

GLORY EWERE SUNDAY

**THE NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENT
WELL-BEING
IN THE UK**



**UNIVERSITY OF ALGARVE
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS**

2025

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Master in Management

Dissertation made under the supervision of:

Professor Doutor

Pedro Gonçalo Tenazinha Pimpão



**UNIVERSITY OF ALGARVE
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS**

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Work Authorship Declaration

I declare to be the author of this work, which is unique and unprecedented. Authors and works consulted are properly cited in the text and are in the listing of references included.

Glory Ewere Sunday

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(Signature)

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ABSTRACT

Social media is widely used by United Kingdom adolescents, with potential benefits and harm. This study examined the adverse impact of social media on adolescent well-being in the United Kingdom. The study used a mixed-method approach. 150 respondents were chosen through convenience sampling. An online survey was used to collect data from participants who accessed the study link via emails. SPSS was used to examine survey data. Regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between the frequency and timing of social media engagement and self-reported outcomes. Out of the 150 chosen participants, only 67 fully completed the study questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 44.67%. The research findings revealed that social media considerably affects the sleep patterns (50%), anxiety, tension, and emotional discomfort (50%) of United Kingdom teens. Most respondents participate in life comparisons, highlighting their vulnerability to digital platforms. Correlation study ($r = -0.292$, $p < 0.05$) revealed a relationship between extended social media use and deteriorating mental health in teenagers. In the realm of cyberbullying, while a minority of teenagers reported being direct victims, a substantial percentage acknowledged witnessing online abuse. The mean score for teenagers reporting direct bullying on social media was 1.72. The mean score for seeing others endure bullying was markedly high at 2.87. The findings indicate that passive exposure to cyberbullying is very widespread. Ultimately, participants indicated that social validation metrics, such as likes and comments, significantly influenced their self-esteem. The study confirms that social media involvement among adolescents has significant psychological dangers. These concerns include altered sleep patterns, heightened stress, vulnerability to cyberbullying, and diminished self-esteem. The research emphasises the need for a unified, coordinated strategy to mitigate these risks. However, the research's applicability to the wider teenage population is constrained by its modest sample size of 67 individuals in the United Kingdom.

Key-words: Social media, Adolescent, Mental health, Cyberbullying, United Kingdom.

RESUMO

As redes sociais são amplamente utilizadas por adolescentes do Reino Unido, com potenciais benefícios e danos. Este estudo examinou os impactos das redes sociais no bem-estar de adolescentes no Reino Unido. O estudo utilizou uma abordagem de método misto. A amostragem por conveniência foi utilizada para selecionar uma amostra de 150 respondentes. Uma pesquisa *online* foi utilizada para a coleta de dados dos participantes que acederam ao *link* do estudo por e-mail. Para examinar os dados da pesquisa foi empregue o sistema SPSS. A análise de regressão foi utilizada para examinar a relação entre a frequência e o momento do envolvimento nas redes sociais e os resultados autorrelatados. A análise temática foi utilizada para interpretar os dados das entrevistas. Dos 150 participantes selecionados, apenas 67 responderam ao questionário do estudo integralmente, resultando numa taxa de resposta de 44,67%. A pesquisa revelou que as redes sociais afetam significativamente os padrões de sono (50%), a ansiedade, a tensão e o sofrimento emocional (50%) dos adolescentes do Reino Unido, com muitos adolescentes envolvidos em comparações de vida entre si, destacando a sua vulnerabilidade às plataformas digitais. Um estudo de correlação ($r = -0,292$, $p < 0,05$) revelou uma relação entre o uso prolongado de redes sociais e a deterioração da saúde mental nos adolescentes. No contexto do *cyberbullying*, embora uma minoria de adolescentes tenha relatado ser vítima direta, uma percentagem substancial reconheceu ter testemunhado abuso *online*. A pontuação média para adolescentes que relataram *bullying* direto nas redes sociais foi de 1,72. A pontuação média para ver outros a sofrer de *bullying* foi notavelmente alta (2,87). Os resultados indicam que a exposição passiva ao *cyberbullying* é muito disseminada. Por último, os participantes indicaram que as métricas de validação social, como gostos e comentários, influenciaram significativamente a sua autoestima. O estudo confirma que o envolvimento em redes sociais entre adolescentes representa riscos psicológicos significativos. Essas preocupações incluem padrões de sono alterados, aumento do *stress*, vulnerabilidade ao *cyberbullying* e diminuição da autoestima. A pesquisa enfatiza a necessidade de uma estratégia única e coordenada para mitigar esses riscos. No entanto, a aplicabilidade da pesquisa à população adolescente em geral é limitada pelo tamanho modesto da amostra, de 67 indivíduos no Reino Unido.

Palavras-chave: Redes sociais, Adolescentes, Saúde mental, *Cyberbullying*, Reino Unido.

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ABBREVIATIONS LIST

SM	Social media
UK	United Kingdom
Std	Standard
NHS	National Health Service
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Social media usage among teenagers and young adults is prevalent and may have both beneficial and detrimental effects (Sala, Porcaro and Gómez, 2024). Such impacts have been recognized in several news articles and television broadcasts; nevertheless, these sources lack scientific rigour and may exhibit bias (Shannon, Bush, Villeneuve, Hellemans, and Guimond, 2023). Thus, this project aimed to investigate the detrimental impact of social media on teenage wellness in the United Kingdom.

This chapter provides an overview of the general study on the negative influence of social media on adolescent well-being within the United Kingdom. This chapter sets the stage by showing that with the increasing use of social media by teenagers, there are growing concerns about its possible impacts on the health of adolescents. It states the problem statement, research aim, specific objectives, and research questions that will drive this study. It also gives the importance of the research, the scope and limitations, thus laying a firm foundation for the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Background of the Study

While individuals of all ages use social media, the predominant demographic of consumers comprises teens and young adults. Teenagers promptly experiment with emerging trends on various social media sites. For instance, YouTube gained prominence in 2005, followed by Musical.ly, which emerged as the favoured application in 2015. TikTok was established in September 2016, although it did not gain significant popularity until 2019 (Iqbal, 2023). Social networking platforms provide a novel ecology of social interactions whereby teenagers engage with public figures or influencers, such as Instagram personalities, Twitter users, and YouTubers. Their conduct in the postings they disseminate establishes a pattern and serves as a paradigm for subsequent generations (Anderson, Faverio, and Gottfried, 2023). Lozano-Blasco, Mira-Aladrén, and Gil-Lamata (2023) discovered that X, formerly known as Twitter, serves as a platform for critical examination of information and social movements. In this environment, teenagers advocate for their beliefs and ideals. Notwithstanding their diversity, a singular, unequivocal characteristic exists: the endeavour of influencers to engage audiences and cultivate parasocial interactions. The

continuous evolution of social media results in teenagers and young adults experiencing a steady stream of news and information.

Social media has significantly transformed the manner in which individuals get information, both accurate and inaccurate. The rapid accessibility of knowledge has influenced several facets of society, like education, social interactions, employment, and leisure. In 2021, 14.4% of people aged 13-17 used TikTok, while 34.9% of users aged 18-24 did so (Iqbal, 2023). This significant rise in TikTok use (49.3%) may be correlated with the COVID-19 epidemic (Yang, Adnan, Alivi, and Sarmiti, 2024), attributed to the additional leisure time resulting from the closure of schools, companies, and social gatherings.

The global utilization of social media by youth has markedly escalated lately. Likewise, social media use has become emblematic of adolescence in the United Kingdom currently (NHS UK, 2024). With the advent of mobile technology and the proliferation of social media platforms, today's adolescents possess unprecedented access to media and the ability to disseminate it, unlike any previous generation (NHS UK, 2023). With the increase in media production and consumption, societal issues and possibilities concurrently escalate. The rapid progression of technology and the widespread emergence of social networks have radically altered the manner in which teenagers engage, communicate, and see themselves. In the United Kingdom, social media engagement among adolescents has become practically universal, with platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and Facebook occupying pivotal positions in their daily routines (Oprea and Bâra, 2024). In 2022, YouTube emerged as the predominant social network for teens in the United Kingdom, with 88 per cent of participants reporting the use of the site. WhatsApp is second, with 55 per cent of adolescents in the United Kingdom actively using the application (Statista, 2023). Furthermore, the utilization of TikTok and Snapchat grew from 2021 to 2022 among individuals aged 13 to 19 in the United Kingdom (Woodward, McGettrick, Dick, Ali, and Teeters, 2025).

