

## Teachers' Perspectives on Social Media: Reflections from Educational Frontline

Beata Joanna Godejord<sup>1</sup>, Ivana Bojanic<sup>2</sup>

Nord University, Norway<sup>1,2</sup>

### Abstract

*The ever-growing use of social media [1] has profoundly impacted nearly every aspect of people's lives, extending beyond interpersonal relationships to permanently influence entertainment, education, work, business, marketing, and, finally, political and social movements. The vast influence of social media is far-reaching, multifaceted, and undeniable. This paper analyzes perspectives on the informational and educational aspects of social media engagement. The views analyzed are from participants in the course 'Informational and Educational Aspects of Social Media, where reflecting on the impact of social media on communication and education is a critical part of the learning process. This course is part of the 'ICT and Learning' study program offered as further education for professional teachers by Nord University, Norway. The analysis focuses on the participants' views shared through blog posts, which were assigned as a form of reflective practice. The method used in this study was content analysis. Among the three thematic areas suggested for written reflections, the vast majority chose "Problematic Social Media Use," with a predominant focus on social media's negative impact on young people's mental health. Numerous studies have addressed the risk factors related to problematic social media engagement [2] and mechanisms underlying its connection to mental health [3]. Our analysis offers insights into the concerns of teachers in Norway and provides cues on how to further develop the course to better meet their professional development needs and expectations, particularly regarding the complex dynamics of social media use among younger populations.*

**Keywords:** Problematic social media use, mental health, teachers' concerns

### 1. Introduction

Social media has become an essential part of contemporary life, transforming communication, social interactions, and engagement with global events. Its ever-expanding influence shapes individual behaviors, collective perceptions, and cultural trends. As its reach continues to grow, it solidifies its role as a powerful force, influencing personal decisions, public discourse, and market dynamics through global conversations. From fostering personal relationships to driving collective movements, social media amplifies individual and political voices, fuels engagement, and plays an increasing role in business and economic activities. Companies leverage these platforms for marketing, brand building, and consumer engagement, while social media-driven trends shape industries and impact financial markets. As a result, social media remains a defining force in the ongoing cultural, economic and societal transformations [4].

As frontline educators, teachers navigate the multifaceted impact of social media on both their professional roles and classroom dynamics. While online platforms foster collaboration, engagement, and knowledge sharing, they also present significant challenges. Privacy concerns emerge as users weigh personal data exposure against security measures [5]. Harmful social interactions, such as cyberbullying and online harassment, have become a pressing issue in digital spaces [6]. The relentless stream of notifications and digital content can diminish focus, reduce productivity, and increase digital dependency [7]. Misinformation remains a persistent threat, as false narratives, manipulated content, and unverified claims spread rapidly, shaping public perceptions and influencing decision-making [8].

Addressing these challenges is essential for harnessing the benefits of social media while mitigating its risks. By fostering digital literacy, ethical online behavior, and critical thinking, educators can empower students to use social media responsibly and constructively, transforming it into a space for learning, collaboration, and both personal and professional growth.

## 2. Background

Social media plays a transformative role in modern education, offering both valuable opportunities and complex challenges. Understanding how educators perceive and respond to these complexities is crucial for fostering informed discussions on social media's role in modern teaching.

This paper examines educators' perspectives on social media informational and educational impact, shedding light on their experiences, concerns, and reflections. Driven by a firm conviction that integrating social media awareness into curricula can empower students to cultivate responsible and constructive online habits, we argue that educators must be equipped to understand its risks to effectively guide their students.

### 2.1 Course 'Informational and Educational Aspects of Social Media'

The study participants were students enrolled in the course *Informational and Educational Aspects of Social Media*, a core component of the *ICT and Learning* study program. Offered online by Nord University as further education for teachers, the *ICT and Learning* program consists of eight courses designed to enhance educators' competence in pedagogical use of digital media. In the course *Educational Aspects of Social Media*, students engage in reflective practice, examining the influence of social media, security challenges, and approaches to networked learning. One of the course assignments requires students to share their reflections through blog posts and provide feedback by commenting on peers' posts. In this way, they engage in discussions about social media using social media itself. The alignment between content and format is intended to foster a deeper understanding of the nature of social media. Students select their reflection topic from three thematic areas: the pedagogical use of social media, its problematic aspects, and social media security. The latter encompasses themes of cognitive warfare, particularly the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Problematic social media use focuses on its impact on mental health, while the pedagogical aspect explores opportunities for integrating social media into knowledge sharing, collaborative learning, and professional networking.

