Investigation of the people's perceptions/opinions about the effect of social media

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Abstract

The instant rise in the usage of social media platforms has major implications for individuals' mental welfare. Multiple stakeholders outlined the severe impact of social media usage on mental welfare. However, there has been restricted information about young females' perceptions of the effects of social media in the UK context. To overcome this gap, this research aims to examine young females' perceptions of the effects of social media in the UK. This research employed a qualitative research method, and data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Around 10 young females (aged between 18 and 25 years) were enrolled through the purposive sampling method, through social media platforms, especially LinkedIn and Instagram. Thematic analysis was utilised for the data analysis method, which revealed 3 major themes, including patterns of social media usage among young women, negative perception about the effect of social media, and the positive perception about the effect of social media. This research showed that around 80% of the young females held positive perceptions about the effect of social media, as it permits them to show their creative side, build relationships or networks, raise social awareness, and enhance communication or social skills. However, a few of the young women argued that they got addicted to social networking sites, and social media detrimentally disturbed their sleep and personal lives as they started comparing their bodies or life achievements with others.

Keywords: Social media, young women, Instagram, social relationships, Facebook

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

Globally, several countries have obtained significant access to the Internet owing to the immediate advances within information technology within the past 20 years (Shirvani Moghaddam, 2024). Social networking sites, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, are the most recognised and famous ones utilised on the Internet. Hutchinson, Suwana, and McTernan (2024) define, social media, also called social networking sites, as the web-based services which permits people to formulate a semi-public or public profile within the bounded structure, articulate a list of other social media users with whom they view or traverse their list of connections, share a connection, or those made by others in the system.

The immediate escalation within social media popularity started in the second half of the last decade, mainly because of their widespread utilization by university or school students and working professionals. For instance, around 86% of the internet-using young adults had joined social networking platforms by the end of 2009, with around 38% of them using social media platforms regularly (Li et al., 2021). Javed et al (2024) argue that young individuals attempt to engage in such social media sites while doing their work, and it might have a negative influence on their academic accomplishments by distracting them from the learning process. Chemnad et al (2023) measured the relationship between social media and productivity. The results showed that young individuals who spend greater time on Instagram or Facebook spend less time working or studying and demonstrate lower productivity compared to those who do not utilise social networking sites.

Certain researchers, such as Chen et al (2023), have recognised the following effects: loss of motivation among working professionals to work productively, time wastage, and the reduction of

research capabilities, whereas only a few studies have outlined the positive effects of social media (Moughal et al., 2023). For example, Li and Zhuo (2023) showed that the usage of blogs or weblogs facilitated a learning atmosphere for individuals. Also, Connolly (2023) demonstrated that the youth could employ social media sites for academic support or assistance. There is limited research that examines young women's perceptions of the social media effect, especially in the UK. Thus, this research aims to unveil young women's opinions or perceptions of the effect of social media.

1.2 Problem Statement

Past studies have demonstrated an inconsistent relationship between social media use and young women's perception of the effect of social media. For example, Blokdijk and Elmberg (2023) found that young women perceive social media as a source of forming connections and positive aspirations. Also, Plachynda et al (2024) revealed that many young undergraduate women perceived social media as a source of giving voice, a talent gateway, and digital activism. On the other hand, Castellanos Silva and Steins (2023) discovered that the consistent use of social media leads to body image concerns among young women, resulting in body dissatisfaction. Similarly, Nguyen (2023) argues that certain young women might build addictive behaviour associated with social media, finding it challenging to disconnect from it. The negative and positive effects of social media have been the center of extreme controversy. This circumstance has raised a number of questions, for instance, to what degree young women use social media and for what motives? Are these young women aware of the positive or negative effects of social media usage? Research has been performed in tackling these questions, however, many of the studies are from outside the UK context. While this association has been well-researched with the adolescent population, there

has been a restricted focus on young people, especially women. Therefore, this research aims to examine the young women's perception of the effect of social media on their lives in the UK.

1.3 Significance of the Research

This study sheds light on young women's perceptions of the effect of social media use. The findings of this research could be utilised by multiple parties, including healthcare professionals, educators, and parents, to formulate materials that would better prepare young individuals to tackle negative feelings that might emerge from employing social media. Additionally, the findings of this study empower policymakers, regulatory bodies, and the government to develop and execute policies that shield individuals from dangerous content, assure the ethical usage of personal data, and encourage responsible platforms. This research also suggested that self-esteem might play a critical role in the association between mental health and social media usage. Thus, interventions that concentrate on aspects such as self-esteem and its association with social media might be more efficient compared to those that only concentrate on social media usage.

1.4 Research Questions

- What are the young women's opinions/perceptions about the effect of social media?

1.5 Research Aim and Objectives

This research aims to explore young women's perceptions of the effects of social media in the UK. The following research objectives are used to accomplish this aim.

- To identify the extent to which young women use social media.
- To uncover the young women's awareness of the effects of social media on their lives.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter will serve as an examination or overview of the past research performed on the young women's perceptions of the effect of social media usage. This chapter's sub-section will include the extent to which young women utilise social media, common social media habits among young women, and young women's positive perceptions of social media usage. Lastly, the chapter will provide a theoretical framework to guide the research process.

2.2 Social Media

The term "social media" is defined as several internet-based networks that permit users to connect with others, visually and verbally (Gkatzola and Papadopoulos, 2024). According to Griffin and Hatton (2024), social media is the joint term for applications or websites that concentrate on interaction, community-based input, collaboration, communication, and content-sharing. Currently, many individuals, such as young people, teenagers, and adults, are now using social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc, to interact and stay in touch with family members, friends, or several communities (Gazi et al., 2024).

