It is hypothesise that students' social media overuse is correlated to high levels of social comparison and lower self-esteem, impaired academic productivity and significant effect on student's mood change.

The research questions for the current study are as follows:

RQ 1: What are the experiences of students who feel that they overuse social media?

RQ 2: How does social media overuse affect student's mood and wellbeing?

RQ 3: Do college students with excessive social media usage feel their productivity and social engagement is impacted?

Methods

Design

The study utilise a qualitative research design and a inductive approach to thematic analysis method. The study used semi-structured interviews with a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions as a method of data collection. The data collection process involved sharing information about the study strategically on social media as online posts, to attract participants that meet the criteria. The researcher collected data and generated codes based on key themes used to and formulate a conclusion on the impact of excessive social media use on student's experiences. This design involves understanding individual experiences and perspectives on social media overuse and its effects on different aspects of student's life, such as physical engagement, productivity, mood, and well-being.

Researcher's Position

The researcher in this study is a college student who has a significant use of social media platforms. The researcher's background as a student and the personal engagement on social media, could influence their interpretations despite efforts to maintain objective during data collection and analysis. The researcher's prior understanding of social media overuse lied in past personal experiences with such, both negative and positive. In result, viewing possible results of the study with a critical and experienced mind, being able to relate and better understand participants perceptions and experiences. In conclusion, it is important to note that results have not been intentionally affected.

Participants

The study uses a purpose sampling technique to select participants. An advertisement post informing the study's aims was placed in various social networking sites such as Instagram, WhatsApp groups, and Facebook. It targeted college students above 18 years old who use social networking sites for more than 2 hours a day. According to Rahmawati et al. (2019), a daily screen time of more than 2 hours is positively associated with excessive social media use. This sampling technique allowed for a time-

effective recruitment and was followed by a Snowball sampling technique, an approach to recruit participants in qualitative research through referrals from previous suitable participants. A total of 4 students demonstrated an interest in taking part on the study through the online advertisement, and 3 out of 5 potential participants referred took part in the study due to cancellation and lack of interest. The research study have a final sample size of 8 participants including the pilot study (1), in accordance with Braun & Clarke (2013) recommendations of 6 to 10 rich and detailed interviews for Thematic Analysis. All participants met the inclusion criteria which included being in college, English proficiency, over 18 years of age and over 2 hours of social media use per day. A small sample size is advisable for studies that rely on thematic analysis since it allows researchers to record enough data to highlight patterns (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Use of large sample sizes is likely to leave the researchers with too much data to manage thus affecting the reliability of outcomes. Potential participants received an Information Leaflet by email and the individuals who fit the criteria informed on both the online post and the Information Leaflet, agreed on a suitable time for the interview.

Materials

An interview guide (Appendix A) was developed based on study research questions. Interview Question 4 was utilised in a study by Aksoy (2018) and have been utilised for the present study. A pilot study was conducted to ensure all questions asked are relevant and necessary for the project. The online advertisement post (Appendix 0) and the researcher's personal social networks were used to get more views and attract participants, providing a highlight of the goals and eligibility conditions. Access to such information is necessary for potential participants to know what to expect and if they meet the criteria. The researcher's computer (MacBook Pro) was used throughout all eight interviews to record and transcript the interviews using the Teams app/website.

Procedure

Through the study advertisement on social media, participants will have access the researcher email contact. The advert will include the criteria to take part and details related to the study's objectives and other factors to encourage individuals to participate. During the data collection process, possible participants were contacted back by email to participate in the study if met the criteria specified on the Information Leaflet (see Appendix B). This in-depth information leaflet is provided to inform participants of the study's goals, eligibility criteria, and other relevant information. The Consent Form (see Appendix C) attached to this email, had demographic questions to fill in, such as age and gender, and it also informed participants the possibility to remove any data from the study if they wish to resign within a limit of 7 days after collected data. Signing the consent form was necessary for individuals to indicate their willingness to participate. The link to the Teams interview was sent through email on a fitting time stipulated by the researcher and the participant. At the start of the call, participants were briefed accordingly to the Information Leaflet, then asked to confirm if they were college students and if they use social media for over 2 hours a day. The participant then was asked for consent to start the recording. The researcher administered semi-structured interviews to gather needed data. The interviews carried out on Teams, were held for 22 to 41 minutes, with an average of 29 minutes excluding the time spent on briefing participants. A mix of open-ended and close-ended questions at the interview provided an opportunity for the researcher to note the different opinions about the topic of interest, and using thematic analysis, the researcher compared the data to previous findings, drew conclusions and presented results. Such methods allowed the researcher to explore participant's personal experiences and ask for clarification when needed. After the interview, participants were sent a debrief sheet which included in Appendix D. In addition, links to support websites and services to address any distress, worries or discomfort that could arise from the study. The researcher de-identified collected data to minimize the risk on participant's confidentiality. The project's findings do not mention individual names or any information that is likely to jeopardize a participant's privacy. The participants were given

a code (e.g. Participant 1,2,3) to identify them throughout the study, but protect their anonymity. The password-protected recorded data was used to inform findings and will not be accessed by unauthorized persons. After the study is concluded, the recorded interviews will be kept only by the researcher for a period of 1 year, and then destroyed to further protect the participants confidentiality, in accordance with NCI policy.

