

Original Research

Beyond the Feed: Academic, Emotional, and Social Consequences of Social Media Use Among College Students

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Abstract

In 2025, college students are reportedly more anxious and strained than any previous generation of young people, while they are also the first to have grown up entirely immersed in social media. This research explores social media use patterns and their relationship with academic, emotional, health-related and social well-being among college students. A total of 111 college students from an East Coast university self-selected to complete a one-time assessment anonymously through Qualtrics. A mixed-methods, exploratory design examined relationships among social anxiety, social media addiction, image and upward comparison, social media usage patterns, academic performance-related behaviors, social media-related stress, and sleep. The data reveal that only 18% of students showed no level of social anxiety. Significant correlations emerged between social media addiction and self-control failure, as well as between image-related usage and appearance consciousness. One-way ANOVAs uncovered significant differences across Liebowitz Anxiety subscales and social media use measures. Qualitative data reflects the students' reality that their social media usage corresponds with increased stress, wasting time, goal impediment, academic strain, self-esteem, image and self-care issues, being less present in real life, social isolation and anxiety, and poor sleep. The findings suggest that social media use negatively affects academics, sleep, and many aspects of emotional, social, and behavioral well-being. Reportedly, 74.6% of student participants have tried to limit their social media use, and 70% would join a "social



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media fast” to temporarily or perhaps permanently step away from social media to improve their well-being. Their willingness reflects an openness to behavioral change despite entrenched challenges. It is imperative to develop programming and education interventions that highlight productive options for young people to assess the various impacts of their social media usage and present opportunities for behavior adjustments towards the improvement of emotional, mental, social, and physical well-being.

Keywords

Social media use; college students; academic performance; anxiety; social media fast

1. Introduction

Current college-aged students are the first generation to grow up entirely within a world awash in social media use and influence. In 2023, the Pew Research Center surveyed over 5,500 US adults regarding their social media use and found that 83% of adults use YouTube, 68% use Facebook, 35% use Pinterest, 33% use TikTok, and 30% use LinkedIn [1]. College-aged students (18-29) reportedly have a slightly different social media platform preference list, with 93% on YouTube, 78% on Instagram, 65% on Snapchat, and 62% on TikTok. Nearly 75% of emerging and young adults under age 30 have indicated that they use at least five platforms, which is almost 25% higher than 30-49-year-olds [1]. Emerging adults are considered young people beyond adolescence into their twenties-plus, who experience a prolonged period of identity and responsibility exploration. The “emerging adult” as an updated conceptual phenomenon is understood to exist primarily within cultures that socially and economically tolerate this extended developmental period [2]. A recent Gallup survey found that approximately 51% of US teenagers (age 13-19) spend a minimum of 4 hours on social media daily, with girls spending almost an hour more than boys [3]. The question quickly becomes, what are the effects of this unprecedented engagement and stimulus on aspects of well-being and optimal functioning in emerging adults?

Braghieri et al. [4] investigated the effects of the initial rollout of Facebook in US colleges over a period in the early 2000s; they found a distinct deterioration in the mental health of the students introduced to Facebook when compared to those who had yet to experience the social media platform. Findings also suggest that the worsening mental health had a detrimental effect on academic performance. A systematic review of the literature investigating the relationship between social media and mental health issues found a strong association between these two variables that demonstrated increases in anxiety and depression among social media users [5].

Further research involving college students specifically found greater levels of anxiety and stress among those who scored higher on a measure of social media and internet addiction [6]. Social media addiction, also referred to as problematic social media use and social media disorder, is viewed by some as a subcategory of internet addiction that involves repeatedly shifting attention towards social media to check/scroll activity and assess affirmations or “likes” from other social media users [7]. The literature demonstrates that those suffering from social media addiction are more likely to also experience other mental health challenges, such as social anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem [8]. More mixed-methods research is necessary to fully realize the cumulative and

composite effects of social media-related challenges impacting virtual and face-to-face social interactions, mental health, well-being and academic performance in college students.

Technology use and its incessant lure may compound the issue in which people spend a great deal of time not paying attention to the present moment. Seminal research on attention involved collecting data on feelings, attention and happiness (among other things) using an iPhone application; the results indicated that our minds wander 46% of the time [9]. The researchers further determined that among the 5000-participant sample, people were reportedly less happy when their minds were wandering. The Pew Research Center reported that 35% of teenagers use one of the top five social media platforms almost constantly [10]. If emerging adults are aware of their technology-driven, social-media-focused immersion, how would they feel about stepping away from those interactions for a period to recalibrate their time and attention? Data collection involving teens found that 54% reported social media would be somewhat difficult to give up for a segment of time [10]. Among 306 college students at a University in a Gulf country, researchers found that approximately 50% of the students self-perceived social media addiction 75 to 100 percent of the time, while 20% of respondents perceived that they were addicted to social media 100 percent of the time [11]. The items on the social media disorder scale that were reportedly the highest were—*tried to spend less time on social media but failed, and often felt bad when not able to use social media.*

Further harm may occur, in addition to the time and attention relegated to social media, when the actual content is shrouded in idealized, purposefully developed information that ignites comparison and envy in the viewer. Upward social comparison happens when someone compares themselves to another whom they perceive as superior; research suggests that upward comparison can adversely affect body image, self-esteem, well-being, and mental health [12]. Social comparison theory highlights that one way we learn about ourselves is through comparison to others; thus, social media provides an opportunity to engage in self-assessment [13]. Social media content expressly formulated to reflect a venerated representation of one's life, treasures, talents, and physical image provokes a negative response in viewers through upward comparison. Midgley et al. [14] found that participants experienced negative effects on self-esteem and well-being immediately following a scrolling session filled with upward comparison, with the aggregate negative effects impacting mood, self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Beyond the damaging effects of upward comparison, social media users may be exposed to the detrimental experience of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is considered a deliberate, harmful, harassing act committed by a person/persons towards another/others utilizing digital media [15]. In the U.S., 46% of teenagers surveyed reported experiencing one of six major forms of cyberbullying (not an exhaustive list), with offensive name-calling exhibited as the most common form, with a prevalence of 32% [16]. The other forms of cyberbullying cited with the incidence of occurring are the following: spreading of false rumors about the individual 22%, receiving explicit images they did not request 22%, constantly being asked where they are, what they are doing, or who they are with (not by parents) 15%, physical threats 10%, and having explicit images shared of them without their consent 7% [16]. Research conducted by Poole [17] found that across 16 universities, 85% of the students reported being victimized through some form of cyberbullying. The current research project casts a much-needed broad net, collecting data on social media-related usage and behaviors buoyed by students' words, providing their interpretation and perception of its impact on their mental health, well-being, social capabilities, academic performance and more.

2. Methods

This study employed a mixed-method, descriptive research design to explore social media use in emerging adult college students and the relationships between social media use behaviors and demographic, health-related, and academic variables. Following Institutional Review Board approval, college students at an East Coast university in the United States were invited through campus-wide electronic messaging to participate in a one-time data collection survey experience available electronically through Qualtrics. If students self-selected to participate in the research, they accessed the survey through a provided link, and a unique code was developed to protect their anonymity. Students were introduced to an implied consent form for online surveys that stated that if they chose to complete the survey, they were then consenting to participate in the research but were free to withdraw at any time for any reason. For purposes of clarity, social media use was defined and was an implied inclusion criterion for participation in the data collection. The research survey link was available from mid-April 2024 to mid-April 2025.

2.1 Data Collection and Variables

The demographic data queried age, gender, ethnicity, race, academic major, GPA, projected graduation year, scholarship or grant status, and first-generation college student status. The quantitative data collection involved yes/no questions and surveys, including the Social Media Use Scale (SMUS) [18], the Social Media Self-control Failure Survey (SMSCF) [19], the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) [20], the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) [21], and the Appearance-related Social Media Consciousness Scale (ASMC) [22]. Qualitative data were also collected in the form of open-ended questions involving social media use behaviors, sleep patterns, cyberbullying, social media upward comparison, social media use, and academic performance.

