Caught Between Screens and Sleep: A Phenomenological Study of Adolescents' Social Media Use and Sleep Experiences in Ilocos Sur

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become deeply integrated into adolescent life, providing opportunities for communication, entertainment, learning, and social connection. At the same time, continued engagement with social media, particularly during evening and bedtime hours, may become difficult to regulate and may interfere with adolescents' intended sleep routines. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of adolescents regarding social media use and sleep in Ilocos Sur. Fifteen adolescents were purposively selected as informants and participated in individual semi-structured interviews. The narratives were analyzed using a phenomenological approach, with particular attention to adolescents' everyday social-media experiences, bedtime use, social connection, difficulty disengaging, sleep and next-day experiences, and self-regulation.

Six themes emerged: Social Media as Part of Everyday Adolescent Life; The Pull of the Screen at Bedtime; Caught Between Connection and the Need to Sleep; Losing Track of Time and Difficulty Disengaging; Sleep Disruption and the Next-Day Experience; and Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Attempts to Regain Control. The findings indicated that adolescents did not experience social media solely as a harmful activity. Rather, it was woven into their friendships, communication, entertainment, school-related activities, and everyday routines. Difficulties emerged when nighttime engagement became prolonged, particularly when adolescents experienced habitual scrolling, ongoing peer communication, social expectations, or difficulty disengaging. Participants described delayed sleep, difficulty waking, tiredness, reduced concentration, and changes in daytime functioning in relation to nights when they remained online late. At the same time, they demonstrated awareness of the importance of sleep and described strategies for regulating nighttime social-media use. The findings suggest that adolescent sleep interventions should recognize the legitimate social and emotional functions of social media while promoting digital self-regulation, healthy bedtime routines, supportive family practices, and responsible technology use. The findings may serve as a basis for developing a context-sensitive sleep enhancement and digital-wellness program for adolescents in Ilocos Sur.

Keywords: Adolescents, Social Media, Sleep, Digital Engagement, Problematic Social Media Use, Lived Experience, Phenomenology, Ilocos Sur

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become deeply embedded in the everyday lives of adolescents. Digital platforms provide young people with opportunities to communicate with friends, participate in online communities, obtain information, express themselves, access educational materials, and engage in entertainment. For many adolescents, checking notifications, responding to messages, watching short videos, browsing posts, and interacting with peers are activities that occur throughout the day and often continue into the evening. Social media has therefore become more than a technological tool; it forms part of the social environment in which adolescents develop relationships, negotiate identity, and experience belonging.

The increasing integration of social media into adolescent life has also generated concern regarding patterns of use that become difficult to regulate. The World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (2024) reported that problematic social-media use among adolescents increased from 7% in 2018 to 11% in 2022 based on data from nearly 280,000 adolescents across 44 countries and regions. Problematic use was characterized by difficulty

controlling use, prioritizing social media over other activities, withdrawal-like experiences, and negative consequences in daily life. At the same time, the WHO recognized that digital platforms can provide meaningful social connection and peer support. This dual character of social media is important because adolescent digital engagement cannot simply be classified as either beneficial or harmful.

Sleep is one area in which adolescent digital behavior has become particularly relevant. Adolescence is a developmental period in which adequate sleep supports physical development, learning, cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, and daily performance. However, adolescents often experience competing demands involving schoolwork, family responsibilities, peer relationships, entertainment, and digital communication. When social-media engagement extends into the hours intended for sleep, the boundary between waking social life and nighttime rest may become increasingly blurred.

Recent evidence has strengthened concerns regarding problematic social-media use and adolescent sleep. Khan et al. (2024), using data from 212,613 adolescents aged 11 to 15 years across 40 countries, reported that intense and problematic social-media use was associated with sleep-onset difficulties. The association was particularly pronounced among adolescents exhibiting problematic patterns of use. The authors emphasized, however, that further longitudinal research was needed to clarify the direction and mechanisms of the relationship.

Ahmed et al. (2024), in a systematic review and meta-analysis involving 182 studies and more than one million individuals, similarly found associations between problematic social-media use and sleep problems. Their findings are important because they distinguish problematic social-media use from ordinary social-media use. This distinction suggests that the degree of control adolescents have over their digital behavior and the consequences associated with that behavior may be more informative than simply measuring the amount of time spent online.