Data Analysis

The proposed research study will rely on an inductive approach to thematic analysis to analyse data collected from the research study, enabling a deeper understanding of participant's perspectives from the qualitative data collected through interviews. Thematic analysis is based on the idea that common themes and patterns can be derived from the experiences and opinions shared by different participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was analysed with accordance to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. Carrying out thematic analysis required the researcher to familiarize themselves with collected data before generating codes based on key words. Codes were identified by the manual coding method of taking notes, followed by identifying patterns among the codes, and grouping similar codes into potential themes. A thematic map was created to aid in visual representation. After ensuring themes are meaningful and distinct, themes names were established and ensured to be clearly defined and supported with evidence. The refined themes are then used to generate results for the study and answer to the research questions with supporting quotes from the interviews. The methods of this study seek to achieve an understanding of individual experiences and their conscious structure. Such methods allow the research to explore personal experiences and ask for clarification when needed. In this case, the researcher relied on the interviews to identify negative or positive participant experiences impacts of excessive social media use on college students.

Results

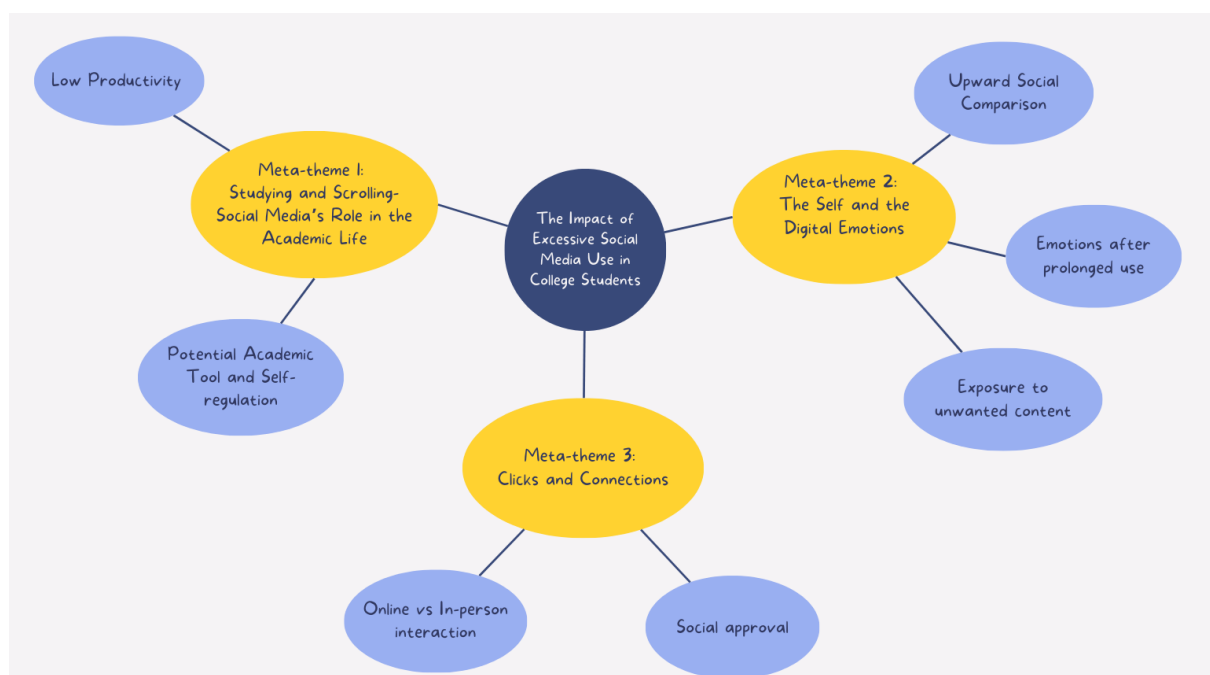


Figure 1. Meta-themes and Subthemes

Utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) methods, thematic analysis was conducted on the interview data of seven participants. Participants' responses to questions about their social media use were grouped into three meta-themes and seven subthemes. Each meta-theme and its subthemes are presented in Figure 1. These themes highlight the complex impact of social media in students' academic and personal lives, and well-being.

Meta-theme 1: Studying and Scrolling- Social Media's Role in the Academic Life

Social media have an important role in students' academic experiences, acting both positively and negatively. The impact of social media use on the academic life were coded under the subthemes of *Low Productivity* and *Potential Academic Tool & Self-regulation* according to the data collected from participants (N=7), as presented in Figure 1. While many participants mentioned using platforms such as YouTube and LinkedIn for academic resources and networking, they also admitted to disrupted productivity due to excessive scrolling.

Low Productivity

The majority of students reported that their social media use negatively impacted their academic life in some way. Nearly all participants responses to questions regarding their social media engagement during class and studying, have mentioned frequently checking their phones for notifications, disrupted focus, and unintended procrastination. For instance, participants expressed initial distractions resulting in prolonged periods of unproductive scrolling:

“Well, when I'm doing my stuff from college, like studying for tests, sometimes I want to just check a message or like just quick text someone on social media, like Instagram, et cetera. But then instead of spending like 2 minutes checking, I just spent a lot of time replying back and talking on the phone, it happens a lot. I also watch a lot of random videos, those small and short videos on TikTok for example, but when you see you just spend an hour doing that. You don't realize how long you are there for, until it's too late.” (Participant 3)

“...sometimes I am like just in the middle of class and I feel my phone vibrate or something like that. I know that's going to be a WhatsApp or Instagram notification. It might be something important, so I just pick it up and check it from time to time.” (Participant 2)

Participants also mentioned feeling more productive on the days with lower social media use, highlighting a clear correlation between reduced screen time and increased productivity.

