


# WHAT A MONTH WITHOUT SOCIAL MEDIA TAUGHT ME ABOUT MY EVERYDAY LIFE: AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPERIMENT

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## Abstract

The article explores the influence of social media on everyday life through the lenses of the sociology of everyday life and symbolic interactionism. The increased social media consumption in post-pandemic society has become a trending topic – both in media and academia. Not only a consequence of COVID-19 restrictions, but also an example of omnipresent megatrend of digitalisation, social media use is on the rise across the globe, getting more and more account users every year. It is one of the most fast-growing technologies of the XXI century, now representing an attractive USD 39.7 billion market size, where careers in social media got into CNN's ranking of 100 Best Jobs in America. Thus, social media represents a definite research interest for a sociologist, as basically, a great deal of interactions in society happen online nowadays.

*Keywords: sociology of everyday life, symbolic interactionism, impression management, symbolic capital, dramaturgical approach, deviant behaviour, social media*

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## Introduction

In recent years, the influence of social media on everyday life has become a compelling topic of interest, both in academic research and in the broader society. The post-pandemic era has witnessed a significant increase in social media consumption, resulting not only from COVID-19 restrictions and social isolation (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020) but also from the omnipresent megatrend of digitalisation. As a consequence, interactions and activities that were once primarily conducted face-to-face have now shifted to online platforms, making social media a fundamental aspect of everyday life. Eager to explore the research question – “How do social media impact individual’s everyday life?”, the researcher has conducted a qualitative study.

The fundamental assumption of this study suggests that social media exerts a substantial influence on everyday life. To test this assumption, the researcher presumed that cutting down on or stopping to use social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, would free more time to spend on “offline” activities. Specifically, the study examined the impact on daily life in case of reducing time or completely abstaining from feed-based social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook activity. This research endeavours to uncover the mechanisms through which social media influences our daily routines.

To accomplish this, a multidimensional methodology was employed, including an auto-ethnographic self-experiment validated through an analysis of sociological theories, supported by an extensive review of existing literature.

As Clara E. Hill and Sarah Knox (2021) define it in their foreword to the Christopher Poulos book *Essentials of Autoethnography*, auto-ethnography is “an autobiographical genre of academic writing that draws on and analyses or interprets the lived experience of the author and connects researcher insights to self-identity, cultural rules and resources, communication practices, traditions, premises, symbols, rules, shared

meanings, emotions, values, and larger social, cultural, and political issues” (Hill, Knox 2021: iv). The auto-ethnographical self-experiment was the main qualitative method, chosen for a deep dive into the mundane aspects of the social media influence on an individual’s everyday life. Such approach allowed to get unique qualitative data based on the researcher’s personal experience.

Over a span of one month, the researcher deliberately disconnected from the most time-consuming social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram, documenting their experiences in an autobiographical manner. This self-study aimed to provide firsthand insights and personal reflections on the influence of social media on everyday life. To complement the auto-ethnographic experiment, desk research was completed. The literature review encompassed the period from 2010 to 2021, allowing for an examination of the recent trends and developments in social media consumption. Sociological theories, particularly the sociology of everyday life and symbolic interactionism, provided a theoretical framework for understanding the influence of social media on individuals’ daily experiences. Additionally, various concepts such as impression management, symbolic capital, the dramaturgical approach, and “deviant behaviour” were explored to further illuminate the dynamics between social media and everyday life.

By synthesising the findings from the literature review, the auto-ethnographic experiment, and a critical examination of sociological theories, this research offers a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media on individual’s everyday life. It contributes to the broader sociological discourse and enhances our knowledge of the complex interplay between social media, self-presentation, and social interactions.

## The Role of Social Media in Post-Pandemic Society

Social media has become an integral part of modern life, with billions of users worldwide. The number of active social media users has been

steadily increasing over the years, reaching approximately 4.48 billion in 2021, and 4.9 as of March 2023 (Dean 2023). It's forecasted that there will be 5.85 billion social media users worldwide by the year 2027 (Nath 2023). The global social network penetration rate was 59.4% as of January 2023. The average time spent on social media per day globally is 2 hours 25 minutes, with Poland averaging 2 hours daily. Social networks have transcended generational boundaries and are now used by people of all ages (We Are Social & Meltwater 2021: 22).

The age distribution of social media users varies depending on the platform and country. For example, in the United States, the largest demographic on Facebook is males and females aged 25-34 (Millennials), while TikTok has a majority of users aged between 10 and 29. In Poland, Facebook primarily engages people aged 35 and older, while TikTok has a user base where 90% are under 18 years old (Wikipedia 2019).