Prospective research has provided additional evidence concerning the importance of bedtime digital behavior. Research involving early adolescents found that bedtime screen behaviors, including social-media use, phone-based communication, and keeping internet-connected devices in the bedroom, were associated with shorter sleep duration and greater sleep disturbance over time. Such findings suggest that the timing and context of digital engagement may be important considerations when examining adolescent sleep.

More recent evidence has continued to support the relationship between digital behavior and sleep. Cal-Herrera et al. (2025), in a systematic review and meta-analysis, reported associations between social-media use and unhealthy sleep-related behaviors among adolescents. A 2025 umbrella review likewise synthesized evidence from systematic reviews and primary studies and identified relationships between digital-device use and several sleep outcomes, including shorter sleep duration, bedtime procrastination, and poorer sleep quality. These findings reinforce the importance of understanding not only how much adolescents use digital devices but also how and when they use them.

Nevertheless, the relationship between social media and sleep is not necessarily uniform. Experimental research has suggested that short periods of controlled pre-sleep social-media exposure do not inevitably result in measurable deterioration in sleep. Sennock et al. (2024), for example, found no significant differences in objectively assessed sleep quality, subjective arousal, or memory consolidation following a controlled 45-minute period of pre-sleep social-media use compared with a reading condition among adolescents. Such findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between occasional, controlled use and patterns involving prolonged engagement, difficulty disengaging, or problematic use.

The social meaning of digital engagement is particularly important during adolescence. Social media may be used to maintain friendships, participate in group conversations, respond to peers, seek entertainment, relieve boredom, or remain aware of what is happening within one's social circle. Scott et al. (2022), in a qualitative systematic review of adolescents' perspectives on bedtime social-media use, identified social motivations, habitual smartphone use, and recognition of the problem as important dimensions of the experience. Fear of missing out and perceived expectations of social availability could make it difficult for adolescents to disengage from social media at bedtime.

This perspective helps explain why nighttime social-media use cannot be understood solely as a matter of poor discipline. For some adolescents, remaining online may represent maintaining friendships or avoiding exclusion from peer interactions. Consequently, putting the phone away may involve temporarily withdrawing from an important social environment. Effective interventions therefore need to acknowledge the social and emotional functions of social media while helping adolescents establish healthy boundaries.

The WHO (2024) similarly emphasized the need to promote healthier online habits without overlooking the positive social functions of digital platforms. The organization's findings indicated that a substantial proportion of adolescents maintained frequent online contact with friends, demonstrating how digital communication has become integrated into adolescent relationships. Thus, the public health challenge is not necessarily to eliminate social-media use but to support healthier and more balanced patterns of engagement.

Sleep disruption is important because its consequences may extend into adolescents' daytime experiences. Difficulty sleeping may be followed by morning tiredness, difficulty waking, daytime sleepiness, reduced concentration, lower energy, and changes in mood. When these experiences occur repeatedly, they may affect school participation and general well-being. Understanding how adolescents themselves experience these consequences may therefore provide information that cannot be obtained through sleep-duration measures alone.

The distinction between social-media use and problematic social-media use also has implications for intervention development. If adolescents use social media primarily for communication, relaxation, entertainment, or emotional connection, an intervention based only on prohibition may be difficult to accept or sustain. Conversely, adolescents who recognize that they repeatedly remain online despite being tired or needing to sleep may benefit from interventions focused on self-regulation, bedtime routines, notification management, and supportive family practices.

Despite the growing international literature, much of the evidence concerning social media and adolescent sleep remains quantitative. Surveys and meta-analyses can demonstrate statistical associations, but they provide less insight into how adolescents themselves understand their behavior. They may not fully explain why an adolescent continues scrolling despite knowing that it is already late, why a message from a friend may feel more urgent than sleep, or how adolescents interpret the consequences of their nighttime digital behavior.

This gap is particularly relevant in the Philippine context. Adolescents in provincial communities such as Ilocos Sur experience social media within specific family, school, peer, and community environments. Their digital practices may be shaped by school requirements, family expectations, peer relationships, internet access, household routines, and local patterns of communication. Findings from international populations may therefore not completely capture the lived realities of Filipino adolescents.

