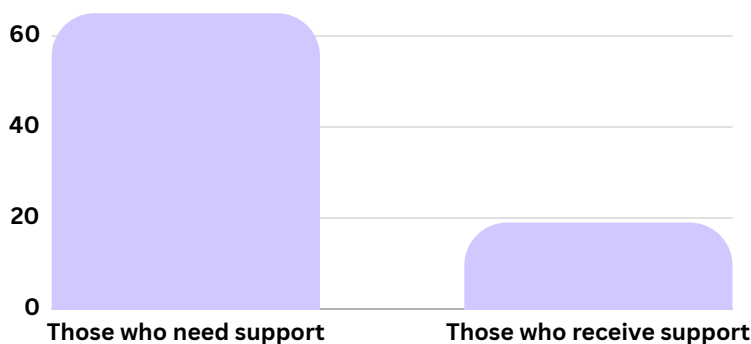


# Social Media: An Alternative to Existing Anxiety Support for First Year Students?

*For my dissertation, I investigated the perspectives that first year university students hold towards the use of social media as a tool to support anxiety and worry.*

## 1. Why investigate this?

- **90%** of first year UK university students have experienced anxiety and stress (Mey & Yin, 2015).
- In 2021, **65%** of students required support for their mental health, but only **19%** of those received the support needed (Student Minds, 2021).
- Social media is viewed as a **massively underused tool** in mental health promotion by mental health professionals (O'Reilly et al., 2019)

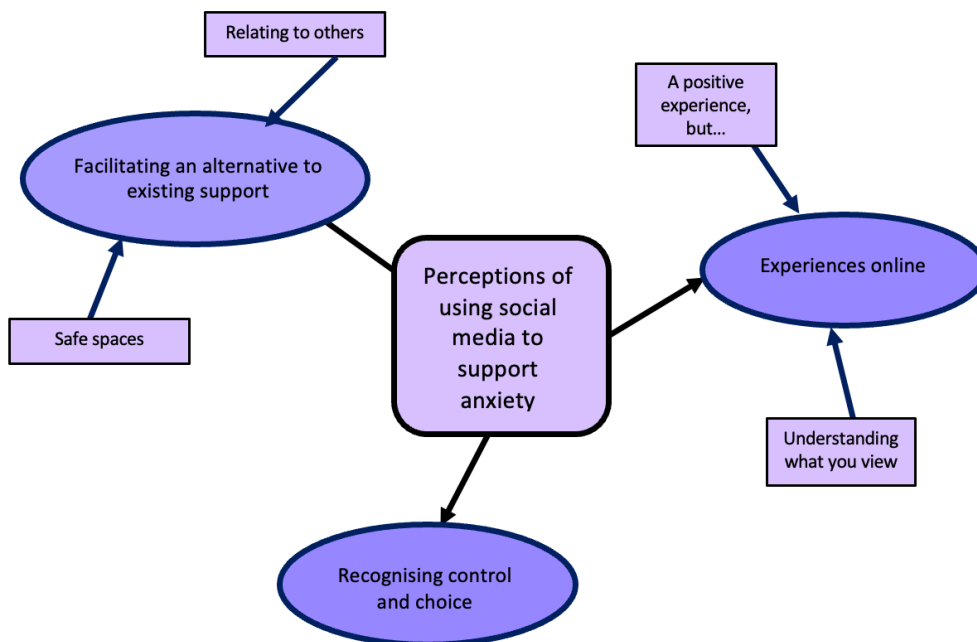


## 2. The Research

- A qualitative approach was taken to the study, to facilitate **deeper insights** and **richer data**.
- **Semi-structured** interviews were conducted because they are best suited to exploring **perceptions** and **understandings** (Braun & Clarke, 2013).
- **Six participants** who self-identified as having **experienced anxiety or worry** took part.
- **Braun and Clarke's (2006) Six Steps of Thematic Analysis** were used to analyse the interview data.

### 3. What did I find?

- **Three** themes and **four** sub themes were identified using thematic analysis which can be seen in the thematic map below:



#### Facilitating an alternative to existing support:

The participants believed that social media could offer an **alternative** to **existing methods of anxiety support**, as it offers people the ability to **access information** and **support**. One

participant expressed how social media was **‘invaluable’** for her at a time she was experiencing anxiety.

### *Relating to others*

It was viewed that social media enables individuals to **relate to others** who have also **experienced anxiety and worry**, which offers **comfort** when feeling anxious or worried.

### *Safe spaces*

Participants felt that to **enhance** the use social media to help anxiety and worry, **safe spaces** could be created for people experiencing such feelings.

## Experiences Online:

### *A positive experience, but...*

The participants discussed that their **experiences** on social media had been **positive**, as it allowed them to **remain connected** with others, but acknowledged that other people can have negative experiences.

### *Understanding what you view*

This theme suggested that **what you view** on social media can affect your **emotional experience** with phenomenon. The participants highlighted that it is important individuals **understand how different content can make you feel**.

## Recognising Control & Choice:

Participants recognised that they have a **level of control and choice** over how they use social media, and argued that such control may affect the potential of the phenomenon to **help one’s anxiety**. The idea that you can **filter out content**, and **choose what you want to consume** was discussed.



## 4. What does this mean?

The study presented **novel findings** to a field of limited research.

The research has shown that social media can offer an **alternative to existing support** and help **bridge the gap** between first year **students who require support**, and first year **students who receive it**. However, there are **influential factors** that must be considered when implementing this: **personal experiences**, the **content viewed**, and the ability to **control content**.