2.3 Extent to Which Young Women Utilise Social Media

Coyne and Woodruff (2023) showed that many young women, aged 18-21 years, spend around 2 hours a day, where they get connected multiple times each day. Similarly, the qualitative research by Lim et al (2022) show that many young women, especially undergraduate students, attempt to utilise their preferred social media site 6 times or more each day. Blokdijk and Elmberg (2023) support this by stating that around 70% of the young women in their research employ social networking sites for approximately 50-60 minutes throughout the day. However, these studies pose limitations in terms of small sample size, which limits the generalisability of the findings.

Additionally, Dane and Bhatia (2023) reveal that young women are spending more time on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram than they are on studies. Koç and Koç (2023) conducted a survey to determine whether young individuals spend more time on social media platforms or in their studies. The results showed that around 45% of the young individuals spend more time (2 hours a day) on Instagram than on their studies (approximately 30 minutes), whereas 55% use social media platforms for their academic learning for around 1 hour. However, this study poses a limitation in terms of a low response rate, as many participants did not complete the survey. Furthermore, Boulianne, Hoffmann, and Bossetta (2024) explored that social media usage was extremely higher among young women, where Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook were the most famous online platforms. In addition, Pang and Ruan (2023) observed in their research that the majority of young individuals are overutilising social networking sites, especially between the ages of 16 and 25. They employ social media for the purpose of chatting, surfing, and entertainment. The researcher also explored that overutilisation of social media is leading to both physical and mental health problems, such as body pain, strain, and fatigue. Certain respondents shared their opinions that they could not survive without using Instagram and Facebook.

2.4 People's Positive Perception Of the Effect of Social Media

Much research outlines the conflicting perceptions of people about the effect of social media. In the study of Bailey et al (2020), around 70% of the individuals stated that social media significantly enhances creativity and offers them a space for personal expression. Whether through group chats, online forums, or sharing documents, people could now function with others to accomplish a common goal, resolve issues jointly, and develop meaningful content. However, the quantitative nature of this study restricted the researcher from unveiling a holistic understanding related to the perceptions of young individuals about the social media usage effect.

Moreover, social media platforms, such as LinkedIn and Instagram give opportunities for individuals to forge new connections and expand their social networks with others across the world. Nguyen et al (2024) show that around 45% of people possess a positive perception of social media usage, as they can now access diverse resources, experiences, and viewpoints, which could foster their social capital and enrich their entire lives. However, this study utilised a survey for the data collection, which resulted in data errors because some answer options might be interpreted differently by the respondents. In contrast, Noori, Sayes, and Anwari (2023) claim that social media platforms also destroy relationships and social connections by connecting individuals with wrong connections, who start to exploit them for their own advantage only.

Similarly, Kligler-Vilenchik and Literat (2025) revealed that many young populations consider the positive effects of social media as beneficial as social media platforms permit advocates to reach a global audience more easily and discuss social issues or solutions that could better their lives, such as getting more fun out of life or enhancing physical activity for better overall health. Additionally, social media has built an intricate human interaction at various levels that occur simultaneously within a single venue, varying from the new events or general to more personal events entertainment in manners formerly segmented in separate communication channels, such as print media, telegraph messages, and telephone (Connock, 2024). Social media platforms offer chances for people to connect with like-minded individuals, families, or friends, which aids in maintaining relationships, fostering self-esteem, and boosting a sense of belonging. Furthermore, Sarwar et al (2023) argue that young women's opinions about social media platforms are mainly positive since the practices conducted on these platforms are beneficial for enhancing their language skills. However, this study poses limitations in terms of researcher bias, because the

semi-structured interviews' open-ended nature could result in the temptation to ask leading questions.

Similarly, Lobo-Quintero et al (2024) uncovered that young individuals' motivation for social media usage was the extrinsic factor perceived connectedness, and the second was the intrinsic factor perceived enjoyment. This research found that young individuals held positive opinions about social media usage because they use social media platforms as a main source of knowledge seeking, entertainment, and learning. The study also discovered that the relationship between social media usage and perceived enjoyment is mediated by the ease of usage and perceived usefulness of the system. This suggests that the aspects, such as perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness, might result in boosted enjoyment, which is the major source of using social media platforms.

Social media platforms could permit individuals to share their activities or interests through images, videos, or text (Ghaderi et al., 2024). This kind of personal sharing on social media, particularly as an authentic kind of self-expression, could aid young females in better apprehending who they are. Experimental research by Cingel and Olsen (2018) offered evidence that young females who see their social media profiles as self-affirming mentioned that their profiles assist them in comprehending more of who they are, which subsequently raises their self-esteem.

Additionally, around 56% of the participants in the study of Yang et al (2021) outlined that social media platforms offer them the potential to maintain or form relationships online and build social connections. These relationships might offer opportunities to have positive associations with highly diverse peer groups who are accessible to them offline and could offer significant social support to young females, which ultimately fosters their overall health. Similarly, in the qualitative research of many young females documented that social media aids them in feeling highly accepted

(65%) like they possess individuals who could support them through challenging periods (78%), they are more highly connected to what is going on in their friends (70%), and they possess a safe space to demonstrate their creative side (92%). However, De and Lu (2024) claim that many individuals encounter negative reviews on their creative content, which limits them from showing their creativity skills on Facebook and Instagram.