## 3. Data Processing Framework

### 3.1 Blog Posts as Data

This study analyzes students' blog posts, created as a course requirement for *Informational and Educational Aspects of Social Media* during the autumn semester of the 2024/25 academic year. Blog posts can serve as both data and providers of data, depending on the analytical approach. In this study the focus is on the topics, sentiment and key words rather than extracting additional information from comments or factual content within posts. Therefore, blog posts are analyzed as data rather than providers of data.

Students developed their blog posts within a *Confluence* workspace, a platform designed for teamwork, knowledge sharing, project management and documentation. Access to the developed posts was provided to fellow students via links posted in the online classroom forum (Canvas LMS). The decision to use *Confluence* was guided by two objectives: fostering blogging as a collaborative practice and enhancing students' awareness of social media platforms that can be utilized professionally for work-related engagement. The number of students working on the blogging assignment was 15 (N=15).

### 3.2 Data Analysis

The data was examined and interpreted using qualitative content analysis, a technique commonly applied to various forms of human communication, including both linguistic and non-linguistic texts. Like other artefacts of social communication, written texts are well suited for content analysis [9].

To establish analytical framework, data was coded, and meaning was subsequently attributed through interpretation. The analysis followed an inductive approach; coding process was conducted without a predefined model. Instead, assumptions emerged directly from the data, with codes being constructed based on the meaning attributed to the data. Understanding participants perspectives from their own viewpoints was essential, aligning with the principles of grounded theory [10], [11].



The process of organizing and interpreting the data involved two stages: the initial stage of breaking down data into smaller segments and assigning codes to these segments; and the following stage during which the initial codes were grouped into broader categories. The coding process was assisted by NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS).

## 4. Results

Out of 15 blogposts, 11 (approximately 73,3% of texts) addressed topics related to problematic social media use. Of the remaining 4, 2 were related to cognitive warfare, 1 to the need for source criticism, and 1 to digital activism. The following analysis considers only texts related to problematic social media use.

In the first cycle of coding, data was categorized into nineteen codes, which were in turn reduced to three themes in the second cycle of coding. Similarities that qualified codes to form a theme were defined on a conceptual basis. Units of meaning related to internal emotional responses were grouped under the theme 'Emotional distress', while those linked to responses triggered by external social factors were categorized as 'Psychosocial stress'. 'Distorted perception of reality' was separated as a distinct theme, 'Cognitive distortion', as its nature is more related to thought process than emotional process.

The number of references to a particular theme is specified in Fig.1 and visualized in a hierarchy chart presented in Fig. 2.

| ⊕ Name                    | ▲ Files | References |
|---------------------------|---------|------------|
| ⊕ ○ Cognitive distortions | 4       | 4          |
| ⊕ ○ Emotional distress    | 6       | 19         |
| ⊕ ○ Psychosocial stress   | 9       | 53         |

Fig.1. Themes that emerged from the second cycle of coding and the number of reference to a particular theme.