A recent survey indicates that social media platforms are the primary news source for youth in the United Kingdom (Masterson, 2023). In 2022, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube emerged as the predominant platforms for news consumption among 12- to 15-year-olds (Garwood-Cross, 2023). Approximately one-third of adolescents use Instagram as their news source, making it the predominant platform for news within the United Kingdom's 12-15 age demographic (Weforum.org, 2025). Both TikTok and YouTube are followed by 28% of young individuals for

news. Despite being widely used for news, social media platforms are among the least trustworthy sources, along with acquaintances, according to Garwood-Cross (2023). According to Vogels and Gelles-Watnick (2023), just one-third of people between the ages of 13 and 19 believe that news articles on social media are trustworthy, and 37% believe that information from friends is reliable.

Social media has sparked worries about its possible detrimental effects on teenagers' mental and emotional health, even as it offers chances for self-expression, connection, and education. Recent research has shown that heavy social media usage is linked to problems, including elevated rates of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Serenko, Turel and Bohonis, 2023; Oberle, Alkawaja, Molyneux, Kerai, Thomson, Guhn, Schonert-Reichl, and Gadermann, 2024). According to recent research, there may be gender disparities in the association between social media use and health. According to Beyens, Pouwels, van Driel, Keijsers, and Valkenburg (2024), adolescent social media use significantly influences future well-being, particularly among females. Since 2005, the lives of young people have seen considerable disruption due to the advent of the social media age and the increasing accessibility of photographic and video recording capabilities on mobile devices. There is a discernible apprehension over the impact of increasing photography, recording, and commenting on young people's engagement in hazardous behaviours and their overall viewpoints, since this generates a semi-permanent record for posterity. "Sexting" refers to the non-consensual dissemination of images that have been posted online. Adolescents are particularly apprehensive over this issue, since data indicates that both males and females experience pressure to engage in this activity (Jarman, McLean, Slater, Marques, and Paxton, 2024). The use of social media and the Internet by children and adolescents is perpetually increasing.

The World Economic Forum reports that about ten percent of children aged nine and a half to twelve have a social media presence (Weforum.org, 2023). The relationship between increased social media use and worse mental health remains ambiguous, despite data correlating particular rises in consumption with poorer mental health outcomes. Heightened social media engagement is probably a consequence of deteriorating mental health (Shoshani and Kor, 2023). The impact of social media and screen time on adolescents' health and well-being remains ambiguous, since the existing research is inadequately robust or definitive to confirm a causal relationship. According

to Maftai, Merlici, and Dănilă (2024), a child's health may be influenced by several factors, including social media and screen usage.

1.3 Problem Statement

Even while social media is known to provide advantages like encouraging creativity and maintaining social ties, there is growing evidence that excessive and uncontrolled use of the platform may be detrimental to teenagers' mental and emotional well-being (Bottaro and Faraci, 2022). Teenage incidences of anxiety, despair, and cyberbullying have significantly increased in the United Kingdom. A thorough examination is necessary to establish the extent to which social media influences teenagers' identity, body image, and self-perception and contributes to these health issues. Interventions may not be successful in addressing the detrimental effects of social media usage if these implications are not well understood.

According to research, teens who use social media extensively have increased symptoms of anxiety and sadness. Ferguson, Kaye, Branley-Bell, and Markey (2025) established that the primary causes of mental health issues are feelings of inadequacy and an unrealistic standard setting brought on by the continual comparison with the chosen and edited lifestyles on social media platforms (Irmer and Schmiedek, 2023). Since teens spend much time online, cyberbullying is another issue that is intimately related to their internet usage. The ability to operate anonymously and the widespread availability of social media platforms raise the possibility that bullying behaviours will have a severe effect on the mental and overall health of the victims. However, identity, body image, and self-esteem are among the areas most impacted by social media (Pop, Iorga, and Iurcov, 2023; Jaruga-Sękowski, Staškiewicz-Bartecka, and Woźniak-Holecka, 2025). Some young individuals may have long-lasting repercussions if they have a false impression of themselves and their potential based on what they read online. The goal of this research is to thoroughly examine these effects. Thus, the overall goal of this research is to assess the extent to which social media negatively affects the well-being of teenagers in the United Kingdom.

1.4 Research Aim

This project aims to investigate the detrimental influence of social media on teenage well-being in the United Kingdom. In particular, comparing the negative impacts of various types—such as anxiety, depression, cyberbullying, and impaired self-esteem—caused by the rise in

teenage social media usage in the United Kingdom is pertinent. These problems are significant because they impact not just health but also relationships with others and unspoken patterns that shape the mental health of teenagers.

1.5 Research Objectives

This research project aims to realize the following specific objectives:

- i. To identify and analyse typical detrimental consequences linked to social networking site engagement among youth in the United Kingdom.
- ii. To examine the correlation between social media usage and mental health issues such as depression among adolescents.
- iii. To analyse the involvement of social media in cyberbullying and its effects on adolescent victims in the United Kingdom.
- iv. To analyse the effects of social media on adolescents' self-esteem, body image, and identity in the United Kingdom.

1.6 Research Questions

To guide this study, the following research questions have been formulated:

- i. What are the typical negative consequences of social media engagement among youth in the United Kingdom?
- ii. Is there a significant correlation between social media usage and mental health issues such as depression among adolescents?
- iii. How does social media contribute to incidents of cyberbullying, and what are its impacts on adolescent victims in the United Kingdom?
- iv. What are the effects of social media on adolescents' self-esteem, body image, and identity in the United Kingdom?

1.7 Significance of the Study

By offering empirical data unique to the United Kingdom setting, this study adds to the expanding corpus of research on the connection between social media and teenage well-being. Parents, educators, legislators, and mental health specialists will find the data useful in formulating

plans to lessen social media's detrimental effects on teenagers. Additionally, the results of this study may guide the creation of educational initiatives and regulations that encourage teens to use social media in a healthy way, which may enhance their mental and emotional well-being.

1.8 Scope of the Study

With a focus on teenagers in the United Kingdom between the ages of 13 and 18, the research will investigate how they use social media, namely Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, X, and TikTok. Surveys will be used to gather data in order to get thorough insights. The focus of the study will be on the psychological and emotional effects, with particular attention on identity, body image, self-esteem, mental health concerns, and cyberbullying.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

The report admits a number of shortcomings. First of all, response bias may affect self-reported statistics on social media use and its impacts. Second, the sample demographics and recruiting strategies may limit how broadly the results may be applied. Although thorough, the study's mixed-methods methodology could potentially have trouble smoothly integrating and harmonizing qualitative and quantitative data.

1.10 Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters:

Chapter One: Introduction, which provides the background, problem statement, objectives, significance, scope, limitations, and key definitions.

Chapter Two: Will discuss the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies relevant to social media and adolescent well-being.

Chapter Three: Outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques used.

Chapter Four: Presents the results of both the quantitative and qualitative components.

Chapter Five: Interprets the findings, discusses implications, and offers recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence supporting the research on the adverse effects of social media on the well-being of adolescents in the UK. The chapter proceeds to review the empirical studies that cover social media trends, mental health, cyberbullying, and body image. The chapter concludes with an integrated theoretical framework that combines some of the most important theories to give this research a cohesive foundation. In addition, it ends with a summary that transitions the reader to the next chapter.

2.2 Empirical Studies on Social Media and Adolescent Well-Being

2.2.1 Social Media Trends in the UK

As of January 2024, social media's impact in the United Kingdom is expanding, with 56.2 million active users, constituting 82.8 per cent of the population (Dixon, 2025). The penetration rate exceeds the worldwide average of 62.3 per cent, establishing the UK as a frontrunner in social media use. The nation's elevated use signifies a broader trend of escalating social media participation globally, especially in Northern and Western Europe. Social media platforms are essential to individuals' lives, providing avenues for communication, content creation and consumption, and information sharing. Ofcom reports that over 89% of UK internet users used social media applications or websites in 2023 (IBISWorld, 2024). Adolescents and young adults are the primary consumers, while there is a fast increase in use among older demographics. Advertising serves as the principal revenue stream for social media platforms, while subscription-based services are increasingly gaining traction as these platforms endeavour to diversify their income sources (Vitalis, Onyejelem, and Okuneye, 2023). TikTok has emerged as the preeminent success story of recent years, attaining the status of the most downloaded application from 2020 to 2022. In November 2024, Meta's Facebook commanded almost 60 per cent of the social networking market in the United Kingdom, whilst Instagram represented around 13.45 per cent. X had 10.87 per cent of the social network market in the UK (Statista, 2025).