A phenomenological approach provides an opportunity to address this gap by focusing on the meanings adolescents attach to their experiences. Rather than asking only how many hours adolescents spend online or how many hours they sleep, phenomenology allows researchers to ask what it is like to live with the tension between digital connection and the need for rest.

The present study therefore examined the lived experiences of adolescents regarding social-media use and sleep in Ilocos Sur. It focused on how adolescents incorporated social media into everyday life, how they experienced nighttime use, what made disengagement difficult, how they experienced sleep and the following day in relation to nighttime digital engagement, and what strategies they used to manage their digital habits.

By bringing adolescents' voices to the foreground, the study sought to move beyond the simple question of whether social media was associated with poor sleep. Instead, it examined what it meant to be caught between screens and sleep—to want to remain connected to an increasingly digital social world while simultaneously recognizing the need for rest. Understanding this lived experience may provide a stronger foundation for developing adolescent sleep and digital-wellness interventions that are practical, developmentally appropriate, and responsive to young people's everyday realities.

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to explore the lived experiences of adolescents regarding social media use and sleep, particularly how social media was experienced in their everyday lives, evening and bedtime routines, sleep experiences, and efforts to manage their use.

Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. explore how adolescents experienced social media as part of their everyday lives;
2. describe adolescents' experiences of social media use during evening and bedtime routines;
3. explore how adolescents experienced and negotiated the tension between social connection through social media and their need for sleep;
4. understand adolescents' experiences of losing track of time and difficulty disengaging from social media;
5. explore how adolescents described their sleep experiences and next-day experiences in relation to nighttime social media use; and
6. examine adolescents' awareness, self-regulation, and strategies for managing social media use in relation to sleep.

Research Questions

1. How did adolescents describe their experiences of social media as part of their everyday lives?
2. How did adolescents describe their experiences of using social media during evening and bedtime routines?
3. How did adolescents experience and negotiate the tension between staying connected through social media and the need to sleep?
4. How did adolescents describe experiences of losing track of time and difficulty disengaging from social media?
5. How did adolescents describe their sleep and next-day experiences in relation to nighttime social media use?
6. How did adolescents demonstrate awareness, self-regulation, and attempts to regain control over their social media use in relation to sleep?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design. Phenomenology was appropriate because the study focused on the lived experiences and meanings adolescents attached to social-media use and sleep. The purpose was not to quantify the amount of social-media use or statistically establish an association with sleep but to understand how adolescents experienced the phenomenon in their everyday lives.

An interpretive phenomenological orientation guided the analysis, allowing the researchers to consider both the adolescents' descriptions and the meanings embedded within those descriptions. Particular attention was given to the six experiential dimensions reflected in the objectives and research questions: everyday social-media use, evening and bedtime engagement, the tension between connection and sleep, difficulty disengaging, sleep and next-day experiences, and self-regulation.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in selected communities and school settings in Ilocos Sur, Philippines. The province provided a meaningful context for examining adolescent digital experiences within a provincial Philippine environment.

Sampling

Fifteen adolescents were purposively selected as informants based on predetermined inclusion criteria. Eligible informants were adolescents who regularly used social-media platforms and were able to describe their experiences of social-media use and sleep. The informants were junior high school learners enrolled in public schools, with ages ranging from 12 to 16 years old. For confidentiality, the informants were assigned codes A1 to A15. Their names and other identifying information were not included in the manuscript. Because the informants were minors, written consent was obtained from their parents or legal guardians, and assent was obtained from the adolescents before participation.

Data Collection

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide composed of open-ended questions. The interview guide was organized around the same six dimensions reflected in the objectives and research questions.

The first dimension focused on social media as part of everyday adolescent life. Questions encouraged participants to describe what social media meant to them, how they used it during ordinary days, and what purposes it served. The second dimension focused on the pull of social media during evening and bedtime. Participants were encouraged to describe their usual nighttime routines, what they did on social media before sleeping, and how their intended bedtime interacted with their digital activities.

The third dimension explored the tension between social connection and the need for sleep. Questions examined experiences involving friends, group conversations, social expectations, fear of missing out, and the perceived importance of remaining online.

