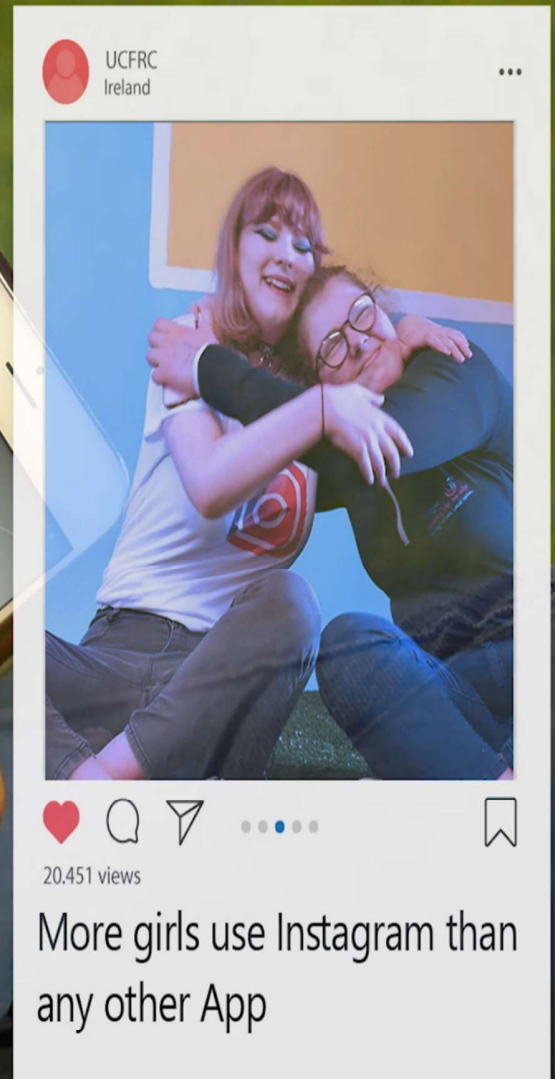


Social Media Use in Mayo's Teenagers

A report on Social Media Use in Mayo's Teenagers



NOVEMBER 2019

Authored by:

Mayo Tusla Youth Advisory Committee



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The Mayo Tusla Youth Advisory Committee is a group of 12 young people from all over Mayo, formed as a joint project between Foróige, National Youth Organisation and Tusla, Child and Family Support Agency. The group work on projects focused on youth participation in Tusla services and Tusla funded services locally and nationally.

This piece of youth led research has been made possible through the Youth as Researchers programme run by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre in NUI Galway. The Committee were all trained in research skills by the centre.

Our aim is to investigate the Social Media usage of teenagers in county Mayo and how they perceive this affecting their mental health.

We would like to thank Tusla, Foróige, The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre NUI Galway, CYPSC Mayo and Mayo Comhairle na nÓg for their help and support in this project. We would also like to thank Professor Pat Dolan, Dr Ciara Boylan and Dr Danielle Keenan from NUI Galway for the training we received which enabled us to complete this research and write up the report and to Niamh Heery from Swansong films for all her help in creating our video piece. Finally we would especially like to thank Mr Paddy Martin and Dr Liam White from Tusla for their support and finally Stephaine Cook, our facilitator, for all her help and encouragement in this amazing journey so far.

**Aim:**

To investigate the Social Media usage of teenagers in county Mayo and how they perceive this affecting their mental health.

Introduction:

For organisations like Tusla and Foroige, who are open to hearing the voices of young people, we believe that the findings collected by youth on any topic, but in this case on Social Media, are one of the most valuable resources available in better improving interactions with children and young people. The research conducted by us and other similar groups allows an honest insight on what we, as the future, thinks needs to be improved on in our day to day lives. When youth create questionnaires and influence information that is included on leaflets and posters, they automatically become easier for other youth to understand as they have been created for children by children. We ourselves benefit from this youth research by gaining experience, life skills and the added benefit of knowing we are having a positive impact on organisations who directly work with children and young people.

From our own experiences and discussions with youth professionals the group agreed that the topic of social media use in teenagers was becoming exhausted. It is also usually done by adults looking to show primarily the negatives of social media to parents. It rarely seemed to ask the teenagers directly about how social media actually made them feel. We knew from the start the question of how teens really feel about social media was going to have to be one of the pivotal questions in our research and we built our questionnaire around this.

Literature Review:

Before completing the survey, we looked at other research done before to better gauge what information had already been found about social media and teenagers opinions on it. When trying to learn more about social media and young people's mental health it is much easier to find the negatives than it is to find the positives. It's almost as though people want to automatically associate social media and young people with a negative angle, such as ill mental health for instance. A survey taken by the Royal Society of Public Health in the UK found that young people between the ages of 14-24 years of age found that Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram all lead to feelings of depression, anxiety, loneliness and even poor body image in these young people.