2.2.2 Mental Health Impacts

The extensive internet and social media use may provide opportunities for innovation, socialisation, and education. Adolescence is the most critical phase of human existence. This phase induces "storm and stress" in teenagers (Hudimova, Popovych, Baidyk, Buriak, and Kechyk, 2021). At this age, several biological, psychological, and social changes transpire, resulting in an elevated incidence of criminality, norm violation, and antisocial behaviour. Adolescents and social media are inextricably linked. Today's adolescents engage with diverse groups outside their educational environment via mass media (Ambat, 2025). The heavy usage of social media by adolescents is regularly linked to mental health issues. Davis and Goldfield (2025) analysed the association of social media with anxiety, depression, and psychological discomfort. They assert that time spent, engagement, investment, and addiction to social media are all correlated with psychological discomfort. Hylkilä, Männikkö, Peltonen, Castrén, Mustonen, Konttila, Männistö, and Kääriäinen (2024) similarly found that problematic social media use is associated with decreased life satisfaction, with the impact being mediated by loneliness. Excessive social media use heightened loneliness, adversely impacting life satisfaction over time. Similarly, inappropriate social media use may adversely impact social interactions, according to Sepas, Bangash, Nielsen, Yang, and El-Hussuna (2024).

Gupta (2023) indicated that social media is the most detrimental platform, as it facilitates cyberbullying and trolling, posing a significant risk to adolescents' mental health. Popat and Tarrant (2023) examined that those who overly engage with social media may encounter mental health issues. Maltby, Rayes, Nage, Sharif, Omar, and Nichani (2024) have delineated the consequences of online networking that specifically influence the psychological well-being of adolescents, indicating that excessive usage of social media leads to mental health difficulties. Another predator exists; conversely, various researchers have highlighted the detrimental effects of online life. For instance, the World Health Organisation revealed that individuals who have engaged with social media for extended periods are increasingly aware of the associated risks and contemplating future national issues (Awopetu, Olabimitan, Kolawole, Newton, Odok, and Awopetu, 2024). Çakar-Mengü and Mengü (2023) showed that social media incites antagonistic and dangerous behaviour, adversely affecting an individual's mental well-being, especially among adolescents. The influence of internet-based living is contingent upon its use; excessive engagement with social media may be detrimental to a person. Wang (2024) said that 21st-century kids dedicate around 12 to 15 hours daily to different social devices, including phones, computers,

laptops, and televisions, among others. They use these devices to access WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and many more.

Yu, Liu, She, Wang, Wang, Abbey, Singh, Rozelle, and Tong (2023) conducted research that established a dose-response correlation between screen time and depression symptoms. They showed that the risk of depression first decreased and then rose with prolonged sedentary time. The risk of depression considerably escalated with increasing screen time. Gender disparities were significant; females indicated more emotional discomfort, perhaps because of heightened vulnerability to social comparison (Plackett, Sheringham, and Dykxhoorn, 2023). Stănculescu and Griffiths (2023) found that social anxiety significantly predicts social media addiction, with young females who extensively use social media, characterised by moderate anxious attachment and a pronounced unmet desire for belonging, exhibiting the most significant risk. Consequently, technology is continuously advancing, enabling an increasing array of various activities on screen-based gadgets. Nevertheless, engaging in a screen-intensive lifestyle may incur consequences. Excessive social media use has heightened the incidence of mental health issues.

2.2.3 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a significant adverse outcome of social media. Purificacion and Vallespin (2024) investigated cyberbullying on social media among adolescents and adults and its correlation with well-being. They identify many potential determinants of cyberbullying via social media, such as indiscreet posting, duration of social media use, and personality characteristics. Potential adverse impacts on well-being associated with cyberbullying through social media involve psychological anguish, diminished life satisfaction, and suicidal thoughts, according to Sengül (2024). Okoka and Kheswa (2024) showed that elevated social media addiction scores increased online hours and male identification substantially forecasted instances of cyberbullying. Consequently, those who allocate more time to online activities, exhibit increased social media addiction metrics, and identify as male may have a heightened risk of engaging in cyberbullying behaviours.

Victims of cyberbullying exhibit increased anxiety, diminished self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts (Albikawi, 2023). The anonymity of social media intensifies these impacts since offenders encounter less responsibility (Soler and Roos, 2024). Sobkin and Fedotova (2023) demonstrated that teenagers with strong social standing among peers ("leaders") used social media

as a significant educational tool, whilst those with low status ("loners") employed it to mitigate their inadequate real-life experiences. Hostility on social media seems to be prevalent among teens. Conventional distinctions between male and female subcultures are shown in the preference for private or public expressions of hostility (Trufanov, Tomin, Yevstafev, and Akulina, 2024). The rise in hostile encounters with strangers as adolescents mature suggests that the fulfilment of the fundamental teenage demand for "broadening one's social network" in online exchanges is accompanied by the potential for damaging, aggressive responses.

2.2.4 Body Image and Self-Esteem

Body image satisfaction is a vital element in how people assess and value their physical appearance and sexual appeal, being an essential factor of self-esteem and psychological well-being. Persons' impressions of their physical selves are profoundly linked to their mental and emotional well-being, influencing more significant aspects of life beyond surface concerns, according to Ricketts, Maleté, Myers, Pfeiffer, Kiuchi, and Tshube (2025). The search for body image fulfilment is a multidimensional representation of personal, social, and cultural influences according to Thai, Davis, Mahboob, Perry, Adams, and Goldfield (2024). Media and popular culture put out powerful images in shaping social norms while instilling particular attitudes and values within family and friends to shape body image further. Psychological factors, such as self-esteem, personal experiences, and differences in temperament and resilience, contribute to how individuals perceive and feel about their bodies (Zhang, Abbas, Shahzad, Shankar, Ercisli, and Dobhal, 2024).

Sociocultural norms and beauty ideals provide a backdrop in which individuals evaluate their appearance; all too often, this fosters a hostile relationship with body image. As stated by Atwal and Browne (2024), body image satisfaction is important to conceptualize since it is strongly associated with overall psychological well-being. Good body image may promote self-confidence, improve emotional resilience, and, therefore, be contributory to good psychological well-being. Discontent may result in a host of psychological conditions such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. Body image content influences several aspects of life, especially social interactions, professional experiences, and personal interactions, shaping people's engagement with the world (Kazeminia, Salari, Heydari, Akbari, and Mohammadi, 2023). Besides, body image satisfaction is not static-it may change through events, aging, health changes, and the cultural definition of beauty

and health. Such malleability underlines the importance of developing a positive and healthy relationship with one's body based on acceptance, care, and respect rather than pursuing unattainable standards, according to Rodrigues, Monteiro, Flores, and Forte (2025).

Social media also enhances body image issues among teens due to their visual nature. According to Merino, Tornero-Aguilera, Rubio-Zarapuz, Villanueva-Tobaldo, Martín-Rodríguez, and Clemente-Suárez (2021), in this electronic proliferation era, the way body image problems were considered has been revolutionized by Instagram and Facebook. The endless exposure to idealised pictures with a general culture of social comparisons often contributes to higher discontent and psychological distress. Physical attributes of weight, height, and BMI are pitted against the cultural dimensions of health and beauty to produce a wide range of mental health issues, including low self-esteem, depression, and eating disorders. Cultural standards and gender roles make body image perceptions complex, influencing individuals differently according to their social and personal aspirations, according to Vandenbosch, Fardouly, and Tiggemann (2023). Wu, Kemps, and Prichard (2024) relate that participation in social media is strongly associated with body image problems; high social media exposure is related to greater body dissatisfaction, lower self-esteem, and increased appearance concern. This becomes more poignant among teenagers and young adults, who are considered a big chunk of users and at an important phase in the formation of self-identity and body image (Valkenburg, van Driel, and Beyens, 2023). Instagram exposure to unattainable beauty has been linked to disordered eating behaviours and lowered self-esteem (Chagoury, 2023). Suhag and Rauniyar (2024) established that "self-objectification" in teenagers is commonly done when assessing one's appearance compared to others and influences, which further deteriorates body image. Early adolescence is a very critical period of development that is more vulnerable to the impact of social media, which may normalise harmful behaviours and contribute to negative body image and concerns. This calls for targeted treatments and educational campaigns that lighten the adverse effects of both eating disorders and body image concerns in the setting of social networking.