“For sure I feel like I am more productive on the days I am not on social media as much.”
(Participant 3)

“Just imagine if I used these four, five, six hours I spend it on Instagram every day, reading instead? I would have finished Freud by now. But I haven't even started.” (Participant 4)

“I would say most of the time when I am trying to be more productive, I still spend too much time on social media. I think I would have done so much more if it wasn't because of it.” (Participant 5)

It is evident that excessive social media use significantly impacts the productivity of college students. Participant 7 response regarding the use of social media distraction from doing homework or studying for tests, highlighted the delayed recognition of the negative impact of this distraction on academic achievement:

“It is something I only realised the seriousness of it, when I failed to meet a deadline for one of my essays. I thought that maybe if I spent less time on my phone, I would have gotten it done.”

(Participant 7)

Potential Academic Tool and Self-regulation

Social media can be a resourceful tool for many areas of students' lives, especially for students who struggle with the complexity of academic content. Social media platforms mentioned by participants such as YouTube and LinkedIn, are examples of potential academic tools that can supplement and enhance learning.

“...there are a lot of things I don't understand in class because the technicality of terms is complicated, and videos on YouTube are wonderful. Even more if they are animated, I love animated videos. I learn a lot about psychoanalysis on YouTube videos.” (Participant 4)

“It's good because we are able to somehow use the Internet to improve ourselves, like LinkedIn. You can do courses, find a job, and contact people that are in the same area of study as you, all through LinkedIn, which is really good for your academic life.” (Participant 3)

However, many participants expressed difficulty in managing their social media use for their academic purposes. When asked about the significance of the positive and negative impact of their social media use, a number of students acknowledged the positive academic use of social media and its effectiveness depending on self-discipline.

“I think the negative effect is bigger, but because of bad administration. I think we don't know how to manage ourselves, including myself.” (Participant 4)

“So it's good in some ways, when you can use it for you to improve yourself or your academic life. But sometimes it's bad as well because I don't use these tools for my benefit enough. So I would say that it's more about how you use social media than for how long, and how much you use it.”
(Participant 3)

“I tend to spend too much time watching random videos on YouTube. It definitely takes more of my day than the rest of my responsibilities. I could have been watching tutorials instead, or just studying, but I just don't control that well.” (Participant 7)

This subtheme highlights the critical issue of social media academic support and students lack of discipline and self-regulation, affecting significantly on their full potential for academic success. Therefore, according to the data collected, social media's impact on education is not completely positive or negative, it depends positively on how students manage their usage.

Meta-theme 2: The Self and the Digital Emotions

The participants' responses to questions regarding their use of social platforms and its emotional impact, were coded under the meta-theme of The Self and the digital Emotions. The subthemes of this meta-theme are *Upward Social Comparison*, *Emotions after prolonged use*, and *Exposure to unwanted content*, according to the data collected from participants (N=7), as presented in Figure 1. The subtheme of *Upward Social Comparison* was repeated most frequently by the participants. Some participants stated that they usually feel *envy* and *frustration*. The students showed to acknowledge the negative emotional impact of their social media use and that they attempt/attempted to make changes to their social media habits.

Upward Social Comparison

According to student's social media experiences, upward social comparison was reported to lead to feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, anxiety, and contributing to a more depressive state of mind. The comparison of achievement, lifestyle and appearance, significantly affect students well-being and self-image.

"It's unhealthy because I mean, obviously I can't be this person. And yeah, it's sometimes like it's just difficult to understand. Like maybe it's even like kind of you don't really know who you are because you want to be someone else." (Participant 1)

"...this [social comparison] make me feel sick all the time, and anxious. When I see celebrities for example, I think I'm not skinny enough, I'm not blonde enough, I'm not smart enough, I'm not rich enough, I didn't travel enough, so I'm all the bad things if I compare of course. This constant comparison makes me feel bad about myself and more depressive." (Participant 4)

"...it makes my life feel less interesting than other people's. I am pretty sure that messes with my emotional state and it makes me believe I am less than I actually am." (Participant 7)

Most participants acknowledged their habit of comparing themselves to others they perceive as better as an unhealthy tendency. However, they stressed that the behaviour is unavoidable despite their awareness. One participant mentioned:

"...I know that we can't compare, but I still compare myself with other girls, other bodies, another life. It makes me want to change everything on me because I don't feel that I'm enough or that I have enough. I just feel like, 'Oh my God, I need to look more like this', 'I need to improve myself', 'I need to change this or that'. So I just start to find problems on me, that I didn't before, things that I didn't even care about before. And yeah, it makes me feel sad and bad about myself." (Participant 3)

Students emotionally affected by such comparisons have also reported attempts to manage or limit their use as a mean to avoid such impact on their self-perception and well-being. Awareness of thoughts, removing notifications, unfollowing specific content, and ceased use of social media platforms, were examples of attempts to reduce or halt the negative effect of online comparisons. Some of the responses also indicated some failed attempts of reducing social media use.