A comment made by childmind.org that we found interesting was that young people now only do their communication through a phone screen, compared to years ago before social media became so popular, when communication was done face to face or over a phone call. This article seems to suggest that making friends can only be done in person, and the fact that young people are communicating through their phones mean that these bonds are not being made (Ehmke, 2019). The topic of young people suffering with anxiety due to the use of their phones and social media is a reoccurring topic throughout this article. The writer believes that these youths will feel extremely anxious in their older years when communicating with people in person and this is directly linked to their communications being on their phone and through social media.

Another article discusses low self-esteem and how damaging it can be to young girls or boys who are comparing themselves to different celebrities wanting to be slimmer or have more muscle, or prettier, and in turn this article suggests that all this may affect their self-respect and dignity (Prajapati, 2019). All of the articles found when researching teens and social media use all have very similar negative messages about mental health and how it can affect the teens using it. There is serious repetition of the topics depression, anxiety, cyberbullying and communication issues amongst the articles and yet very little research shown in their findings to support where these ideas are coming from (Gordon, 2019).

However since we completed our own research another eight year longitudinal study on young people aged between thirteen and twenty found that there is no evidence that time spent on social media was associated with increased mental health issues. (Coyne. S et al, 2019)

Method:

It was important to the group that we reach as many young people of secondary school age as possible from all across Mayo. We felt that interviews would not be practical and so decided to use questionnaires. The questionnaires would be anonymous and therefore young people could be honest in their replies. We used a mixture of open and closed questions to enable us to gather as much information as possible.

We knew that in order to get a substantial number of responses from our research survey we would have to use a medium of distribution that would allow us to have a large reach while also providing ease of use. We chose Google Forms, an online survey creating service, which happens to tie in neatly with the social media topic that we were researching. We targeted secondary school students from 12-18 years of age in Mayo. We asked all of our committee members to share this survey on social media and to encourage their family and friends to complete it. Mayo Comhairle na nÓg members also shared and promoted the survey/questionnaire. We generated almost 500 responses.



Findings:

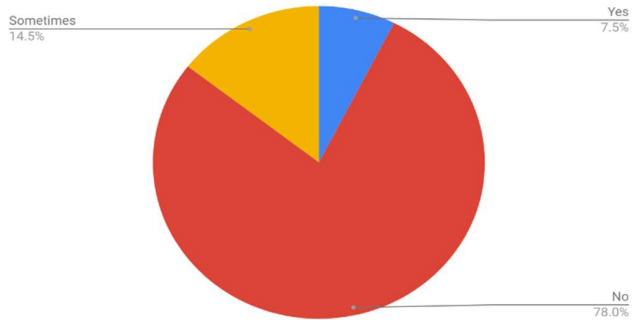


- Overall, the majority of teenagers (approx. 87%) stated that they feel happy when using social media. This contrasts the overwhelming negativity surrounding social media and so we felt that this statistic stood out to us as one of the most surprising. Of course not all teenagers feel happy on social media all of the time as one person explained in our survey

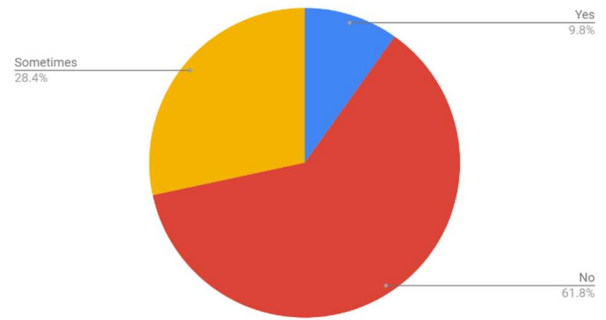
"[Teenagers feel]predominantly happy; however, missing out on events and being left out of groups can cause anxiety"

- A vast majority of teenagers feel pressured by their friends to use social media, but also feel comfortable using it. This finding shows that although people feel pressured to start communicating on and use social media, that pressure does not lead to them using something that makes them uncomfortable and we concluded that social media as a whole is not always the issue.

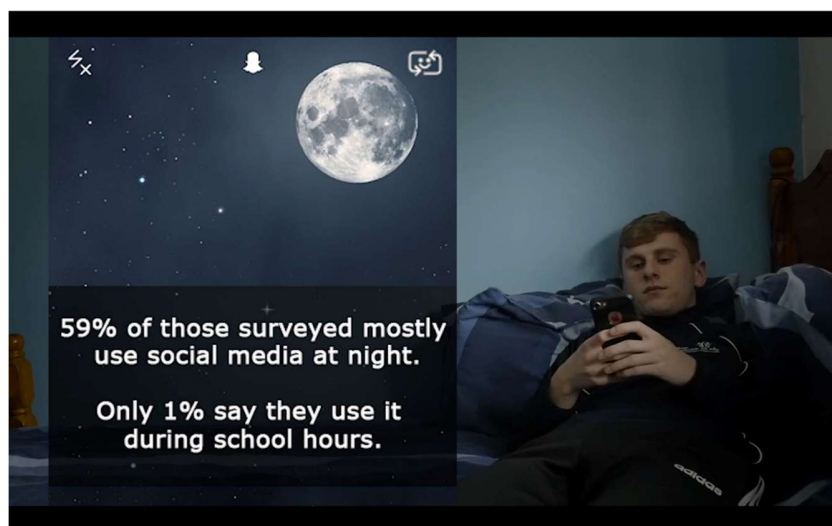
Parental Restrictions (Male)