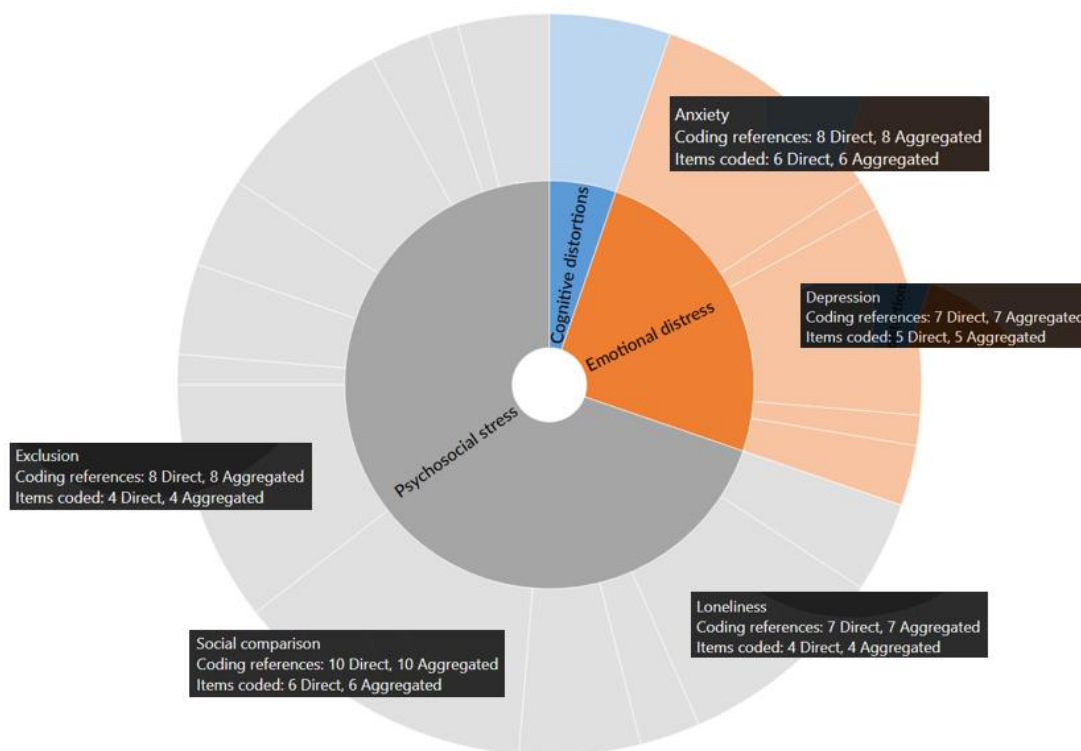


Fig 2. The frequency of coding references across sources. Hierarchy chart generated by Nvivo CAQDAS.

Under the theme 'Emotional distress', anxiety and depression were the most frequently mentioned. Students used the terms 'depression' and 'anxiety' to describe mood-related conditions in a general sense rather than in medical or diagnostic terms. These expressions function as in vivo codes.

Under the theme of 'Psychosocial stress,' social comparison - assessing oneself in relation to others - along with feelings of exclusion and loneliness, emerged as the most frequently identified stressors.

The theme 'Cognitive Distortions' synthesizes perspectives on how social media contributes to unrealistic standards of success and body image.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

Increasing body of evidence indicates that social media use (SMU) is related to various aspects of well-being in users and research into these effects has grown significantly over the past decade. The relationship between SMU and well-being or ill-being is complex and inconsistent across studies. General SMU has been linked to both negative and positive effects. Social comparison, which may lead to lower well-being, is not universally negative. However social media intensity and problematic SMU have been correlated with lower well-being and higher depression/anxiety [12].

Problematic SMU has been defined as the lack of regulation of one's use of social media associated with negative outcomes in everyday functioning [13]. The central symptoms of problematic social media use (PSMU) are the tendency to think obsessively about going online, difficulties in resisting the urge to use social media, and preference for communicating with people online rather than face-to-face [14].

In the analyzed blog posts, teachers (the study participants) primarily expressed concerns about indicators of problematic social media use, particularly its links to emotional distress and psychosocial stress. They emphasized the negative impact of social media on socioemotional well-being, especially the harm caused by social comparison, i.e. comparing one's own life to the carefully curated online lives of others. Their belief that social media negatively affects mental health further reinforces the broader discussion on its implications for well-being.

Well-being plays a crucial role in educational attainment, as students with higher emotional, social, and psychological well-being tend to achieve stronger academic performance [15]. It influences key factors essential for academic success, including motivation, concentration, resilience, and engagement [16]. Recognizing this correlation is vital for educators, and our study indicates a high level of awareness among participating students.

As we continue developing the course *Informational and Educational Aspects of Social Media*, we will remain committed to fostering this awareness. At the same time, we recognize the need to place greater emphasis on understanding the broader spectrum of cognitive distortions that can emerge from social media exposure. These distortions extend beyond the false realities shaped by social comparison, affecting also perception and critical thinking in ways that may be detrimental not only to individual mental health but also to broader societal and cultural shifts.

Only two students' blog posts addressed the topic of cognitive warfare, an emerging domain of conflict that targets human perception and decision-making process by manipulating information, emotions, and beliefs. As digital technology becomes increasingly intertwined with social dynamics, cognitive warfare has evolved into a powerful strategy for influencing individuals and societies. The pervasive reach of networking platforms and messaging apps has enabled the use of human cognition as a battleground through altering people's comprehension on an unprecedented scale. NATO recognizes cognitive warfare as a growing threat, highlighting how adversaries leverage artificial intelligence, neuroscience, and social media to shape public opinion, polarize societies, and undermine democratic institutions [17].

The weaponization of public opinion shapes how individuals engage with knowledge, posing a growing challenge for the education system. Educators can address this issue by emphasizing the importance of media literacy, critical analysis and responsible interaction with information. Integrating reflective practice into academic course frameworks is one of the most accessible ways to foster essential skills for navigating the information society across curricula. Several models have been developed to help structure and operationalize the reflection process, with Kolb's [18] or Gibbs' [19] models being widely acknowledged and easily tailored to various learning objectives. Equally important is increasing awareness of the mechanisms behind personal and cognitive biases, as these negatively influence beliefs and are easily amplified in online environments, causing disruptions at both individual and societal levels. Recognizing these biases and their impact is crucial for fostering socio-emotional competence [20], equipping individuals with both self-awareness and social awareness needed for responsible online engagement and independent intellectual growth.



The findings of this study hold considerable relevance in light of the purpose statement. The analyzed data provides valuable insights and helps guide further course design efforts. However, due to the limited student sample, these results cannot be generalized beyond the existing dataset.

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