“There are situations where I have to remind myself that I am a different person. There are situations where I have to remind myself that we live different lives and we made different decisions that brought us to where we are right now. It's very easy to say and think like ‘Why is it so easy for this guy?’. And that's something I try to avoid doing as much as I possibly can, because it's a very sad point whenever you start comparing yourself, whenever I start comparing myself with someone that in my eyes are better doing better than I am.” (Participant 2)

“There was a time I even stopped following all profiles of blonde models, because I was obsessing over it and how I could never achieve that tone in my hair, but it's impossible. But I can't just stop using it, it's like a cycle. I also removed my notifications from Instagram and TikTok and I realized I feel better after doing that” (Participant 3)

“I think when I look at someone online that has a healthier lifestyle and a healthier body, and then I am just not able to get that body or get that lifestyle, that actually makes me feel frustrated and sad. And that is actually one of the main reasons why I tried to stop using social media a while ago, because I realised that social media had the power of messing me up for the rest of the day, very easily. Clearly it didn't work cause I am back using it 5 hours a day.” (Participant 6)

In contradiction, some of the participants have reported to feel influenced positively from comparisons to social media sources, highlighting different possible outcomes of upward comparisons.

“...whenever you see someone achieving a goal, for example, and that person is nice enough to share how they did it, and if it's something that I see that I would benefit from, I'm probably gonna follow that. So if that person can positively influence me somehow, yes, I'm probably gonna follow that person and do whatever that person is doing or suggesting to do.” (Participant 2)

This variance between the positive and the negative side of upward comparisons were frequently mentioned by the participants. Some students stressed that while such comparisons can influence them positively, it also pressures them into thinking they are not as capable as others, highlighting a significant impact on self-esteem and self-doubt.

“But sometimes it makes me think I can't do it, that I am not strong enough mentally, to have the same outcome as that person.” (Participant 6)

Excessive use often leads to feelings of inadequacy and a sense of inferiority. One participant reported:

“I follow a lot of fitness influencers, so I feel like I learned a lot from them. But there is the negative side, well, maybe I started comparing myself to them a lot, so it made me feel pressure to do more in terms of sports and exercising. Sometimes I just don't have the time and I question why is it harder for me, than it looks on social media?” (Participant 7)

Emotions after prolonged use

Answers to questions regarding participants emotional consequences after prolonged use were significantly negative. Students described a range of negative emotions associated to this excessive use of social platforms, such as feelings of failure, exhaustion, guilt, anger, and sadness. While social media succeeds in entertaining users, the excessive engagement often cause feelings of unproductivity and regret.

“I start thinking about how long have I already spent doing absolutely nothing on social media during the whole week or the whole month or the whole year, and I just start overthinking about that and I feel like a failure.” (Participant 6)

According to a participant, tiredness and difficulty to sleep were also consequences of their overuse:

“It makes me feel exhausted. But because I normally use it at night. So it makes me tired and at the same time makes it difficult for me to sleep. I don’t know why.” (Participant 1)

Participants described themselves as caught in a cycle of scrolling and procrastination despite their awareness of its negative effects, while acknowledging difficulty in breaking the cycle of prolonged engagement.

“I actually feel quite guilty because I realize that I could have spent the time in a more productive way, doing some exercises or sports that I like, studying for the college exams and assignments, reading a book, etc. It makes me regret it but I never seem to be able to stop.” (Participant 3)

“I feel more lazy and unproductive than before. I also feel angry at myself sometimes, or sad because I procrastinated and know that I will probably do the same tomorrow.” (Participant 4)

Exposure to unwanted content

Feelings of anger, anxiety, sadness, and irritability are common. Participants expressed a range of negative emotional responses when asked about exposure to controversial or distressing content on social platforms.

“I can very easily get affected by things and news I see on social media. Especially that I have anger problems, I feel very angry and stressed.” (Participant 4)

“...when I would see like a tragedy, or like an accident, or anything like that on social media I would be very sad the rest of the day, or if I saw something about someone that I like or someone that I don't like. That would make me very frustrated and impact the rest of my day, or the way that I communicate with people the rest of the day, so I think those affect me a lot.” (Participant 6)

One participant highlighted their frustration due to social media platforms' profit from negative information and manipulative content, leading to a sense of helplessness and anxiety:

“That kind of thing disturbs me, but I understand that's what social media is there for, to spread good and bad information, but they actually make money out of evil dissemination and that makes me feel angry. That also makes me feel anxious, because although 90% of the time, whenever I'm scrolling, I'm getting good information and or information that makes me feel good, but I would say that other 10% is unwanted information, or ads, or stuff that really don't help me at all. So it makes me feel kind of anxious whenever I'm scrolling and also really sad or annoyed whenever that 10% hits.”
(Participant 2)

Meta-theme 3: Clicks and Connections

The participants' responses regarding their social engagement were coded under the subthemes of *Online vs In-person interaction* and *Social approval*.

Online vs In-person interaction

Participants' responses regarding their preference between online versus physical interaction were mixed, highlighting both the convenience of online communication and the depth of in-person interactions. Some of the participants mentioned that online interactions can be '*easier to communicate*' and '*more convenient*', but acknowledged physical interactions' importance.