2.3 Gap in the Literature

Despite significant advances in understanding the adverse effects of social media, several inadequacies still exist within the current literature. First, studies suggest links between social media use and poor mental health, but the causal connections remain poorly studied (Stănculescu

and Griffiths, 2023; Purificacion and Vallespin, 2024; Albikawi, 2023). Secondly, much of the research is either global in scope- Ameen, Hosany, and Taheri (2023), Merino et al. (2024)-or focused on the United States- Baharuddin, Hilmiyah, Hubbansyah, and Syafiai (2024), Keyes, Kreski, and Patrick (2024)-and thus lacks UK-specific studies that consider cultural and socioeconomic differences. Thirdly, nascent platforms like TikTok, characterised by different engagement patterns, are still poorly investigated in the context of teenage well-being.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 Social Comparison Theory

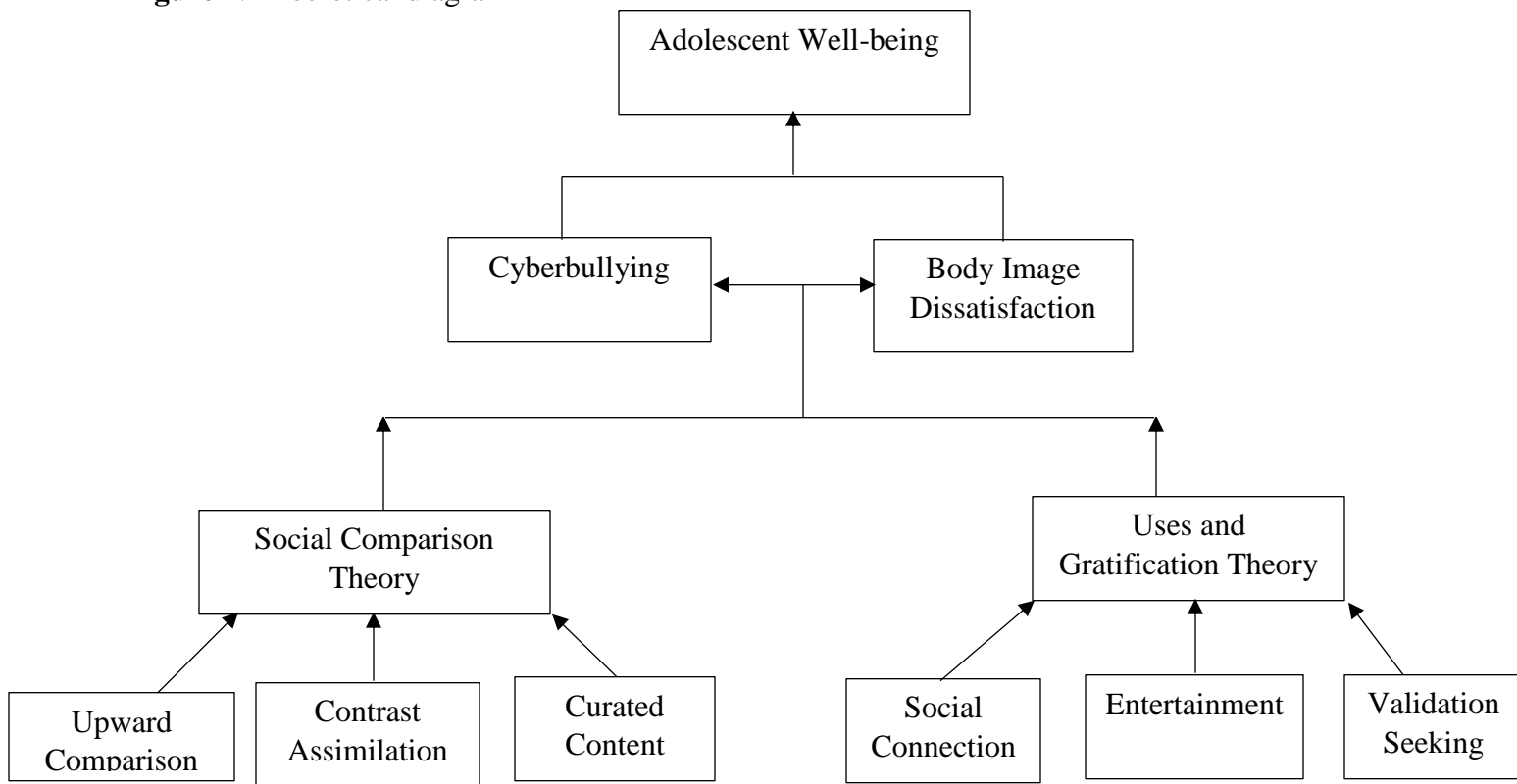
Social comparison theory maintains that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes to others, as stated by Liu, He, Feng, Huang, and Liu (2024). This concept applies to the study of teen well-being in the context of social media. Social comparison theory maintains that people frequently judge their ideas and abilities compared to others (Al-Shoaibi, Shao, Ganson, Lavender, Testa, Kiss, He, Glidden, Baker, and Nagata, 2024). Among a set of possible comparisons, there will be one who is closest to oneself in one's abilities or opinions. According to Maulana, Wati, and Wibowo (2024), it was observed that the "standard setter" is chosen in whom comparative superiority is present.

According to Tandon, Laato, Islam, and Dhir (2024), an assimilative social comparison involves one's relational similarities with the target of comparison stressed in a desire to resemble that target. A contrastive social comparison occurs when one emphasises relational disparities with the target of comparison and the factors maintaining them. The emergence of social comparison from social media posts and images is affected by the contrast-assimilation procedure (Li and Liu, 2024), resulting in benign and illicit jealousy among users (Van de Ven and Zeelenberg, 2015; Van de Ven et al., 2009). On the other hand, through Instagram, social comparison is positively associated with both benign and malevolent jealousy among its users, linked with inspiration among them. According to Villanueva-Moya, Herrera, Sánchez-Hernández, and Expósito (2023), for example, adolescents using such platforms as Instagram and TikTok experience curated and primarily idealised portrayals by peers and influencers; these promote upward comparisons, which greatly influence development. Thus, the social comparison theory provides the necessary framework to view how teenagers assimilate influences within a digital context.

2.4.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

As Du, Hashim, and Kamarudin, (2024) have suggested, the uses and gratifications hypothesis is very important in explaining the teens' involvement on social media. Those general motives are social connection, amusement, and self-expression (Schultze-Krumbholz, 2024). This theory is crucial in this research since it identifies the discrete motives which make teens in the UK engage themselves on the Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat platforms. These hidden agendas underpin and explain how usage practices might unwittingly render people vulnerable to either harmful content or over-engagement, which in turn fuels anxiety and depression. The theory provides an orderly way to assess the association between user intention and the unforeseen adverse effects of social media engagement. Figure 1 below summarizes this research's theoretical framework.

Figure 1: Theoretical diagram



Source: Author

This study integrates social comparison theory and uses and gratifications theory to develop an inclusive framework for analysing the negative effects of social media on the health of teenagers. Social comparison theory explains how adolescents internalize negative self-concepts through upward comparisons, especially after viewing idealized and edited content on sites such as Instagram and TikTok (Gambelli, 2024). On the other hand, the theory of uses and gratifications is the explanation of their purpose of using such websites for validation, entertainment, or social connectedness formation, thus perpetuating their exposure to harmful information (Shuvo, 2024). This integration is important to the study because it provides a deeper understanding of how the interaction between social media use and user intent influences issues such as mental health disorders, cyberbullying, and body image dissatisfaction among teenagers in the UK. This paradigm will guide the investigation in the following chapters by emphasising both psychological and behavioural aspects of social media use.

2.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter has reviewed the current social media trends, empirical data, and theoretical frameworks on their adverse effects on well-being in adolescents. The key themes emerging from that are mental health, cyberbullying, and body image concerns, supported by theories of social comparison and uses and gratifications, thus providing a unified theoretical framework. The next chapter describes the methodological framework for achieving the research objectives.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

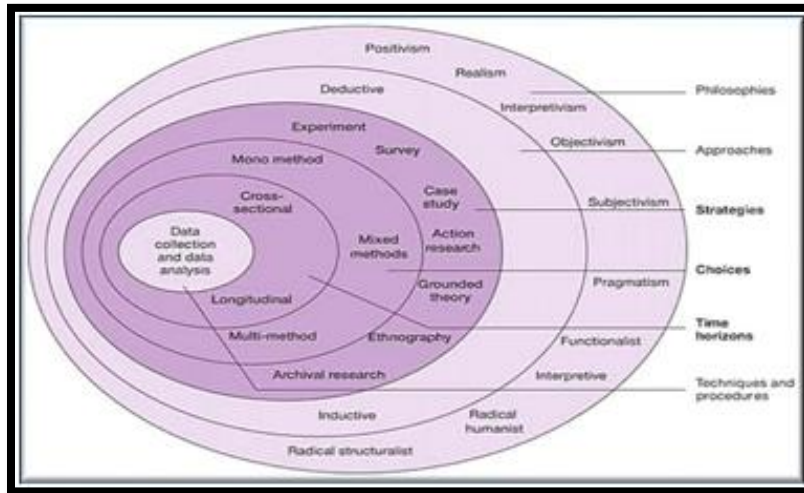
3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology for conducting a study on the negative effect of social media on the well-being of adolescents in the UK. It shall outline, among other things, a conceptual and methodological framework, data gathering, analysis, and management procedures. This chapter will cover research philosophy, study methodology, data collection processes, sampling tactics, reliability, validity, data processing techniques, and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Onion

The research onion model gives an overview of the various layers that need to be explained before starting the study. The research onion shows the intricate layers of procedures used in the potential research study, as postulated by Haydam and Steenkamp (2020). The research onion offers a solid ground for understanding research approach development. The onion framework of research provides a good pathway for determining the flexibility of the research and the various tools used in the research. The onion framework states the various components needed to carry out research. The onion model further outlines the various processes in hierarchical order to ascertain the development of the methodology chapter (Gamage, 2025). The research onion presents the detailed structure encompassing the philosophical foundation, methodologies, strategic direction, and methods employed. The research onion is thus a diagrammatic representation of the overall methodology employed in the selected study, as presented below.

