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How does social media help students cope with everyday hassles and stressors?

Sara Richards

How does social media help students cope with everyday hassles and stressors?

### ABSTRACT

**Social media has vastly grown in recent years, and has turned into a coping strategy for some individuals. This qualitative study explores the uses of social media as a coping strategy for students when experiencing everyday hassles and stressors. Eight undergraduate students based in the United Kingdom were interviewed about their social media use using semi-structured interviewing. Participants were recruited using opportunity sampling, where individuals were told they had to use social media networks, and the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Three main overarching themes were found; the uses of social media, public and private, and individual reactions and actions. Findings suggest that the main uses of social media were communication, posting about their hassles, stressors and uplifts, and browsing the web for materials such as people they knew and celebrities' posts and for entertainment. Also, findings found that there are two aspects to individuals' social media platforms; their public profiles and posts, and their private forms. The reactions and actions were varied among the participants regarding the effects of 'likes' and followers on the individual's mood/self-consciousness, and also using social media as a coping strategy.**

KEY WORDS:	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	SOCIAL MEDIA	COPING STRATEGY	EVERYDAY HASSLES AND STRESSORS	STUDENTS
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## **Introduction**

### **Social Media**

Social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook in the last decade have evolved into a popular activity for millions of users (Schmalz et al., 2014). It has changed the way people worldwide communicate with others about information, share interests, develop friendships, and to seek social support (Sriwilai and Charoensukmongkol, 2015; Ridings and Gefen, 2004). Individuals can also express their opinions and reactions to certain events on social media applications (Gaspar et al., 2016) and also express themselves in their traits and interests, especially younger individuals (Inglehart, 2008). Currently, individuals expressing themselves are at record height, with individuals depending on social network platforms to express themselves correctly and positively (Orehek and Human, 2017).

With over two-hundred-and-eighty-eight million users on Twitter, an average of five-hundred million messages are posted per day (Orehek and Human, 2017). In the last few years, the number of individuals who use Twitter has grown, in particular of users between the age of eighteen and twenty-nine, with 37% of them using the network (Duggan et al., 2014).

The psychological viewpoint of 'digital trust and trustworthy behaviour on the internet' is a pretty new aspect of individual behaviour research (Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018:303). As social media has grown phenomenally, individuals have found it hard to imagine a life without it, due to the simplicity of finding out what is going on in the world; rather than having to read the newspaper or watch the news on the television (Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018). Some individuals publish information about themselves on the internet without any concerns about privacy (Tufekci, 2008). It is also possible for individuals to express themselves, as they can share features with less worry for dismissal or criticism, rather than direct face-to-face communication with people they know (Bargh et al., 2002).

On the social networking websites, users can produce their own posts, which allows them to self-express explicitly through self-publication, and implicitly through the use of words (VanLear et al., 2005); therefore it is possible that users are recognised with some accuracy.

Despite the benefits of social media, there are clearly some problems with it. This involves more people, in particular adolescents, are becoming addicted (Koc and Gulyagci, 2013), and it is becoming more common for users to restrain themselves from using social media (Karaiskos et al., 2010; Kuss and Griffiths, 2011).

### **Everyday Hassles and Stressors**

Everyday hassles are seen as bothersome, irritating, distressing applications that to some extent indicates everyday activity with the environment (Kanner et al., 1981). They apply to minor happenings of everyday life, such as handling personal and professional life with family and money worries (Pavalache-Ilie and Rioux, 2017; Kanner et al., 1981). Also, small, unanticipated events, such as aggravating problems, for example losing an item, or being stuck in traffic, and unforeseen circumstances such as rough weather, along with arguments and dissatisfaction (Kanner et al., 1981) can be considered hassles.

Moreover, everyday stressors can be considered to be taken for granted, as the unit of stress is somewhat small and the stressor is thought to be minor compared to other more intense stressors (McLean, 1976). They are of low severity and are occasional, however, can add up in one day and have a significant influence on the involved individual's daily life (Bruchon-Schweitzer, 2002).