The SMUS is designed to classify an individual's social media use and consists of four sub-scales—social media use that is (1) belief-based involving individuals sharing their beliefs (2) consumption-based which includes the actual content that one consumes; for example, through watching videos or scrolling (3) image-based which involves managing one's social image and may be monitored through likes (4) comparison-based involving comparison of self with others or with previous iterations of self [18]. Through analysis, SMUS demonstrates internal consistency and convergent validity. The SMSCF is a three-item scale that measures how often one gives in to the temptation to engage with social media, with higher scores inversely correlated with psychological well-being. Researchers found that the scale is distinguishable from other social media use scales, has good internal consistency, and demonstrates favorable test-retest validity [19]. The LSAS is one of the most utilized social anxiety scales with excellent internal consistency and convergent validity with other anxiety scales. LSAS has been studied and used broadly in several languages and has two subscales assessing fear and avoidance in performance anxiety, and fear and avoidance in social situations [20]. The BSMAS consists of six items scored on a five-point Likert scale that capture facets of preoccupation with social media usage [21]. The higher the score on the BSMAS (score of 26 out of 30) may indicate a possible risk for problematic social media use (PSMU) and provide a clinical marker for the diagnosis of social media disorder (SMD) [22]. The final scale used to capture quantitative data was the ASMC, which is a 13-item assessment delving into behaviors and thoughts that reflect a “camera-ready” approach to living, whether off or online, with a major focus on cultivating attractiveness to the online spectators. In addition to original validation among an

adolescent population, subsequent research shows that ASMC is also valid for use among young adults [23], with higher scores suggesting higher levels of appearance-related consciousness.

3. Results

All data were transferred from Qualtrics to Excel, where summary scores were tabulated at which point, the quantitative data were uploaded to SPSS version 30 for analysis. Descriptive statistics were determined; one-way analysis of variance was performed with LSAS as the independent variable, along with some correlational analysis and percentages calculated. Qualitative data were similarly transferred from Qualtrics to Excel and from there uploaded into Dedoose, where data were analyzed inductively with in vivo coding using participants' own words and commentaries towards the development of themes and categories [24]. Two experts consecutively analyzed data, establishing intercoder agreement, credibility and dependability of data management [25].

3.1 Demographic and Descriptive Data

A total of 111 students—77 female, 32 male and 2 non-binary, self-selected to participate in the study and completed all the mixed methods data collection. Participants' mean age was 19, 88% of whom were pursuing a bachelor's degree; see Table 1 for further details. In Table 2 we can see that, on average, participants spend nearly five hours a day on social media, the time ranging from less than one hour to seventeen hours per day (which equates to about all waking minutes); Table 2 also shows that 83.3% of the students get less than 8 hours of sleep per night. Table 3 illustrates that the most popular platforms among the students are TikTok and Instagram. There was no significant difference in the amount of time spent on social media or sleep among the genders.

Table 1 Demographic data.

	Mean	Range	Number	Percentage			
Age	19.0	16-33	111	99.1%	23 or less		
Gender	Female	Male	Nonbinary				
	77	32	2				
Race/Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Caucasian	Hispanic or Latino	Other
Percentage	4.5%	6.3%	28.8%	3.6%	48.7%	61.3%	8.1%
Degree Level	Associate	Bachelor's	Master's	Doctoral			
	6.3%	87.4%	5.4%	0.9%			

Table 2 Descriptive data time spent on social media and sleeping per day.

	≤59	60-119	120-179	180-239	240-299	300-359	360-419	420-479	480-539	540-599	600-659	≥660
Avg. Time Spent on Social Media Per Day (Minutes)	0.9%	5.5%	15.6%	18.4%	16.5%	11.0%	11.0%	6.4%	5.5%	0.9%	3.7%	4.6%
	Mean	Median	Mode	Range								
	295.3	240.0	240.0	1050.0								
	<5	5	5.5	6	6.5	7	7.5	8	8.5	9	9.5	10
Avg. Time Spent Sleeping Per Day (Hours)	3.7%	3.7%	8.3%	20.4%	18.5%	21.3%	7.4%	9.3%	2.8%	1.9%	1.9%	0.9%
	Mean	Median	Mode	Range								
	6.7	6.5	7.0	7.5								

Table 3 Most active social media platforms.

Platform	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice	Total Mentions
Instagram	47	50	7	104
TikTok	51	27	9	87
Snapchat	3	10	20	33
Twitter (X)	3	7	16	26
YouTube	4	7	9	20
Facebook	1	3	10	14
Pinterest	1	2	4	7
WhatsApp	1	0	3	4
Discord	0	1	1	2
Other	0	1	3	4
None	0	3	29	32

Summary scores were tabulated for quantitative variables of SMUS, SMSCF, LSAS, BSMAS, and ASMC as a means of describing the current state and social media-related practices of the students (Table 4). SMUS provides a four-facet assessment of social media use from a behavioral perspective involving the frequency with which an individual engages in each facet of social media use per week, rather than an application-oriented approach to understanding usage. The highest mean score of social media use was in the consumption category, showing that the participants in the study were almost two times more likely to engage with social media to consume content than any other facet (see Table 5 for SMUS descriptives). The least likely reason for social media engagement was reportedly to share one's beliefs with others, while the mean scores for comparison with others and managing one's image were closely aligned.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics for each scale summary scores ($N = 111$).

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
BSMAS	14.92	5.32	6	30*
SMSCF	10.30	2.71	3	15
ASMC	3.84	1.56	1	7

Note: $N = 111$ for all variables. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Min = Minimum; Max = Maximum. *9 participants had scores greater than or equal to 24 which would classify them as severe risk for social media disorder (social media addiction), while 23 participants had scores of 10 or below.

Table 5 Descriptive statistics for SMUS Variables (*N* = 111).

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
SMUS Sum Score	54.50	16.86	21	107
SMUS Image	11.40	5.41	4	33
SMUS Comparison	10.98	5.95	3	27
SMUS Belief	6.01	3.18	4	21
SMUS Consumption	26.12	7.99	7	45

Note: *N* = 111 for all variables. *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation; *Min* = Minimum; *Max* = Maximum.

The SMSCF survey assesses the frequency with which an individual succumbs to social media usage despite it interfering with other priorities. The three-item scale is scored 1-5, with 1 being almost never and 5 as very often. Higher scores (possible scores 3-15) indicate an increased frequency of social media self-control failure and are correlated with negative psychological well-being and increased guilt around social media use [19]. In Table 4, we see the mean score for participants on the SMSCF as 10.30, indicating a higher-than-average self-control failure rate.

The LSAS scale assesses social anxiety and is scored in 6 categories ranging from “Does not suffer from social anxiety” to “Very severe social anxiety”. The findings suggest 84% of the participants have some level of social anxiety, with 18% registering as severe to very severe social anxiety; See Table 6 for the depiction of participant social anxiety.

Table 6 Descriptive statistics LSAS.

Score Range	Subscale Labels	Number of Participants	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage
0-29	No social anxiety	17	15%			
30-49	Mild social anxiety	32	No social anxiety			
50-64	Moderate social anxiety	24		84%		
65-79	Marked social anxiety	18		Mild to severe	34%	
80-94	Severe social anxiety	11			Marked to very severe	18%
>95	Very severe social anxiety	9				Severe to very severe

3.2 Number and Percentage of Participants for Each Subscale of the LSAS

The BSMAS scale assesses the extent to which social media use has become problematic with 6 questions answered, choosing from (1) very rarely up to (5) very often. BSMAS is a reliable clinical measure of social media disorder (SMD), which is characterized by difficulty resisting social media site engagement regardless of personal cost to productivity, sleep, mental or emotional health and is considered a behavioral addiction [26, 27]. Previously, research identified 24 as a raw score cut-off point for BSMAS, indicating SMD and further supporting that SMD is an addictive behavior having common attributes to other addictive behaviors [28]. See Table 4 indicating that 9 of 111, or 8% of participants, fall into the SMD category.

The ASMC scale (Table 4) was used to assess an individual's propensity to adopt an unwavering focus on their attractiveness and a concern with how they are depicted and perceived through image distribution. Currently, there are no predetermined cut-off points with this scale; research shows that higher scores are associated with measures of depression and disordered eating [29].

3.3 Correlational Analysis

To further ascertain relationships between quantitative variables, correlational analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between BSMAS and SMSCF $n = 111$, $r = 0.59$, $p < 0.01$ (Figure 1). These findings logically suggest that higher levels of social media disorder identified through the addiction scale are related to an individual's failure to control their social media use to the extent that it interferes with their daily functioning. Additionally, there was a significant correlation between the scoring on the Image subscale of the SMU and the ASMC, $n = 111$, $r = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$ (Figure 2). Again, this finding makes sense, as people who consume social media at high levels in relation to their projected image will likely also have high levels of appearance-related social media consciousness.