“I would much rather interact with people through the Internet...its more convenient for me.”, “But physical interaction is gonna make a lot more difference. There are actually several different studies that show that your body produces hormones, specific hormones when you're having contact, physical contact with other people. But for productivity, having to spend, let's say one hour commuting to a place, to a library to meet people, and then another hour from the library home and doing that three times a week, something like, that is very counterproductive.” (Participant 2)

“...I can stay connected with people. I can always just text one of my friends and talk about whatever.” (Participant 7)

Social networking impacts student's relationships and influences the lack of in-person engagement due to the ease of online connection, which can lead to weaker social skills:

“...I don't have any contacted people anymore like, I don't see the need for me to do that anymore...because with a few clicks I can just download something and go to a WhatsApp group and just share with everyone. So there's no social interaction anymore, we can have a video call and chat online, but it's different. It's never the same as a face-to-face interaction.” (Participant 2)

“...some people don't even know how to talk in person anymore, don't know how to do a job interview, or how to act and be around people. So I believe we are missing what's really important, because we really need to feed ourselves with other's conversations. Maslow's theory for example, a theory that talks about human needs and conversation, and that be around others is essential for our lives, not just on social media and stuff, but like physically around others is really important for our life.” (Participant 3)

According to the answers collected, some participants are living far away from their family and friends, which makes online engagement, their only mean of communication. It is also mentioned the difficulty to meet friends in-person due to different routines.

“... I live abroad, so that is the only possible way to contact those who live in my home country. Well, it's also because it's hard to meet the friends I have here in-person because each of them have a different routine, their own jobs, their own things. So, using social media just facilitate this. Yeah, we share photos and updates online, an easier way of interacting than to meet and talk in person”
(Participant 3)

“...most of my closest friends live in another country, the country I am from, so online is my only option if I miss them.” (Participant 6)

“....I can see other people's lives, like my friends and family's life.” (Participant 3)

Other participants emphasised a preference and importance of physical interactions, referring to in-person interactions as ‘more honest’ and ‘genuine’, allowing for true and honest connections.

“It's more Interesting when you're in person, everything is just more real and more enjoyable, and interactions are like instant. You're not waiting for someone to look at their phones, to reply at something. It's just instant and true. They don't have time to think about like an appropriate a specific answer to what you're saying, and that's just how things should always work. So it's more honest, more true, more genuine.” (Participant 5)

“I think it has its downsides to online interaction as much as it is very convenient. But I think physical interaction it's more honest, it's more deep. Like, you feel of the person's energy and you know if they're comfortable around you. When I think about it now, let's say someone says something very funny to me, the difference between if it is online or like in person, it's that if it's online I will send a few emojis laughing but I will probably just smile a bit, but if I'm in person and someone says something funny, I will laugh and I will feel good and I will feel the joy at that moment. And that's not the same online.” (Participant 6)

Social approval

Participants' perceptions and experiences regarding the importance of followers, views, and likes, were varied. Many participants expressed how the social media culture of visibility and recognition, impact their self-perception and emotional state. Participants acknowledged both the desire and the psychological burden of being seen in the online world. Five participants reported to significantly value engagement on posts, while two participants reported to not care about views, likes, or followers, since their preference is to watch other people's content rather than post themselves.

"I really like likes. If I don't get likes, I'm very surprised. So I like likes. I like when people message me, comment on my videos. I think it's very important. It's like a reward or something. I feel important." (Participant 1)

"It's good. Yeah, for sure. I like to be heard and seen. I like when people agree with me. I like when people like the stuff that I have to say. Yeah, I think it's very interesting. It makes me feel wanted." (Participant 2)

The participants who mentioned their perspective on the importance of online engagement, also reported feelings of 'reward', feeling validated by engagement, and need for approval. In case of standards of engagement not being met, some students feel affected emotionally, and feel a need to delete the posts.

"... when I post something and let's say 100 people like it. I just feel like 'Oh my God, why didn't 150 people like it?'. I just feel like I need the approval from others through the likes, through the comments. It really affects me." (Participant 3)

"If I don't have enough likes and views, I will delete the post. I feel like I have to have at least a set amount that I stipulated in my head and if I don't, I'll just delete that. And like, about followers, like today for example, I looked at my followers and saw that I lost a few that actually made me so annoyed

and for a second I was like 'what can I do to get more?'. I think it's a bit dramatic to be honest, I know that, but it's just how I felt." (Participant 6)

Social media provides some sense of connection and validation for some, but it also fosters feelings of frustration. One of the students who reported to value such approval, commented that the 'culture of being seen', referring to today's generation need for online approval, also cause expectations and pressure to fit into beauty standards and societal norms within social media, shaping their self-worth around external perceptions.

"...there is like this culture of being seen being recognized being, you know, a model to people so. This always affected me a bit cause, I don't know, I always felt the importance of like being recognized in this like, virtual world....

...The negative part is definitely this standards that they are always putting in your mind even though you're not aware of it. So like, there's always gonna be in your life, something regarding this virtual world, something about how you are being seen, how you are being like, spoken about, you know? There's always gonna be someone or something in your head about what's being said and being seen and etcetera....

... it's like a pattern that molds your life. Like a beauty standard or social pattern. There are loads of patterns that are being input like how to act, what to wear, how to speak, even how to dance. ...I think those standards are always like being planted in your brain, and it only tends to grow and grow. And it's something that you don't even notice or don't even realize it's being done to your mind. And that affects me deeply." (Participant 5)

On the contrary, two participants expressed their lack of interest in social media validation due to preference of content consuming.