Figure 2: Research Onion



Source: (Haydam and Steenkamp, 2020)

3.3 Research Philosophy

This research is positivist in nature, relying on figures and facts to confirm hypotheses. Park, Konge, and Artino Jr, (2020) assert that positivism is the natural scientist's perspective and entails observing tangible social occurrences in order to form general laws. This is the correct method for a research study that seeks to identify patterns or correlations among variables, as Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) have shown. Positivist approach fits this research as it aims to study the adverse impact of social media on the mental well-being of United Kingdom teenagers objectively, which can be quantified by the answers given in surveys. This research adopts a positivist approach to create objective and dependable information that can be used for the majority population.

3.4 Research Design

This study will adopt a descriptive research design in describing the detrimental impact of social media on adolescents' wellbeing in the United Kingdom. According to the nature of the research question, descriptive research designs are especially good at detailing the distinctive features of the studied sample. According to Siedlecki (2020), descriptive research may also generalize findings from a representative sample to a larger target population. A characteristic that all the descriptive research designs share is using only one sample where no comparison group exists. In this regard, the research design will use a descriptive method in so far as it will be helpful

in researching information on the negative effect utilizing social media is having on well-being status amongst United Kingdom adolescents.

3.5 Research Method

This research will adopt a mixed method, an approach that blends quantitative data with qualitative insights. According to Dawadi, Shrestha, and Giri (2021), in a mixed-methods research design, there is its set of beliefs and ways of formulating enquiries. It has ideas that make it possible for one to gather and understand data from various sources in just one research. In addition, it incorporates a mix of methods in researching how social media could have particularly worst impacts among adolescents within the United Kingdom setting. Quantitative measures of the time and frequency of social media use are combined with self-reported outcomes of modified scales such as those of Schumacher, Plano Clark, Eilers, Kigondu, Geary, Kupzyk, Lydiatt, Lackner, and Ly (2021) and Akyıldız and Ahmed, 2021. This approach had a mixed-methods design and thus provided a more holistic look at issues from many different perspectives, making the findings easier to generalise to the broad public (Borgstede and Scholz, 2021).

Quantitative approaches allow researchers to solicit responses among an enormous group of settings, enhancing the generalisation of findings to a larger population. The qualitative method, on the other hand, provides detailed insight into the research subject, with much consideration given to the actors' point of view (Taherdoost, 2021). Quantitative data thus increases the breadth of the research, while qualitative data provides depth. Qualitative findings sometimes confirm quantitative findings and vice versa (Donkoh and Mensah, 2023).

3. 6 Data Collection Methods

3.6.1 Sampling Strategy

This study will use a non-probability sampling technique, namely convenience sampling. This study will use convenience sampling due to its accessibility and ease of data collection. This research employs convenience sampling since it enables efficient data collection from readily accessible young social media users on online platforms while maintaining manageability within time and budget constraints. A convenience sample study may exhibit high internal validity if the

findings are dependable (Golzar, Noor, and Tajik, 2022). This is achievable if the study was methodologically sound and the findings were precisely examined.

3.6.2 Quantitative Data Collection

An online survey will be conducted to collect quantitative data. An online survey will gather data from participants who will access the research link using internet communication technologies, including email and online survey platforms, as indicated by Dawadi et al. (2021). The online survey is appropriate for this study as it provides a cost-effective and efficient method of data collecting, eliminating the need for the researcher and facilitating automated data input, in contrast to other distant data-gathering methods. The poll will be disseminated via social media to guarantee a varied sample. Due to time and financial constraints, a target sample size of 150 adolescents will be used to attain statistical validity and generalisability.

3.7 Analysis Plan

3.7.1 Quantitative Analysis

SPSS will be used to analyse the quantitative data acquired from the survey. SPSS will analyse survey data using regression analysis to investigate the correlation between the frequency and time of social media activity and self-reported outcomes and provide descriptive statistics for demographic insights. One of SPSS's strengths is its capacity to generate variables from existing data (Alili and Krstev, 2019). Rahman and Muktadir (2021) assert that SPSS can open several file formats, including Excel, SAS, Stata, tab-delimited, and other recognised formats. Software platform compatibility is a significant concern in the current environment, and SPSS offers several benefits over other statistical tools in this regard.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

Newman, Guta, and Black (2021) posit that research ethics show respect for participants by protecting participant rights. In this study, therefore, respondents to be recruited will be provided with a participant information sheet describing the purpose of the study and the procedure, participant role, and participant rights. The completion of the survey will entail informed consent among the respondents. Explicit consent will, however, be requested during the data collection, and all data will be anonymised. Because the study encompasses minors, ethical factors mean that the surveys had to be distributed through parents/legal guardians. Because of the

adolescents' age, parental or legal guardian consent was obtained before the participation of the adolescents for ethical reasons. No identifying information will be requested or retained from the user. Data collection will be stored at all times on password-protected encrypted media devices. Data collection will be pre-approved by the University ethics board or similar entity before completion, based on the study's pre-determined directives. The participants will be informed that they can participate and leave the study anytime. Data collected from the participants will be explained to them on how or which it will be used, who will get access to it and how long it will be kept. Data retention and destruction programs will be recommitted to parity with legal governances of data protection.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology used to investigate the detrimental impact of social media on adolescent well-being in the United Kingdom. A mixed-method approach using an online survey was selected for this study. The collected data will be analysed conceptually and quantitatively using SPSS. The research follows a positivist approach and will use convenience sampling. The subsequent chapter will provide the results of the data analysis.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and critically examines the results of the primary data gathered for this research. The data must be interpreted to support the study's objectives and answer the research questions. This chapter also covers the results' relevance to the research on social media and its impact on teenagers, especially in the United Kingdom.

A target sample size of 150 adolescents were used in this study. Convenience sampling was conducted to select respondents from readily accessible young social media users in the United Kingdom on online platforms. An online survey was conducted to collect quantitative data. Of the selected 150 participants, only 67 completely filled the research questionnaire, reflecting a 44.67% response rate. Quantitative analysis of the findings using SPSS is as follows.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study sample included 67 adolescents, with a nearly similar gender distribution: 33 men (49.3%) and 34 girls (50.7%).

Table 1: Gender distribution

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	33	49.3	49.3	49.3
	Female	34	50.7	50.7	100.0
	Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

The age distribution was notably skewed, with 98.5% of respondents aged 16 to 18, while just 1.5% were within the 13- to 15-year range.

Table 2: Age distribution

Age					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	13-15	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
	16-18	66	98.5	98.5	100.0
	Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

4.2 Social Media Usage Trends

4.2.1 Most Frequently Used Platforms

The study results revealed that Facebook is the most used platform, and it is referenced by 40.3% of participants. Additionally, 20.9% indicated using a mixture of TikTok and Facebook, and 14.9% used a more extensive mix, including Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Facebook, and Twitter/X. Furthermore, 11.9% used Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter/X, while 11.9% engaged with Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. These results highlight the complex nature of social media use among teenagers. Instead of depending on a single platform, several young people engage concurrently across various networks.

Table 3: Most frequently used platform

What social media platforms do you use most frequently?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Facebook	27	40.3	40.3	40.3
	TikTok, Facebook	14	20.9	20.9	61.2
	Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter/X	10	14.9	14.9	76.1
	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter/X	8	11.9	11.9	88.1
	Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat	8	11.9	11.9	100.0
	Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

4.2.2 Duration of Daily Use

A significant portion of respondents, 49.3%, indicated that they allocate between 1 and 3 hours each day to social media engagement. In the interim, 23.9% allocated over 6 hours each day to their social media engagement, while 17.9% dedicated between 4 and 6 hours to the same activity. A mere 9% of respondents reported engaging with social media for less than one hour daily.