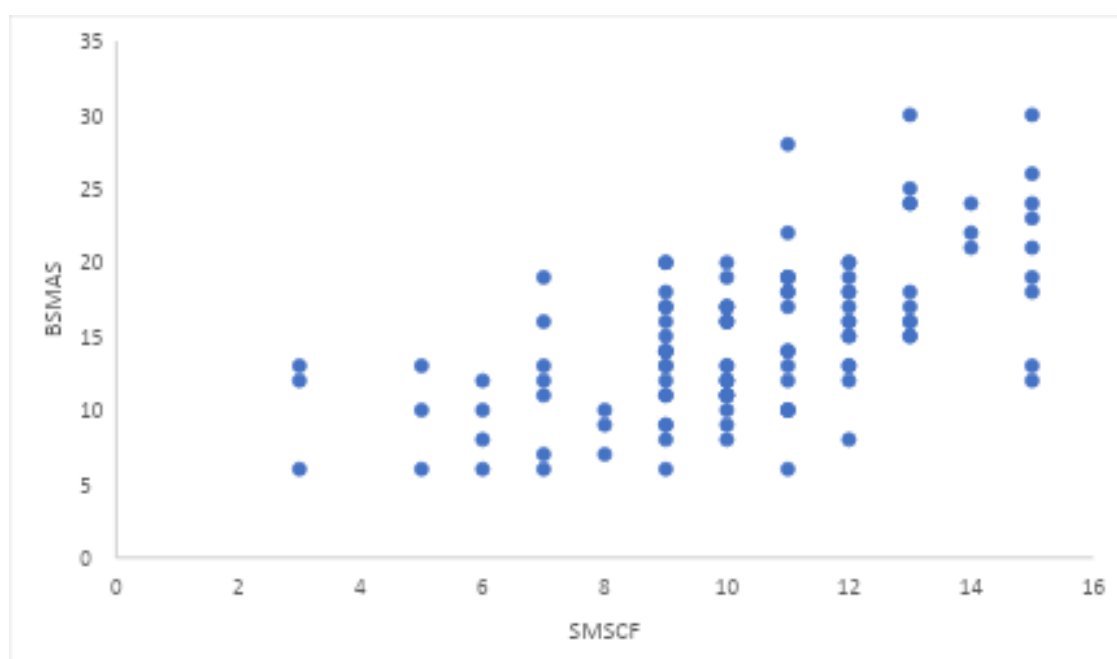


Figure 1 Correlation between BSMAS and SMSCF. The correlation between BSMAS and SMSCF was significant, $n = 111$, $r = 0.59$, $p < 0.01$.

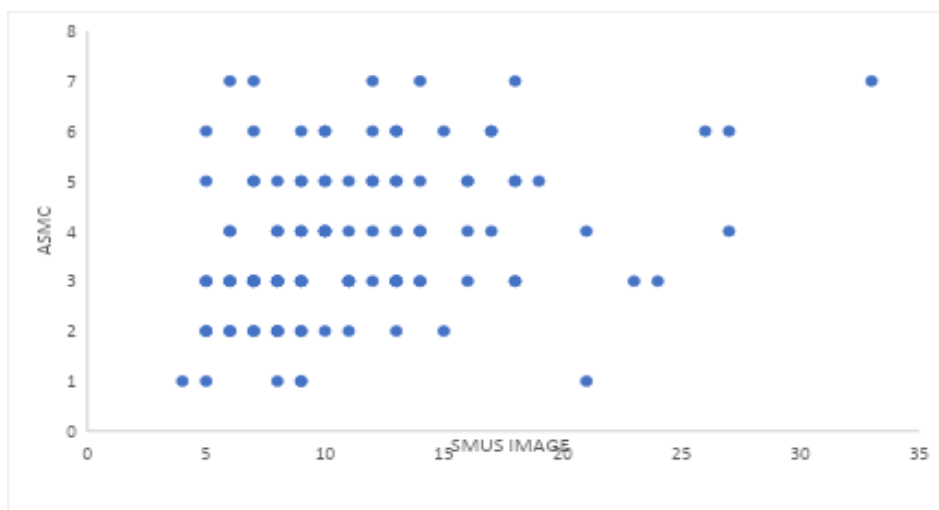


Figure 2 Correlation between ASMC and SMUS. There was a significant correlation between the scoring on the image subscale of the SMU and the ASMC, $n = 111$, $r = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$.

3.4 One-Way Analysis of Variance

The LSAS scores for participants indicate high levels, and a high proportion of individuals in this study are suffering from social anxiety. To further investigate factors that may contribute to these findings, the research team conducted one-way analysis of variance using LSAS as the independent variable. Figure 3 shows the means for the total SMU for each subscale of the LSAS. A one-way ANOVA showed a significant effect among the groups, $F(5,105) = 4.215$, $p = 0.002$. The SMU scale represents the frequency with which an individual engages in a broad range of social media activities, comprised of four subscales. These findings suggest a relationship between the Social Media Use Sum Score and social anxiety. Post-hoc analysis revealed that this effect was driven by the very Severe Social Anxiety group, which scored significantly higher on the Social Media Use Sum Score than the None, Mild and Moderate social anxiety groups.

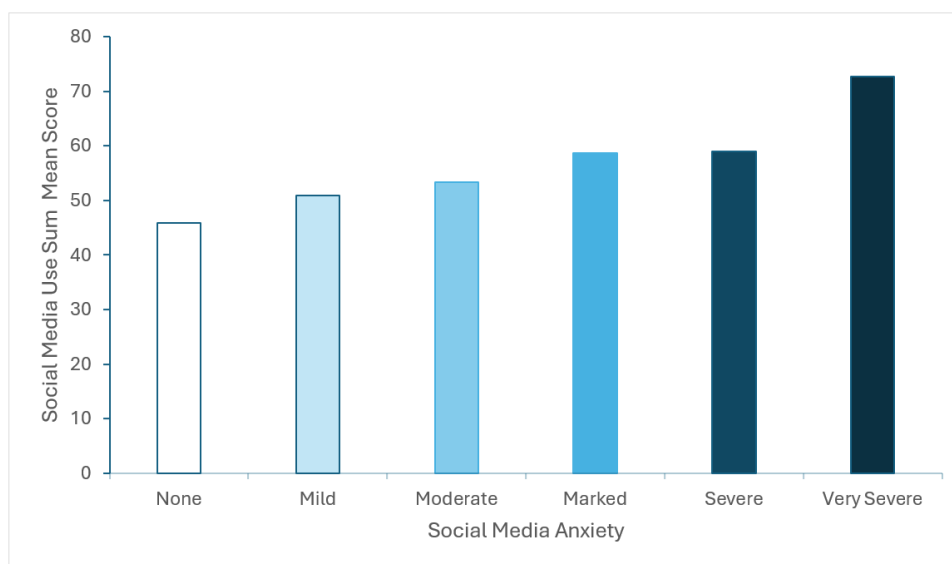


Figure 3 Social Media Use Sum Score for each category of Social Media Anxiety.

Figure 4 provides the means for the SMU Image subscale for each subscale of the LSAS. A one-way ANOVA showed a marginally significant effect among the groups, $F(5,105) = 2.268$, $p = 0.05$. This suggests that the propensity for image-focused social media usage, centered around a desire to portray a positive image, is associated with higher levels of social anxiety. The SMU subscale of Comparison depicts a student's propensity to compare oneself to others; higher levels are associated with attributes related to poor social and emotional well-being. Figure 5 illustrates a significant effect among anxiety levels and the facet of comparison, $F(5,105) = 6.818$, $p = 0.01$. Post-hoc analysis suggests that this was driven by the very Severe Social Anxiety group scoring statistically higher than any other group. Post-hoc analysis suggests that this was driven by the very Severe Social Anxiety group scoring statistically higher than any other group.

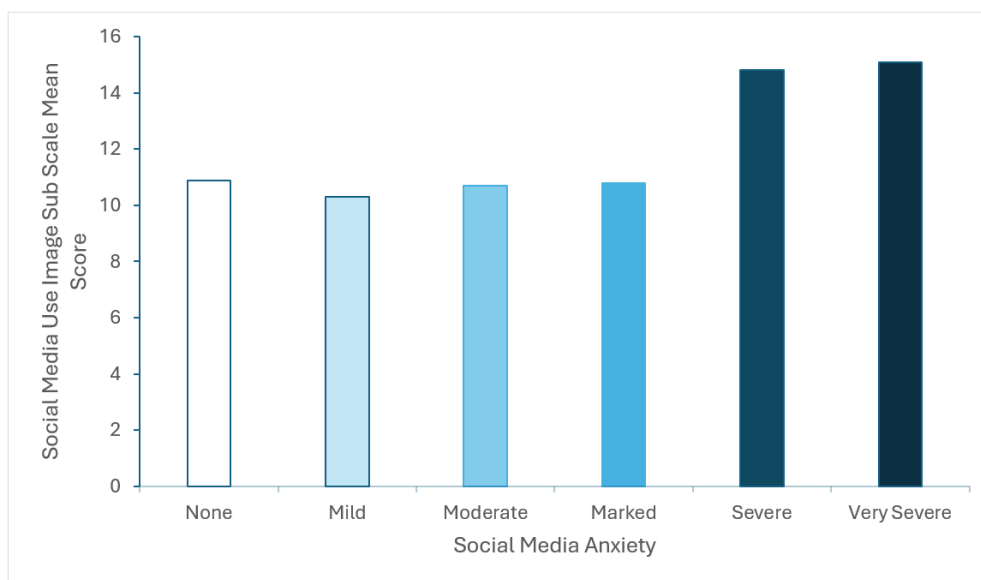


Figure 4 Social Media Use Image subscale score for each category of Social Media Anxiety.