It is common for individuals to have multiple social media accounts, with an average of 8.4 accounts per person in 2020. The growth in multi-networking can be attributed to the expanding choice of platforms and their specialisation. Facebook remains the leading social network with 2.9 billion monthly active users, followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, FB Messenger and WeChat (Dean 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns led to a surge in social media and internet usage globally. Online activity increased as people sought ways to stay connected and businesses turned to social media for brand awareness. In Poland, the pandemic did not cause a drastic increase in social media use, but it did reveal the growing fear of missing out (FOMO) among the population (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, Gladwell 2013). The pandemic accelerated the impairment of social relationships and polarisation, leading to concerns about the future impact on society.

Social media serves various purposes in people's everyday lives. The top reasons for using social media globally include staying in touch with friends and family, entertainment, and information consumption. In

Poland, social media usage aligns with these global trends, with each platform serving different needs and interests of users (Jupowicz-Ginalska et al. 2021).

The socio-cultural role of social media is significant, especially among young people who are the most influenced by the information flows and cultural impact of online content. Social networks shape real-life social practices and contribute to the formation of meanings, cultural images, and systems of values. Social media platforms act as tools for self-presentation, allowing individuals to manage their public image and impression. However, the public nature of social media can also lead to scandals and breaches of ethical norms, affecting a person's self-image.

The impact of social media on self-image is multifaceted. Users can choose to restrict access to their accounts, presenting themselves only to a limited circle of friends. Profile closure can serve as an impression management technique, aimed at maintaining a specific self-image and protecting personal information. Social media platforms enable individuals to represent themselves visually, and the images created online are often an extension of one's real-life image or an idealised representation.

Understanding the role of social media in post-pandemic society is crucial, as it has become a tool for self-representation, shaping cultural norms, and impacting relationships. Further analysis of the interconnection between images constructed on social media and real-life social interaction can provide valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of social media use and its effects on individuals and society as a whole.

The influence of social media explained by sociological theories

The influence of social media on our daily routines is deeply rooted in the sociology of everyday life and symbolic interactionism. The sociology of everyday life examines the social dynamics and interactions that occur in our day-to-days, emphasising the significance of seemingly mundane activities and interactions in shaping social structures. As

Michel de Certeau explains it: “this goal is achieved if everyday practices, ways of operating, doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity, and if a body of theoretical questions, methods, categories and perspectives, by penetrating this obscurity, make it possible to articulate them” (Certeau de 2011: xi).

Symbolic interactionism, on the other hand, focuses on how individuals derive meaning from social interactions and symbols, highlighting the role of social interactions occurring online in constructing reality (Blumer 1986). Communication in social networks, according to the paradigm of symbolic interactionism, is a gateway to the co-formation of meanings, cultural images, and even systems of values happening whenever users interact online. This means that the younger generation introduces into real life the values, norms and behaviour models that are assimilated in the course of virtual interaction. It can be assumed that the desire to shape real life social practices are already largely determined by the specifics of online communication space.

Social media have the dual nature that dialectically combine the private and the public life of the users. The openness and accessibility of platforms to everyone who has an Internet connection determines the following peculiarity: all activities on a personal page become potential messages for a large number of anonymous users. Therefore, any information posted on a user’s account can be evaluated by the public, who have the opportunity to comment, copy, repost, etc. In one way or another, the private information appearing in social networks is addressed to the public space and, to a certain extent, participates in forming a public image of the account owner. Thus, the social network itself becomes a means of impression management (Goffman 1980), a means of self-image maintenance, another critical concept in the context of social media influence. Therefore, following Goffman’s

dramaturgical approach<sup>1</sup>, social networks can be considered as a tool to present oneself to others in public space, wherein users act out different roles to create specific impressions on specific audience.

Individuals engage in strategic self-presentation on social media platforms, carefully curating and managing their online personas to convey desired impressions to others. This impression management process is intricately linked to the accumulation of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986), which refers to the resources and social status individuals gain through their online presence.

However, the pervasive nature of social media also presents challenges. While being present on online platforms is taken for granted, culturally, being offline and not using social media is not so common nowadays. Not having a Facebook or any other social network account is seen as weird and almost unacceptable (Quora [no date]), especially for younger people and those working in the digital marketing and communication jobs. The sociology of deviance (Erikson 1962) and labelling theory (Tutor2u 2017) explain this phenomena well. Howard Becker explores the subject of deviance<sup>2</sup> in societies in his book *Outsiders* (1997). Following his labelling theory, such an offline user can be considered an outsider, since being offline and not using the most popular social media platforms could be perceived as deviant behaviour by the online-present majority.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Goffman's theory, the self is a sense of who one is, a dramatic effect emerging from the immediate scene being presented. In dramaturgical approach the perception of self is dependent upon time, place, and most importantly, the audience. The goal of this presentation of self is acceptance from the audience through carefully conducted performance.