### **Students' hassles and stressors**

Presently, university students use social media platforms such as Facebook on average of 100 minutes a day, where they interact with peers mostly by posting and looking at photos (Junco, 2012). Hassles and stressors differ as adolescents encounter various events in life, (Dewald et al., 2014) and have been related to troubles with moods (Sim, 2000). For students, the change of position from a sixth form or college student to a university undergraduate is a great change, that usually involves the student moving from familiar surroundings to one that is unknown (Pavalache-Ilie and Rioux, 2017). This new phase in their lives produces new pressure as they have to adopt new administrative and domestic duties that were not their responsibility at home, for example, housework, financial pressure, finding a way to support their education, uncertainty in the city, complication in handling unfamiliarity and uncertainty, isolation and the stress to do well at work. All of these can cause everyday hassles and stressors foreign to them up to their time at university (Pavalache-Ilie and Rioux, 2017).

Examinations are a common example of a stressful event for a student. The apprehension of, and preparing for it, can be stressful as being a successful student is an essential feature of how they view themselves; the result of the exam can influence their opinion of themselves and how they are seen by others (Sherman et al., 2009).

### **Using social media as a coping mechanism**

When experiencing daily hassles and stressors, individuals have different coping strategies to feel better. Social media as a coping strategy is used differently by every individual. It suggests that individuals who use social media as a coping strategy, use emotion-focused coping to help ease psychological pressure rather than problem-focused coping (Baker and Berenbaum, 2011). As emotion-focused coping only allows individuals to distract themselves temporarily from stress, it may cause more stress long term, therefore it is a flawed method (Chang, 2012). Problem-focused coping, on the other hand, allows individuals to eliminate the source of stress and secures positive outcomes (Hsieh et al., 2012; Lewin and Sager, 2008). Also, lack of mindfulness, suggests that individuals use emotion-focused coping when using social media to cope (Sriwilai and Chaoensukmongkol, 2015).

### **The Present Study**

Social media in psychological research is still a rather new topic, therefore it is understandable that there are still gaps currently. There is a lack of qualitative research on this topic, which also inspired this research. This research will expand on Sriwilai and Charoensukmongkol (2015)'s exploration of the impact of social media addiction on coping strategies, mindfulness, and the consequences of emotional exhaustion. Moreover, Tiggeman and Slater (2015) researched the relationship between adolescents' depressive symptoms and the use of social media, which

resulted in a significant weak positive correlation. Both of these studies did not focus on everyday hassles in individuals without mental health problems, that inspired this study.

Furthermore, some qualitative studies that looked at social media and psychological wellbeing include Fergie et al., (2016) that focused on young adults' viewpoints on creating, and consuming, user-generated content about mental health and diabetes. They found that online friendships support long-term mental health problems. Also, they found that the internet has the potential of offering ways to access other people's experiences, that can positively help others, although it can also provide individuals to engage with health content and other supportive networks (Fergie et al., 2016). Furthermore, creating and consuming content created by other users, is an action embedded within individuals' specific health experiences, and is affected by offline contexts, along with their daily usage with various social media platforms, and the expectations from the other individuals within the social media environment (Fergie et al., 2016). Additionally, Singleton et al., (2016) analysed the interaction between online social networking experiences, and wellbeing in twelve young individuals looking at mental health services. Despite how they received 'connection and support' on the sites, they also experienced 'threats and judgement'. Both Fergie et al., (2016) and Singleton et al., (2016) therefore suggest that using social media as a coping mechanism is problematic.

The motive for this research is to broaden the knowledge on social media usage, and to understand why individuals use it as a coping mechanism for everyday hassles and stressors. This research will not be conducted on individuals with mental health problems, as this has been studied previously. Currently, there is no study that has looked at how healthy individuals use social media to cope with daily hassles and stressors; it will explore how it is not only individuals experiencing mental health problems that turn to social media as a coping mechanism. Focusing on Kanner et al., (1981)'s study on individuals' daily hassles will guide this study, rather than mental health problems.