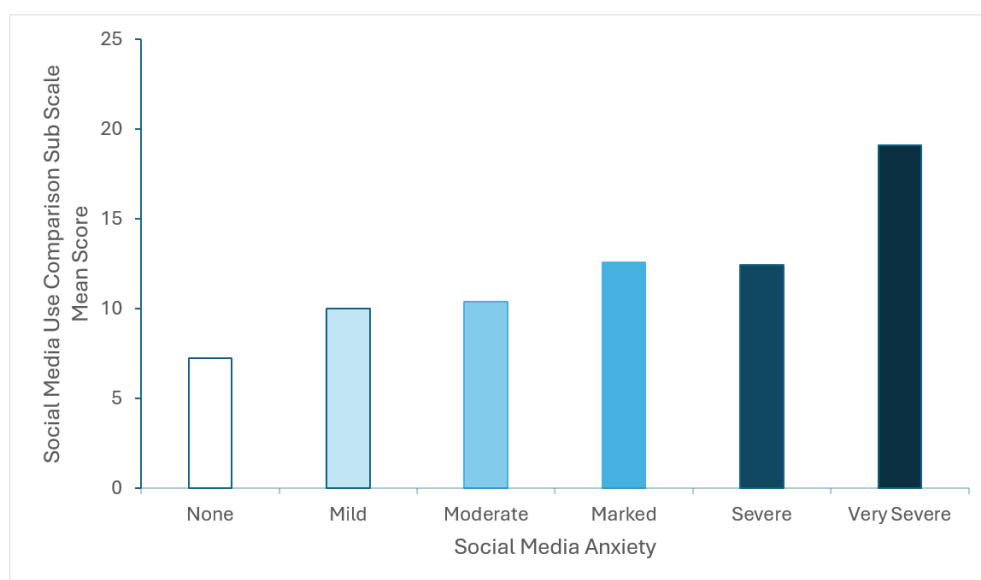


Figure 5 Social Media Use Comparison subscale score for each category of Social Media Anxiety.

A one-way ANOVA showed a marginally significant effect among the groups, $F(5,105) = 2.268$, $p = 0.05$ (Figure 4). Post-hoc analysis suggests that this was driven by the very Severe Social Anxiety group and the Severe Anxiety group scoring higher on the Social Media Image subscale than the Mild, Moderate, and Marked social anxiety groups.

The SMU subscale of Consumption represents the collection of social media activities to which participants are drawn for their overall social media experience and may include behaviors such as scrolling. Figure 6 shows the means for the SMU Consumption subscale for each subscale of the Liebowitz anxiety scale. A one-way ANOVA showed a significant effect among the groups, $F(5,105) = 2.794$, $p = 0.021$. This finding suggests that those with a greater consumption score also had higher rates of social anxiety. Post-hoc analysis suggests that this was driven by the very Severe Social Anxiety group scoring statistically higher than the no social anxiety group; no other differences are significant.

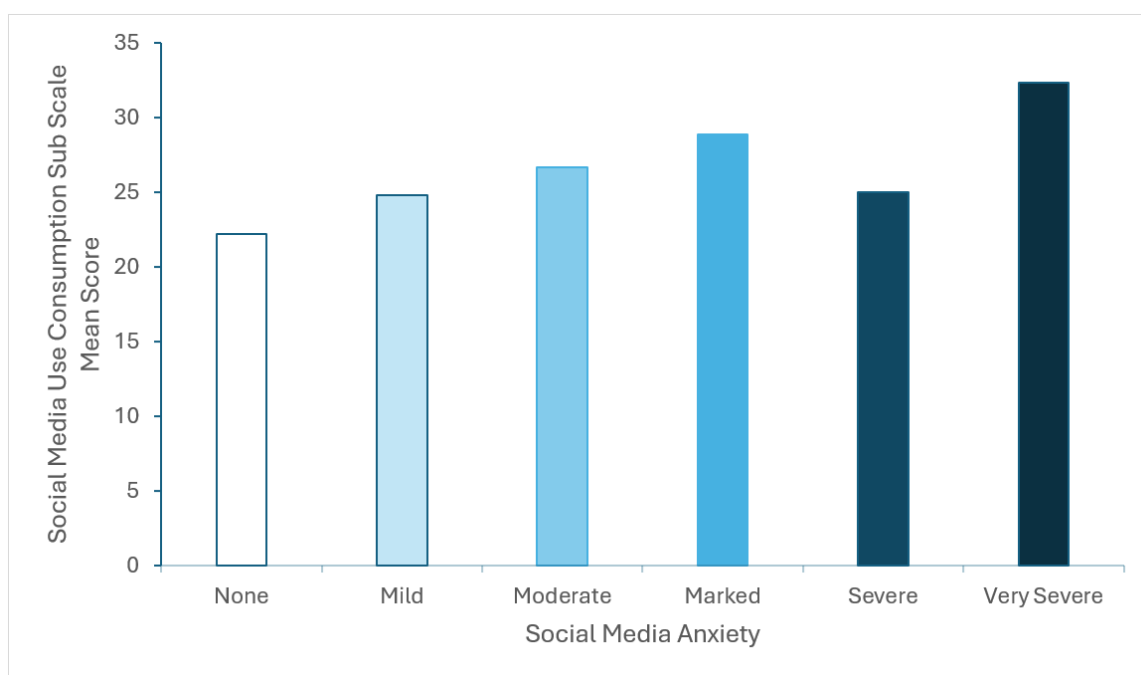


Figure 6 Social Media Use Consumption subscale score for each category of Social Media Anxiety.

The BSMAS assesses the level of preoccupation one exhibits towards continual social media engagement with higher scores suggesting problematic social media use. ANOVA shows a significant difference among these means, $F(5,105) = 4.579$, $p = 0.001$. Post-hoc analysis suggests that there is a difference between the Marked and Severe Social Anxiety groups and the None group. There is also a difference between the Very Severe group and all groups except the Severe Social Anxiety group (see Figure 7) all of which denotes a relationship between problematic social media use and social anxiety. Similarly, higher levels of appearance-related social media consciousness are associated with greater social anxiety. Figure 8 shows the mean scores on the ASMCS for each subscale of social anxiety. An ANOVA reveals a significant difference among the means, $F(5,105) = 5.088$, $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc analysis suggests that this is being driven by the Very Severe Social Media Anxiety group being significantly higher than all the other groups.

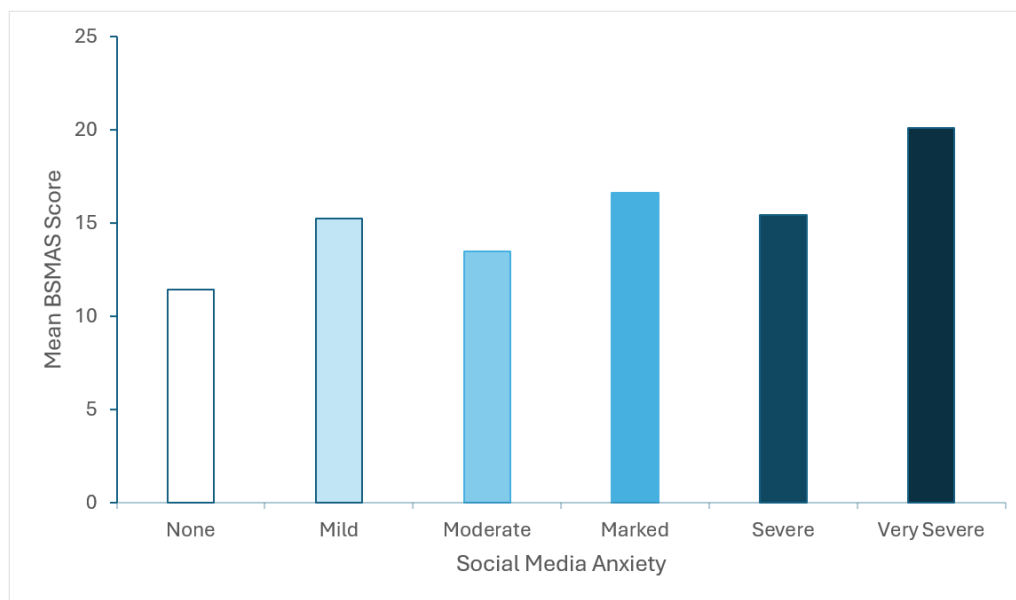


Figure 7 Scores on the BSMAS for each subcategory of social media anxiety.