The fourth dimension addressed losing track of time and difficulty disengaging. Participants described situations in which they intended to use social media briefly but continued longer than expected, as well as experiences that made stopping easy or difficult. The fifth dimension explored sleep and next-day experiences. Participants described their experiences of falling asleep, waking, tiredness, energy, concentration, mood, and daytime functioning following nights when they used social media close to bedtime. The sixth dimension examined awareness and self-regulation. Participants described how they recognized the need to manage their digital behavior and what strategies they used to limit nighttime social-media use and protect their sleep.

Interviews were conducted in a private setting to promote confidentiality and openness. With appropriate consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Translation of Narratives

When informants expressed themselves in Filipino, Ilocano, or a combination of languages, their narratives were translated into English while preserving the intended meaning and context. Translated narratives were reviewed against the original statements to minimize loss of meaning.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were read repeatedly to develop familiarity with the narratives. Significant statements related to social-media use, nighttime engagement, sleep, peer expectations, difficulty disengaging, daytime experiences, and self-regulation were identified. The significant statements were coded and grouped according to similarities. Related codes were clustered into categories, from which broader themes were developed. The

researchers repeatedly returned to the original narratives to determine whether the themes accurately reflected the informants' experiences.

The analysis was organized in accordance with the six research questions. Narratives concerning ordinary social-media experiences were grouped under the first theme. Narratives concerning nighttime attraction and bedtime use were examined under the second theme. Experiences involving the competing demands of social connection and sleep were examined under the third theme. Narratives describing loss of time and difficulty stopping were examined under the fourth theme. Experiences involving sleep and the following day were examined under the fifth theme. Finally, narratives concerning awareness and attempts at self-regulation were examined under the sixth theme. The analysis considered both common experiences and individual differences among the informants. Particular attention was given to the meaning adolescents attached to their behavior rather than simply describing the frequency of social-media use.

The researchers recognized that their professional and academic backgrounds could influence interpretation. Reflexive notes were maintained throughout data collection and analysis. The researchers consciously avoided assuming that social-media use was inherently harmful and remained receptive to positive experiences such as friendship, entertainment, learning, and emotional connection.

The researchers also avoided interpreting participants' accounts as proof that social media directly caused sleep problems. Instead, participants' descriptions of sleep and next-day experiences were treated as their lived experiences and perceptions within the context of nighttime digital engagement.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was supported through repeated engagement with the transcripts, careful coding, and member checking when appropriate. Dependability was strengthened through documentation of the research and analytic procedures. Confirmability was supported through reflexive notes and an audit trail. Transferability was enhanced through detailed descriptions of the research context and informants.

Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical requirements for research involving minors. Appropriate institutional permissions were obtained before data collection. Written informed consent was secured from parents or legal guardians, while assent was obtained from the adolescent informants.

Participation was voluntary. Informants were informed that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, and all recordings and transcripts were securely stored.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were presented according to the six research questions and corresponding objectives. Each theme represented a major dimension of the adolescents' lived experiences and directly corresponded to one objective and one research question.

Theme 1: Social Media as Part of Everyday Adolescent Life

This theme corresponded to Objective 1 and Research Question 1, which focused on adolescents' experiences of social media as part of their everyday lives.

The informants described social media as an ordinary part of their daily routines. It was used for communicating with friends, following updates, watching entertaining content, completing school-related activities, and passing time. This suggested that adolescents did not necessarily view social media as a separate or unusual activity. Instead, it had become incorporated into the rhythm of everyday life.

A1: *"Social media is already part of my everyday routine. I use it to talk to my friends, check what they post, and sometimes watch videos when I am resting."*

A3: *"Most of my friends are online, so if there is something we need to discuss, we usually talk through social media."*

A4: *"I use social media for different things. Sometimes for school, sometimes for chatting, and sometimes just because I am bored."*

A5: *"It helps me stay updated with my friends. Even if we do not see each other personally, we still know what is happening through social media."*

A7: *"Sometimes I open my phone without really planning to use social media. I just check one thing, then I end up looking at other posts."*

A8: *"I use social media because it helps me relax after school. Watching videos helps me forget about schoolwork for a while."*

A11: *"I cannot say that social media is always bad because there are many useful things there. The problem is sometimes I spend longer than I planned."*