2.5 People's Negative Perception Of the Effect of Social Media

While some people possess a positive perception of the effect of social media, other researchers discovered the negative perceptions of people regarding social media. For example, Margolis and Amanbekova (2023) unveil that many of young adults encountered negative effects of social media usage, in the form of embarrassing comments, negative photos or posts, or employing social media to spread rumours, which detrimentally erodes their overall health. In addition, people can now expose their life achievements and luxury lifestyles on social media platforms, which negatively impacts the mental health of those who cannot accomplish these things in their lives (Heikkilä, 2024). Thus, as a result, social media creates a negative image among the users. Furthermore, society's obsession with the fair and thin idea significantly spread to many users, affecting their overall cognition or perceptions, and resulting in immense anxiety among the users (Cruz et al., 2023). In addition, the research by Anto et al (2023) uncovered that around 67% of the young women participants had negative perceptions about social media usage. The participants stated that the emphasis on unrealistic beauty standards on Instagram contributes to body dissatisfaction or body image concerns among them. However, this research utilised a small sample size, which might not properly represent the population as a whole, making it challenging to generalise the research's findings to a larger population. Similarly, the systematic review by Khalaf et al (2023) indicated that many young women encountered sleep disturbance and distraction from family

activities due to the consistent use of social media sites, hence possessing a negative perception about social media. However, this study employed outdated research articles, which raises concerns about the credibility of research findings. Santos et al (2023) support this by highlighting that extreme use of Facebook and Instagram networks has been associated with poorer sleep quality, which, as a result, is associated with poor self-esteem among young women. In addition, in the research of Shahid, Yousaf, and Munir (2024), addiction was viewed in 70% of the respondents and was highly common among the age group of seventeen years and above. The most common social networking sites utilised were Instagram (75%), followed by YouTube (30%), and Facebook (67%). Mobile phones were the most common way of accessing social media platforms, followed by computers or laptops at home. The results of this study found that social media platforms influenced the academic performance of respondents by disturbing their capability to finish the work on time. Also, Ting et al (2023) found that the majority of young individuals possess negative opinions of the effect of social media use, because using social networking sites leads to loss of appetite for eating, restlessness, addiction to social media, and laziness. These negative facets also obstruct the young women's academic results, as mentioned in the research of Zavala et al (2023), who found a negative relationship between the young women's GPA and use of social networking sites. Similarly, in the research of Hill et al (2024), many young women argue that they do not consider social media as beneficial because it detrimentally influences their academic performance.

2.6 Common Social Media Habits Among Young Females

Many studies outlined the common social media habits among young individuals, especially among females. Social media has offered young females the capability to rapidly interact with others and share their life locations through status updates, videos, or photos. In the study of

Hatamleh et al (2023), many young females defined social media platforms, such as Instagram or Facebook, as the key tool for maintaining relationships or interacting with others, learning more about the world, and being creative. However, this study deployed a small sample size, which limits the generalisability of the results. Similarly, Raza et al (2020) argue that many young individuals are engaging in the usage of social networking sites primarily for socialisation instead of academic purposes.

Additionally, in the quantitative study of Bell (2019), many young females outlined that they mainly post their achievements on social media. Around 34% stated that they share things associated with their feelings or emotions on Instagram and Facebook, whereas 22% documented posts related to their dating life. However, this study utilized a questionnaire for the data collection, which posed limitations in terms of a low response rate. On the other hand, Fenton, Gillooly, and Vasilica (2023) found that many young females try to share their accomplishments with their close friends only, as they believe that they are the only genuine ones who might be happy with their achievements. Also,

Similarly, Charmaraman et al (2024) uncovered those social media platforms, especially Instagram, permit users to post their selfies and happy moments frequently, which increases their self-esteem. This finding is consistent with the study of Markey et al (2024), in which around 76% of the young females reported they mostly post their selfies on various social media platforms, particularly on Instagram and Snapchat. In contrast, Mucundorfeanu, Balaban, and Mauer (2024) showed conflicting results, as many participants (86%) claimed that they rarely post selfies on social media sites, as they start comparing themselves with others, making them highly anxious. Also, Southerton and Taylor (2020) assert that although social media platforms could be deployed for good motives, young individuals mainly utilise them for their engagement in digital snapshots,

exposing securities or engaging in online conversations because some other communities on social sites motivate users for this type of inadequate actions. Saha et al (2024) support this by arguing that social networking platforms grab the young individuals' attention and turn it towards unethical acts, such as spending half of the time on random searching, useless searching, or not doing their jobs. However, this systematic review utilised very limited research articles, which leads to a narrowed perspective and overlooking of other critical insights about the positive facets of social media.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

2.7.1 Idealism Theory

This research was underpinned by the Idealism Theory, rolled out by idealist George Berkeley and Plato (Lindén, 2024). This theory states that objects are nothing more than individuals' experience of them; the manner individuals perceive things is directly influenced by their own experience of those things. According to this theory, individuals could not possess the perception of things outside their world or which they have never had direct access to; the only direct access individuals possess is through their own experience (Young, Kananovich, and Johnson, 2-23). This suggests that young women would perceive the social media usage effects as they have encountered them, whether they are positive or negative experiences. Therefore, this research utilised this theory in comprehending what affects young women's perceptions of the effects of social media on their lives. Idealism theory is extremely relevant for this research as it defines what affects perceptions of things, since this research aimed at exploring the young women's perception of the effects of social media on their lives (Sivoronova, Vorobjovs, and Raščevskis, 2024).

2.7.2 Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) posits that individuals' thoughts structure their behaviour or feelings in relation to their surroundings (Stewart and Christner, 2024). Social media platforms detrimentally escalate the feelings of inferiority and encourage social comparison among young individuals, impacting their opinions of personality depending on online personas. As a critical part of contemporary life, especially for the young, immense involvement with social media platforms adversely influences their welfare, making them vulnerable to feelings of loneliness or isolation. CBT provides tactics to aid young individuals in challenging distorted or negative thoughts, empowering them to concentrate on the positive facets of life (Mulligan, Ayoub, and Liberti, 2024). By valuing their own opinions or capabilities and stressing self-acceptance, young women could resist obeying the idealised standards prevailing in the digital world. It is imperative for the young women to identify the online personas' deceptive nature and strike a balance between physical and digital realities to protect the young women's overall health.