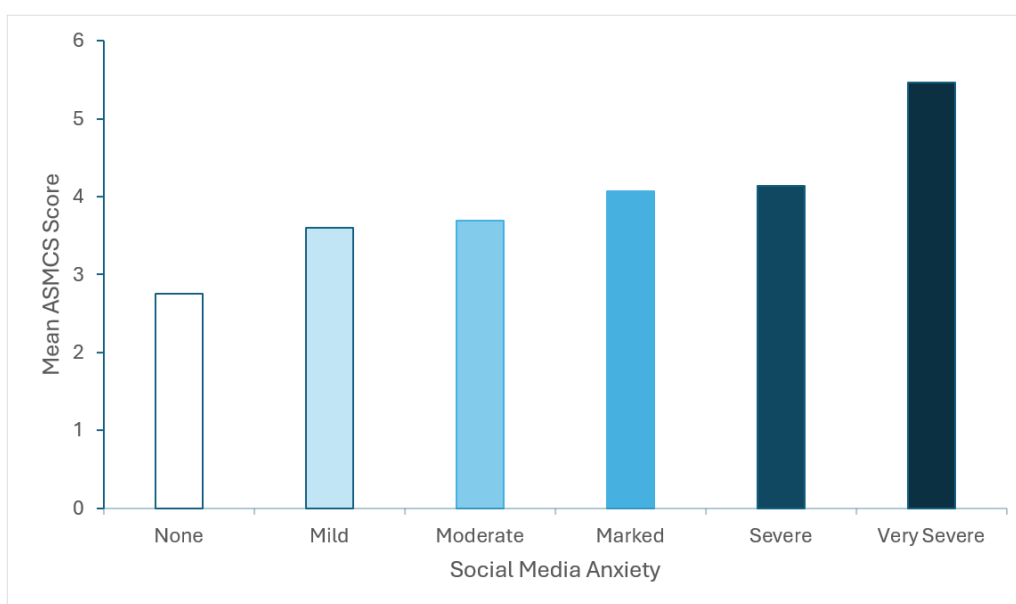


Figure 8 Mean Scores on the ASMCS for each subcategory of social media anxiety.

3.5 Social Media and Academics, Sleep, Cyberbullying and Image

In Table 7 we see self-reported responses to yes/no questions around social media use and academic practices, sleep behaviors, cyberbullying and image. In the yes/no questions, more than half of the participants said yes that social media impacted their ability to complete coursework and homework, while 72% found social media impacted studying for exams; however, 91% said no, social media does not interfere with class attendance. Qualitative data was collected through open-ended questions, one of which involved explaining how academics were impacted by social media use, if at all; please see themes, codes and excerpts for this question in Table 8. The qualitative data findings dramatically illustrate the magnitude of the impact, with 83 separate excerpts offering that social media was a distraction and contributed to procrastination when it came to attending to

academic responsibilities; students speak of scrolling endlessly, continuing to use social media within the classroom and setting schoolwork aside. Further, 58 participant excerpts present that social media interferes with academic productivity, explaining it affects their mood, their ability to think critically, and even their attention span. More than half a dozen participants also reported that their assignments were subsequently turned in late, resulting from their social media engagement.

Table 7 Qualitative data yes/no questions.

	Yes	No	Responses
Has your use of social media ever impacted your academic pursuits, such as... - Attending class	8.3%	91.7%	109
Has your use of social media ever impacted your academic pursuits, such as... - Submitting coursework	50.5%	49.5%	109
Has your use of social media ever impacted your academic pursuits, such as... - Studying for exams	72.5%	27.5%	109
Has your use of social media ever impacted your academic pursuits, such as... - Completing homework	58.7%	41.3%	109
Have any of the following ever interfered with your ability to fall asleep at night: - The proximity (closeness) of your device	46.3%	53.7%	108
Have any of the following ever interfered with your ability to fall asleep at night: - The easy access of your device	56.5%	43.5%	108
Have any of the following ever interfered with your ability to fall asleep at night: - The continued use of your device	75.0%	25.0%	108
Have you ever had any experiences that involved being subjected to cyberbullying (i.e., the use of technology to harass, threaten, embarrass, or target another person)?	22.2%	77.8%	108
Social media can provide us an opportunity to compare ourselves with others - has this ever been your experience?	86.1%	13.9%	108
Have you ever attempted to limit the amount of time you spend on social media?	74.6%	25.4%	110
The scientific literature presents that there may be an association between an abundance of social media use and loneliness, attention challenges, body image struggles, social anxiety, procrastination, stress, and other barriers to happiness. Hypothetically, would you consider participating in a brief social media fast for 24 to 48 hours?	71.3%	28.7%	108

Table 8 Question #24b: Has your use of social media ever impacted your academic pursuits? If so, please explain in detail.

Main Theme	Number of Total Excerpts in Theme	Subcategory	Example of Excerpts	Muti-faceted Outcomes from Excerpts
Distracting and Procrastination	83		<i>Although I manage to get my work done and study for exams, social media almost always distracts me in the process. I frequently procrastinate.</i>	<i>There has been some occasions where I procrastinate into thinking that I would watch one more TikTok video and do my work from there, but that later turned into more than one and I've had to cram all my assignments that were due that same day in one sitting.</i>
		Continual Scrolling	<i>Scrolling endlessly on social media has led me to push the priority of classwork aside and nearly miss deadlines but never miss class because if anything I'll be on social media in class.</i>	<i>Sometimes, when I am using social media, it almost gives me the impression that I don't care about my homework or like studying. It's like I know that I have to do them but I rather scroll on social media, and that can in the long term gives me anxiety especially when there is no more time left and the due date for homework or exams dates are close.</i>
		Use Social Media as a Distraction Instead of School Work	<i>I always get distracted with social media and forget to prioritize my responsibilities which is doing my assignments and studying for exams.</i>	<i>If I don't understand a certain topic in school or homework I go on my phone and scroll through TikTok or Instagram.</i>
Social Media Helps Me With School	2		<i>The content on my social media is usually inspiring, I view videos similar to my situation that motivate me to continue doing well in school.</i>	
		Use as a Relaxation Break From Working	<i>Sometimes I'd give my breaks in between studying or doing homework in order to just relax myself a bit.</i>	

Work is Late Miss Deadlines	7		<i>I have not completed coursework because, I would come home from work and instead of doing my assignments I would go online and then go to sleep.</i>	
Affects Productivity	58		<i>Sometimes when I know there's a certain time for something to be done, I lose track of it due to social media.</i>	<i>Sometimes when studying, I tend to go on my phone for a "break" and it turns into me wasting time and getting sucked into social media. When this happens I completely forget about studying.</i>
		Affects Critical Thinking Skills		<i>My time spent surfing the web might have dampened my critical thinking skills and attention span to focus on schoolwork, mostly due to the "appeal" it has to my tastes. It's only when due dates are close by that I decide to focus my attention at schoolwork.</i>
		Affects Mood	<i>Sometimes it affects my mood or makes me lazy.</i>	<i>Sometimes, when I am using social media, it almost gives me the impression that I don't care about my homework or like studying. It's like I know that I have to do them but I rather scroll on social media, and that can in the long term gives me anxiety especially when there is no more time left and the due date for homework or exams dates are close.</i>
		Choose Social Media Over Studying	<i>I would often check social media between study breaks and forget about what I was doing in the first place.</i>	<i>Studying for exams I procrastinate on them and usually go onto social media to clear my mind, but the next thing I know I'm endlessly scrolling through TikTok and reels.</i>
		Impacted Attention Span		<i>My attention span has declined due to social media. When it comes to my studies I find myself being on my phone, procrastinating. Unfortunately it has shown throughout my grades.</i>

		Social Media Takes Away from Time Needed on School Work	<i>I get distracted on social media and waste time which gives me less time to study and makes me more likely to leave coursework for later rather than now.</i>	<i>There has been some occasions where I procrastinate into thinking that I would watch one more TikTok video and do my work from there, but that later turned into more than one and I've had to cram all my assignments that were due that same day in one sitting.</i>
Creates Last Minute Pressure/Stress	3			<i>When I am on social media, I seem to become more distracted and don't get as much accomplished. I will just sit there and look at videos and never actually get anything done and than that delays everything and I have to try to rush everything last minute and I scramble.</i>

Three yes/no questions were posed concerning participants' ability to fall asleep at night—46% of participants marked, yes, that the proximity of my phone affects my sleep; 56% cited that the easy access of the device is a sleep detriment, and a resounding 75% reported that the continued use of their device interferes with their sleeping. On the descriptive statistics Table 2, we can also see that students report an average of 6.7 hours of sleep per night, below the NIH recommendation for 8-10 hours and transitioning to 7-9 hours in adulthood [30].