A15: *"Social media is both useful and entertaining for me. I think it becomes a problem when I cannot stop using it."*

This finding is consistent with the WHO (2024) observation that online communication has become an important component of adolescent social relationships. The WHO also emphasized that social media may provide meaningful social connection when used responsibly. Thus, the presence of frequent social-media use should not automatically be interpreted as problematic. The informants' experiences further suggested that the meaning of social media depended on the situation in which it was used. For one adolescent, the phone could serve as a means of communicating with classmates; for another, it could provide entertainment after a demanding school day. This variety is important because it demonstrates that the same digital platform may fulfill different emotional and social needs. The concern emerged when the activity became difficult to control or began to displace other activities, particularly sleep. This distinction corresponds with Ahmed et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of differentiating ordinary social-media use from problematic use.

Theme 2: The Pull of the Screen at Bedtime

This theme corresponded to Objective 2 and Research Question 2, which focused on adolescents' experiences of social media during evening and bedtime routines.

The second theme reflected the increasing attraction of social media during evening and bedtime hours. The informants described situations in which they intended to use their phones briefly but remained online longer than expected. A simple act of checking a message or watching a video could develop into prolonged browsing.

A1: *"I usually tell myself that I will only check my phone for a few minutes, but sometimes I do not notice that it is already late."*

A3: *"Sometimes I start with a message from a friend. After replying, I check another post, then another video."*

A5: *"The problem is when I keep saying, 'one more video,' and then another one comes."*

A6: *"Sometimes I do not even feel sleepy while I am using my phone. I only realize I am tired when I finally put it down."*

A8: *"Sometimes I continue because my friends are still chatting."*

A9: *"I usually check social media before sleeping. Sometimes that becomes the reason I sleep later."*

A11: *"It is easy to lose track of time because you keep seeing something new."*

A15: *"The difficult part is stopping. Starting is easy, but stopping is sometimes harder."*

This experience reflects the findings of Scott et al. (2022), whose qualitative synthesis identified habitual smartphone use and social motivations as important dimensions of adolescent bedtime social-media behavior. Adolescents may continue using social media because the activity is enjoyable, habitual, or socially meaningful.

Khan et al. (2024) similarly found that intense and problematic social-media use was associated with sleep-onset difficulties among adolescents across 40 countries. These findings provide quantitative evidence that complements the experiences described in the present study, although the present qualitative findings do not establish causation.

However, the narratives suggested that prolonged nighttime use was not always intentional. Adolescents often described it as something that gradually happened. The transition from "I will check my phone for a few minutes" to "it is already late" reflected the difficulty of establishing a clear boundary between leisure and sleep.

Theme 3: Caught Between Connection and the Need to Sleep

This theme corresponded to Objective 3 and Research Question 3, which focused on the tension between maintaining social connection through social media and the need for sleep. The third theme represented the central tension in the adolescents' experiences: the desire to remain socially connected while also recognizing the need to sleep. The informants described staying online because friends were active, conversations were ongoing, or they were concerned about missing information.

A1: *"Sometimes I stay online because my friends are still talking. I do not want to leave the conversation."*

A2: *"If there is something happening in our group chat, I want to know what it is."*

A3: *"Sometimes I feel like I might miss something if I log off early."*

A5: *"I do not want my friends to think that I am ignoring them."*

A7: *"When everyone is active at night, it is harder to stop."*

A8: *"I know sleep is important, but sometimes I feel that talking with friends is also important."*

A10: *"I think part of the reason I stay online is because I do not want to feel left out."*

A14: *"It is difficult when your friends are still online and you are the only one who leaves."*

This experience closely reflects the qualitative findings of Scott et al. (2022), who identified fear of missing out and social expectations as important reasons adolescents remained engaged with social media at bedtime. The experience also demonstrates why nighttime digital behavior cannot be reduced to individual self-control. Adolescents exist within peer networks in which communication can continue beyond conventional daytime hours. A young person who disconnects may feel that they are missing an important conversation or becoming socially unavailable. The tension was therefore relational. Adolescents were not simply choosing a screen over sleep. They were negotiating two needs that could both feel important: maintaining connection and obtaining rest. This finding has implications for intervention design. Rather than framing sleep promotion as a conflict between adolescents and technology, interventions should help adolescents develop healthy social boundaries and recognize that immediate online availability is not always necessary.