Table 4: Social media daily use duration

How many hours per day do you spend on social media?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 1 hour	6	9.0	9.0	9.0
	1-3 hours	33	49.3	49.3	58.2
	4-6 hours	12	17.9	17.9	76.1
	More than 6 hours	16	23.9	23.9	100.0
	Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

4.3 Negative Consequences of Social Media Use

4.3.1 Disrupted Sleep Patterns

Notably, 50.7% of participants recognised that social media occasionally interfered with their sleep patterns. A further 28.4% indicated that social media often interfered with their sleep patterns, whereas 10.4% reported that such disruptions occurred infrequently, and another 10.4% asserted that they never experienced this issue.

Table 5: Disrupted sleep patterns

Has social media usage ever disrupted your sleep patterns?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sometimes	34	50.7	50.7	50.7
	Yes, frequently	19	28.4	28.4	79.1
	Rarely	7	10.4	10.4	89.6
	Never	7	10.4	10.4	100.0
	Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

4.3.2 Psychological Distress

Upon inquiry regarding their experiences with anxiety or stress linked to social media, 13.4% of participants reported that they frequently encountered such feelings, whereas 4.5% asserted that they consistently felt this way. A significant portion of the participants, specifically 46.3%, indicated that they occasionally encountered anxiety, while 35.8% asserted that they had never experienced such emotions.

Table 6: Experiences with anxiety link to social media

Have you ever felt anxious or stressed due to social media?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	24	35.8	35.8	35.8
	Occasionally	31	46.3	46.3	82.1
	Often	9	13.4	13.4	95.5
	Always	3	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

4.3.3 Life Comparison Behaviour

Adolescents were additionally asked about the frequency with which they compare their lives to those of others on social media platforms. A significant portion, 49.3%, indicated that they engage in this behaviour occasionally, while 31.3% reported it as infrequent. Furthermore, 17.9% asserted that they never partake in it, and a mere 1.5% confessed to doing so regularly.

Table 7: Frequency of life comparison to others on social media

How often do you compare your life to others on social media?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	12	17.9	17.9	17.9
	Sometimes	33	49.3	49.3	67.2
	Rarely	21	31.3	31.3	98.5
	Frequently	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	67	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author

4.4 Social Media and Mental Health Correlation

This objective sought to investigate the relationship between social media engagement and mental health challenges, with a particular focus on depression. The findings indicated that participants reported an average score of 1.88 regarding feelings of sadness, depression, or loneliness following social media use ($SD = 0.769$), suggesting a moderate prevalence of these emotions.

Table 8: Relationship between social media engagement and mental health

Correlations				
		Has social media usage ever disrupted your sleep patterns?	Have you ever felt anxious or stressed due to social media?	Have you ever felt depressed, sad, or lonely after using social media?
Has social media usage ever disrupted your sleep patterns?	Pearson Correlation	1	-.292*	-.129
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.017	.300
	N	67	67	67
Have you ever felt anxious or stressed due to social media?	Pearson Correlation	-.292*	1	.240
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017		.050
	N	67	67	67
Have you ever felt depressed, sad, or lonely after using social media?	Pearson Correlation	-.129	.240	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.300	.050	
	N	67	67	67
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Author

The analysis of correlation revealed several noteworthy relationships: A negative correlation exists between sleep disruption and anxiety ($r = -0.292$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that adolescents experiencing sleep disruption attributable to social media are more prone to feelings of anxiety. A noteworthy correlation exists between anxiety and depression ($r = 0.240$, $p = 0.050$), indicating that emotional distress stemming from social media may intensify into more significant mental health challenges.

4.5 Social Media and Cyberbullying

Objective three examined the role of social media in facilitating cyberbullying and the subsequent effects on adolescent victims. The average score for adolescents who indicated experiencing direct bullying on social media was 1.72, implying a reduced occurrence. Nonetheless, the average score for observing others being subjected to bullying was significantly elevated at 2.87, suggesting that passive exposure to cyberbullying is quite prevalent.

Table 9: Independent sample test

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Have you ever felt anxious or stressed due to social media?	Equal variances assumed	.013	.908	2.301	65	.025	.444	.193	.059	.829
	Equal variances not assumed			2.293	60.723	.025	.444	.194	.057	.831
Have you ever felt depressed,	Equal variances assumed	.272	.604	.614	65	.542	.116	.189	-.261	.493

sad, or lonely after using social media?	Equal variances not assumed			.614	64.928	.541	.116	.189	-.261	.493
Have you ever been bullied or harassed on social media?	Equal variances assumed	.131	.718	.095	65	.925	.021	.226	-.430	.473
	Equal variances not assumed			.095	65.000	.925	.021	.226	-.430	.473

Source: Author

4.5.1 Gender Differences in Experiences

An analysis grounded in gender considerations, employing t-tests, uncovered statistically significant disparities in the experiences of anxiety. Male respondents exhibited a greater mean anxiety score (2.09) compared to their female counterparts (1.65), with this disparity reaching statistical significance ($p = 0.025$). Nonetheless, there was no notable disparity between genders in the reported experiences of being subjected to bullying.

Table 10: Gender disparities in the experiences of anxiety

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Have you ever felt anxious or stressed due to social media?	Male	33	2.09	.879	.153
	Female	34	1.65	.691	.119
Have you ever felt depressed, sad, or lonely after using social media?	Male	33	1.94	.747	.130
	Female	34	1.82	.797	.137
Have you ever been bullied or harassed on social media?	Male	33	1.73	.911	.159
	Female	34	1.71	.938	.161

Source: Author

4.6 Effects on Self-Esteem, Body Image, and Identity

Objective four examined the impact of social media on the self-esteem, body image, and identity development of adolescents.

4.6.1 Self-Perception

Upon inquiry regarding the adverse effects of social media on self-perception, male participants exhibited a notably elevated mean score of 3.24 in contrast to their female counterparts, who scored 2.53. The ANOVA test substantiated that this difference is statistically significant ($F = 7.630, p = 0.007$).

Table 11: The ANOVA test

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Social media has negatively impacted how I view myself (e.g., appearance, abilities, self-worth)	Between Groups	8.514	1	8.514	7.630	.007
	Within Groups	72.531	65	1.116		
	Total	81.045	66			
I feel that the number of likes, comments, or followers I receive on social media affects my self-esteem.	Between Groups	.003	1	.003	.002	.966
	Within Groups	90.296	65	1.389		
	Total	90.299	66			
Does social media affect how you feel about your body image?	Between Groups	1.593	1	1.593	1.946	.168
	Within Groups	53.184	65	.818		
	Total	54.776	66			

Source: Author

4.6.2 Likes and Self-Esteem

Interestingly, the impact of social validation metrics such as likes, comments, and followers on self-esteem exhibited no notable differences between genders. The mean scores for males and females were comparable, recorded at 2.58 and 2.59, respectively. Furthermore, the ANOVA test yielded no statistically significant results ($F = 0.002$, $p = 0.966$). This suggests a common phenomenon among adolescents: the validation received from likes and comments significantly influences their self-esteem, irrespective of gender distinctions.

4.6.3 Body Image Concerns

The average score reflecting the impact of social media on body image was recorded at 1.52 for males and 1.82 for females. While the difference did not reach statistical significance (p

= 0.168), it nonetheless indicates a tendency for female adolescents to report greater body dissatisfaction.

4.7 Synthesis of Findings

The results of this investigation substantiate the legitimacy of the four research enquiries and aims.

Table 12: Descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimu m	Maximu m	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	67	1	2	1.51	.504
What social media platforms do you use most frequently?	67	1	5	2.34	1.420
How many hours per day do you spend on social media?	67	1	4	2.57	.957
Has social media usage ever disrupted your sleep patterns?	67	1	4	1.81	1.004
Have you ever felt anxious or stressed due to social media?	67	1	4	1.87	.815
How often do you compare your life to others on social media?	67	1	4	2.16	.730
Valid N (listwise)	67				

Source: Author

The study reveals a complex interplay between diverse emotional experiences and corresponding behavioural inclinations. Surprisingly, 29% of the respondents indicated that social media often interfered with their sleep, and 50.7% indicated interferences every now and then. The

percentage is important since the establishment of good sleep hygiene is critical to the cognitive and emotional maturation of teenagers (Inhulsen, Busch, Kalk, and van Stralen, 2023; Casavi, Shetty, Alva, and Nalini, 2022; Glasbeek, Inhulsen, Busch, and van Stralen, 2022). The results indicate that the mean score for sleep disturbance is 1.81 (SD = 1.004), showing the high incidence of sleep problems among teenagers attributed to their online activities.