To further expand this line of inquiry, researchers posed the following open-ended question (found in Table 9): Have the proximity, the easy access or the continued use of your phone ever interfered with your ability to fall asleep at night, please explain in detail. The participants' words confirm and expand on these concepts, with 18 excerpts explaining that when sleep doesn't come right away, they retreat to their phone and 26 confirming how they stay up on the phone, some for hours (many reporting they fall asleep on the phone). The noise and proximity of the device, temptation to scroll, and utter distraction are all presented as issues and highlighted with excerpts in Table 9.

Table 9 Question #29b: Have any of the following, the proximity, the easy access or the continued use of your phone--ever interfered with your ability to fall asleep at night? If so, please explain in detail.

Main Theme	Number of Total Excerpts in Theme	Example of Excerpts	Multi-faceted Outcomes from Excerpts
Can't/Don't Fall Asleep, I Go Back to the Phone	18	<i>I takes me awhile to fall asleep, so often times when I can't sleep immediately, I'll scroll on TikTok until I get tired, which can take up to 3 hours.</i>	<i>When the phone is close to me I tend to pick it up when it takes me time to fall asleep, when that happens I tend to keep scrolling and end up sleeping really late.</i>
Distracting	8	<i>my phone being close to me distracts me from falling asleep because if I get a notification I could easily pick up my phone and continue scrolling.</i>	
Fall Asleep with My Phone on Using It	6	<i>If I'm very tired, it does not matter how close my phone is. I am likely to fall asleep with my phone still being on from me using it.</i>	
I Stay up Using the Phone/Prevents Sleep	26	<i>The use at night. I will be sitting on my phone and than next thing you know, it two hours later and I have not gone to bed yet.</i>	<i>This is on rare occasion, but I have found myself going back and forth on my phone when I am ready to go to sleep. I'll go on it for a period of time and come back to myself and say "okay its time to go to sleep." Roll over get comfier and close my eyes, but my mind will still be racing for some reason and I can't stay still or come remotely close to falling asleep. Shortly after I'll roll over again and go back on my phone. This will repeat about 3-4 times over a course of 2</i>

			<i>hours or so and then I'll finally fall asleep without really remembering what I fell asleep to.</i>
Noise of Phone Lures me to it/Prevents Sleep	12	<i>Whenever I get a notification or I hear my phone is buzzing I reach out for it and check what the notification was which hinders my ability to sleep.</i>	<i>If I get a notification, I sometimes feel the need to see what it is regarding, leading to a prolonged usage, before bed.</i>
Scrolling/Hard to Stop	13	<i>I would be tired and ready to go to bed until I picked up my phone and started scrolling.</i>	<i>I takes me awhile to fall asleep, so often times when I can't sleep immediately, I'll scroll on TikTok until I get tired, which can take up to 3 hours.</i>
Talk on the Device	1	<i>I just get distracted by talking to friends and watching videos I enjoy.</i>	
Tempted of Proximity of Phone to Use Instead of Sleep	25	<i>If I know that my phone is close to me and I'm not sleepy yet then I will continue to use my phone.</i>	<i>The proximity of my device could mean that my device is too bright or loud which allows me to be more engaged with whatever is on it.</i>
Use the Phone Until I Feel Tired	3	<i>If I cannot fall asleep, I go back to my phone until I feel tired.</i>	
Watch TV/Videos on my Phone-Keep Watching	8	<i>Sometimes I tell myself I should watch one more video before I go to sleep and it turns into an endless cycle.</i>	<i>The continued use of my device is usually me having something on my mind that's stopping me from going to sleep, therefore causing me to be on my phone or watch a movie way past my sleep schedule.</i>

When asked whether participants had ever had experiences that involved any form of cyberbullying, 77% said no, which leaves almost one-fourth of the study population reporting yes. No further meaningful qualitative data were queried on this issue; more research is necessary to understand the scenarios and experiences of cyberbullying.

The next yes/no question involved whether the participants had ever compared themselves to others using social media; a strong majority of 86% answered yes. To dive deeper into image and comparison-related experiences, the research team posed two open-ended questions: in short, who do you compare yourself to and how does comparing yourself make you feel and think about you and others (themes, codes and excerpts found in Table 10 and Table 11)? Interestingly, on the question of who, almost half of the excerpts fell into two similar categories involving celebrities, models, influencers and celebrity influencers. Another entire collection of excerpts landed in the category of peers, regular people and even strangers, suggesting that the broad range of comparison opportunities knows no bounds. Expanding on the issues of social media-related image/life comparisons, the participants reveal rather dramatic and telling thoughts, drawing a bleak picture illustrative of the destructive force of constant comparison. There is a clear collective reference—36 excerpts—to feeling less than and poorly about one's looks and body shape that includes wanting to forgo eating and feeling "uncomfortable in my own skin." The overarching feelings that are reported are insecurity, poor self-esteem, sad, unhappy, frustrated, lonely and more. In contrast, there was a hopeful segment of participants, 12 in number, reportedly using the comparison as motivation and inspiration.

Table 10 Question 34: If you have had the experience of comparing yourself to others using social media, how would you say this impacts how you feel and what you think about yourself and others? If not, please disregard this question.

Theme	Number of Total Excerpts in Theme	Subcategory	Example of Excerpts	Multi-faceted Outcomes from Excerpts
Creates poor body image/not attractive enough	36		<i>This negatively impacts me because I end up feeling sorry and bad for myself. I always think, "Why can't I have the same life or look as pretty as my friends?" I end up feeling jealous of them, which makes me feel even worse.</i>	<i>I feel like this impacts me a lot because it makes me feel less of myself. I won't feel pretty or attractive and will think. I am just ugly and not good enough. I experience this a lot when it comes to myself because I will stare and say I wish I looked like this person because I'm not comfortable in my skin.</i>
		Impacts Whether I Want to Eat or Not	<i>Makes me feel really bad, sometimes I can go into era where I don't eat because they trigger me somehow.</i>	<i>These negative thought patterns fueled my unhealthy habits such as calorie restricting or emotional eating when I made myself unhappy.</i>
		Uncomfortable in my Own Skin	<i>It makes you feel less confident, insecure, uncomfortable in your skin or insignificant in life.</i>	
Makes me Insecure, Lowers Self-esteem, Question Self-worth	24		<i>Sometimes it really affects my self-confidence, I feel like I am just so different from other people, like I am not good enough or there must be something off about me. I feel like some people seem to be so perfect in the way they look mostly, but sometimes also in what they do and their life.</i>	<i>The few times that I have compared myself to others using social media, it made me doubt my worth a little bit, I sort of believed that I wasn't pretty enough and comparing my life to some of these influencers and wishing I had an interesting life like them.</i>
Unhappy, Frustrated, Sad, Dissatisfied	16		<i>I find myself wishing to have the experiences and lifestyle of other people on social media, which results in me feeling sad or jealous.</i>	<i>Sometimes it makes me uplifted because it's like I could rock an outfit someone's wearing, but then again, I'm not them. So, I get this feeling of</i>

			<i>sadness because I just feel unlucky in my own skin.</i>
Makes Me Unhappy with Myself and What I Have	22	<i>It makes me feel bad about myself because they have better bodies then me.</i>	<i>This impacts my beauty standards for myself and makes me think I need to improve some aspects of myself.</i>
5 Makes me Feel as Though I Need More Friends/True Love, Lonely	4	<i>When I compare myself to others on social media, I compare how many friends they have to how many I have. I feel like I am lacking in friends and when I see others on Instagram having fun with their friends, it makes me feel a bit lonely and motivates me a little bit to be more open to others and make friends.</i>	<i>I feel like I am not doing good enough for my age or that I will never find true love.</i>
6 Shows/Makes Me Feel What I Am Doing is Wrong	2	<i>Sometimes it makes me feel bad about myself. It makes me feel as if I'm not doing enough or doing things wrong.</i>	
7 Inspires, Drives, Motivates Me to Try Harder	12	<i>I feel like it just gives me inspiration and pushes me towards what I want even more. I constantly push forward toward the goal.</i>	<i>Sometimes it doesn't feel great because you think of all the things you could have or do, and it makes you feel like you don't have enough or aren't enough compared to that person. On the other hand there are people who post about the not so happy parts or their opinions on different topics and it makes me either relate or sometimes feel more fortunate that at least I am not going through whatever they are going through.</i>

Table 11 Question 33: If you have had the experience of comparing yourself to others using social media, who are you likely to compare yourself to (for example, celebrities, peers, etc.)? Please list all that apply. If not, please disregard this question.

