

Either You Control Social Media or Social Media Controls You

by Kseniia Zahrai, Ekant Veer, Paul Ballantine,
Herb de Vries and Girish Prayag

U3A, 17 Nov, 2025



Social Media
Users

**65% of
Earth**

Breaking News



**A man was caught
watching the real world**

2.5 hours daily
7 full years of life
79% of NZ population

Is it Good or Bad?

Facebook Therapy? Why Do People Share Self-Relevant Content Online?

[Jonah A. Berger](#) [Eva Buechel](#)

How Adolescents Use Social Media to Cope with Feelings of Loneliness and Anxiety During COVID-19 Lockdown

[Verolien Cauberghe](#) , [Ini Van Wesenbeeck](#), [Steffi De Jans](#), [Liselot Hudders](#), and [Koen Ponnet](#)

Exploring the Potential Benefits of Using Social Media in Education

[Rdouan Faizi](#), [Abdellatif El Afia](#) and [Raddouane Chiheb](#)
ENSIAS, Mohammed V Souissi University, Rabat, Morocco

Empowering patients through social media: The benefits and challenges

[Househ](#), [Mowafa](#), [Elizabeth Borycki](#), and [Andre Kushniruk](#).



Social media and depression symptoms

[Aalbers G](#)¹, [McNally RJ](#)², [Heeren A](#)³, [de Wit S](#)¹, [Fried EI](#)⁴.

Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults

[Ethan Kross](#)^{1*}, [Philippe Verduyn](#)², [Emre Demiralp](#)¹, [Jiyoung Park](#)¹, [David Seungjae Lee](#)¹, [Natalie Lin](#)¹,

Envy on Facebook: A Hidden Threat to Users' Life Satisfaction?

[Hanna Krasnova](#)

#Sleepyteens: Social media use in adolescence is associated with poor sleep quality, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem

