GSA PROJECT

'Does social media influence girls away from sport?'

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Introduction

Our research question is '*does social media influence girls away from sport?*' We thought that this research question is important especially being at an age when technology almost shapes our lives. It was also important as we as a girls' school, want to address the issues faced by our girls on social media platforms and explore how it affects them and their mental health. We want to investigate how girls' usual routines can be disrupted by spending excessive hours online, or by how content can affect them.

Literature Review

The influence of social media on young athletes' mental health: a cross-sectional study (Camille Tooth et al., 2026) examines 912 athletes aged 12 and 24. The survey found 93.4% use at least one social media (SM) platform, with 59.6% sometimes compared themselves with others. Females and older athletes feel pressured to maintain an online image. 71.4% of females spend over two hours online, compared with the 64.9% of boys. A longer screen time was related to negative effects on sleep, mood, self-image and loneliness. 57.1% report support online whereas 25.4% report stress from SM usage. 10.4% experienced online abuse, but only a few sought support. This suggests that SM could have negative effects on young people's mental health and sleep quality. This pressure may discourage girls from taking part. However, this study does not prove that SM causes girls to drop out of sports.

Another study (Effects of social media on body dissatisfaction in junior high school girls in Japan (Rie Hosokawa et al., 2022)) focuses on girls aged 12 to 15 and their body dissatisfaction (BD). SM can promote thinness and was associated with BD. The study recruited 161 girls, 44 with BD and 117 without. Usage of SM and the following of thinness-related content was higher in the BD group. Following SM content, displaying unrealistic figures, may affect girls' confidence and may discourage sports participation.

Our final study (Physical activity as a moderator between problematic social media use and mental health in adolescents, (Donna Niemistö et al., 2026)) examines how physical activity (PA) can be a moderator between SM usage and mental health in adolescents. It investigates 86 girls and 48 boys with a mean age of 14.2 ± 0.3 years, for the symptoms of depression. Girls had an increased risk of anxiety and depression. Moderate-to-vigorous physical activity was associated with fewer negative symptoms in girls. Regular sports participation may help control the impact of SM on adolescents.

Overall, studies suggest that SM can influence girls' participation in sports. Idealised body images that may make girls feel self-conscious, and by being a source of depression and anxiety for adolescents. Sports or PA, however, can be a moderator for those who feel anxiety/depression and help buffer the negative effects of being online.

Methodology:

We created an anonymous Microsoft Forms survey, shared with Year 8 students, and received 58 responses.

We chose a survey because it was quick, easily accessible and encouraged honest responses.

No open questions were used. Our survey consisted of multiple-choice questions because responses were easier to compare, analyse and present in graphs. Questions focused on students' SM use, sports participation, confidence and opinions about SM.

We calculated percentages and identified patterns in the data. We then compared our findings with the research from our literature review to see whether our results supported or challenged what other researchers had found.

Results:

SM Use

The results showed that SM is used regularly by many students.

58 students completed the survey.

36% of students reported spending more than **two hours per day** on SM.

26% spent **less than 30 minutes per day.**

Participation in Sport

Most students reported taking part in sport outside of PE lessons.

60% of respondents said they **participated in sport two or more times each week.**

12% said they **never took part in sport outside of PE.**

SM Instead of Sport

When asked whether they had **chosen SM instead of PA,**

54% of students said they had done so **at least sometimes.**

11% reported doing this **often or very often.**

Confidence in Sport

Most students **did not believe SM affects their confidence in sport.**

12% agreed that **SM influences how confident they feel when taking part in sport**

43% **disagreed.**

45% were **unsure.**

Overall Impact

Students had **mixed opinions** about the **overall impact of SM on girls' participation in sport.**

35% believed **SM** has a **positive impact.**

29% believed it has a **negative impact.**

36% felt it has **no impact.**

Analysis and Discussion:

Our findings suggest that SM influences girls' participation in sport, but not always in a negative way. Although many students reported using SM regularly, most students also said they took part in sport at least twice a week. This suggests that SM does not necessarily stop girls from being active.