<sup>2</sup> Becker (1997: 187) defined deviance as a social creation in which "social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders." Becker grouped behaviour into four categories: falsely accused, conforming, pure deviant, and secret deviant.

The pursuit of validation and social approval may lead to deviant behaviour, wherein individuals might engage in self-destructive or unethical activities to gain attention or followers, thus demonstrating deviant behaviour in contrast to “average” social media behaviour. Needless to say that in this case, any marginal deviations, such as offence, swearing, nudity, exposing too much of a naked body, calling out users, spamming them with fraudulent offers results in the reporting and blockage of such user’s account.

There is another “deviant” scenario. A user might choose to go 100% offline, remove social media presence completely and not engage in online interactions at all, thus behaving deviantly when compared to the majority of people in a contemporary society. Naturally, the complete absence of social media platforms in one’s life (being an offline person with no digital presence) might be seen as “deviance” (Becker 1997) when contrasted to the “norm”.

Given that the constant exposure to idealised representations of others’ lives on social media can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and depression (Bhat, Gupta, Bhat 2023) due to comparing oneself to such imagines, as well as seeking validation for their own digital presence in form of likes, it can be argued that any social media user can feel deviant to a certain degree. When one compares their normal life to the glorified, Instagram perfect image, a feeling of inadequacy might settle in – “My life is not good enough, there must be something wrong with me”. (Bhattacharya 2017)

Building upon the insights from the literature, an auto-ethnographic experiment was conducted to gain deeper understanding and personal insights into the influence of social media on everyday life. The experiment involved a deliberate disconnection from Facebook and Instagram for a month, two of my personally most time-consuming social media platforms. Through self-reflection and recording of experiences, the auto-ethnographic approach provided rich qualitative data were complemented by desk research findings.



The following section will present the methodology employed in the auto-ethnographic experiment, providing a detailed account of the design and execution. By combining the insights from the literature review and the auto-ethnographic experiment, this study aims to provide a holistic understanding of how social media influences everyday life.

The auto-ethnographic experiment – the journal is your best friend

As mentioned in the previous section, the day-to-day use of social media has a profound impact on various aspects of our lives, including mental health, sleep, communication, and emotional fulfillment. The influence of smartphones and social media on the Gen Z, also known as iGen, has been extensively discussed in *The Atlantic*. Members of this generation, born between 1995 and 2012, have grown up with smartphones and have an Instagram account before starting high school. Their lives revolve around their smartphones, and they are more comfortable in their bedrooms than at social gatherings. While they are physically safer and less prone to accidents and alcohol-related issues, they are more vulnerable psychologically, with skyrocketing rates of teen depression and suicide since 2011. The author of the article argues that iGen is on the verge of a severe mental health crisis, largely attributed to their smartphone usage (Twenge 2018).

While most studies and articles focus on the psychological effects of social media on everyday life, this research aimed to explore the sociological aspects of everyday life when social media platforms and scrolling are removed from the equation. In order to understand what offline activities emerge when online interactions are limited, the researcher, a borderline Gen Z / Millennial<sup>3</sup>, conducted an auto-ethnographic experiment on myself, trying to examine the areas of everyday

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<sup>3</sup> The author was born at the border of Millennial / Gen Z generations

life most affected by social media and how they are impacted in the absence of it.

Curious about the influence of social media on her own life, the researcher did a social media detox<sup>4</sup> by removing the platforms which “swallowed” the most time: Instagram (an average of 6 hours and 29 minutes per week) and Facebook (an average of 4 hours and 57 minutes per week). However, some chat apps like WhatsApp, Facebook, FB Messenger, Viber, and Telegram were kept to stay in touch with friends and family. Unlike the removed social media platforms, these apps don't have advertisements or content feeds that are aimed to increase the usage time. The only “social” platform retained was the Couchsurfing app, which is a hospitality and traveling platform where hosting and surfing others' homes are done for free. During the month without Instagram and Facebook, I Couchsurfing was used mainly to host travellers in person and experience socialising offline.

For the methodology of the research, the author opted for an auto-ethnographic experiment. Auto-ethnography is a qualitative research method that involves systematically noting personal experiences, followed by self-reflection and sociological analysis (Poulos 2021). The daily activities (both online and offline) were recorded in an experiment log and the changes in the author's everyday activities were analysed. This approach allows for exploring personal experiences and connecting them to broader cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. This method was chosen for several reasons.