[Heather Cleland Woods](#), [Holly Scott](#)^{*}

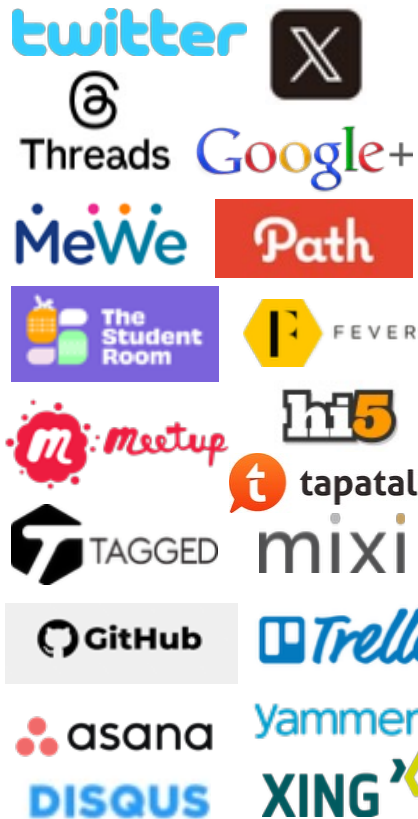
What Counts as Social Media

facebook

myspace LinkedIn

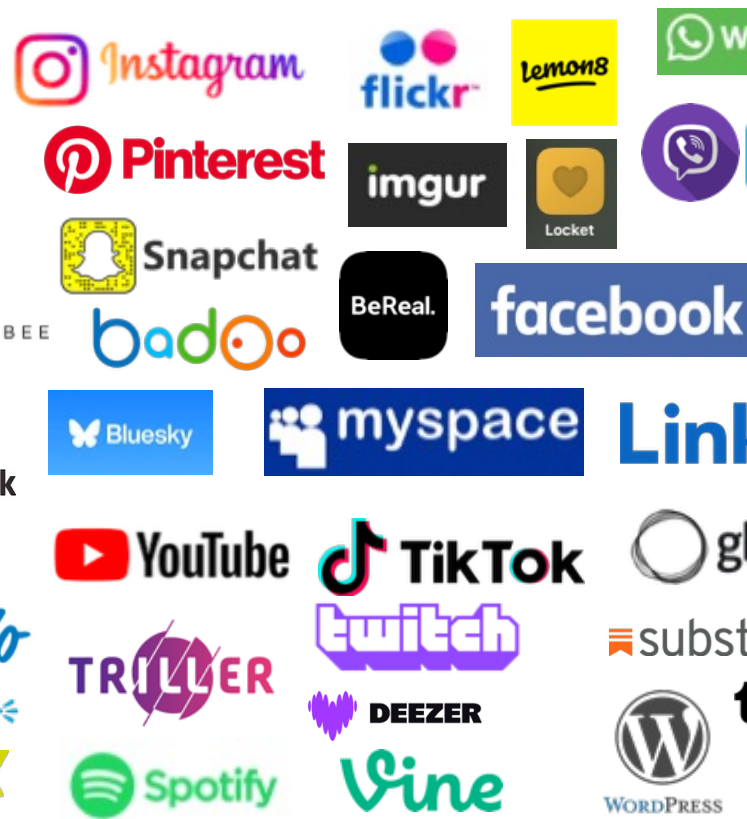
What Counts as Social Media

Community



Collaborations

Visual Sharing



Video & Live Streaming

Messaging & Communication



Publishing & Blogging

Discussions

Virtual Worlds

News Then and Now

30 years ago

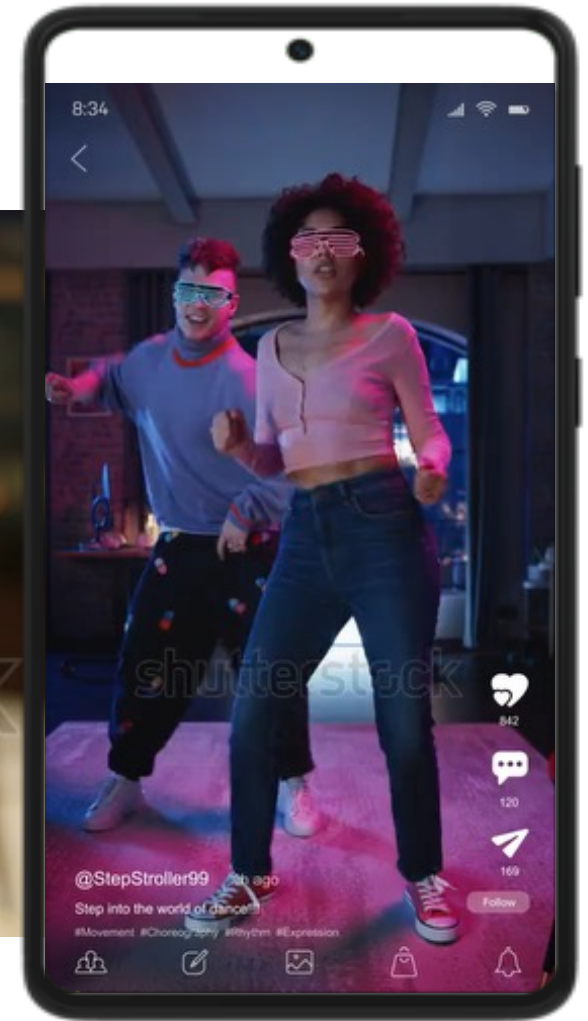
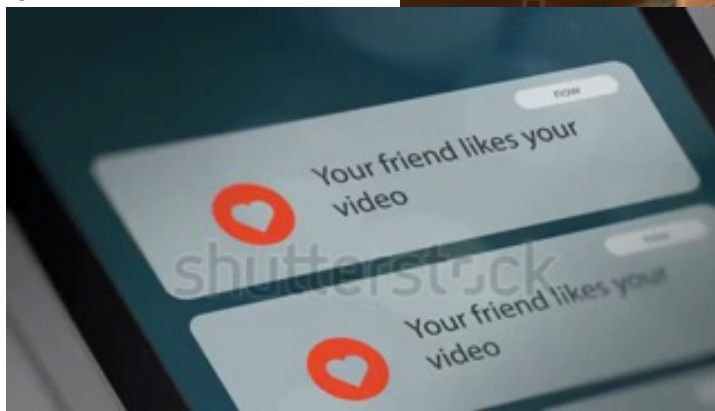


- Fixed daily editions: only the most important stories
- Same news for everyone
- Curated by professionals
- Passive consumption

News Then and Now

Today

- **Endless Scrolling**
- **Attention-grabbing content**
- **Personalised by algorithms**
- **Interactive:** react instantly
- **Anyone can publish**