2.8 Chapter Conclusion

The correlation between young women perceptions and social media usage is intricate. Much research outlined that many young women perceived social media platforms positively, as they permit them to form social connections, foster their creativity, and conduct online learning. However, there have been multiple research studies claiming that the young individuals' negative perception of social media platforms, in terms of increased sleep disturbance, waste of time, body image issues, digital addiction, and social comparison.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter offers a holistic account of the steps or methods acquired regarding how the research was performed. Particularly, this chapter concentrates on the study design, data collection process, sampling technique, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design

There are two types of research design, qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research design involves gathering and analysing non-numerical data (audio, video, or text) to apprehend experiences, opinions, and concepts (Bhangu, Provost, and Caduff, 2023). In contrast, quantitative research is the procedure of accumulating and interpreting numerical data. This study utilised a qualitative research design. The main rationale for opting for qualitative research design is that it explores behaviour or attitudes deeply, as it is more on a personal level and could permit the researcher to gain better apprehension of the young females' views on the influence of social media use (Dzogovic and Bajrami, 2023). The study did not utilise a quantitative research design because of the structural bias. Imprecise measurements, inadequate sampling techniques, and missing data could result in wrong conclusions (Fischer, Boone, and Neumann, 2023). Moreover, qualitative research concentrates on comprehending individuals' emotions or thoughts in-depth, which is essential for this research as the researcher desires to unveil the young women's perceptions about the effect of social media use in a personal and detailed manner. However, qualitative research often employs a small sample size to accumulate data regarding a particular context (Rogo, 2024). This makes it difficult for the researcher to draw a generalisable conclusion because the data might be unrepresentative and biased toward the wider population.

3.3 Research Approach

Inductive reasoning was employed as the research approach, which is the bottom-up approach that generally begins with observations or findings from particular cases and then leads to the development of generalisability or broader theories (Cheng et al., 2024). In this study, the researcher will offer conclusions related to the participants' perceptions of the effect of social media. Unlike the deductive approach, the inductive research approach builds knowledge after spotting particular patterns from the data that has been gathered (Krueger et al., 2024). Thus, using the inductive approach permits the research to look at examples of what aspects of social media contribute to negative and positive perceptions among women. However, a conclusion drawn based on the inductive method could never be completely proven, but it could be invalidated (Barroso Rojo, 2023).

3.4 Research Paradigm

The researcher deployed an interpretivism paradigm, which concentrates on the individuals' reasoning, motivations, and beliefs to gain apprehension of the young females' perceptions of the effects of social media in the UK (William, 2024). The interpretivism paradigm is suitable for this study because it draws apprehension of the phenomenon from the meaning that individuals allocate to it (Wells and Giacco, 2024). The main rationale for selecting the interpretivism paradigm is that it offers a nuanced, deep comprehension of the social phenomenon by discovering the experiences of the individuals and subjective meanings (Acharya, 2024). This approach permits the researcher to unveil insights related to the young women's perceptions of the social media that might be missed by highly rigid i.e., quantitative research. However, in the interpretivism approach, there is the likelihood of researcher bias, as the researcher's personal examination or interpretation skews results (Dahal, 2023).

3.5 Sampling and Sample Size

This research deployed a purposive sampling method, in which respondents were selected based on the particular characteristics relevant to the research (Campbell et al., 2020). The main rationale for selecting the purposive sampling method is that it permits the researcher to opt for a sample highly representative of the attributes, making it easier to accumulate rich data about the topic under examination (Ahmad and Wilkins, 2024). However, the purposive sampling method is subjective and depends on the researcher's judgment, which could cause bias in the research (Robinson, 2024). The researcher might unconsciously opt for the people who fit their preconceived notions or expectations, which could sway the study's validity.

For this research, the sample size consisted of 10 young women aged between 18 and 25 in the UK, who actively utilise social media. This age group is highly appropriate because they are among the highest social media users and are more probable to encounter positive and negative experience associated with online platforms (Goodyear, Armour, and Wood, 2019).

3.6 Recruitment

The participants of this study were recruited from social media platforms and university groups. A document advert was shared on the social media platforms which appeared directly within the feed of the study's target professions. Interested individuals completed an online form to validate eligibility and obtain an email with the interview link. Before commencing the data-gathering process, contact details and email addresses were received from the respondents which permitted the researcher to effectively share the study's information.

de Bell et al (2023) emphasize defining inclusion and exclusion criteria, as it determines which individuals of the target population can or cannot be involved in the research study. Defining exclusion and inclusion criteria raises the probability of yielding reproducible or reliable results,

decreases the probability of harm to the respondents, and protects as opposed to the vulnerable persons' exploitation (Connelly, 2020). Below are the inclusion criteria of the research;

- Young women who actively use social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, etc, were included in this study because they might offer in-depth information about their perception of the effect of social media use.

- Young women aged between 18 and 25 were included in this research because this age group is among the highest users of social media and is more probable to encounter positive and negative experiences associated with online platforms.

As far as the exclusion criteria are concerned, women who do not utilise social media regularly and are below 18 years or above 25 years were excluded from this research.

3.7 Data Collection Process

Semi-structured interviews as the data collection procedure were employed in the research. A semi-structured interview is defined as a data-gathering procedure that is dependent on asking questions in a pre-established thematic framework. The main rationale for selecting semi-structured interviews is that they are often qualitative in nature and introduce more richness or details due to their open-ended nature. Participants could be asked to rephrase, clarify, or elaborate on their answers if required, making it easier for the researcher to obtain holistic and deep insights into the impact of social media usage on young women in the UK. The researcher believed that this technique offers more detailed personal insights that could not be captured through other techniques like survey questionnaires. However, semi-structured interviews might lessen their validity. It might be difficult to compare answers or responses between respondents based on how far the interviewer departed from the defined list of questions.