Theme 4: Losing Track of Time and Difficulty Disengaging

This theme corresponded to Objective 4 and Research Question 4, which examined adolescents' experiences of losing track of time and difficulty disengaging from social media. The fourth theme focused on the adolescents' experiences of difficulty stopping social-media use. They described intending to use social media for a short

period but continuing beyond the planned time. Some recognized that they had stayed online too long only after checking the clock or experiencing tiredness.

A1: *"Sometimes I look at the clock and realize I have been using my phone much longer than I planned."*

A3: *"I tell myself that this is the last video, but then I watch another one."*

A4: *"Sometimes I do not realize how late it is until I feel sleepy."*

A6: *"There are nights when I put my phone down, then pick it up again after a few minutes."*

A8: *"When I am bored, I automatically open social media."*

A9: *"Even if I already know that I need to sleep, I sometimes continue scrolling."*

A12: *"Sometimes I lose track of time because I am focused on what I am watching."*

A15: *"Sometimes I regret staying online because I know I could have slept earlier."*

The WHO (2024) identifies difficulty controlling social-media use as one characteristic of problematic use. Ahmed et al. (2024) likewise demonstrated that problematic use, rather than social-media use in general, showed a stronger relationship with sleep problems. The adolescents' narratives give meaning to this concept of difficulty controlling use. They did not necessarily describe themselves as "addicted." Instead, they described an everyday struggle: knowing that they should stop but finding it difficult to do so. This distinction is important because an adolescent may not perceive the behavior as severe enough to be considered an addiction, yet the repeated inability to disengage can still interfere with sleep. Intervention strategies should therefore emphasize self-awareness and practical behavioral skills rather than relying solely on labels.

Theme 5: Sleep Disruption and the Next-Day Experience

This theme corresponded to Objective 5 and Research Question 5, which explored adolescents' sleep and next-day experiences in relation to nighttime social-media use.

The fifth theme concerned the experiences that participants associated with nighttime social-media engagement. The informants described difficulty waking, morning tiredness, reduced energy, daytime sleepiness, and difficulty concentrating following nights when they stayed online late.

A1: *"When I sleep late because of my phone, waking up for school becomes harder."*

A2: *"I feel sleepy in the morning, especially when I know I did not sleep early."*

A4: *"I notice that I have less energy the next day."*

A5: *"When I sleep late, I sometimes have difficulty concentrating."*

A6: *"There are mornings when I want to continue sleeping instead of getting ready for school."*

A8: *"I can feel the difference when I sleep early compared with when I stay online late."*

A10: *"Sometimes I feel sleepy during the day because I slept late."*

A14: *"My mood can also be affected when I am tired."*

These experiences are consistent with recent evidence linking problematic social-media use with sleep problems. Khan et al. (2024) identified sleep-onset difficulties among adolescents with intense and problematic social-media use, while Ahmed et al. (2024) found associations between problematic social-media use and sleep problems across a large body of literature. The adolescents' narratives, however, provided a more personal

understanding of these experiences. Rather than simply reporting a reduced number of sleep hours, they described what insufficient sleep felt like in daily life. The experience became visible when they struggled to wake for school, felt sleepy during class, lacked energy, or found it difficult to concentrate.

Importantly, the participants' accounts represented their own perceptions and experiences. These narratives should not be interpreted as establishing that social media directly caused their sleep difficulties. Other factors, including school demands, daily routines, family circumstances, stress, and other evening activities, may also influence sleep. This finding reinforces the importance of examining sleep as a lived experience. Sleep is not merely a numerical outcome; it influences how adolescents experience their mornings, school activities, relationships, and overall daily functioning.

Theme 6: Awareness, Self-Regulation, and Attempts to Regain Control

This theme corresponded to Objective 6 and Research Question 6, which examined adolescents' awareness, self-regulation, and attempts to manage social-media use in relation to sleep. The final theme reflected the adolescents' awareness of their digital habits and their attempts to regulate them. Although the informants described difficulty disengaging, they also demonstrated an understanding that excessive nighttime use could interfere with sleep. The strategies described included putting the phone away, turning off notifications, setting a stopping time, seeking parental assistance, completing schoolwork before bedtime, turning off internet access, and avoiding phone use while already in bed.