“...my Instagram is closed and I don't have too many followers. I don't really care about this part of social media, I just like to see what others post, but I don't care if they see what I post or not. I used to care when I was younger, but not now, not anymore.” (Participant 4)

“I don't really care. I don't post much. I rather consume content that other people post.” (Participant 7)

Discussion

The aim of this research was to explore student's experiences and perceptions on their social media use and its impact on their academic and personal lives. Using a qualitative approach, a thematic analysis of the interview data resulted in three meta-themes: (i) *Studying and Scrolling- Social Media's Role in the Academic Life*, (ii) *The Self and the Digital Emotions*, (iii) *Clicks and Connections*. Subthemes included: Low Productivity, Potential Academic Tool and Self-regulation, Upward Social Comparison, Emotions after prolonged use, Exposure to unwanted content, Online vs In-person interaction, and Social approval. In the present study, most participants described a dominant negative impact of their social media use, while acknowledging its importance in the academic life as a tool, convenience and its possible positive influence in lifestyle changes.

Within the first meta-theme, the subtheme "low productivity" identified participants' disrupted productivity and unintended large periods of distraction caused by excessive scrolling. It was noted that the students are easily distracted by social media and constantly check their phones for notifications, causing diversion of their focus from academic contents, which provides a clarification for the study research question regarding their experiences and perceptions on social media impact on productivity. Hridoy et al. (2024) found similar results when investigating the challenges faced by students due to overuse, also highlighting the negative impact on students' academic lives. Moreover, a survey study showed that social media negative impact on academic performance is related to students spending time on platforms rather than dedicating to academic responsibilities (Al-Menayes, 2015). In addition, the subtheme "potential academic tool & self-regulation" revealed students' perceptions of social media as a viable academic resource. Previous studies also suggested social media ability to enhance educational experiences by creating accessible amount of information that can supplement students learning (Rodriguez, 2011; Greenhow et al., 2016. pp.25-28; Chugh et al., 2021). However, many participants also expressed difficulty in managing their social media use for their academic purposes, acknowledging the positive academic use of social media and its effectiveness depending on self-discipline and self-

regulation. A mixed-method study investigating academic self-discipline correlation to social media excessive use and academic achievement among college students, has found similar results, suggesting that self-discipline is directly associated with improved time management, reduced distractions caused by social media, and improved academic outcomes (Tekin, 2024). Therefore, it is noted that social media can have a positive impact on academics, yet students lack of discipline and self-regulation can significantly affect full potential for academic success.

The second meta-theme identified in the present study is *The Self and the Digital Emotions*. Its subthemes are 'Upward Social Comparison', 'Emotions after Prolonged Use', and 'Exposure to Unwanted Content'. According to the subtheme of upward social comparison, all participants reported to have social comparison habits while using social platforms, this emphasizes the importance of exploring its impact. Feelings of envy, frustration, inadequacy, self-doubt, anxiety, and sense of inferiority were commonly reported by students, resulting in direct changes to self-image and self-perception. Iwamoto and Chun (2020) found similar results regarding students' comparisons on social platforms, which lead to unrealistic expectations, reduced self-esteem, and lower well-being. In addition, many recent studies have also explored individuals excessive use of social media and the exposure to idealized portrayals of success, beauty and perfection, leading to a negative effect on well-being and self-perception (Gerber et al., 2018; Kleemans et al., 2018; Fioravanti et al., 2022). Conversely, some of the participants have reported to feel influenced positively from comparisons to social media sources, highlighting different possible outcomes of upward comparisons. In line with these findings, Meier et al. (2020) suggest that upward comparisons can motivate people to imitate others' positive behaviour or characteristics in an attempt of self-improvement, leading to positive changes and personal growth. This variance between the positive and the negative side of upward comparisons allied with social pressure and unbalanced self-esteem results in idiosyncratic behaviour that varies positively and negatively regardless of expectation.

The results under the subtheme ‘Emotions after Prolonged Use’ answers the research question regarding how social media overuse affect student’s mood and wellbeing. Participants’ emotional consequences due to excessive use were significantly negative, describing a range of emotions such as feelings of failure, exhaustion, guilt, anger, and sadness, which are consistent with previous research (Alotaibi et al., 2020; Feng et al., 2025). Participants’ mention of impact of social media overuse on their sleep also corroborate with previous findings on college students, which has been found to corroborate to lower sleep quality (Al Suwayri, 2016; Abu-Snieneh et al., 2020). The subtheme ‘Exposure to Unwanted Content’ found participants negative emotional responses from exposure to controversial or distressing content on social media, such as anxiety, sadness, and irritability, which aligned with previous research (George et al., 2024).

Results from the meta-theme “*Clicks and Connections*” were coded under the subthemes ‘Online vs In-person interaction’, and ‘Social approval’. The study’s investigation of students social media overuse offered valuable insights that effectively addressed the research question on social engagement. The subtheme ‘Online vs In-person interaction’ revealed highlights to both the convenience of online communication and the depth of in-person interactions. Most participants emphasised on preference and importance of physical interactions, referring to in-person interactions as ‘more honest’ and ‘genuine’, allowing for true and honest connections. Recent research highlighted that in-person interactions outperform online interactions in improving well-being (Liang et al., 2024).

However, students have also reported the role of social media in decreased physical involvement, due to the excessive use of such platforms but also allowing for connection with others from the comfort of their homes. These findings reveal two possible outcomes previously mentioned in past studies, both positive and negative where constant engagement with friends and family allow for higher levels of closeness’ with those who are just a click away (Sanchiz et al., 2016). In contradiction, these results

highlight reduced meaningful face-to-face communication, which can lead to weaker interpersonal skills, also seen in previous investigations (Ramdlani et al., 2024).