Parental Restrictions (Female)

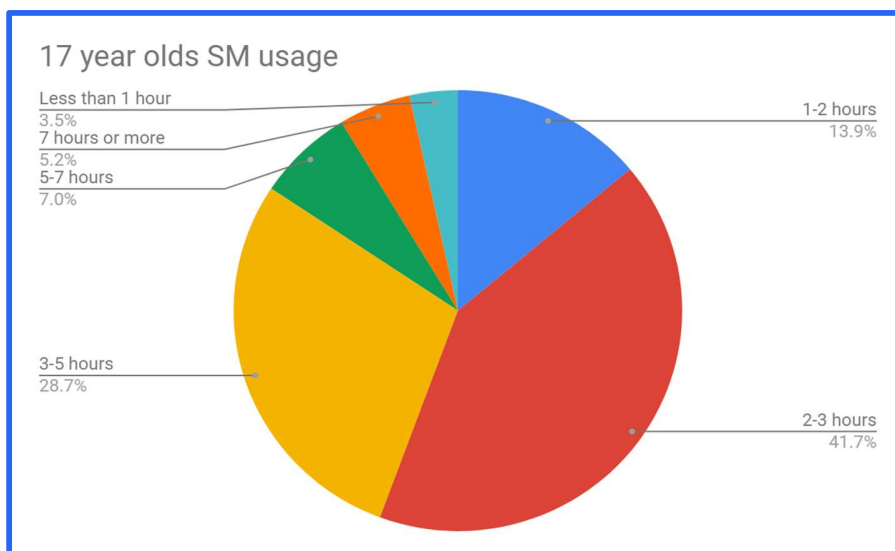
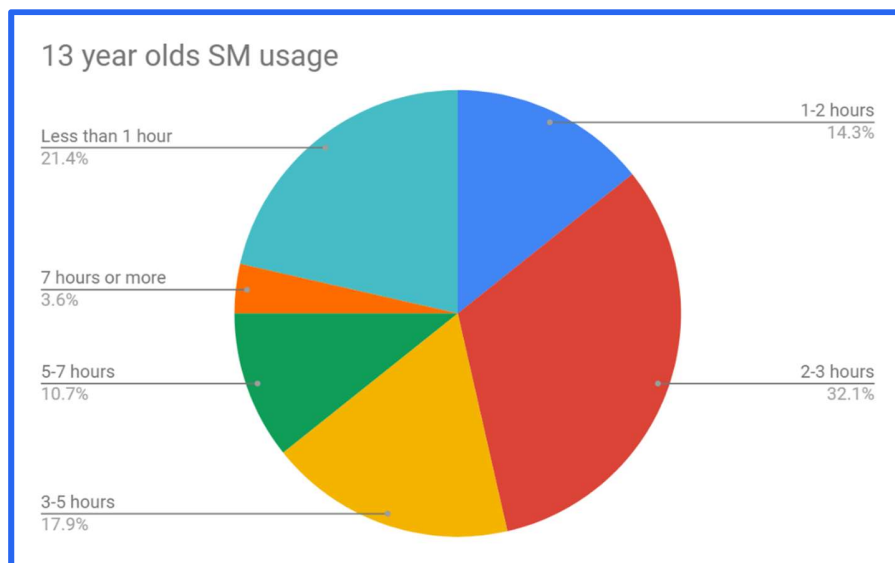


- The young people who responded to our questionnaire reported that girls had a higher level of parental restrictions on their social media usage than boys. This was an unexpected result and leads to the question Do parents worry more about their daughters on social media than their sons?
- An interesting finding was that a majority of the older age group of 15-18 year olds use social media at night, versus the 12-14 year olds who used social media in the afternoon. This may be due to teenagers workload increasing as they get older or having more control in their use of their devices than younger teenagers.