All the interviews were conducted online via Zoom for around 40 to 60 minutes with each participant. Its security or recording features, relative ease of use, and low internet bandwidth demands, joined with participants' familiarity were deemed benefits of employing this platform as a substitute for in-person interviews. Before embarking on the data accumulation process, informed consent was provided to the participants, in which detailed and relevant information about the research study was mentioned, and it needed to be submitted and completed prior to interviews. This assisted the respondents in providing their experiences or insights effectively, which enhanced the results' findings.

3.8 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was recognised as the most adequate technique for the data analysis for this study. The researcher closely assesses the data to spot common themes i.e., patterns of meanings, ideas, and topics, that stem repeatedly (Christou, 2022). Thematic analysis possesses the potential to extract and illuminate deep insights from data sources and a set of initial or subsequent code groups to analyze the data. By interpreting patterns of meanings and yielding themes across data sets, the researcher could unveil subtleties or nuances that might otherwise be neglected (Braun and Clarke, 2024). These procedures ease a holistic apprehension of the respondents' viewpoints or insights about how social media usage influences the perceptions of young women. However, thematic analysis's key limitation lies in its interpretative nature, in which the analysis or identification of the themes depends greatly on the researcher's viewpoints (Christou, 2022). This subjectivity could result in variations in the analysis procedure, where distinct researchers might spot distinct themes in a similar dataset.

The thematic analysis process of this study began with the familiarisation with the data set, by getting a careful overview of the data gathered. This involved transcribing audio, generally

viewing the data to get familiar with it, and taking initial notes (Terry and Hayfield, 2020). Afterward, initial coding of the entire dataset was done, by creating a column in which initial descriptive codes were recognised and data was systematically analyses. Subsequently, themes were generated by identifying patterns among them and combining codes into themes (Ayre and McCaffery, 2022). After the formulation of themes, the entire dataset themes were reviewed within their entirety to allocate the predominate themes. These themes were reviewed in the context of entire research questions and the data they reflected (Kiger and Varpio, 2020). The last stage involves writing up the thematic analysis by employing extracts from the data to show the story the researcher is telling with the data.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethics are highly essential when conducting research. As stated by Hendon, Taylor, and Waldrep (2025), research ethics offers guidelines that facilitate the researcher to assure that the study is performed fairly, without harm, and in an objective or unbiased manner. To maintain the ethical integrity of the research, the ethical approval of this research was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the researcher's university. Moreover, an informed consent form was provided to the respondents, which outlined the study's aims and objectives, the risks or benefits of participating in the research, and the right to withdraw from the research at any time (Arellano, Alcubilla, and Leguízamo, 2023). Participants were allowed to skip sensitive questions and withdraw anytime from the research. To maintain the respondents' anonymity, a pseudonym was allocated to each of the respondents (Vorhölter, 2021). Additionally, to maintain confidentiality, the researcher conducted a discussion with the respondent that direct quotes from the interview recordings would be utilised in depicting the study findings. Furthermore, respondents' personally identifiable data was stored in a secure folder on a password-protected/encrypted laptop.

3.10 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the extensive decision related to methodology choice, analysis, methods, and complete justification of conducting the qualitative research. The next chapter offers a considerable assessment of the themes that appeared from the study, illustrating data extracted to explain their incorporation, whilst discovering their applicability to the research question.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.l Chapter Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings and results of the methods utilised; thematic analysis and semi-structured interviews, identifying their relevance to the entire research question.

4.2 Findings

2 major themes emerged from the data analysis process, including positive perceptions and negative perceptions. Both of these themes consisted of multiple subthemes, which are discussed below. The researcher has replaced the respondents' names with the participants' numbers (such as participant 1).

4.2.1 Theme 1: Positive Perceptions

Around 80% of the young women in this research shared their positive perceptions of social media usage.

4.2.1.1 Subtheme: Increased Networking and Social Relationships

35% of the young women held a positive perception about the effect of social media usage as it gives them the opportunity for social networking. Participant 1 mentioned that;

"I spend around 30 minutes on LinkedIn, which allows me to develop a professional network and seek career opportunities".

Another participant shared that;

"I perceive social media as extremely beneficial, as I made many friends online, who help me in increasing my sense of belonging and reducing loneliness".

Similarly, another young woman shared her perception by stating that;

"The best thing about social media usage is that it enables me to access both the weak and strong connections, which enhances my self-esteem".

Respondent 2 noted;

"Social media permitted me to make new friends with like-minded people, who make me feel accepted and valued. I am extremely happy that I found new people through social media sites".

4.2.1.2 Subtheme: Enhanced Creativity

Approximately 20% of the young women stated that using social media sites significantly enhances their creativity, thus, they perceive social media sites as beneficial. Participant 6 shared her opinion,

"Through social media platforms, I could now learn anything new that I desired to accomplish for myself, pursue a sport, or practice any new hobby".

Another young woman shared their perceptions about the effects of social media.

"Social media significantly enhances my creativity and painting skills; it offers me an opportunity to run my small business related to art and paintings"

Also, participant 3 highlighted that;

"I share photography, writing, and poetry on Instagram and Pinterest, and I found it quite exciting.

Moreover, respondent 7 shared;

"If we have resources and skills, everything could be put on social media platforms, from videos to graphics. I myself post cooking videos on social media and get positive reviews on them. I love social media!"