Firstly, social media usage experiences are highly individual and vary from person to person, as do people's lifestyles and daily activities. Therefore, an auto-ethnographic approach would result in unique quality

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<sup>4</sup> Social media detox is a conscious elimination of social media use and consumption for a set period of time. Generally, most social media detoxes are 30 days, but some people do seven days or even a year-long social media detox.

and in-depth insights on the author's everyday life, thanks to journaling and reflecting on the one-month social media detox experience.

Secondly, the author preferred qualitative data analysis over quantitative data collection. While initially it was considered to conduct a survey to collect quantitative data on social media usage among Gen Z, the researcher to focus on qualitative data analysis instead. The qualitative data would offer unique insights ,since there is already abundant quantitative data on social media use among young people.

Additionally, I was curious to see how my day-to-day activities would change once I went offline. Since I didn't have the resources or means to track other participants' social media usage, I conducted an auto-ethnographic experiment on myself and recorded my own experience. Conducting an ethnographical experiment involving multiple participants would require careful ethical considerations.

Furthermore, it was intriguing for the author to do an auto-ethnographic approach in order to understand the nuances of her own relationship with social media and how it influenced her daily life. Such immersive experience resulted in deeper understanding of the sociological implications of social media usage.

To conduct the experiment, the author removed Instagram and Facebook applications from the smartphone and deactivated her accounts temporarily, not to use them in desktop browser. Phone settings were adjusted to minimise distractions: notifications were disabled from social media apps. This allowed to create a physical and digital boundary between self and social media platforms and ensure that the experiment process will be valid.

Throughout the month, all everyday activities were recorded in a journal, including thoughts and emotions. All daily activities, online and offline, were documented with close attention paid to any shifts in behaviour and perceptions, such as the activities the author engaged in to fill the void left by social media, as well as difficulties encountered in

absence of social media from everyday life. The detailed experiment log can be found in the attachments to this article.

During the experiment, the researcher actively sought out alternative ways to connect with others and engage in meaningful activities. She reached out to friends and family through calling, messaging apps and made plans to meet up in person. The absence of social media platforms from everyday life allowed for exploring new hobbies and interests that had been neglected due to spending excessive time on social media. These included reading books, practicing mindfulness, meditation, engaging in physical exercise, and pursuing creative projects.

One aspect of the experiment that turned out to be particularly interesting was the experience with Couchsurfing app. As an avid traveler, the researcher had used the app in the past to connect with fellow travellers and find accommodation abroad. However, during the social media detox, the author decided to focus on hosting travellers in her own home and interacting face-to-face, in real life. This allowed the researcher to experience the social aspect of the platform without the digital filter of social media. At the same time, it was surprising to find out the curiosity of the guests about the experiment – the experiment itself became the subject of conversations that allowed strangers to connect in real life.

At the end of the one-month detox period, I analysed the data from my journal entries and reflected on my experiences. I looked for patterns, changes in behaviour, and insights into how my daily life was impacted by the absence of social media, connecting my personal experiences and the broader sociological implications of digital platforms usage.

Overall, the auto-ethnographic experiment allowed me to critically examine my own habits and behaviours and consider how they were shaped by the digital realm. By focusing on the sociological aspects of the experiment, I aimed to contribute to the broader understanding of how social media impacts our daily lives and the potential benefits of disconnecting from these platforms.

## (Un)surprising results

The findings of the auto-ethnographic experiment were summarised within three main “everyday life” categories: 1. social interactions and relationships, 2. leisure and rest, and 3. work and studies. Those were defined as key pillars of everyday life by the author – the key changes in everyday behaviour were observed in exactly these categories. Certain negative experiences as well as positive changes that occurred in the everyday life during the experiment were recorded as well, adding insight to the research question – “How do social media influence our everyday life?”

## Withdrawal syndrome

The first days of the experiment were challenging: Social media withdrawal syndrome<sup>5</sup> symptoms, such as searching for Instagram and Facebook icons on the smartphone or checking for notifications where there have been none, were observed. Upon waking up, the first impulse would be to check the phone for notifications, or instead of checking smartphone to see the time, scroll through it to see if there were unanswered messages. If any of the remaining applications had a notification symbol, it would trigger the researcher to check the app until it disappears. The symptoms of anxiety and increased urges to use other social media platforms, for example, LinkedIn, exposed the negative influence of social media in the everyday life. Once the researcher realised she had substituted Facebook and Instagram with LinkedIn, she deleted the app and continued the experiment.