Main Theme	Number of Total Excerpts in the Theme	Example of Excerpts	Multifaceted Outcomes from Excerpts
Models/Celebrities	25	<i>I tend to compare myself with celebrities.</i>	<i>It's a constant thing I do, I'd compare myself to my friends, celebrities, or TikTok "influencers". As long as you had something I wish I had or my insecurity was your best feature.</i>
Influencers/Social Media Celebrities	24	<i>Sometimes I will see a certain person/celebrity on social media and compare myself to them whether it's based on appearance or lifestyle.</i>	<i>Sometimes when going on an influencer's page or even on a friend's or a friend of a friend's page I have found myself comparing my life/looks to them because usually only happy memories are shared to the public.</i>
Peers/People/Strangers	44	<i>I feel like peers are who I compare myself to most because the main difference with celebrities is that they are famous, but my peers aren't. It kind of just makes me question if they're normal just like I am why can't I look as good as them?</i>	<i>I am more likely to compare myself to people my age especially if they have a lot of followers, they are successful, have money... and celebrities like well-known artists, influencers and even my friends, family.</i>
Friends	16	<i>I compare myself to my friends who have a more social life than I regularly do.</i>	<i>I often compare myself to girls that I want to look like whether it's friends, peers, or celebrities. I often feel ugly and not good enough.</i>
Idols/People I Admire	6	<i>It's not a specific person however, when scrolling on TikTok I notice all these pretty women with perfect bodies and great style. Sometimes, in the moment, I compare myself to them.</i>	<i>At times I find myself wanting what others have regarding clothes, shoes, more money. The lavish lifestyle they post is what I compare my life to.</i>
Rivals	1	<i>peers, rivals, idols.</i>	
Athletes	2	<i>I often compare myself to other athletes- both professionals and my friends/peers.</i>	
Family Members	2	<i>Most likely compare myself to friends or even family members.</i>	

The following two yes/no questions involved whether the participants had ever tried to limit their time on social media and if they would be willing to participate in a social media fast (forgoing social media for a period of time) as a part of a research project. To the first question, 74.6% of participants responded yes, reportedly having tried to limit their time on social media at some point prior to the research study. An open-ended question further mined this concept, asking the participants, “If you have tried to limit yourself on social media, what was/were the reason(s) behind your decision?” The first clear theme included 17 excerpts that involved concern for their academic performance, as seen in Table 12, participants felt their grades were suffering and they were losing control. A very pronounced theme involved emotional and mental health concerns, with 23 excerpts explaining the challenges faced affecting mood, emotions and well-being. An equally strong area of concern with 26 excerpts was the recognition that they felt a deep desire to reduce screen time or even step away from social media completely for a time, with a group of students mentioning it was addictive. The largest excerpt theme went to “time wasting”, this was presented in so many different phrases and explanations, as the students clearly felt that social media was reducing their productivity and real social experiences, while challenging the successful completion of all levels of life goals. Interestingly, the need to be more present and engaged in real life was discussed, represented in 17 excerpts, suggesting the need to regroup on what was important and even referencing joining the real world.

Table 12 Question #22: If you have tried to limit yourself on social media, what was/were the reason(s) behind your decision? If you have never tried to limit your time, please disregard this question.

Main Theme	Number of Total Excerpts in Theme	Subcategory	Example of Excerpts	Muti-faceted Outcomes from Excerpts
Academics	17		<i>started affecting my grades.</i>	<i>Well, I wanted to focus more on my studies, and felt like I had no control over my life.</i>
		Distracts From School Work	<i>Sometimes I spend too much time on social media when I can do more productive things, like read, clean, and even study. Social media can be very time consuming.</i>	<i>My decision to limit social media was because I thought I was overusing it and I had to focus on more important stuff like school, family, and friends.</i>
Addicting	7		<i>I tried to limit my time because I noticed how bad my addiction to constantly scrolling was.</i>	<i>The reason was I became too addicted to my phone causing me to be out of touch with reality and losing time I could invest in other things.</i>
Be More Present	17		<i>The reasons were to refocus myself and to remember my reality. Basically, I wanted to root myself in the now and what my life is currently.</i>	<i>I was getting very depressed being in bed just scrolling through social media and I wasn't getting much time to just look at the real world.</i>
		More Mindful	<i>I just need to disconnect because I don't remember the majority of the reels I have watched.</i>	<i>To be on social media less, who I was before was not reflecting how I truly feel or act. So basically, rebranding and being conscious.</i>
Mental Health and Emotional Health	23		<i>It's not good to look at all of these people that truly should have no impact on your day to day, but they do and they affect our moods, emotions, and divert our attention from what's important.</i>	<i>I found myself overthinking and comparing myself and I find the saying "Comparison is the thief of joy" to be very true. I also struggled with my mental health and it can fill me with anxiety and make me overstimulated since it's small portions of media consumed throughout the day. Another factor for me was taking everything to heart, for example someone I considered an acquaintance removing me.</i>

		For Peace and Rest	<i>I feel more at peace and less stressed when I am off of social media.</i>	
Physical Effects	4		<i>To lower my screen time and to not mess up my vision.</i>	<i>wanted to have a better sleep time and get my work done.</i>
Reduce Negativity	7		<i>I deleted Instagram and Snapchat because someone was sexually harassing me and stalking me online when I was 14.</i>	<i>The reason behind my decision was I realize with Instagram I most use it to go back and forth with reels when I can do that with TikTok and the effect it brought to comparing myself that had to get away from some of that negativity and decrease the amount of time I spent on it finding stuff I don't want to find.</i>
Screen Time	26		<i>I wanted to have less screen time.</i>	<i>Yes. during the summer, I deactivated all my social media accounts because I wanted to take a break and it was very peaceful. All over social media, there is this different persona that people put on and it got to be very annoying. It started to feel like people were just being fake and wanted to be popular. I didn't want to surround myself with all this, so I vowed to take a break. I haven't gone onto Instagram since June 2024.</i>
Self-care	18		<i>I need to focus on myself and school.</i>	<i>The reason is just so I am not on my phone to often and realize the time spent on TikTok that I could've invested in myself.</i>
		Self-image	<i>The reasons were to feel better about myself, especially since I consider about my looks a lot because of "looksmaxxing."</i>	<i>I deleted TikTok because it made me feel more and more insecure about myself.</i>
Time Waster	39		<i>I just felt as if using social media so much was a waste of my time.</i>	<i>I have multiple times because I realized it was taking up all my time. I was relying on every second.</i>
		Threatens Productivity	<i>The reason was I saw that I was being a lot less productive due to being on my phone and social media so much.</i>	<i>If I limited myself to social media, I think I could get more done and experience more things outside my cellular device.</i>
		Time with Family, Friends, Social Interaction	<i>I was in vacation and wanted time to connect with myself and family without distractions.</i>	<i>I have tried to limit my time on social media to be able to study more, concentrate more, spend some time with family, and not let it consume by whole day.</i>

As reported, the majority of students had tried to limit themselves on social media, thus informing the next open-ended question about how limiting social media impacted them or made them feel (see Table 13). There were 29 excerpts depicting an increase in productivity that included subcategories of “being able to shift energy to something other”, “completing work/homework”, “less time wasting”, and “results in more free time”. Conversely, 25 excerpts involved feelings of discomfort, anxiety, withdrawal, being disconnected and even boredom. The dichotomy of the qualitative data results illustrates that desirable outcomes, such as more productivity, are possible; however, it also highlights the potential dependency and discomfort that could exist when social media engagement is difficult to change. On the positive side, with less social media engagement, students noticed that they were more aware or mindful, had better mental health, improved self-care, enjoyed a better mood, were happier, and experienced less negativity and stress; a segment of the respondents felt no change at all (14 excerpts).

Table 13 Question #23: If you have limited yourself on social media, did you notice any significant impacts (for example, on your mood or stress levels)? If you have never tried to limit your time, please disregard this question.