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection. The flexibility of this form of interviewing allows participants to deviate and expand on their opinions rather than be restrained by fixed answers with the reduction of interpersonal bias (Langdrige and Hagger-Johnson, 2013).

### **Participants**

Eight undergraduate students (males:  $N = 1$  and females:  $N = 7$ ) in England and Wales, and ranged in age from 18-21 ( $M = 20.125$ ) were interviewed. They were collected using opportunity sampling and were told that they had to use social media. In order to keep confidentiality, the participants are referred to by pseudonyms.

**Table 1.** Information regarding the participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Number of social networks they are members of</b>	<b>How long on social media per day</b>
Grace	21	Female	6	“the majority of my day” (Grace, 35)
Anna	21	Female	7	“most hours I’d say” (Anna, 43)
William	20	Male	6	“Probably a few, say three, two three hours” (William, 38)
Naomi	21	Female	2	“Probably about five or six, quite a lot” (Naomi, 37)
Lauren	20	Female	6	“maybe like six to ten hours” (Lauren, 35)
Ella	18	Female	4	“Most of the time, so probably $\frac{3}{4}$ of the day” (Ella, 28)
Lisa	20	Female	5	“probably between half an hour and an hour” (Lisa, 26)
Emma	20	Female	4	“probably like full two hours” (Emma, 39)

## **Procedure**

The Psychology Research Ethics Committee (PsychREC) of Manchester Metropolitan University granted ethical approval for this study (see appendix 1). Individuals were asked to take part in a study involving students and the use of social media. Nine semi-structured interviews were held lasting between 15-30 minutes. A voice recording device was set up to record the interview, while the participants were asked to read the participant information sheet, and then asked if they were happy to sign a consent form.

All interviews involved one student (the participant), and the researcher in a quiet room. The interview included open-ended questions (for example ‘what are your opinions on the number of ‘likes’ you receive on posts?’), where participants could elaborate on their opinions.

Participants were then thanked for their contribution and were debriefed. They were allowed to ask questions or raise concerns to the researcher and were given the

researcher's contact details. The withdrawal process was clarified in order to confirm that they were aware of their right to withdraw their data. All data was kept under lock and key, and could only be accessed by the researcher. They were also aware that all data would be confidential and they would be referred to as a pseudonym.

The researcher followed ethical guidelines throughout the study, participants were fully aware that the decision to participate was completely their own and were aware that they could withdraw at any point. Information was given verbally by the researcher and also more extensive in the participant information sheet. Written consent was collected from all participants and they were debriefed accordingly.

## **Data analysis**

Findings for this research will be constructed by the participants' experiences and opinions (Sutton and Austin, 2015). Data will be analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method of analysis was chosen due to the flexibility, how it can summarise the main aspects of data and give a wide description, and also show the similarities and differences across the data, which is one of the aims of this study (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Moreover, it allows grouping and depiction of the data to be in full detail and also interpret different facets of the topic researched (Boyatzis, 1998).

## **Analysis & Discussion**

Three main overarching themes were identified from the interviews using thematic analysis: (i) uses for social media, (ii) public and private and (iii) individual reactions and actions.

### **Uses for social media**

Over the past few years, social media has grown into a popular activity for millions of users (Schmalz et al., 2014). Some of the uses found in the analysis of the interviews were communication, posting and looking at posts, and browsing the web.

#### *Communication*

In social media, people have more chances to identify the diverse outlooks of others, as they inadvertently reveal themselves to different materials and share their opinions with other individuals (Brundidge, 2010; Kim et al., 2013). The root importance of using social media is that it constructs social relationships, by making friends through minor communication or taking part in communal societies (Jin, 2015), and also allowing people to companionably assist each other (Nabi et al., 2013). Individuals are more likely to communicate with other and become connected with others rather than browse the web (Vorderer et al., 2016).