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<sup>5</sup> Social media addiction is a psychological condition that compels someone to be overly concerned about social media, spending so much time on these platforms that it impacts other aspects of their life (Marowitz, Hall 2023).

## Changes in daily routine

Right from the first days of the offline life the researcher noticed how much easier falling asleep became. Once the habit of checking social media platforms was removed from daily life, the sleep quality improved while the “felt” anxiety levels gradually decreased. Likewise, instead of immediately checking phone notifications upon awakening, a habit of morning stretch and 5-10 minutes of a guided meditation appeared. Meditation habit could be a consequence of going offline and trying to deal with social media withdrawal syndrome. Soon enough, morning meditation became one of the most enjoyable daily activities, along with exercising (indoor fitness, gym, swimming) and cooking. On the physical health side, the researcher also felt less strain in my neck and shoulders, while eyes became more relieved and headaches were less frequent, which can be attributed to less screen time (which by the end of the first week dropped to 2 hours daily). Less FOMO led to more JOMO (joy of missing out) (see: Bukowska 2021), consciously giving up keeping up to date with all the news that appears on social media – and using that time for other activities, which resulted in more quality time spent with self: investing it in body (exercise, sleep, diet, cooking), mindfulness (meditation, reflection, journaling) and other activities that brought researcher joy.

The impact of social media on social interactions and relationships was examined in relation to the Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical theory. The experiment revealed that without social media, the quality of social interactions improved, as communication became more genuine and personal. This was also the answer to the research question “How do social media influence our (personal) everyday life?”. Social media stage was removed, there was no longer the need to play a virtual role to appeal to the virtual audience. Goffman’s theatrical analogies of the front stage (online persona) and backstage (private self) shed light on the online interactions on social media platforms, where users play specific

roles and present themselves to an audience in the chosen way. While social media also allows for multiple online personas, raising questions of authenticity, real life interactions appeared to be more genuine and satisfying, helping the author to strengthen relationships and created meaningful bonds offline. The experiment demonstrated that without social media, the individual no longer felt the need to compare themselves to others, or play up to the mainstream expectations of how one's life should be, leading to a sense of self-sufficiency and contentment in offline interactions.

Regarding leisure and rest, the experiment showed that cutting off social media provided more free time for self-development activities and engaging in offline hobbies put aside when most time used to be spent on scrolling through smartphone. Such was the assumption to the research question "How do social media influence our everyday life?".

Platforms like YouTube offered educational and entertaining content, while offline hobbies such as dancing and drawing became more fulfilling and socially rewarding. The concept of leisure in sociology is often juxtaposed against work, with Marxist theories suggesting that leisure is the prize to be won with labour. Digital leisure, including social media consumption, is analysed in connection with data security and the monetisation of users' leisure experiences. Cutting off social media led to limited exposure to targeted advertising, reducing the pressure to make leisure-related purchases. The experiment demonstrated a conscious selection of leisure activities and a decrease in impulsive buying, stemming from social media detox. In that context, the feelings of apathy and boredom were switched by curiosity and desire to throw oneself into a new activity. In absence of easily available dopamine, extracted from social media, the author found mundane, boring activities such as studying, reading or staring out of the window or doing crosswords or quiz games much more exciting during the course of experiment, than in regular social media saturated life.

Work and study wise, an auto-ethnographical self-experiment aimed to investigate the whether eliminating social media distractions would have a positive impact on productivity and focus at job and in academia. In other words, removing social media platforms saved 2.5 h daily that could be spent on studying and personal projects, such as online blog. The experiment confirmed that being removing social media positively influenced work and study-related tasks. Without the presence of Facebook and Instagram on the smartphone the researcher experienced fewer distractions and decreased cyberslacking behaviour. This led to increased focus, faster task completion, improved interaction with colleagues, and enhanced presence during meetings. The absence of social media platforms also had a beneficial impact on the author's studies, particularly during the exam session. Reduced online distractions enabled better exam preparation, resulting in successful outcomes in master studies.

While the offline experiment revealed the efficiency benefits of disconnecting from social media, it also highlighted societal challenges and perceptions associated with being offline. The author encountered situations in both workplace and private life where not being present on social media platforms was considered inconvenient for others or created friction in solving everyday tasks, such as searching for a restaurant to go out. This observation echoed with Howard S. Baker's *Outsiders* book and the labelling theory, suggesting that deviant behaviour might be attributed to those who choose to be offline amongst online majority.