4.2.1.3 Subtheme: Social Media As an Educational Material

Social media has been found as an exceptional learning source for young women. YouTube has been found to be the most effective social media platform for academic purposes as different educators post relevant academic videos.

Around 10% of the respondents in this study acknowledged that social media significantly enhances their learning. For example, participant 8 mentioned that;

"I always use social media platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and other informational apps for my academic learning, and I have found them very beneficial"

Participant 6 shared her opinions.

"Being a creator on social media sites and interacting with others aids me in gaining varied perspectives and additional information, which could be utilised to educate several individuals".

In addition, another young woman mentioned;

"I get access to current events or new updates about my educational material. I follow many organisations, journalists, and news pages on platforms such as Facebook or Twitter in order to stay informed"

Furthermore, participant 1 stated;

"While social media platforms negatively impacted my life as an entrepreneur, I could leverage social media sites with broad audiences for customer engagement, brand promotion, and marketing campaigns

Also, respondent 2 outlined that;

"I am only using social media, especially YouTube, for the sake of information, and it also affected my learning aspect, language, and communication".

4.2.1.4 Subtheme: Builds Communication and Social Skills

Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, have played a key role in enhancing the communication and social skills of young women. In this research, approximately 10% of the young women claimed that they enhanced their social and communication skills. As stated by respondent 4;

"I have seen significant improvements in my communication skills by initiating conversations with my peers on Facebook".

Moreover, participant 10 stated;

"In my opinion, social media is very helpful. I use messaging apps, engage in group discussions, and comment on posts, which helps me in maintaining relationships and improving social skills".

In addition, respondent 5 said;

"Oh, I love Instagram, I have improved my communication skills through it".

4.2.1.5 Subtheme: Awareness and Social Activism

5% of the young women in this study use social media to raise awareness regarding social issues. Participant 3 shared her thoughts.

"I share information and participate in online campaigns related to women's harassment, to advocate for change. I believe that everyone should use social networking sites to raise awareness about social issues"

Also, respondent 9 mentioned that;

"I love Instagram and Facebook because I can share my thoughts and express myself through making videos, images, and writings about social issues".

4.2.2 Theme 2: Negative Perceptions

While many young women shared positive perceptions of the effect of social media usage, around 20% held negative perceptions.

4.2.2.1 Subtheme: Sleep

Sleep could be negatively influenced if individuals postpone bedtime so that they can continue to utilise social media for entertainment. Around 8% of the young women perceived social media negatively due to sleep disturbance issues. Participant 7 highlighted that:

"*My sleep cycle is disturbed very much because of the continuous use of Facebook at night*"

Similarly, another young woman argued that;

"*I think social media platforms are destroying young individuals, including me, as we prefer to use Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook at night, rather than go to bed to* sleep"

Participant 6 also shared her feelings.

"I have been struggling to wake up active in the morning, but I couldn't. I mostly sleep late at night, around 3:00 am, as I was using Instagram and watching reels"

4.2.2.2 Subtheme: Addictive Behaviour

Around 6% of young women might build addictive behaviour associated with social media usage, finding it challenging to disconnect, which leads to negative outcomes on their welfare. As stated by respondent 9;

"I built the habit of watching reels. I think I've gotten addicted to them, but I think this is not good as it disturbs my routine and health".

Similarly, participant 2 mentioned that;

"I do not consider social networking sites beneficial because when we start using them, we get addicted. I myself get addicted to watching videos on YouTube, which disturbs my academic life"

4.2.2.3 Subtheme: Comparison of Life

A significant contributor to negative perceptions of young females about the effect of social media was defined as the comparison that they might draw between the lives of others seen on social media platforms and their own lives. Around 6% of the participants revealed that they compare their life and body type to others. Young women particularly discussed the comparative aspects that were external to their physical welfare. A general comparison thread was that of the respondents' social lives, for instance, viewing the enjoyment that their friends experienced from the social gatherings or how many friends others had. Viewing such content from friends might drive young women to become anxious. Participant 2 stated;

"When my friends post a lot of content related to their lives, whilst I'm just at my home, not doing anything unique, I always worry that I must really be doing something or that I'm not doing enough"

Participants also outlined that they compared their life accomplishments to others, stating that it declines their health among them about not meeting a similar standard. For example, respondent 5 mentioned;

"Seeing the success of others and then comparing it to my dearth of success further pushes me down"

Additionally, another young woman (participant 3) stated that;

"I see my friends are fully enjoying their lives and accomplishing all the things they desire, but

I'm not doing anything"

4.2.2.4 Subtheme: Comparison of Body Type

Young women mentioned that image-based social media platforms, such as Instagram, as they accompanied them compare their body or overall physical appearance to the perceived individuals that they saw on these platforms. Participant 5 stated that;

"I had a problem with the body picture. It was not a big thing, but it played repeatedly in my

brain. On Instagram, many individuals, including my friends post pictures in which their bodies

look perfect. This always makes me feel insecure"

Similarly, participant 8 shared her feelings;

"I believe that influencers always increase my insecurity, as they have great body types

and appearances that could make me quite insecure"

Moreover, participant 10 mentioned;

"All of my friends have perfect bodies, which everyone idealises, and when they post their

pictures, I start to feel insecure"

4.2.3 Theme 3: Patterns of Social Media Usage Among Young Women

Almost every young woman in this research acknowledged using social media platforms in their free time, where 57% of the respondents mostly use Instagram, 30% use Snapchat and Facebook, and 13% use YouTube or LinkedIn. For instance, respondent 1 shared that;

"I mostly spend 1-2 hours on Instagram daily to watch some reels"

Also, participant 4 mentioned;

"Oh, yeah! I love YouTube videos, so I spend approximately 30 minutes watching them regularly. I don't consider it a waste of time because I always learned something new or interesting from videos"

Similarly, another young woman stated;

"I mostly spend 1 hour using Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Snapchat regularly, I love that time"

Despite having sleep issues, participant 7 claimed that;

"Although using social media disturbed my sleeping pattern, I still enjoy it and spend approximately 45-50 minutes on social media, especially at night"

Respondent 10 also argued that;

"I get addicted to social media, I think, because after every 30-40 minutes, I open Instagram and start watching reels"

4.3 Discussion

This research aims to examine the perceptions and opinions of young women about the effect of social media on their lives. This study utilised in-depth semi-structured interviews to better comprehend the young women's perceptions about the effect of social media on their lives. The findings of this research significantly contribute to the growing body of literature about the perception/opinion of young women on the multifaceted effect of social media on their lives.