A1: *"I sometimes put my phone away from my bed so I will not easily reach it."*

A3: *"Turning off notifications helps because I am not tempted to check every message."*

A4: *"I try to finish my schoolwork first so that I can sleep earlier."*

A5: *"Sometimes I give my phone to my parents when I really need to sleep."*

A7: *"I have tried setting a specific time when I stop using social media."*

A8: *"When I am successful in putting my phone away, I notice that I sleep earlier."*

A11: *"Sometimes I turn off the internet so I will not keep checking messages."*

A15: *"I want to have better control of my social-media use because I know sleep is important."*

This finding is particularly important because it suggests that adolescents are capable of reflection and behavioral change. Their difficulty may not arise from a complete lack of awareness but from the challenge of translating awareness into consistent behavior.

The WHO (2024) emphasized the importance of promoting healthier online habits among adolescents. Recent evidence summarized by Cal-Herrera et al. (2025) similarly supports the need for preventive approaches addressing digital behavior and sleep.

The narratives suggest that adolescents may benefit from interventions that focus on skills rather than punishment. Digital self-regulation, bedtime planning, notification management, and supportive family practices may provide adolescents with practical tools for achieving healthier routines.

Taken together, the six themes portray adolescent social-media use as a complex lived experience rather than a simple behavioral problem. The first theme established that social media was embedded in ordinary adolescent life and served purposes involving communication, entertainment, information, school-related activities, and social connection. This provided the context in which the remaining experiences occurred. The second theme showed that social-media engagement could extend into evening and bedtime routines. What began as a brief activity could become prolonged as adolescents continued watching videos, checking posts, responding to messages, or interacting with friends. The third theme then revealed the relational tension underlying this behavior. Adolescents valued sleep, but they also valued staying connected with friends and remaining aware of

ongoing conversations. The fourth theme deepened this experience by showing how adolescents could lose track of time and experience difficulty disengaging. The challenge was not necessarily an intentional decision to sacrifice sleep. In many accounts, continued use appeared to develop gradually through habitual checking, engaging content, or ongoing communication. The fifth theme described how adolescents experienced sleep and the following day when nighttime use extended later than intended. Participants described delayed sleep, difficulty waking, tiredness, reduced energy, and concentration difficulties. These accounts represented the participants' lived perceptions and should not be interpreted as evidence of a direct causal relationship between social media and sleep. The sixth theme demonstrated that adolescents were not passive within this experience. They recognized the importance of sleep and described different strategies for managing their digital behavior. These included setting limits, reducing notifications, moving the phone away from the bed, seeking parental support, and deliberately stopping internet access.

Viewed together, the six themes formed a progression from ordinary digital engagement to nighttime use, relational tension, difficulty disengaging, sleep and next-day experiences, and attempts at self-regulation. This progression provided a coherent phenomenological account of what it meant for adolescents to live between the social world of the screen and the physical need for rest. The central experience was therefore not simply excessive technology use. Rather, it involved negotiating competing needs within everyday adolescent life. Social media provided connection, entertainment, communication, and relaxation, but these functions could sometimes extend into a period when adolescents intended to sleep.

This interpretation is consistent with Scott et al. (2022), whose qualitative synthesis demonstrated that bedtime social-media use was influenced by social motivations, habitual smartphone use, and fear of missing out. The present study extends this understanding by emphasizing how these experiences may be lived within the everyday routines of adolescents in Ilocos Sur. The quantitative literature provides complementary evidence. Khan et al. (2024) reported an association between intense and problematic social-media use and sleep-onset difficulties among adolescents across 40 countries. Ahmed et al. (2024) likewise found associations between problematic social-media use and sleep problems across a large body of research.

At the same time, the evidence does not support the assumption that all social-media use is inherently harmful. Sennock et al. (2024) found no measurable deterioration in several sleep outcomes following a controlled 45-minute period of pre-sleep social-media use compared with reading. This reinforces the importance of distinguishing ordinary, controlled digital engagement from patterns involving prolonged or difficult-to-control use. The adolescents' experiences of losing track of time are particularly relevant to this distinction. The problem may not always be the initial decision to use social media but what happens afterward. Once adolescents begin scrolling or communicating, the intended duration may gradually expand. The experience of "just a few minutes" becoming a much longer period illustrates how digital engagement can interfere with bedtime without the adolescent deliberately choosing to remain awake for an extended period.