On popular sites such as Facebook and Twitter, due to the number of people on these sites, individuals are able to meet and communicate with other individuals and "follow a variety of people" (Grace, 8). Users also can turn to social media when feeling alone, as they can message their online friends, or also message other friends instead of meeting in person. The participants expressed how they enjoyed using social media to communicate with other individuals:



“your Instagram followers ‘like’ all your stuff, comment on it, your Twitter followers you interact and stuff so even if you haven’t met them then you kind of ‘know them?’” (Grace, 131-133)

“I absolutely love that I’ve made amazing friends on social media, it’s crazy to think if it wasn’t for Twitter I wouldn’t know them. I also love keeping in contact with everyone, seeing what my friends and family are up to” (Anna, 190-192)

Dolev-Cohen and Barak (2013) suggest that communicating online is helpful for nervous, shy or depressive young people, which was also accurate for experiencing hassles and stressors. Social media is an easy way to keep in contact with friends and family when starting to experience hassles and stressors: “if I’m feeling lonely and I start messaging one of my friends and I feel a bit better” (Lisa, 86). It is also possible to keep in touch with people that you may not have been able to keep in touch with before:

“I’ve been travelling and stuff and you meet people, it’s good to keep in contact and then for messaging” (Naomi, 11-13).

It is also possible to meet friends online (Ybarra et al., 2005; Sriwilai and Charoensukmongkol, 2015). Some participants mentioned that they had met friends on some websites: “I’ve met people through [Twitter]” (Grace, 8-9), as people can share their interests and find others who also share their interests:

“you can just connect with people and I do think it’s quite nice, especially if you live in a small town and there’s not many people there who share your interests. It’s quite nice to be able to just log on and find all of these people who are into the same thing that you are and you can bond over it” (Lauren, 197-200).

Some interests that were mentioned was music and celebrities: “I’ve met a lot of my online friends at concerts I go to” (Grace, 113). Through swooning over celebrities on websites, individuals can find others who feel the same as they do, and they can speak to each other and discuss information regarding the celebrities:

“I went through a phase of liking heavy metal bands and there’s a big community for that on Tumblr, so it was kind of nice you know we’d talk about the new songs coming out and fangirl over it” (Lauren, 136-138).

The development of social media has dramatically changed communication for individuals also in finding a partner online (Arvidsson, 2006). This can vary in either regular social networking websites such as Facebook; (“I met my boyfriend online”; “I stalked [him] on Facebook” William, 88;93-94), or specifically dating websites such as Tinder (“I’ve also been on dating sites and met guys” Anna, 122-123).

## **Posting on Social Media**

Due to its mass development, some individuals have turned to social media when experiencing hassles and stressors, to post about their struggles to find support from others they see similar to themselves in order to cheer up (Singleton et al., 2016). Individuals may do this for different reasons: “I always express how I feel on Twitter and I feel like I don’t really get judged on there” (Anna, 8-9). Letting their worries out can also make them feel better rather than keeping it to themselves: “it’s kind of my

go-to release” (Grace, 65), “I think too much, and I post it online so it’s not clouding my brain” (Anna, 56).

Various hassles and stressors that students may post about involve other people: “if someone’s pissing you off you can moan about them on it” (Grace, 50-51), work: “I was really stressed at work, and I posted something on Twitter like ‘what a day’” (Emma, 54-55), and university work:

“I have a lot of deadlines at the moment, and I moan a lot on my Twitter that I’m stressed and that I have too much work to do and that I’m frustrated” (Anna, 64-65).

Some individuals also admitted to sometimes posting what could be considered as ‘too much information’ on social media. Examples of these included: “probably my sex life” (Grace, 91), “I’ve spoken about sex good or bad, period pains, other pains, bad experiences” (Anna, 109), however, she admitted that they were “stuff [she] shouldn’t really say” (Anna, 110). Moreover, it seems that emotions can have an effect on some posts: “it’s easy to overshare, especially if you’re feeling a little bit down in the dumps or angry” (Lauren, 109-110) and also whether one is under the influence of alcohol:

“sometimes when I’ve had too much wine I’ll say loads of stuff, but I’m so embarrassed the next day I delete everything” (Anna, 110-111).