Main Theme	Number of Total Excerpts Theme	Subcategory	Example of Excerpts	Multi-faceted Outcomes from Excerpts
Anxious/ Uncomfortable Being Disconnected	25		<i>I have, I get more anxious to check social media.</i>	<i>Mood increased, but stress also because I wanted to know what was going on.</i>
		Anxious to Re-Engage with Social Media	<i>After re-opening my Messenger I was kind of anxious to see who wrote to me.</i>	
		Bored	<i>I found myself more bored.</i>	
		Feeling of Withdrawal	<i>Yes, I felt like a kind of withdrawal like constant attempts to open the app but whenever I did, I would just close it out quickly.</i>	<i>I've noticed myself grabbing for my phone only to exit out, but when deleting it, at first, I miss it, but then after 1-2 days I feel perfectly fine without it. I actually tend to feel better about myself, like I have control of my life. I typically restart social media when I start to feel like I'm missing out with keeping up with my friends. It tends to be a cycle for me.</i>
		Discomfort		<i>Momentary discomfort was felt losing access to a crutch like it, but my grades improved, and so did my mood long term.</i>
		Uncomfortable Feelings	<i>Impacted my mood, as it made me somewhat irritable, when significantly reducing my time spent on social media.</i>	<i>I think since I had no distraction, I had to sit with my own thoughts and my mood was mostly sad.</i>
Better Focus/Attention	14		<i>Yes, I feel more focused. When I'm online, I am more distractable.</i>	<i>I did notice that I was able to concentrate and study more. The time I would usually spend scrolling was used to read a book or study and my grades did reflect that. I felt less sluggish since I was staring at a screen for so long.</i>

		More Mindful/Aware/Present	<i>My interaction has changed, I'm more aware, and I don't always depend on social media to keep me entertained.</i>	<i>Yes, I noticed I was able to have more fun in real life instead of being on my phone.</i>
Better Grades	2		<i>My grades improved.</i>	
Better Mental Health	6		<i>Yes, my mood felt way better, I feel like when I am on social media is just have a negative impact on my mental.</i>	<i>I feel that social media can sometimes be overwhelming, or it can add more negative emotions on my not so good days. The time I spend off social media has helped with my mental health, and physical because I find others ways of being productive.</i>
		More Confident		<i>Yes, I felt a lot better on a daily basis. My mood was better, energy was better, confidence was better.</i>
		More Stable		<i>I noticed that I was more productive, and my mood levels are more stable.</i>
Better Mood	17		<i>I have noticed my mood I'm happier nobody's post is bothering me and affecting my mood.</i>	<i>The most significant impact I've gained from it was less stress levels on my appearance which I am gaining out of it a positive mood.</i>
		Calm/Peace	<i>Yes, I felt calmer and more relaxed throughout the day.</i>	<i>When I limit myself, I find more peace. I can actually sit and enjoy the present moment.</i>
Happier	5		<i>I probably am happier when I am off social media.</i>	<i>Yes, I noticed that I was much happier without it. I became less stressed as well. My friends didn't know that I was taking a break, so most of them came to check up on me, which was good.</i>
Improvements in Self-Care	13		<i>I have noticed that if I limit myself, I worry about others less and more about myself.</i>	
		Attend to/Improve Physical Health	<i>I did recall feeling a bit more well rested when I did go on a break so there's that, I suppose.</i>	

		More Energy	<i>Yes, I felt a lot better on a daily basis. My mood was better, energy was better, confidence was better.</i>
		More Time to Exercise	<i>A lot, especially getting some time to walk or run.</i>
		More/Better Sleep	<i>Yes, I was more energetic because I was getting more sleep.</i>
Less Negativity	13		<i>Yes, I believe my stress decreased because I wasn't seeing any negative news or content or comparing myself with the lives of others.</i>
		Less Body Image Struggle	<i>I feel that social media can sometimes be overwhelming, or it can add more negative emotions on my not so good days. The time I spend off social media has helped with my mental health and physical because I find others ways of being productive.</i>
		Less Comparison-Related Experiences	<i>The most significant impact I've gained from it was less stress levels on my appearance which in gaining out of it a positive mood.</i>
More Productive	29		<i>I noticed I compared myself less to people when I didn't use social media as much.</i>
		Able to Shift Attention/Energy to Something Other	<i>Yes, I would more productive and less likely to procrastinate.</i>
		Completing Work/Homework	<i>I have deactivated my instagram before and I can say that it helped me focus a little more on completing my work on time and not scroll as often.</i>
		Less Time Wasting	<i>I found that I wanted to put more attention to my daily tasks. I wasn't letting my mind wonder into random thought as much. I would catch myself getting things done in a much more timely manner when I put my phone to the side.</i>
			<i>Limited myself allowed me to get more work done and be more productive leaving a positive impact.</i>
			<i>Yes, I do think social media can impact your moods and stress so I did see a difference when I managed my time more properly.</i>

		Results in More Free Time	<i>I was more active on other stuff that didn't have to do with social media. I had more free time.</i>
No Change	14		No
Positive Effect	8		<i>Yes, I felt a lot better on a daily basis. My mood was better, energy was better, confidence was better.</i>
		Keeping Life More Private	<i>yes, I noticed I learned how to keep my life more private.</i>
Reduced Stress	12		<i>My stress levels are low, I get more done throughout my day, and I go out on walks with friends.</i>
		Less Tension	<i>less tense and more concentrated.</i>

The final yes/no question asked whether students would be willing to participate in a social media fast for 24-48 hours, and 71.3% answered yes. With the majority of respondents having self-directed to limit social media and express a willingness to engage in a social media fast, we can be encouraged that emerging adults are open to and demonstrate agency towards understanding their behaviors, adjusting, and pursuing optimal functioning.

4. Discussion

The aim of this mixed-methods descriptive research study is to better understand the social media-related practices of the emerging adult college student and gather their perceptions and observations on how they use social media, and how that may impact their life. Our findings suggest that student participants average almost five hours (four hours and fifty-five minutes) of social media use per day. The students report that social media use interferes with, among many things, academic performance, sleep, mental and emotional health, productivity, image perception, real life and self-esteem. According to the CDC, young adults between 18-29 have the highest likelihood of experiencing anxiety than any other age group [31]. The LSAS measures social anxiety involving both fear and avoidance in a variety of social situations, and only 18% of our participants don't suffer from some level of social anxiety. The sum score for the SMU scale provides the frequency with which individuals use social media, involving four facets. Analysis revealed a significant difference in the sum score for the SMU across the levels of the social anxiety scale. Similarly, there was a significant difference in the SMU subscale in the Image and Consumption driven subscales across levels of anxiety. Social anxiety is highly prevalent in our findings and shows a relationship with social media use.

Social media allows for ample opportunity to compare oneself to others, i.e., upward comparison, and appears to be a significant emotional and mental health challenge through all manner of data collection in this study. With over 85% of the students reportedly comparing themselves to others through social media and 104 excerpts negatively describing the effects of this comparison, including poor self-image, unhappiness, low self-worth and even loneliness, it is logical that there is a positive correlation between the Image sub-scale of SMU and ASMCS. This suggests that when much social media time is spent involving image factors, higher levels of appearance-related social media consciousness occur. Compounding these outcomes, we find that a higher reported Image usage in the SMU scale is significantly related to higher levels of social anxiety. This study expands the literature involving upward comparison by presenting firsthand remarks from the college students along with the quantitative measures illustrating the detrimental effects of overt and constant comparison.

Qualitative data collection in this study affords a unique experience for a participant through the act of answering questions, reflecting on aspects of their life, analyzing their thinking while exploring their practices and behaviors. The questions answered by the participants reference social media, challenging their ability to be present and "in real life", while also citing improvements in "mindfulness" and positive feelings when adjusting/decreasing social behaviors. We find out that 74.6% of the participants report having already tried to limit their social media engagement before the research study, ostensibly drawn from a level of awareness, feelings and assessment that motivated them to do so. Additionally, over 70% of the participants reportedly would opt into a social media fast if the opportunity arose. These findings reflect some level of knowing how the

social media experience is impacting oneself, and a willingness to adjust or guide oneself toward an improved level of functioning and well-being. Future research is needed to measure the effects of temporary departures from social media (a social media fast) on all components of health management, well-being and academic performance in college students. In addition, the findings provide great insight into the emerging adult college student experience and life alongside the mainstay that is social media use. The data delivers powerful content that should inform program and intervention development for college students (and in turn other people groups) to optimize their academic success, mental health, health behaviors and more. The students' reported willingness to step away from social media engagement for a time suggests that this is a population of emerging adults who thankfully appear open to continued growth and evolution despite the seemingly embedded current social media-related challenges.

Author Contributions

All contributing authors participated in each aspect of the research, development, execution, analysis, manuscript creation and completion of this project.

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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