Furthermore, emotional upheavals, including anxiety and stress, also displayed a notable prevalence. Approximately 35.8% of the respondents indicated that they had never undergone anxiety or stress as a consequence of social media. Conversely, a notable 46.3% admitted to having experienced these emotions at one point or another. Conversely, 13.4% of the participants indicated that they encountered these incidents with frequency, whereas 4.5% did so constantly. The persistence of stress is consistent with current literature suggesting that social media increases emotional distress among adolescents (Cataldo, Lepri, Neoh, and Esposito, 2021; Weinstein, Kleiman, Franz, Joyce, Nash, Buonopane, and Nock, 2021). The average score in the present study was 1.87 (SD = 0.815), further corroborating the fact that emotional responses to virtual environments are typical (Bettis, Burke, Nesi, and Liu, 2022).

The Pearson correlation matrix indicated a statistically significant negative correlation between sleep disruption and anxiety ($r = -0.292$, $p < 0.05$). Our findings align with existing literature indicating that a decline in sleep quality is associated with increased emotional instability (Riemann, Dressle, Benz, Spiegelhalder, Johann, Nissen, Hertenstein, Baglioni, Palagini, Krone, and Perlis, 2025; Meneo, Samea, Tahmasian, and Baglioni, 2023). Furthermore, a positive correlation was observed between anxiety and depression ($r = 0.240$, $p = 0.050$). Additional researchers corroborate these findings, suggesting a sequence of events that links behavioural disturbances to emotional and psychological repercussions (Conte, Cellini, De Rosa, Rescott, Malloggi, Giganti, and Ficca, 2021; Rezaie, Norouzi, Bratty, and Khazaie, 2023).

Although a limited number of participants indicated experiencing direct online bullying (mean = 1.72, SD = 0.918), a significantly greater segment recognised having observed instances of cyberbullying (mean = 2.87, SD = 1.140). This indicates that although explicit victimisation may not be prevalent, passive exposure to cyberbullying is frequently observed, as supported by Park, Golden, Vizcaino-Vickers, Jidong, and Raj (2021). Observing instances of cyberbullying may result in emotional desensitisation or heightened stress levels, as young individuals resonate with the plight of victims or harbour fears of becoming targets themselves (Adewoye, 2022).

The exploration of gender differences introduced an additional dimension to these insights. While both male and female participants indicated comparable instances of bullying, male respondents exhibited markedly elevated levels of anxiety (mean = 2.09, SD = 0.879) in contrast to their female counterparts (mean = 1.65, SD = 0.691), a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.025$). This underscores that males, notwithstanding conventional gender norms that inhibit emotional expressiveness, may be internalising stress to a greater extent than anticipated (Mink, Maddox, Pinero, and Crockett, 2023; Lonigro, Longobardi, and Laghi, 2023).

The influence of social media on one's self-conception and identity proved equally enlightening. Male respondents indicated more significant challenges in self-perception, achieving a mean score of 3.24, whereas females scored 2.53. The ANOVA results ($F = 7.630$, $p = 0.007$) suggest that this difference holds statistical significance. Notwithstanding this, both sexes demonstrated comparable sensitivity to online affirmation. Participants concurred that indicators such as likes, comments, and follower counts impacted their self-esteem, yielding nearly equivalent mean scores (males = 2.58, females = 2.59). The consistency of the data was substantiated through an ANOVA test, which indicated no significant difference ($F = 0.002$, $p = 0.966$). The findings align with existing literature that underscores the ubiquitous influence of social media validation mechanisms on adolescents' self-worth, irrespective of gender (Dhingra and Parashar, 2022; Merino et al., 2024).

Moreover, regarding the issue of body image, females exhibited a higher mean score of 1.82 compared to males, who had a mean score of 1.52; however, this disparity did not reach statistical significance ($p = 0.168$). Nevertheless, the quantitative disparity reinforces the perspective by Jung, Barron, Lee, and Swami (2022) that females are more predisposed to experience dissatisfaction with their appearance, a phenomenon exacerbated by social comparisons driven by idealised representations on social media platforms.

The integration of data from various domains—mental health, cyberbullying, and self-perception—indicates a collective influence of social media participation. Adolescents experience impacts not confined to singular areas; their comprehensive well-being is shaped by a complex interplay of emotional and cognitive factors (Wagner et al., 2021; Xiang and Kong, 2024). The engagement with various platforms, as indicated by 14.9% to 20.9% of users, could potentially intensify these concerns by amplifying both the quantity and diversity of content accessed, a significant portion of which is crafted by algorithms aimed at enhancing engagement rather than

ensuring psychological safety (Möri, Mongillo, and Fahr, 2022). A particularly troubling statistic reveals that 23.9% of adolescents use social media for over six hours daily. Extended exposure heightens the likelihood of encountering detrimental content (Scott, Marcu, Anderson, Newman, and Schoenebeck, 2023), participating in adverse comparisons (Prasad, Ait Souabni, Anugwom, Aneni, Anand, Urhi, Obi-Azuike, Gibson, Khan, and Oladunjoye, 2023), and becoming entangled in negative online exchanges (Khalaf, Alubied, Khalaf, Rifaey, Alubied, and Rifaey, 2023)—each of which can exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities.

4.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter examines the quantitative data gathered to investigate the detrimental impacts of social media engagement on adolescents in the United Kingdom. The findings reveal a consistent pattern of disrupted sleep, emotional distress, and reduced self-esteem in youths. Moreover, differences in responses based on gender provide complex insights that challenge conventional understandings. The insights gained from these findings will clarify the final chapter. In the next chapter, conclusions, actionable recommendations, and potential directions for future exploration, will be presented.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

Detrimental consequences linked to social networking site engagement among youth in the United Kingdom

The data analysis uncovered several significant insights regarding the influence of social media on adolescents in the UK. The most pressing and widespread adverse effect observed was the disturbance of sleep patterns. More than fifty per cent of the participants recognised that social media occasionally influenced their sleep patterns, with nearly thirty per cent indicating regular disturbances. This was accompanied by cognitive repercussions, manifesting as anxiety and stress. Almost fifty per cent of the participants reported experiencing emotional distress at times as a result of their engagement with social media. The phenomenon of life comparison was notably prevalent, as numerous adolescents indicated that they occasionally juxtaposed their own experiences with others on social media platforms. These behaviours collectively indicate a pattern of emotional instability and susceptibility driven by extended interaction with digital platforms.

The correlation between social media usage and mental health issues such as depression among adolescents

The research additionally revealed statistically significant relationships between social media engagement and mental health factors, including anxiety and depression. Individuals who encountered disturbances in their sleep patterns exhibited a higher propensity to express feelings of anxiety. A noteworthy correlation between anxiety and depression has been identified, highlighting the connection between prolonged engagement with social media and the decline of mental health among adolescents. It is noteworthy that adolescents engaging in social media for over four hours each day exhibited increased levels of emotional distress, thereby affirming the adverse psychological consequences associated with extended usage.

The involvement of social media in cyberbullying and its effects on adolescent victims in the United Kingdom

In the context of cyberbullying, while a smaller number of adolescents indicated that they were direct victims, a significant proportion recognised having observed online harassment. This indirect exposure fosters an atmosphere characterised by apprehension and psychological strain.

An analysis focused on gender revealed that male participants exhibited notably elevated levels of anxiety compared to their female counterparts despite the absence of a statistical disparity in the incidence of bullying victimisation between the genders.

The effects of social media on adolescents' self-esteem, body image, and identity in the United Kingdom

The research clarified that youths' perceptions of themselves are negatively impacted by social media. Male participants reported much more negative impacts on self-perception, challenging the widely held belief that women are more vulnerable in this area. As evidence of the widespread psychological constraints imposed by digital platforms, both male and female respondents said that social validation indicators, such as likes and comments, had a substantial impact on their sense of self-worth. The research confirmed that all sexes experience equal pressures and anxieties, despite the fact that body image issues were somewhat more prominent among females.

5.2 Implications

This study makes a substantial addition to our knowledge of teenage conduct and mental health in the digital era. The implications go across a number of theoretical frameworks and their real-world applications.

5.2.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings align with the social comparison and uses and gratifications theories. The social comparison theory argue that people evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes to others (Gan, Li, and Liu, 2024). Young people exposed to meticulously curated and idealised representations of life on digital platforms may internalise unreachable ideals, leading to diminished self-esteem and a fragmented sense of identity. Moreover, the results substantiate uses and gratifications theory. This theory identified the discrete drivers for teens in the United Kingdom engage themselves in social media. The idea of uses and gratifications elucidates the rationale behind United Kingdom teenagers using social media for validation, enjoyment, or the establishment of social connections, hence reinforcing their exposure to detrimental content. Therefore, this study made significant contribution to these two theories, particularly in explaining the common inclination of United Kingdom teenagers to compare one's life with others on social

media (Dündar and Tufan, 2022). Such comparisons, especially when contrasted with idealised representations, can lead to emotional dissatisfaction and psychiatric distress (Latif, Weng, Pitafi, Ali, Siddiqui, Malik, and Latif, 2021). Adolescents were noted seeking social approval and notoriety via their engagements on social media sites. Unmet needs or negative online encounters might lead to manifestations such as anxiety, stress, or depressed symptoms (Wang, Miao, Jia, and Lai, 2023). Social media provides affirmation but also induces emotional instability, depending on youths' online interactions.