The results of this research are consistent with the idealism theory, which states that people cannot own the things' perceptions outside their world; the only direct access people possess is through

their own experiences. The findings of this research showed that young women perceive both the social media usage effects as positive and negative as they have experienced them. Many young women have encountered a significant increase in creativity skills, social skills, and communication skills, hence, they perceive social media positively. On the other hand, some encountered sleep disturbance and compared their life with others, thus, they consider social media platforms negative or ineffective.

The findings of this research revealed that young women perceived social media positively and considered social media sites to be beneficial, as they permit them to show their creativity on these platforms. These findings are consistent with the study by Hanckel et al (2019), who shared similar results. However, these findings contradict the results of De and Lu (2024), which indicate that posting negative comments on someone's content limits them from sharing their further creative content on social media. Most people often share things on social media platforms which are personal or that they are struggling with. When other individuals relate to them, they could demonstrate empathy by encouraging others through comments or messages.

 Improving social relationships and connecting with others also enable young women to perceive social networking sites as favourable and positive. Many respondents in this study mentioned that they have developed multiple friendships and connected with several professionals. This finding is aligned with the research by Nguyen et al (2024), who showed that young individuals could access diverse professionals and resources, which assist them in building professional networks. The study by Kligler-Vilenchik and Literat (2025), also shared similar results. In contrast, this finding contradicts the research by Noori, Sayes, and Anwari (2023), who assert that connecting with the wrong person on social media platforms might damage social relationships. Young women in this research also hold positive perceptions about social media usage because they have

enhanced their social and communication skills through engaging in posts or comments and interacting with their peers. This finding is aligned with the past study by Connock (2024, which also suggests that engaging in social media sites enhances communication and social skills. These findings suggest that engaging in social media platforms, especially Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, significantly fosters the overall health of young individuals and transforms their perceptions towards a positive side as they permit them to build social connections, foster social skills, and show creativity. Enhancing the spectrum of possible connections could aid individuals in recognising particular parties with collective goals or shared interests, encountering similar issues, or even tools for finishing a mutual task. The findings of this study also suggest that through social media, young females could reach out to new connections and start building relationships with them. It is also an easy way to strengthen existing relationships with friends or family who have moved away by hosting video calls, sharing photos, and sending messages. In this research, many young women also use social media platforms, especially YouTube and Twitter, for educational purposes, hence perceiving social networking sites as beneficial for academic learning. This finding is consistent with the research by Connolly (2023), who concluded that social media could be utilised for academic support. Additionally, some participants shared that social media is highly effective for them as it permits them to explore new business opportunities. For example, social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram host barter pages, community trade groups, or non-profit events, making it easier for people to expand on their business opportunities.

Although the majority of the young women in this study held positive opinions about the effect of social media on their lives, a few of them also held negative perceptions about the effect of social media use. The findings of this research showed that many young women started to compare their lives, in terms of achievements, lifestyle, and body images, which detrimentally affects their

overall health. These results are consistent with the past literature, which suggests that when individuals share their luxury lifestyle of life achievements with others through social media platforms, it negatively impacts those who could not attain all these things in their lives due to financial and family issues (Heikkilä, 2024). Social media platforms, especially Instagram, stress unrealistic beauty standards in terms of a thin and fair body, which contributes to detrimental body dissatisfaction among those having darker skin tones or who are fat. This suggests an immediate necessity for educational measures intended to boost resilience and digital literacy among young women, especially within the context of social media platforms' pervasive influence. Sleep disturbance is another significant factor that induces negative perceptions of social media usage among young women in this research. This finding is aligned with the research by Khalaf et al (2023), which also mentioned that consistent use of social media sites leads to sleep disturbances among individuals.

This research also demonstrated that 57% of the young women mostly use Instagram, 30% use Snapchat and Facebook, and 13% use YouTube or LinkedIn. This finding aligned with the research by Boulianne, Hoffmann, and Bossetta (2024), who claimed that social media usage was higher among young women, where Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook were the most famous online platforms. However, this research did not investigate patterns of social media usage among young men. Future research must focus on investigating the perceptions of both young women and men about the effect of social media to better understand which gender spends more time on the internet. This research also suggests that despite having sleep problems, many young women still enjoy social media. The study also found that spending time on social media platforms, especially on YouTube, enhances the knowledge base among young women, and they do not consider it a

waste of time. This research contradicts the research of Chen et al (2023), who discovered that using social media platforms is a waste of time.

In conclusion, while young women hold positive perceptions about the effect of social media on their lives in terms of opportunity to show creativity, build relationships, enhance communication or socialising, and boost learning, the possible negative perceptions of young women about the negative effect of social media, such as addiction, comparison of life, and sleep disturbance could not be overlooked. Tackling these challenges demands a cooperative effort among social media platforms, policymakers, and educators to build holistic tactics that attenuate risks and encourage healthier online experiences for young females. Future research must concentrate on these dynamics across diverse cultural settings to foster individuals' apprehension of social media's influence on young women's lives.