Moreover, the allure of social media as a source of infinite information, entertainment, inspiration and commerce made the author reflect on the experiences of procrastination and the sociology of boredom. Silke Ohlmeier, Mariusz Finkielsztein & Holger Pfaff (2020) discussed that boredom stems not from a lack of things to do, but from a lack of meaning in that case. In the context of modernity, boredom intertwines with societal changes, such as secularisation and the pursuit



of individual happiness. However, the researcher's personal offline experience reveals the joy of embracing moments of doing nothing and the relaxation it brings away from the screens.

Overall, the experiment findings confirmed the hypothesis that social media has a significant impact on social interactions, leisure activities, and the way individuals spend their free and work time. The sociological perspectives provided insights into the theatrical nature of online interactions and the complexities of digital identity. The experiment emphasised the value of genuine, one-on-one communication and the rediscovery of fulfilling offline activities. It was highlighted that one needs to strike a balance between the benefits of disconnecting and the societal pressure to be constantly online. Further research is recommended to explore strategies for fostering a healthy relationship with social media while maintaining productivity and mental wellbeing in the digital society.

## Conclusion

In this study, the researcher explored the influence of social media on everyday life through the lens of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the interpretation of symbols and meanings in social interactions, where meaning is constructed through social interaction, interpretation, and negotiation. Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram serve as spaces where individuals define their identities based on the perception of others, and new meanings are being created with every new meme, video or image that goes viral. The process of communication and validation through likes, comments, and shares defines one's online persona, creating a "social looking glass" and a "divided self": real-life individual, and their online persona.

The concept of the self, as discussed in symbolic interactionism, is closely tied to social media. Online personas and self-image are influ-

enced by the opinions of significant others and the general online community. Social media acts as a modern-day theatre where we perform and seek acceptance from the audience.

Through an experiment of removing Facebook and Instagram feeds from my daily routine, the researcher discovered that social media can act as a procrastination tool, diverting attention from important tasks. Without external validation and interpretation of one's offline actions, an individual can become more self-determined and focused on completing tasks.

Furthermore, the research findings were further explained using the labelling theory and the concept of reflected appraisals. Labels and perceptions from others can shape our self-concept, and the absence of social media can be seen as deviant behaviour in today's society. However, self-reflection was found to be more dependent on significant others' opinions rather than the generalised online audience during the experiment. Quality communication and feedback from close relationships played a more important role in self-reflection.

The findings suggest that social media heavily influences our perception of self and our need for validation from others. The constant evaluation through likes, comments, and shares can lead to an emphasis on presenting positive, successful images of ourselves, sometimes at the expense of authenticity. The desire to fit into the standards set by the "generalised others" on social media may overshadow the significance of genuine connections with our "significant others" offline. Removing social media platforms revealed the possibility of appreciating oneself based on personal fulfilment and the support of close relationships, rather than seeking validation from a larger online audience.

## Recommendation and further research

Based on the findings, it's evident that critical reflection on one's personal social media use habits and their impact the everyday life is crucial for understanding one's self-image perception and the relationship between self-image and the perceived/projected self online. Finding a balance between online and offline interactions can contribute to a healthier sense of self and overall well-being. Focusing on genuine relationships and personal self-development, intentional behaviours and everyday life choices seems easier in the absence of social media platforms, as it deprives an individual from seeking validation online.

From a societal perspective, awareness should be raised about the potential consequences of excessive social media use and the pressure to conform to online standards. Education and social media literacy and hygiene programs can equip individuals with the skills to navigate social media consumption consciously – here an investigative study on the efficiency of such programs can be proposed as a further, solution focused research. Promoting a culture that values authenticity, meaningful connections, and self-acceptance can contribute to a healthier relationship with social media in everyday life, and a further bigger scale quantitative study with a similar experiment on a bigger cohort of subjects can be conducted in the future.

In conclusion, social media, through the lens of symbolic interactionism and sociology of deviance and everyday life, plays a significant role in shaping our identities and day-to-day interactions. Understanding the impact of social media on our self-perception and everyday life allows for more intentional and mindful engagement with these platforms, while increasing the chance of living our life in integrity with our values, interests and needs.