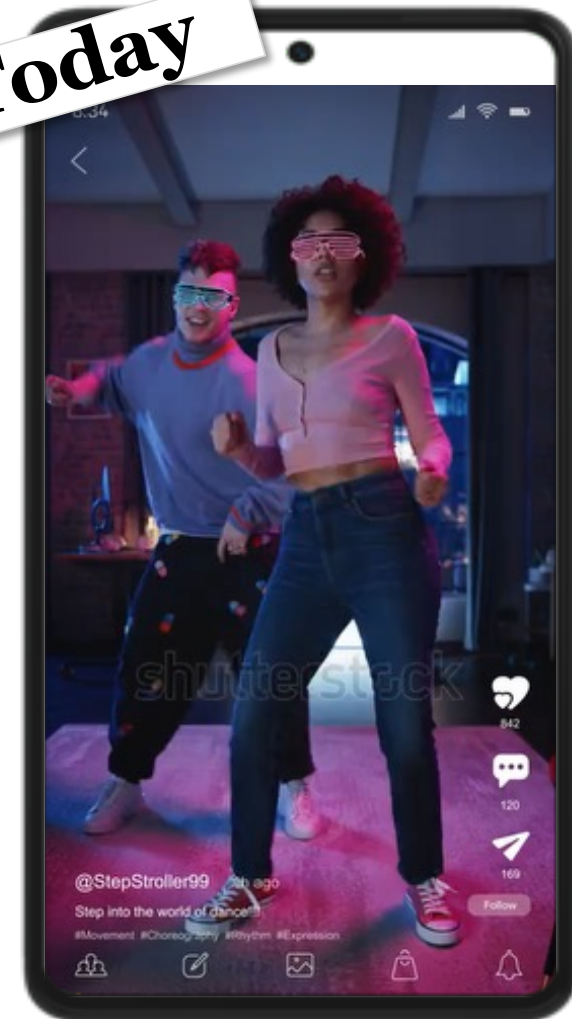
in-confidence

News Then and Now

30 years ago



Today



Same Apps, Different Outcomes

Some people can easily put the phone down...



...while others keep scrolling — even when it harms their well-being



Self-control is the ability to **resist immediate impulses** and act in line with long-term well-being (Tangney et al., 2004). *Is it just about self-control?*

How much is too much?

- **No universal “safe” time standards**
(Galer, 2018; Ross et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2012)
- **Time limits quickly become outdated**
as average use rises
- **Excessive use is defined by negative impact on well-being, not just time spent** (Andreassen et al., 2016; Kuss et al., 2011)

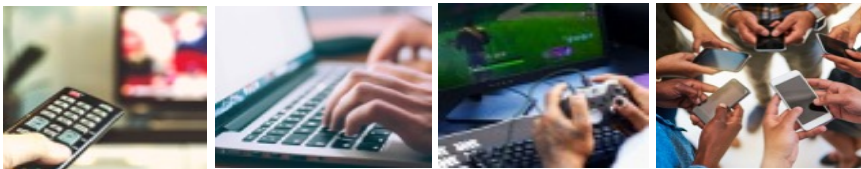


Nature of Excessive Behaviours

Non-Media Behaviours



Media Behaviours



Impulsivity
(non-conscious hard-to-control urges)



Self-reporting tools
(people describe what they think)

Research Questions

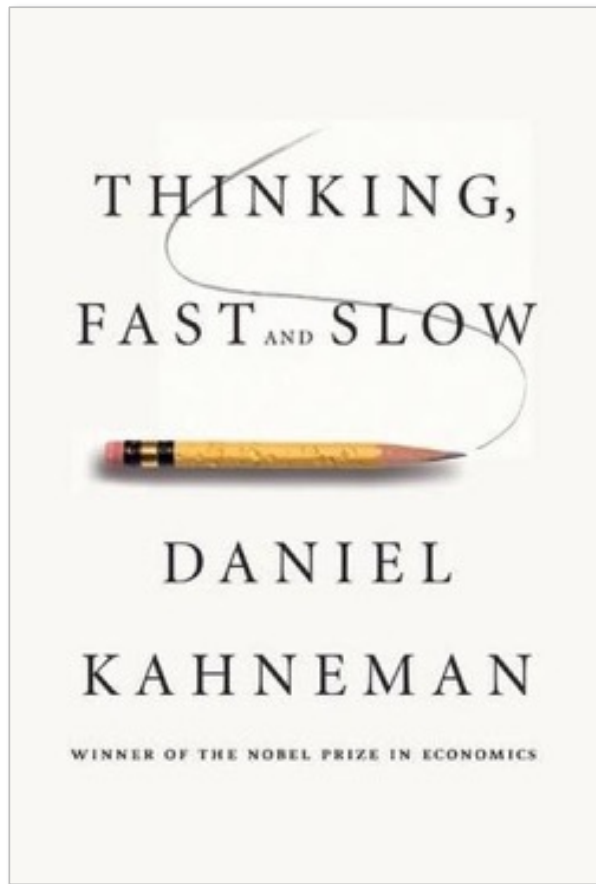
RQ1: How does *impulsivity* impact excessive social media use?