Another important finding was that adolescents were aware of the consequences. They recognized that staying online could be followed by difficulty waking, morning tiredness, reduced concentration, and lower energy. However, awareness did not always result in immediate behavioral change. This gap between knowledge and action is important for health promotion because information alone may not be sufficient to change digital habits. The informants' attempts at self-regulation provide an important basis for intervention. Their strategies demonstrate that adolescents can identify practical ways to reduce nighttime engagement. However, these strategies may need reinforcement through supportive family environments, school-based education, consistent routines, and healthy peer expectations.

The findings therefore suggest that a sleep enhancement program should not simply instruct adolescents to stop using social media. Instead, it should acknowledge the legitimate social and emotional functions of digital platforms while helping adolescents establish boundaries. The objective should be healthier digital engagement rather than complete digital disengagement.

CONCLUSION

The study explored the lived experiences of adolescents regarding social media use and sleep in Ilocos Sur. The

findings, organized around six interconnected themes, demonstrated that social media was deeply integrated into adolescent everyday life and served meaningful purposes involving communication, friendship, entertainment, information, school-related activities, and relaxation.

The first two themes showed that social media formed part of everyday routines and could extend naturally into evening and bedtime. The third theme demonstrated that nighttime use was shaped not only by individual preference but also by the desire to maintain connection with peers. Adolescents experienced a tension between remaining socially connected and obtaining sufficient rest. The fourth theme showed that adolescents sometimes lost track of time and experienced difficulty disengaging from social media. The fifth theme indicated that participants described delayed sleep, difficulty waking, tiredness, reduced concentration, lower energy, and other next-day experiences following nights when they remained online late. These accounts reflected adolescents' perceptions and lived experiences and did not establish that social media directly caused the reported sleep difficulties. The sixth theme demonstrated that adolescents were aware of the importance of sleep and were capable of identifying strategies for regulating their digital behavior. Their attempts included setting stopping times, turning off notifications, putting phones away from the bed, limiting internet access, completing schoolwork earlier, and seeking parental assistance.

The phenomenological essence of the experience was therefore one of being caught between screens and sleep—wanting to remain part of the digital social world while simultaneously recognizing the personal need for rest. The experience involved not only technology but also relationships, habits, emotions, routines, expectations, and the adolescent's developing capacity for self-regulation.

The findings provide a meaningful basis for developing a locally responsive sleep enhancement and digital-wellness program for adolescents in Ilocos Sur. Such a program should focus on healthy boundaries, self-regulation, supportive bedtime routines, family involvement, and responsible digital engagement rather than treating social media use as inherently harmful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the six themes that emerged from the adolescents' lived experiences, the recommendations emphasize the need for a balanced and supportive approach to digital use and sleep. Adolescents may be encouraged to practice self-regulation by setting limits on social-media use, managing notifications, keeping phones away from the bed, and becoming more aware of how nighttime digital habits affect their daily well-being. Parents and guardians may support these efforts through consistent bedtime routines, reasonable device boundaries, and open communication rather than overly restrictive rules. Schools and teachers may integrate digital wellness and sleep health into appropriate activities, focusing on responsible use, healthy boundaries, and self-regulation while recognizing the social and emotional value of online interaction. Health professionals may address sleep routines and digital behaviors during relevant consultations and provide counseling or referral when persistent difficulties are observed. Families and peers may also help reduce the pressure to remain constantly available online, particularly at night. The proposed sleep enhancement program should therefore be developed collaboratively and include practical strategies on digital self-regulation, bedtime planning, sleep hygiene, family support, and peer boundaries. Future researchers may further examine adolescents' experiences across different ages, sex, school levels, family environments, platforms, and nighttime-use patterns through longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches. Overall, interventions should respond to adolescents' actual experiences and help them maintain the benefits of digital connection while developing healthier habits and supportive environments that promote adequate and quality sleep.

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