Finally, the subtheme ‘Social approval’ revealed participants perceptions and experiences regarding the importance of social media feedback. Due to the large role of social media in society nowadays, individuals self-perceptions can be evaluated based on the feedback received on social media. Some participants reported feeling validated by engagement and feeling a need for such online approval, which suggests low self-esteem in agreement with past studies (Diefenbach and Anders, 2022). This need for approval on social media can lead to dependence on external validation, influencing self-worth and mental well-being (Nie et al., 2024). In addition, students reported feelings of pressure and frustration due to the attempt of fitting in idealized standards, accordingly, Merino et al (2024) found that such expectations can lead to increased dissatisfaction and psychological distress.

Limitations and Future Research

In view of the limited number of qualitative research on the impact of social media excessive use in college students, this study intent to significantly contribute to literature. The results of this research contain valuable information about the impact of social media in students' academic and personal lives, and well-being. Despite its potential contribution to the topic, the present study contain limitations that should be noted. While the qualitative approach provides depth, the study self-reported data can be influenced by factors such as selective recall, inaccurate self-perception, social desirability, mood, and more. Future research could combine quantitative techniques to further reinforce the reported data, allowing for statistical analysis of social media overuse and a qualitative methodology to explore its impact. Despite appropriate sample size according to Braun & Clarke (2013) recommendations, a replication of the current study in a larger sample could provide a deeper understanding of students' excessive usage and its impact in a broader population. Despite the fact that age and gender were collected in the present study, they were not accounted as variables. In the present study, variables such as cultural background, pre-existing mental illnesses, lifestyle factors and coping mechanisms were not collected. Future research could benefit from including additional control variables for a better exploration and interpretation of data. Additionally, it is important to note that the study focused on questions regarding general use of social media platforms despite mentioning specific platforms on participants results, in that sense, conclusions on specific social media apps such as Facebook, Instagram or TikTok, should be further investigated. Policymakers and public health practitioners may benefit from the present research to provide light on how social media use affects mental health, wellness, and social connectivity. However, the findings must be viewed cautiously because of the study limitations. Social media use has become more popular over the years, and the concern about the possible harmful effects is constantly growing. These limitations and potential areas for future study could provide a more robust understanding of the impact of excessive social media use on college students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media is a pervasive phenomenon in the modern world, and its effects on college students have become increasingly significant. This study explored the varied impact of social media on college students' academic and personal lives, both its benefits and disadvantages. Amongst positive effects, social media can serve as a tool to enhance students' learning, aid social connection, provide a source of networking opportunities and positive influence, and facilitate information sharing/seeking. Concerning the adverse effects, social media use can take part in social detachment, distraction, underproductivity, sleep disturbance, unhealthy social comparison, mood irregularity, unrealistic expectations of self, and lower overall well-being, especially when the using of social platforms is excessive and problematic. It is possible to conclude that the impact of social media can significantly depend on multiple factors such as preference, self-discipline, coping mechanisms, and more. It is also perceived that countermeasures currently available can easily be bypassed and, therefore, should not be considered as a possible solution to the detrimental impact of social media overuse. In agreement with suggested limitations and future research directions, exploring additional variances can be beneficial for a better understanding of the topic discussed. Moreover, due to the study's limitations, the researcher hopes to further develop this study in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Guide (Both open-ended and closed-ended questions)

Interview Questions:

- What are the experiences of students who feel that they overuse social media?
- How does social media overuse affect student's mood and wellbeing?
- Do college students with excessive social media usage feel their productivity and social engagement is impacted?

A. Introductory questions

1. What is your age and gender?
2. Are you currently in college?
3. Do I have consent to record this interview?

B. Social Media usage and productivity

1. Do you feel like you spend much time on social networking platforms?
2. Do you feel as your engagement with social media has an impact on your productivity?
3. What was the purpose of using social media when you first started using it?
4. Do you use social media when on campus? How often?
5. Do you go through your social media or answer text messages during class times?
6. How often does your cell phone distract you from doing homework or studying for tests?

C. Social media and personal life/connections

1. Do you often partake in activities you enjoy, that do not involve the use of social media?
2. Do you socialise in-person with friends and family often?
3. Do you prefer physical or online interaction?
4. Do you think that physical interactions are more important than online interactions?
5. Do you think social networking has an impact on your relationships in college or outside of college?

D. Preference

1. If you were forced to spend 24 hours with no internet, what would you do during those hours?
How do you think you would feel?
2. If you had to replace your time on social media, with other activity, what would that be?

E. Impact

1. Do you compare yourself and your life with people and their lifestyle on social media? How does it make you feel?
2. Have social media influenced you to change your lifestyle in any way positive or negative?
3. How do you feel when you see something that you dislike or that bothers you on social media?
4. Is it important to you to have many followers and views on social media?
5. Do you feel as though social media has more of a positive or negative impact on your life? How so?
6. How do you feel after you realise you have just spent a long time on social media?

F. Closing questions

1. Have you considered to limit and monitor your phone usage/screen time?
2. Do you reckon you need appropriate intervention to help you with any of the topics discussed?

Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

Study Title: A Qualitative Study on the Impact of Excessive Social Media Use on College Students

Thank you for taking an interest in taking part of this study. It is important you take time to read this document before deciding to participate. Please do not hesitate to contact me through the emailed I added at the end of this form in case you have any concerns or questions.

What is this study about?