In Radovic et al., (2017)’s study, it was also found that some negative posts that individuals post included “oversharing”, and “stressed posting”. Along with hassles and stressors, some individuals will also post about their uplifts (Radovic et al., 2017), which more participants admitted they were more willing to do rather than their hassles and stressors:

“I don’t tend to share loads of things about my life because I don’t think it’s really ... you don’t need everyone knowing about your life” (Naomi, 51-52)

“I try not to [post about hassles and stressors], I don’t like being vulnerable in that way” (Lisa, 56). Some uplifts that participants say they post about included university: “I said that I got accepted to university” (Ella, 111), “I’ll tweet if I pass an essay or an exam” (Grace, 118) and also accomplishments, for example, passing a driving test:

“When I passed my driving test at 17 I posted on Facebook though because I was so happy I couldn’t keep it in” (Anna, 160-161),

and reaching a goal in a fundraiser: “whenever we reach something good I’m like ‘ooh this happened’” (William, 105).

## **Browsing the web**

Browsing the web is a popular use for social media for individuals (Sampasa-Kanyinga and Hamilton, 2015): “I’m basically always browsing” (Grace, 34). When experiencing everyday hassles, despite maybe not always posting about their struggles, they would use it to look through:

“say I go on Twitter and then I get bored of that so I’ll go straight to Instagram and then I go to Tumblr and then I go to Snapchat” (Lauren, 36-38)

“on Instagram, I’d look through people’s pictures and on Snapchat just talk to people and Facebook just see what people are doing” (Ella, 70-71).

On these websites individuals can look at people they know, others, for example, various internet personalities, and celebrities’ photos and posts: (“see what’s going on, either in people I know’s lives or celebrities’ lives” Anna, 49-50). Artists can also post their artwork on these sites to gain publicity or advice: “I really like seeing what other artists are working on, I really like seeing works in progress and behind the scenes kind of things” (Lisa, 150-151).

A few participants admitted that they enjoy being nosy and inquisitive on other people’s posts: “I like going on there just to see some drama” (William, 130-131); “I’m just a bit nosy I think” (Lauren, 79); “I like Facebook because it gives you loads of information to be nosy” (Emma, 11). This can be due to different reasons, for example feeling like they are not alone when experiencing hassles and stressors: “you know there’s always someone like you” (Lauren, 95) or comparing their life to others and thinking that their experiences are not as negative: “at least my life isn’t this bad” (Grace, 74-75).

Social media websites can also give individuals entertainment (Radovic et al., 2017): “it’s one of my main sources of entertainment” (William, 133). Some examples included using video-sharing website YouTube:

“I’ll somehow get on YouTube and get onto the weird side of things so it kind of cheers me up” (Grace, 73-74).

Some examples of YouTube videos mentioned were beauty videos: “I usually look up makeup tutorials” (Grace, 40); autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) videos: “all these ASMR and watching them make all these noises and their faces and stuff” (Grace, 79-80) and funny videos: “just general funny videos to keep me entertained” (William, 132-133). Memes, which typically are a picture, video, or a quotation that is comical and is copied and spread by users of the internet, were mentioned as a form of entertainment: “I like looking at all the memes” (Grace, 41-42).

Some of the social media platforms that were most mentioned were Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Firstly, Twitter was said to be easy to post on: “it’s easier just to tweet rather than post on Facebook” (Grace, 9). People are also able to see information on Twitter for example what other people say: “just seeing other people’s opinions on the world” (Lauren, 9-10); “[Twitter] gives me even more information because you can see what people actually think” (Emma, 12-13).