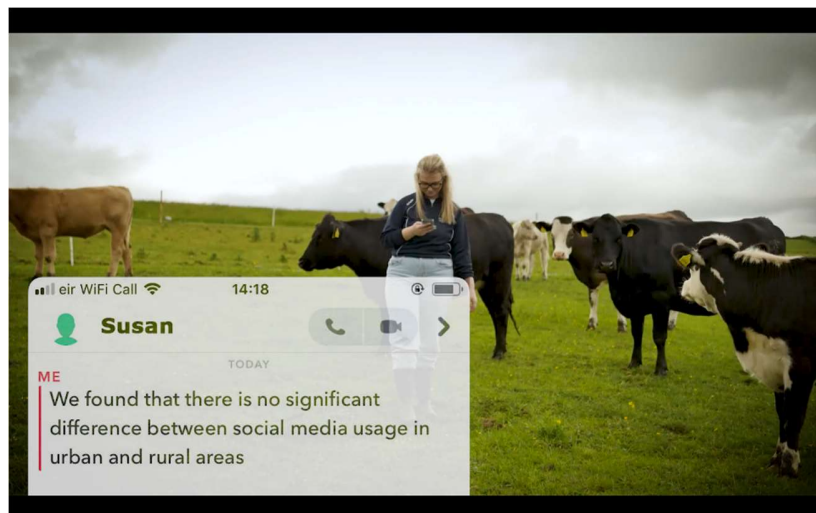
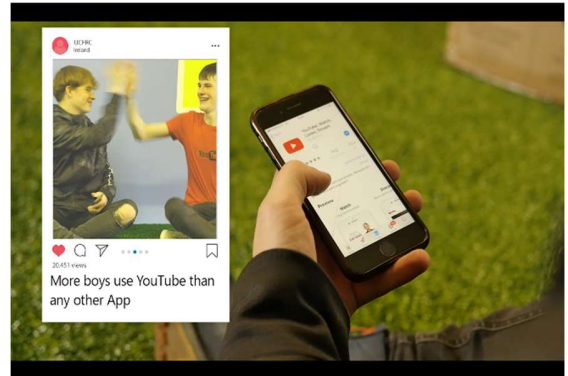
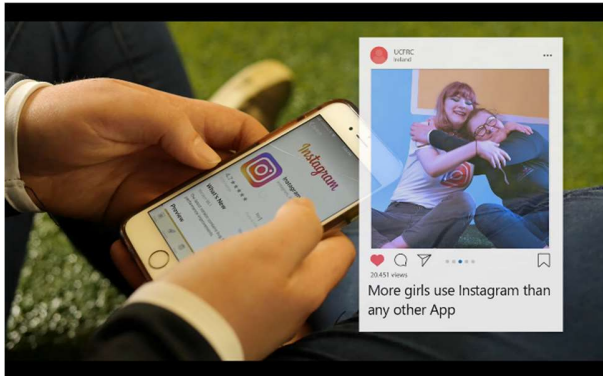


- We discovered that females felt more pressure to use social media and were more anxious when using social media. They also felt that social media caused anxiety in teenagers more than their male counterparts.

- Social media usage increase with the age of the young person. 21.4% of 13 year olds used social media for less than 1 hour a day where only 3.5% of 17 year olds use social media for less than one hour. The majority of 13 year olds are on social media for 2-3 hours a day whereas the majority 17 year olds use social media for 2-4 hours a day.



Other Findings:



Conclusions:

From the many well worded and insightful comments of our survey, one in particular stood out.

“Social media is amazing; I probably wouldn’t be alive if I didn’t have social media. I’m so rural I have no one to help me when my emotions get overwhelming or when I’m having a panic attacks [sic]. I also probably wouldn’t be as connected to my friends as I currently am...[social] media also has a lot of representation for a lot of communities and its helpful”

This comment encompasses the core finding of our research: that there needs to be less negativity around social media. Finally we would like to share one more insightful quote from one of our respondents:

“Social media is a tool. Like any other tool in our life it can be used for both good things and bad things. You use it to learn piano? Wonderful. But if it eats your time and damages your self-esteem then that’s not good. It requires self-awareness of one’s own limits and a constant appraisal of the merits and demerits of your current social media use. And willpower, I suppose, to change that. I personally believe that healthy social media use should be emphasized as opposed to demonizing its entire existence”

This comment not only shows that teenagers are not as lazy as some people believe them to be but it highlights the pros, while taking into consideration some of the cons of social media. As a result it displays the main conclusion of our research.

Recommendations:

- There needs to be less negativity around social media in general but in particular in media.
- Adults need to be more informed about how important social media is for young people to communicate with each other. Rather than restrict it, they should teach their children to use it responsibly.
- There needs to be a dedicated national support service that young people can freely access to assist with issues arising from social media use.
- Support adults (teachers, social workers, family support workers, youth workers) should be informed and work to dispel negative information about children using social media. Instead they should help with sharing information on using it responsibly.
- Schools should have parents evenings that share a balanced view on children’s use of social media and how best to manage it.

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Watch our research video at: <https://youtu.be/qPyPdtP3JqQ>