My name is Jennifer Castro, and I am a BA Psychology student at National College of Ireland. This research is a project required for my current final year.

The research project will gather data on the participant experiences related to excessive social media use and the impact of it in their social engagement. Excessive social media use (ESMU) is characterised as “being overly concerned about social media, to be driven by a strong motivation to log on to or use social media, and to devote so much time and effort to social media that it impairs other social activities, studies/job, interpersonal relationships, and/or psychological health and well-being” (p. 4053; Andreassen & Pallesen; 2014).

The research to be used in the study will be collected by interviews, focussing on understanding individual experiences about social media use and its connection to issues like anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, and unhealthy comparison. I aim to investigate the positive and negative impacts of social media use and a more specific data on these experiences.

The study is supervised by the National College of Ireland lab technician Eden Bryan.

What will taking part in the study involve?

If you decide to take part in this research, you will be asked to attend a online Teams interview. The interview questionnaire will ask about the use of social media and its impact on the participants' lives and will take about 30 minutes. **It is important to note that the interview will be audio recorded.**

Who can take part?

The criteria for inclusion to take part in this study is excessive social media use (quantified as over 2 hours a day), English language proficiency, participants currently in college and over 18 years old. Criteria for exclusion includes individuals under the age of 18, those who cannot or will not offer informed consent or participants that do not meet the criteria of using social media sites for more than 2 hours per day.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this research is voluntary; you do not have to take part, and a decision not to take part will have no consequences for you. If you do decide to take part, you can withdraw from participation within 7 days of consent.

What are the possible risks and benefits of taking part?

Taking part on this study will not have any direct benefits. However, the information collected will provide knowledge required to understand the topic of this research.

There is a small possibility that the questions presented in the interview causes the participant to feel distressed or upset due to the questionnaire reflection on negative impacts of social media excessive use. If the participant is to feel anyhow, they are free to stop the questionnaire for a period or exit the interview completely.

Will taking part be confidential and what will happen to my data?

Participants' confidentiality will be enhanced by ensuring that personal information does not appear on the interview recordings. The researchers will also focus on ensuring that participants' anonymity is not compromised. Collected data will be accessible by the researcher and the supervisor.

As this is a qualitative study, direct quotes from interviews may be included in the presentation of the results., but these quotes will be anonymised and will not contain any information that could identify the participant or any other individual. Data will be retained for 5 years in accordance with the NCI data retention policy.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of this study will be presented in my final Dissertation, which will be submitted to National College of Ireland.

Who should you contact for further information?

Researcher: Jennifer Castro (x21430306@student.ncirl.ie)

Supervisor: Eden Bryan (Eden.Bryan@ncirl.ie)

Appendix C

Consent Form

Study Title: A Qualitative Study on the Impact of Excessive Social Media Use on College Students

I _____ consent to take part in the proposed research study.

- Participant Age: _____
- Participant Gender: _____

Please tick the boxes if in agreement:

I have knowledge that I can ask for my data to be removed from the study within 7 days of my interview.	
I understand that failing or refusing to answer questions will not expose me to any negative consequences.	
I have read the nature and purpose of the research study and have been provided with the opportunity to ask for clarification on different issues.	
I acknowledge that I will not benefit from the research study.	
I consent for my interview to be recorded.	
I consent to my interview data to be stored and utilised for analysis purposes in a de-identified way. My real name or any identifiable information about me will not appear in any dissemination or publication of the current research.	

(Given that the filter committee has reviewed the project, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure compliance to required ethical principles during the completion of the study.)

- ☐ Please tick this box if you have read and agree with all the above information.
- ☐ Please tick this box to indicate that you are providing informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of research participant

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix D

Debrief Leaflet

Dear Participant,

You have now completed the study.

Thank you for taking part in this research. The researcher appreciates you for agreeing to use your time to participate in the project. Your contribution to this study has helped up to further understand the Impact of Excessive Social Media Use on College Students.

What will happen to the information which you gave?

On completion of this research project, the data will be retained on the National College of Ireland database. The researcher will allow you to withdraw from the study if a request is made within 7 days. Withdrawal from the study after data has been collected and analysed will not be possible.

Mental Health Services

If you feel distressed following the interview or need someone to talk to, please consider reaching out to the following support services:

- **Text message support service:**

Helpline - Free-text **SPUNOUT** to **50808**

- **Listening, support and information service:**

NiteLine -1800 793793 <https://niteline.ie>

- **Centre for Mental Wellbeing:**

MyMind - hq@mymind.org

- **Counselling service:**

Helplink- helplinksupport@helplink.ie @: helplink.ie

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me:

Researcher: Jennifer Castro (x21430306@student.ncirl.ie)

Supervisor: Eden Bryan (Eden.Bryan@ncirl.ie)

Thank You

Appendix E: Advertisement post



A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE IMPACT
OF EXCESSIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN
COLLEGE STUDENTS

ARE YOU A COLLEGE STUDENT WHO SPENDS
OVER 2 HOURS A DAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA?
PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDIES!

*How does the overuse of social media
affect me as a student?*

OBJECTIVES:

- 01 TO UNDERSTAND STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES
- 02 TO UNDERSTAND POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL
MEDIA OVERUSE ON SOCIAL INTERACTION, ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE, AND MENTAL HEALTH.
- 03 TO EXPLORE THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA OVERUSE

CONTACT: x21430306@student.ncirl.ie