Instagram is recognised for its visual aspects: “I just like seeing nice photos and stuff and videos” (William, 17); “think I like it because it’s more visually appealing and it’s about the pictures” (Lauren, 10-11). Instagram can also be used to gain inspiration: “you can see other people’s profiles and it’s good for ideas and different things like food and outfits” (Naomi, 14-15) and also for artists to show their artwork: “I’m an artist and it’s a really good platform for advertising my work or showing my work because it’s such a visual set up” (Lisa, 12-13).

Furthermore, Facebook allows people to keep up with others they are familiar with: “it keeps you connected to people that you’ve met” (Naomi, 11) and see what they are up to: “you can see what people are doing” (Ella, 11). People also can keep

in touch with others by messaging them through Facebook's add-on, Facebook Messenger:

"it's good to keep in contact, and then for messaging, like I find I don't really have people's numbers now I just message them on Facebook sort of thing" (Naomi, 12-14).

Similar findings were found in Knight-McCord et al.'s (2016) study, where it was discovered that Instagram was the most used social networking sites, with Snapchat and Facebook following. However, Snapchat was not mentioned by the participants in this study while Twitter was not considered in Knight-McCord et al.'s study.

## **Public and private**

Public and private was a theme that came up in the data. The participants spoke about their various social media accounts and their posts.

### **Public**

Psychological viewpoints of trust on the internet is a new aspect of human research (Warner-Söderholm et al., 2018). When referring to public accounts, individuals meant that it was open for anyone: "anyone can follow [my public Twitter]" (Grace, 26). Not all accounts for different social media were public for the participants, as different networks have different purposes for them, for example, a work account for artists: "[my Instagram] is a public account but that's because it's more of a work account" (Lisa, 17). Twitter and Instagram appeared to be popular sites that were public for the individuals: "I'll allow anyone, apart from Facebook, stuff like Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr, anyone can follow me" (William, 26-27).

### **Privacy**

It is suggested that people tend to express themselves on the internet without considering privacy (Tufekci, 2008), however, this did not seem the case with the participants. Though it may seem contradictory, privacy seemed to be more popular than public regarding social media. Participants said that they tend to allow Facebook for people they knew rather than everyone: "I don't like other people I don't know adding me" (Ella, 20); "my Facebook you have to send me a friend request and I don't accept unless I know them" (Naomi, 28-29). This seemed to be as they were conscious about what they said on the accounts: "I don't want everyone to see what I say" (Emma, 25), however despite having people she knew on Facebook, it meant nothing: "it doesn't mean as much to me because I don't put anything on Facebook" (Emma, 145).

It was found that some also had two accounts for websites such as Twitter, where one was considered more public than the other: "I have a normal Twitter and private Twitter" (Grace, 13). The 'private account' seemed to be only allowed for people who the individual was closest to: "on my private Twitter, only my closest friends follow me" (Anna, 27-28). This was due to them posting private thoughts: "I can post really personal things on there and I don't want everyone to see and think I'm mad" (Anna, 28-29). To keep 'private accounts' individuals use nicknames and use restricted privacy settings (Pietkiewicz and Włodarczyk, 2015).

Moreover, a participant mentioned how she uses Tumblr as a private account: “my Tumblr is way more private than my Twitter would be” (Lauren, 16) and that she doesn’t allow just anyone to follow it:

“this one girl from back home and we went to high school together, and I never really liked her that much, and I don’t know how but she managed to find my Tumblr and I blocked her straight away, I have no idea how she managed to find me but I wasn’t comfortable with her following something a bit more private” (Lauren, 22-25).

### **Individual reactions and actions**

A variety of reactions were gathered from the data. The participants spoke about the effects of ‘likes’ on the individual’s mood/self-consciousness, the effect of followers on their profiles, and moreover, how they thought about social media as a coping strategy.