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## Annex

### *One month without social media experiment log*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Apps Used (online activity)</b>	<b>Offline activities</b>	<b>Comments</b>
01.01.	WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, FB Messenger, camera (taking photos), Spotify	Breakfast with bf, playing with a cat, laundry, commuting on a train, walking, dining out, taking a bath, watching a movie, watching YouTube, listening to music, resting	Checked phone with no intention but reflex of needing to check social media feeds
02.01.	WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Signal, Spotify, YouTube, balance, (meditation app) while commuting, co-star, Gmail, Nebula, sanctuary (astrology apps), waking up (meditation app)	Having breakfast, commuting by a bus, meeting friends for coffee, meeting friend to pass him money, meeting friend and watching football match together, journaling, made a plan for January, wrote down activities to do in a month without social media, listening to a podcast	Noticed the uncontrolled urge to check phone, discussed it with a friend – social media as a means to “kill time”/fill time, while waiting at the traffic lights or commuting, listened to a guided meditation on a tram instead of staring at the phone
03.01.	Watched YouTube (stand up), Viber, Telegram, talked to classmates on WhatsApp	Work, studied (wrote a paper), checked assignments from school, exercised from home, did laundry, cooked lunch, took out trash, read a book, did some journaling, morning pages, listened to lectures by A. Watts while doing home chores, had dinner with a bf, went to sleep around midnight	
04.01.	WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Spotify, Co-Star, Nebula, sanctuary, YouTube, LinkedIn	Woke up, had coffee, got dressed and left for work, read kindle on metro, checked linked in, replied to messages on WhatsApp and Telegram, checked Viber, worked (emails, press release, brainstorm at work), had lunch with colleagues, checked astrology apps, listened to Alan watts lectures at work, listened to music to work, listened to podcast in the gym	Started to check LinkedIn, Facebook (to check menu, to check pitch bike places)
05.01.	WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Spotify, Co-Star, Nebula, sanctuary, YouTube, LinkedIn, play24	Woke up, had coffee, get dressed and left for work, read kindle on metro, checked linked in, deleted LinkedIn, replied to messages on WhatsApp and Telegram, checked Viber, worked (emails, press release, brainstorm at work), had lunch with	Deleted LinkedIn, but still would check social media when my friends would send links or events invitations

		colleague in a restaurant, checked astrology apps, listened to Alan watts lectures at work, went to the dance class, met friends, went for a dinner in Serbian embassy	
06.01.	WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Spotify, Co-Star, Nebula, sanctuary, YouTube	woke up, had coffee, had breakfast at the Mexican place, went to the coffee shop, studied, finished assignment, walked home, exercised, cleaned my apartment, did dishes, listened to a podcast, took shower, went to my friend's place, checked psychology articles on the phone, had a call with my mom, while commuting, exercised, had dinner, took a bath, watched a movie, tried motorcycle suit on	Feeling better now not using social media, used FB when checking marketplace offers
07.01.	WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Spotify	Woke up, had shower, breakfast, shopping for groceries, meeting with new people, working on studies assignments, checking the cellar, called pit bike schools	Aware of the need to use Facebook and Instagram for studies purposes
08.01.	WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, FB Messenger, camera (taking photos), Spotify	Met friends, worked on uni assignments in the coffee shop, visited palace of culture panoramic view, Norblin factory, meeting new people, going out, chilling at home	Not having Instagram seems to be helpful for my school assignments
09.01.	WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, FB Messenger, camera (taking photos), Spotify, astrology apps	Walked in the park/forest met friends, drank coffee in a coffee shop, read a bit, listened to a podcast, couldn't fall asleep	Feeling partially a better conversationalist, trying to ask deeper questions, seeking contact and providing contact
10.01.	WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, FB Messenger, camera (taking photos), Spotify, astrology apps, MS Teams	Work, exercise, study, chat with friends, watched YouTube videos	Think that I chat more than I used to, now using WhatsApp and Telegram
11.01.	WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, FB Messenger, camera (taking photos), Spotify, YouTube, astrology apps, MS Teams, couch surfing app	Work, art class, read kindle in metro, checked work stuff and worked on the bus while going to art class	Felt very tired, came home and just rested, sleep is important
12.01.	WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, FB Messenger, camera (taking photos), Spotify, YouTube, astrology apps, MS Teams, couch surfing app	Work, dance class, a chill evening at home with `lis, resting, watching archer	Dancing is such a great activity to socialise!