However, more than half of respondents said they had chosen SM instead of physical activity at least sometimes. This supports previous research which suggests that SM can compete with sport for young people's free time.

Our findings did not fully support research suggesting that SM affects confidence in sport. Only a small number of students agreed that SM influenced their confidence. This may suggest that students are more affected by SM through the amount of time they spend online rather than through confidence or self-image.

The results also showed that students had mixed views about the impact of SM overall. Some believed it encourages participation through role models and sporting content, while others felt it distracts girls from being active.

Conclusion:

The results showed that social media has positive and negative effects. While many students chose social media instead of exercise sometimes, most students still took part in sport regularly. Students had mixed opinions about the impact of social media, with some believing it encourages participation through sports content, while others felt it can be a distraction. These support the research we reviewed, suggesting social media can both inspire and discourage girls from participating in sport. Overall, social media does influence girls' participation in sport, but it depends on how platforms are used and the individual experiences.

References:

- Physical activity as a moderator between problematic social media use and mental health in adolescents (Donna Niemistö et al., 2026)
- Effects of social media on body dissatisfaction in junior high school girls in Japan (Rie Hosokawa et al., 2022)
- The influence of social media on young athletes' mental health: a cross-sectional study (Camille Tooth et al., 2026)

Appendices:

The questions we used for our survey can be seen in the following figures.

Figure 1

1. How often do you use social media?

Less than 30 minutes a day	15
30 minutes to less than 1 hour a day	9
1 to less than 2 hours a day	13
2 to 4 hours a day	18
More than 4 hours a day	4

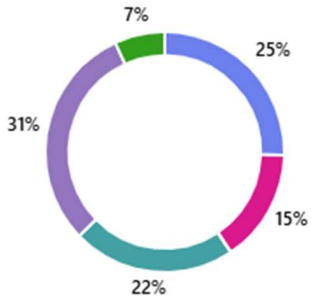


Figure 2

2. How often do you take part in sport or physical activity outside of PE lessons?

Never	7
Once a week	17
2–3 times a week	24
4 or more times a week	11

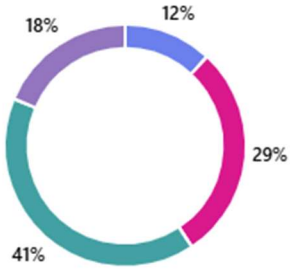


Figure 3

3. Have you ever chosen to spend time on social media instead of taking part in sport or physical activity?

Never	16
Rarely	12
Sometimes	25
Often	5
Very Often	1

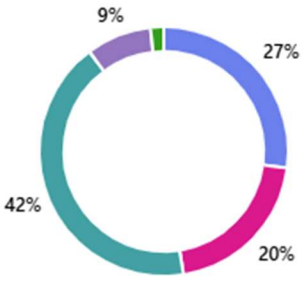


Figure 4

4. How much do you agree with the statement: "Social media influences how confident I feel when taking part in sport."

Strongly disagree	10
Disagree	16
Neither agree or disagree	26
Agree	6
Strongly Agree	1

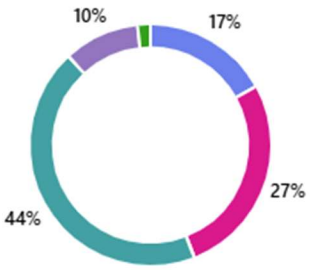


Figure 5

5. How much do you agree with the statement: "Images and videos on social media make me compare myself to others."

Strongly Disagree	7
Disagree	11
Neither agree or disagree	23
Agree	14
Strongly Agree	4

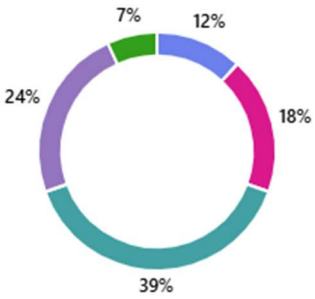


Figure 6

6. Overall, do you think social media has a positive or negative impact on girls' participation in sport?

Very positive	3
Mostly positive	17
No impact	22
Mostly negative	14
Very negative	3