### **Effects of ‘likes’ on the individual’s mood/self-consciousness**

Typically, social media include a lot of photo-sharing by both celebrities and peers (Lenhart, 2015). ‘Likes’ on photos refer to when someone posts something, such as photos, and other people will ‘like’ that photo, giving it a number of ‘likes’. Research suggests that self-consciousness does not have a significant effect on receiving ‘likes’, however, it was significantly related with the amount of giving ‘likes’ (Hong et al., 2017). In the current age, the amount of ‘likes’ has developed into something quite big: “[the amount of ‘likes’ on posts and photos] is such a big thing I think” (Grace, 140). This can have an effect on individuals’ self-esteem:

“when you see some girls get hundreds or thousands of ‘likes’ on a photo and you just get tens, it’s a bit of a downer” (Anna, 184-185).

Participants stated how much ‘likes’ meant to them: “I love getting ‘likes’” (Lauren, 184). The more ‘likes’ that someone gets, the better they feel about themselves: “If you don’t get enough ‘likes’ you might think it’s not good enough and then delete it.” (Anna, 183-184), while not getting much can have a negative effect: “I would be a bit depressed if I put something on and it’d get one ‘like’” (Emma, 150-151).

Additionally, it was suggested that receiving ‘likes’ on photos was highly positive as it could raise self-esteem and moods: “I know that it releases dopamine when you get ‘likes’” (Naomi, 127-128).

On the other hand, Lisa thought differently about how ‘likes’ does not define who someone is: “I don’t think the amount of followers and ‘likes’ and stuff you have kind of means anything about you” (Lisa, 135-136), and when she started to equate herself to ‘likes’ she would stay away from social media:

“when I start noticing that I’m kind of, again equating my self-worth with how many ‘likes’ I’m getting, I try to take a little break for a bit because it’s not healthy.” (Lisa, 144-145).

However, regarding her artwork, she did admit that:

“I definitely feel more confident about things that get more ‘likes’, definitely it makes me feel like okay this was a successful piece and if something doesn’t get as many ‘likes’ as I expected, or that I’m used to then I might kind of be like oh that was shit and I won’t do that again” (Lisa, 140-143).

Despite being suggested that receiving ‘likes’ affects individuals’ feelings and self-perceptions, according to Hong et al. (2017), there is no significant correlation between the two.

### **Reactions on followers**

Presently it is suggested that social media users have a supposedly ideal idea for the type of people their followers are, which is people that are similar to them (Marwick and Boyd, 2010). Followers refer to someone who tracks an individual on a social media platform. Contrarily to ‘likes’, the opinions were more diverse regarding the number of followers. On one hand, some participants enjoyed receiving new followers:

“if I gain a few Instagram followers then that’s nice, I think it’s nice to have lots of people following you, just because it does give you a bit of a boost” (Lauren, 173-174).

This can be due to knowing that someone would like to know what they are up to, and decide to keep up with them: “oh these people think I’m interesting enough to follow, and they want to know about my life” (Lauren, 175-176).

The number of followers can also help up and coming artists showcase their work, and the more followers they have the more publicity they have:

“if your business relies on having a social media presence, then you know that’s kind of your brand, then I think it’s awesome if someone has loads of followers” (Lisa, 133-135).

However, for others, the number of followers did not seem to mean as much, or that they used to mean something before but not anymore: “I used to have a Twitter with over a thousand followers and I just deleted it overnight and didn’t care” (Anna, 176-177). Also, a large number of followers could have negative effects on the individual:

“one of my friends, she’s got loads of followers on Facebook and Instagram, and that, but she doesn’t really leave the house much, and she doesn’t really have many close friends” (Naomi, 113-115).

It’s suggested that it may “go to [their] head” (Naomi, 117-118) and they may avoid real-life relations: “it might take away from your real-life friendships” (Naomi, 119). It is implied that users with a large number of followers are likely to think of their audience as a community that they can associate with (Marwick and Boyd, 2010).

### **Action of Social Media as a Coping Strategy**

Whether social media can be used as an effective coping strategy has been debated greatly in psychological research (Sriwilai and Charoensukmongkol, 2015;

Gaspar et al., 2016), and the participants expressed how they felt about social media as a coping mechanism.