5.2.2 Practical Implications

The study findings are important for parents, educators, mental health practitioners, and policymakers. Parents must adopt a proactive stance in overseeing their children's online activities. Nevertheless, as Throuvala, Griffiths, Rennoldson, and Kuss (2021) articulated, this process should be conducted to maintain trust and transparency. Establishing parameters for screen time, engaging in conversations about emotional reactions to digital content, and promoting activities beyond the screen can markedly mitigate risks, according to Steinfeld (2021).

Educators are vital in navigating adolescents through the intricate landscape of digital existence. Educational institutions have the opportunity to implement digital literacy initiatives that equip students with a comprehensive understanding of the mechanics of social media, the processes of content curation, and the distinctions between online personas and authentic identities (Gür and Türel, 2022). These programs can enable students to engage in more rational and less emotionally driven decision-making regarding their online activities.

Mental health practitioners should integrate digital behaviour assessments into therapeutic sessions with adolescent clients. Comprehending a young individual's online engagements can provide a significant understanding of the origins of their emotional difficulties (Khanna and Carper, 2022). Psychological services should advance by incorporating dialogues concerning digital health and the principles of self-regulation.

From a policy standpoint, there exists an urgent necessity for regulatory oversight that guarantees social media platforms place a premium on user safety, especially concerning minors. This entails the establishment of more rigorous anti-cyberbullying policies, enhancing content

moderation systems to ensure their efficacy, and advocating for transparency in the workings of algorithms (Wood, 2024; Caddle, Naher, Miller, Badillo-Urquiola, and Wisniewski, 2023). Governmental bodies and social media enterprises must collaborate to cultivate a digital landscape that fosters, rather than hinders, the developmental progress of adolescents, as articulated by Doyle (2022).

5.3 Limitations

While the research offers significant insights, it is not devoid of limitations. The limited sample size of 67 participants constrains the generalisability of these findings to the broader adolescent demographic in the United Kingdom. An expanded and more varied sample would enhance the strength and external applicability of the findings. Moreover, the study was limited to a specific geographical area, and the cultural context may have shaped adolescents' social media behaviours and reactions. Varied cultural norms regarding online communication, familial involvement, and mental health consciousness may yield divergent outcomes in alternative contexts.

The research additionally depended on self-reported data, which may be subject to the influence of social desirability bias. Participants may have either understated or overstated their experiences intentionally or unintentionally (Zhu, Greene, and Dolnicar, 2024; Tan, Ho, Teoh, and Ng, 2021). Furthermore, the study's research design provides merely a temporal snapshot, complicating the identification of causal relationships among the variables involved. Longitudinal research would be more appropriate for evaluating the evolution of social media usage and its effects over time.

A further constraint was the consolidation of social media platforms within the analysis. The aggregation of diverse platforms hindered a thorough analysis of the unique characteristics or cultural nuances inherent to each, some of which could potentially yield more detrimental consequences than others (Sörensen, Fürst, Vogler, and Schäfer, 2023). Future research should incorporate analyses tailored to specific platforms to clarify these distinctions.

5.4 Recommendations

In light of the findings and their inherent limitations, recommendations are made to improve adolescents' digital well-being and guide future research and policy development. Parents

and guardians must foster a domestic atmosphere harmonising digital autonomy with well-defined parameters. Participating in consistent dialogues regarding social media and its psychological impacts can foster trust and enhance awareness. Parents must exemplify healthy digital behaviour, as adolescents frequently mirror adults' usage patterns.

Mental health services should meet the changing needs of teenagers in a digital environment. Practitioners must be trained in the psychological impact of social media. These practitioners must integrate this information into their practice. Intersectoral collaboration between education institutions, health professionals, and families will be instrumental in caring for vulnerable youths.

Finally, updating rules is necessary to deal with the regulatory shortcomings of social media regulation. Transparency of recommendation and filtering algorithms is necessary. For example, governments must provide funds for continuous research. Similarly, the governing bodies can create independent regulatory agencies tasked with monitoring compliance and safety measures on digital platforms.

5.5 Conclusion

This research explored the different impacts of social media on young people in the United Kingdom. Social media usage has proven to be more than the simple function of entertainment or communication. It is highly interconnected with emotional well-being, social development, and identity formation. The research verifies that social media engagement among young people has serious psychological risks. Such risks include disrupted sleeping habits, increased stress, exposure to cyberbullying, and low self-esteem. The study stresses the need for a combined, harmonized approach in minimizing these risks. Parents, schools, mental health practitioners, and governments must collaborate in order to create an e-environment that is both safe and supportive. The findings further show that boys and girls navigate these experiences in complex and often unexpected ways. This research enriches theoretical and practical insight into young people's engagement with digital technologies. It lays the groundwork for further investigation and identifies specific strategies aimed at enhancing the well-being of young people in an increasingly interconnected world.

In the modern world, the significance of digital interconnectedness is paramount to everyday life. As it is, it is essential to have as a key goal the advancement of social media towards

enabling, rather than undermining, the emotional and psychological well-being of adolescents. This entails ongoing research, evidence-based decision-making, and a collective determination to comprehend and facilitate the online existence of future generations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire



Survey: *The Negative Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Well-being in the UK.*

Confidentiality and Purpose Statement

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study. This questionnaire is part of my master's dissertation project, "*The Negative Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Well-being in the UK.*"

All your answers will be anonymous and not be used for any purpose other than academic purposes. By setting an appropriate privacy policy, no user's personal information will be collected or used.

The questionnaire should take no more than 15-30 minutes to complete. Your truthful and genuine answers would be very helpful and informative in enhancing our understanding of this issue.

By proceeding, you confirm that you understand the purpose of this study and voluntarily agree to participate

* Indicates required question

1. I voluntarily participate in this survey *

Check all that apply.

- Yes
 No

Section 1: Demographics

Tick(✓) where appropriate

2. Age *

Mark only one oval.

13-15

16-18

3. Gender *

Mark only one oval.

Male

Female

Other:

4. What social media platforms do you use most frequently? *

Check all that apply.

Instagram

TikTok

Snapchat

Facebook

Twitter/X

Other:

5. How many hours per day do you spend on social media? *

Mark only one oval.

Less than 1 hour

1-3 hours

4-6 hours

More than 6 hours

6. Has social media usage ever disrupted your sleep patterns? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes, frequently

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Section 2: Mental Health & Well-being

Tick(✓) where appropriate

7. Have you ever felt **anxious or stressed** due to social media?

Check all that apply.

- Never
- Occasionally
- Often
- Always

8. How often do you compare your life to others on social media?

Mark only one oval.

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently

9. Have you ever felt **depressed, sad, or lonely** after using social media?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

10. Have you ever taken a break from social media to improve your mental well-being? *

Check all that apply.

- Yes, for a few days
- Yes, for a few weeks or more
- No, but I have considered it
- No, I have never taken a break

Section 3: Cyberbullying

Tick(✓) where appropriate

11. Have you ever been bullied or harassed on social media?

Check all that apply.

- Yes, frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

12. Have you ever witnessed someone being cyberbullied?

Check all that apply.

- Yes, frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

13. If you were bullied online, what actions did you take? *

Mark only one oval.

- Blocked the person
- Reported the incident
- Ignored it
- Spoke to someone about it

14. Did you report any cyberbullying incidents?

Check all that apply.

- Yes, always
- Sometimes
- No, I didn't know how
- No, I was afraid

15. Do you feel that social media makes you compare yourself to others more often? *

Check all that apply.

- Yes, a lot
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- No, not at all

Section 4: Self-Esteem, Body Image & Identity

Tick(✓) where appropriate

16. Social media has negatively impacted how I view myself (e.g., appearance, * abilities, self-worth)

Check all that apply.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

17. I feel that the number of likes, comments, or followers I receive on social media affects my self-esteem. *

Check all that apply.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

18. Does social media affect how you feel about your **body image**?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, negatively
- Yes, positively
- No impact

19. Have you ever used filters or edited photos to feel more accepted on social media?

Check all that apply.

- Yes, frequently
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

20. Do you feel pressure to gain more likes, followers, or comments?

Check all that apply.

- Yes, a lot
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- No, not at all

Section 5: Open-Ended Responses – Personal Experiences and Perspectives

21. How has social media influenced your emotions or mental well-being (positively or negatively)? Please provide specific examples.

22. In what ways do you think social media affects your self-esteem and body image?

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