13.01.	WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, FB Messenger, camera (taking photos), Spotify, YouTube, astrology apps, MS Teams, couch surfing app	Met with couchsurfers, had a good evening talking and listening to music, studying	A lot of things going on at work and in my private life – no time to check phone
14.01.	WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, FB Messenger, camera (taking photos), Spotify, YouTube, astrology apps, MS Teams, couch surfing app	Work, workout, attending classes online, studying, having a evening at home with couch surfers, drinking together	Enjoy working chill and taking time for myself
15.01.	WhatsApp, YouTube, astrology apps, Gmail	Walking in a forest, slow wake up, cooking breakfast, watched Archer, went bouldering with couchsurfing, had a chill evening home afterwards	Enjoyed not feeling pressed by notification
16.01.	WhatsApp, YouTube, astrology apps, Gmail, Viber	Studied in a coffee shop, Viber video call with my mom, did house chores, planned my day in a journal, wrote	Missing my family, eating less sweets, sharing music with my friends, reflected on my friendships, love & relationships
17.01.	WhatsApp, YouTube, astrology apps, Gmail, Viber, MS Teams	Worked from home, exercised, drew, studied, watched YouTube videos, reading on a train? called lisandro, recorded a video birthday greetings for a friend, read couch surfing requests, followed up with a request	Getting anxious about approaching deadlines
18.01.	WhatsApp, YouTube, astrology apps, Gmail, Viber, MS Teams	Worked from home, exercised, drew, studied, watched YouTube videos, reading on a train? called lisandro, recorded a video birthday greetings for a friend, read couch surfing requests, followed up with a request	Start enjoying YouTube as a source of knowledge and free books, lectures, etc
19.01.	WhatsApp, YouTube, astrology apps, Gmail, Viber, MS Teams	Studied in a coffee shop, Viber video call with my mom, did house chores, planned my day in a journal, wrote	Enjoyed not feeling pressed by notification, was productive with my thesis work
20.01.	WhatsApp, YouTube, astrology apps, Gmail, Viber, MS Teams	Met with couchsurfers, had a good evening talking and listening to music, studying	Couchsurfing is a great activity! I think I would keep doing it despite social media detox
21.01.	WhatsApp, YouTube, astrology apps, Gmail, Viber, MS Teams	Workout, attending classes online, studying, having a evening at home with couch surfers, drinking together	Socialising in person feel much more satisfying than before; didn't

			touch my phone in the process
22.01.	WhatsApp, YouTube, astrology apps, Gmail, Viber, MS Teams	Got a vaccine shot, made flan with Lis, studied, watched lectures on love & romanticism on YT	Like the “me time” spent journaling while listening to YouTube
23.01.	WhatsApp, YouTube, astrology apps, Gmail, Viber, MS Teams	Went to coffee shop, wrote, studied for exam, called mom, made a plan for my thesis	Admitted my procrastination to avoid writing my thesis. admitted the need for solo time
24.01.	WhatsApp, YouTube, astrology apps, Gmail, Viber, MS Teams	Studying, reading, watching YouTube, chatting with my mom	Spending long hours on call now with mom, sharing recipes
25.01.	WhatsApp, astrology app, Signal, Facebook, Telegram	Gym workout with a friend, journaling, reading, doing shopping	It’s nice to share favourite offline activities with someone
26.01.	WhatsApp, astrology app, Signal, Facebook, Telegram	Gym workout with a friend, journaling, reading, doing shopping, healthy recipes cooking	Internet is a great source of information and inspiration
27.01.	WhatsApp, astrology app, Signal, Facebook, Telegram	Getting more into astrology, watching movies and series, cooking, hosting my friend	Having someone around you helps in not using social media
28.01.	WhatsApp, astrology app, Signal, Facebook, Telegram	Getting more into astrology, watching movies and series, cooking, hosting my friend	Had a great time out of home with my friend
29.01.	WhatsApp, astrology app, Signal, Facebook, Telegram	Bouldering with Lis, working in the coffee shop on thesis, meeting with friends, Arthur’s birthday	Checked Facebook to find out more about upcoming quiz
30.01.	YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, astrology apps, meditation app	Lazy morning with enough sleep, visiting my friend, doing home chores	Finishing my thesis – after all, it was useful to cut down on social media
31.01.	YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber, astrology apps, meditation app	Celebrating NY ewe with friends, hosting my friend from Belgium, listening to music	Don’t feel like installing Instagram and Facebook back

## About Autor

Yuliya Lapsenak is a MA, graduated Collegium Civitas with outstanding results in sociology in November 2022. She was awarded a special certificate of achievement for successfully completing her degree with an excellent thesis defence “The Role of Social Media in Everyday Life in Post-Pandemic Time: auto-ethnographic self-experiment”. The thesis itself became selected for publication in *Zoon Politikon* scientific magazine under the title “What a Month Without Social Media Taught Me About My Everyday Life: Auto-ethnographic Experiment”. Previously, she graduated with a BA in International Relations in Collegium Civitas (2017-2019), and studied International Business Communications with a major in Spanish at Belarusian State Economic University (2013-2017).

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