On one hand, some participants believed social media to be an accurate coping strategy: “it’ll make me feel better though” (Anna, 116). It was suggested that posting when experiencing different hassles and stressors was effective due to repressed thoughts and feelings being relieved:

“if I need to moan about something and I’m a bit pent up if I do tweet about it or whatever, I’d instantly be like \*sigh of relief\*, it takes the pressure away a little bit” (Lauren, 60-62)

Posting about feelings to friends and family, also seemed to help as then the individual would not feel on their own and could feel that they could talk about their struggles:

“I think if people actually respond to the things you post then maybe it is, you know for example if you have a family member or something and they see it, maybe then it’d be a coping mechanism because they could help you” (Emma, 97-99).

On the other hand, it was suggested that social media may also not be a very effective coping strategy when experiencing hassles and stressors: “there are better things you can use to help you cope but a lot of people tend to go on social media” (Ella, 83-84). Using social media more frequently has been found to correlate with negative psychological well-being (Huang, 2010). It is possible on social media, for individuals to compare themselves to others, which can have a negative effect:

“if you’re having a stressful time and then you’re looking at everyone else on a nice sunny beach and stuff it’s just a bit depressing” (Naomi, 65-66).

It is suggested that some people only post the positive parts of their lives, and therefore when someone who is having a bad day sees all the best parts, it can affect their mental health:

“people only post the best parts of their lives, I definitely went through a period where I was looking at Facebook and I was looking at other people’s pictures and it was making me depressed so I stopped doing it” (Lisa, 31-34).

While individuals have different opinions on social media as a coping strategy, it could be effective to some extent, however it shouldn’t be considered as a full coping strategy that will always make people feel better: “I don’t think, on its own anyway, don’t think just social media is good to cope with everyday life” (Lisa, 100-101). It has been previously suggested that individuals that turn to social media as a coping strategy use emotion-focused coping rather than problem-focused coping, which does not lead the problem to be solved fully, only temporarily (Sriwilai and Charoensukmongkol, 2015).

## **Concluding remarks**

This research explored the uses of social media and how it helps students when experiencing everyday hassles and stressors. The interviews provided thorough explanations by the participants of how, and why it helps them along with other opinions regarding whether or not they believe it is effective. The findings help

researchers understand how, and why social media is considered a coping mechanism for some individuals, whether they use it often or not. Also, findings suggest that there is a wide variety of options that individuals can do to cope with hassles and stressors, such as posting about it or talking to others. It has expanded on past research to explain how it helps individuals cope, and how it varies for different people.

This study has some limitations, for example the sample mainly consisted of females as not as many males were available through the opportunity sampling. Also, all the participants were white individuals from the United Kingdom, therefore it cannot be generalised to other cultures. Moreover, due to social media's rapid changes, it is possible for individuals' opinions and experiences to change in the future. Further research could explore other groups of individuals' uses of social media as a coping strategy, such as different ages or cultures.

### **Reflexive Analysis**

I chose a topic that I am very passionate about, it gave me a thorough insight into other people's opinions about using social media as a coping strategy, and it was very interesting to explore. However, I realise that my own experiences and previous research may have influenced my aims and outcomes of the study. Despite this, the findings were constructed based on the data, and I used inductive thematic analysis in order to find the themes. I believe that this approach reduced any additional biases as, despite my own knowledge, the data was taken purely from the data.

In regards to the interviews, I believe that my lack of experience in interviewing, it reflected in some parts of the interviews. Examples include sometimes when there was a long pause the participants were thinking, I would assume that they were not going to say more, so I would move onto the next question, therefore it is possible that I may have missed out on some information that could have been useful.

Using thematic analysis was practical as it was flexible to find rich and detailed reoccurring themes in the data. It also helped to examine viewpoints of the participants, similarities and differences were found and unexpected insights were gathered. However, despite the flexibility, it can show inconsistencies when finding themes in the data.



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