

*The Role of Social Media Literacy in the
Relationship Between Night-Time Social
Media Use and Sleep in Young People*

A COMIC BY ANNIE ROLAND



A year ago in January, I went off of social media for a month to see if I would feel like I had more time for other things and if I felt any different afterwards.

too much

addictive
harmful

problematic

BBC

Is social media
bad for you? The
evidence and the
unknowns

INDEPENDENT
SIX WAYS SOCIAL
MEDIA NEGATIVELY
AFFECTS YOUR
MENTAL HEALTH

The Atlantic

Have Smartphones
Destroyed
a Generation?

This kind of "social media detox" is a pretty common phenomenon these days due to social media being portrayed as "addictive" and "harmful" to our mental health in media and public conversation.

To be honest, I no longer remember whether I felt any different after the "detox"...



But this sparked my interest in the connection between social media and mental health, and I knew I wanted to do my dissertation on this topic.

So when the time came to choose my supervisor for my dissertation, I knew I wanted work with someone who had researched social media and mental health.

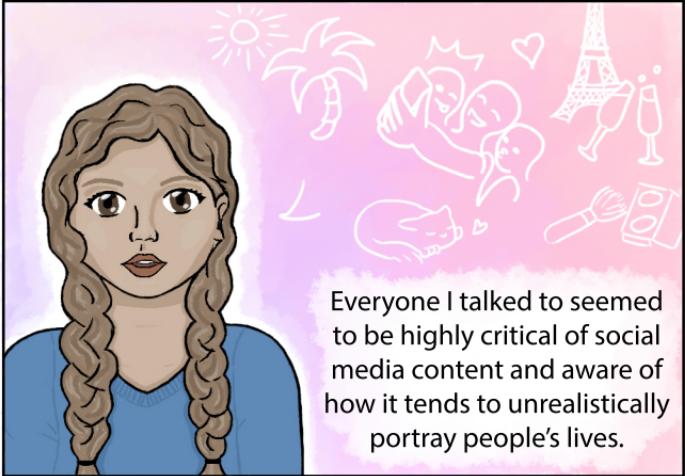


In April, Heather agreed to supervise my project.

In the summer, I worked as a camp leader for youth aged 15 to 16 and ended up having insightful conversations with them about social media use.



This kind of awareness and critical thinking contradicted the popular idea of younger generations being some kind of mindless mass consumers of social media who are simply victims of its detrimental effects.



Everyone I talked to seemed to be highly critical of social media content and aware of how it tends to unrealistically portray people's lives.

Therefore, I became interested in testing the relationship between social media and mental health. I also wanted to find out what the role of critical thinking is in social media use. Could higher critical thinking about social media content predict healthier social media use?

So for my dissertation, I chose to focus on social media literacy, defined as one's critical thinking and perceived realism of social media content.



Heather's previous work inspired me to look particularly at night-time social media use and sleep-related variables, as using our smartphones before going to sleep is a common habit for many.



In fact, 90% of young people these days take their smartphones to bed.

To investigate the links between social media literacy, night-time social media use, mental health, and sleep, I measured a total of five variables:

1. SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY

One's critical thinking and perceived realism of social media content

2. PASSIVE SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Engaging in social media activities where you do not interact with others or share content, for example scrolling passively and viewing photos and posts

3. SOCIAL COMPARISON ORIENTATION

The extent to which one compares their opinions, thoughts and performance to those of others on social media

4. RUMINATION

A repetitive negative thinking tendency where one has difficulty disengaging from repetitive thoughts about their negative past experiences, which worsens their mood and has been associated with depression

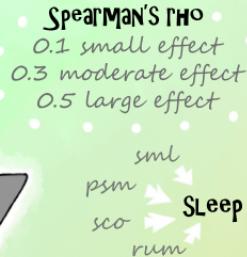
5. SLEEP QUALITY

How well one sleeps, including sleep onset latency, number and duration of sleep disturbances, and perceived consequences of poor sleep

Based on previous research, I predicted the following associations:



101 participants aged 17-25 completed an online survey.



The associations between the variables were examined by looking at Spearman's correlations. I also did a multiple regression model to see how each variable predicted sleep.

Participants with higher social media literacy were more likely to compare their thoughts and feelings to those of others on social media, whereas there was no connection with comparing one's abilities or performance.



I speculated that this link may be due to an underlying critical-analytic approach to information. Yet, it was surprising that being more critical was not linked to reduced ability comparison.

Participants who passively scrolled and viewed social media content around bedtime were found to be somewhat more likely to compare their performance to that of others online.



Those who tended to compare their performance and abilities to others online also tended to have more ruminative thoughts around bedtime.

As expected, participants who ruminated more were also more likely to report poor sleep. All the other associations between the variables were nonsignificant.



Lastly, contrary to my predictions, social media literacy seemed to have neither a direct nor indirect link with sleep. There was no connection with rumination either.



This finding suggests social media literacy may not be an effective target for interventions aiming to reduce rumination or improve sleep quality.

An important contribution this study makes to the field is that no connection was found between night-time social media use and sleep quality.

It therefore provides evidence against the notion that social media is harmful for young people's sleep.



Future studies on the role of other variables, such as mindfulness, loneliness, and stress alongside rumination could get us closer to identifying good targets for interventions to improve the sleep health of young people.



In addition, for the first time an association was found between online opinion comparison and social media literacy, which merits further research. This study also underlines the importance of rumination as a factor in poor sleep.