4.4 Chapter Conclusion

From the data analysis process, 3 major themes appeared: patterns of social media use among young women, negative perceptions, and positive perceptions, where both negative and positive perceptions also consisted of many subthemes. The findings showed that many young women held positive perceptions about social media usage because it offers them an opportunity to show their creativity on social networking sites, enhance social relationships, foster communication or social skills, and raise social awareness. However, others claimed that using social media makes individuals addicted to it, leads to sleep issues, and pressures young women to start comparing their bodies or lives with others. The next chapter will offer a conclusion and discuss the implications of the research, limitations, and direction of future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research aims to investigate the perceptions or opinions of young women about the effect of social media on their lives. The utilised qualitative research design and data were gathered from the semi-structured interviews. After completing data analysis, 3 major themes appeared: patterns of social media use among young women, negative perceptions, and positive perceptions, where both negative and positive perceptions also consisted of many subthemes. The findings of this study are consistent with the Idealism theory, which posits that individuals might not own the views of things outside their world; the major direct access individuals have is through their experiences. The results of this study demonstrated that young women consider the effects of social media platforms, both as negative and positive, because they have encountered them. Almost 80% of the young women consider the effect of social media as positive, whereas 20% perceive social media as negative. This study found that young women significantly share their creativity in terms of writing, poetry, painting, or cooking on social networking sites. Many participants also used YouTube, Twitter, or other educational apps for their academic learning. Social networking sites also enabled young women of this group to foster their communication and social skills and build social connections by interacting with others through messages and commenting on posts. Social media gives young females significant opportunities to discover new business opportunities, increase creativity by running small businesses, build professional networks, and make new friends. Raising social issues on social platforms has also been found to be a significant factor in escalating young women's positive perceptions towards the effects of social media. These findings are consistent with the past literature, which also suggests that using social networking sites significantly improves the overall health of young individuals as they can build social connections,

share their creativity, start their business, and learn from one another. Although the majority of the young women held positive perceptions about the effect of social media usage, a few of them also held negative opinions about the effect of social media usage on their lives. They claimed that using social networking platforms disturbed their sleep and made them addicted. Some respondents also argued that they started comparing their lives and body images with others, including their friends and influencers, which negatively impacted their overall health. The findings of this study contribute to apprehending the particular issues faced by young females in the UK, providing precious insights that might inform future interventions to mitigate social media usage negative influence among young individuals. The findings of this research suggest that the ways in which young females are utilising social media might have more of an influence on their welfare and mental health than the duration or frequency of the use. Positive connections and networking significantly reduce feelings of low self-esteem, social isolation, and loneliness.

5.2 Implications

The present research made a major contribution to the literature by effectively discovering the under-researched area. Although several studies examined the people perceptions of the effect of social media usage on their lives, the literature is restricted to the perceptions of the young women about the effect of social media usage on their lives in the UK. The significant implication of this current research is that educating children on safety and how to deploy the advantages of the internet ought to be taught to children at a very young age. Educating them on how to stay safe and avoid harm could aid them in mitigating their experiences with the negative facets of social networking sites. With the invention of modern technology, young individuals will continue to use and be exposed to social media platforms. It is essential to educate future and current generations on how to mitigate the social media's negative effects. By educating future or current users,

encouraging digital detox exercises, raising awareness, and boosting online connections, individuals, especially young women, could acquire energetic initiatives and better their overall welfare in an increasingly social media world. Moreover, public health campaigns must be rolled out to raise awareness regarding the possible risks linked with social media usage and encourage healthy online behaviours. There is also a critical role in training experts or professionals to spot and tackle the problems emerging from social media usage, including its impact on interpersonal relationships and self-esteem. Additionally, this research paves the way for future study endeavours, voicing the holistic exploration of the intricate aspects that sway young women's perceptions of the effect of social media usage. By delving into these complications, we could build more targeted tactics or interventions to aid young individuals in navigating the digital landscape positively. Overall, the goal is to strengthen our understanding of these nuances to boost a healthier online environment for everybody.

5.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study possesses various limitations, which provide direction for future research. Firstly, the sample size consisted of only young females, which leads to skewed results and findings that might not be generalisable to other populations. Future research should focus on studying the perceptions of the effect of social media usage on both genders to easily compare and study the social media usage patterns. Secondly, this research did not integrate quantitative data, which could have offered a stronger relationship between social media usage and young women's perceptions of it. For instance, quantitative metrics could have shown the rise in sleep disturbance. Thus, future research should examine the relationship between social media usage patterns among young females through quantitative research, by using a questionnaire survey as the data collection method. Moreover, the findings of this research are not generalisable to other populations and countries, as

they are only associated with young females in the UK. Future studies must widen the research sample to involve respondents from greater demographics and countries, which is highly representative of the population. Also, the semi-structured interviews' online nature might result in less open communication due to the lack of face-to-face interaction. Lastly, throughout semi-structured interviews, it was recognised that various social media platforms possess a greater influence on the negative perceptions of the effect of social media. Respondents outlined that platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, influenced them more than others, thus stressing the necessity for future examination and drawing granularity or comparisons in relation to individual platforms.

This research's findings opened out new avenues for discovery, aiming to boost individuals' comprehension of the young women's opinions about the effect of social media usage. Strategies to attenuate the negative impact of social media usage include offering workshops and resources on social media usage and coping strategies to mitigate exposure to the negative impact. Healthcare professionals should build and assess intervention tactics modified to educate clients about the effect of social media on their health and sleep. By executing these collaborative initiatives and holistic tactics, individuals could eliminate the social media adverse effect on young women. This approach aims to boost a more informed or healthier approach to engaging in online platforms.

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