RQ2: What is the role of *self-control* in managing excessive use and its negative impact on daily life?

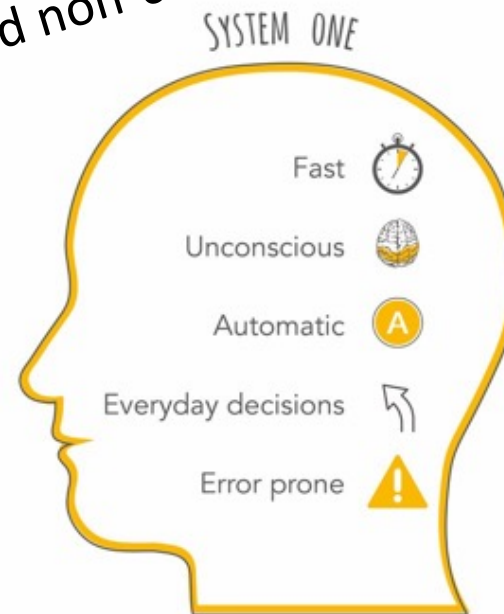


Dual-System Theory

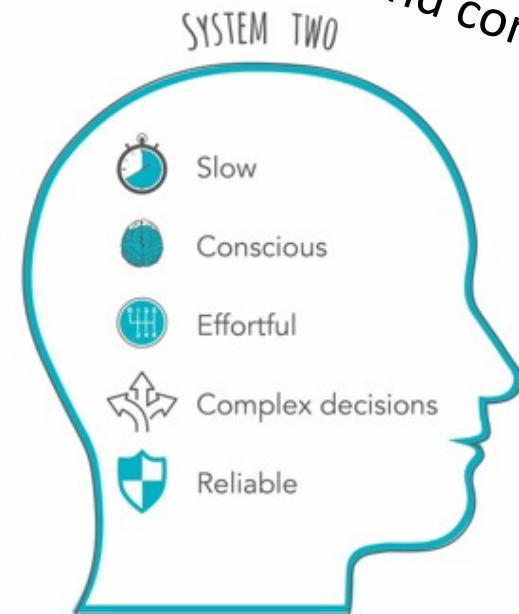
Two Systems in Judgement and Decision-making (Kahneman, 2011)



S1 (impulsive):
fast and non-conscious



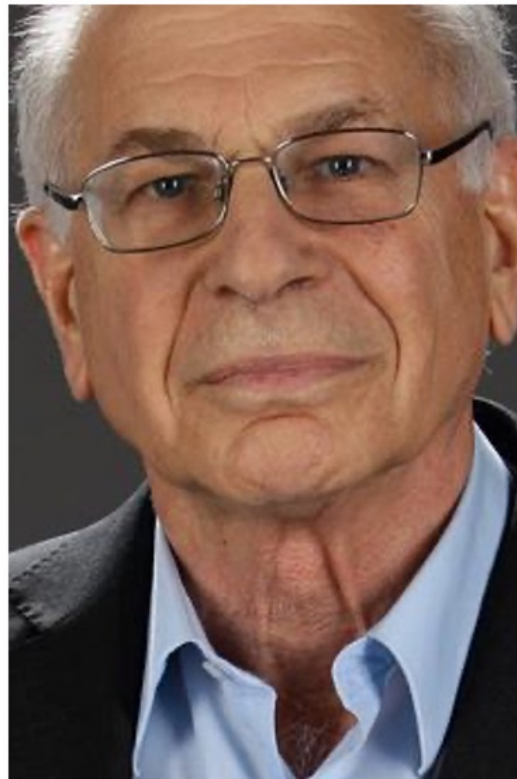
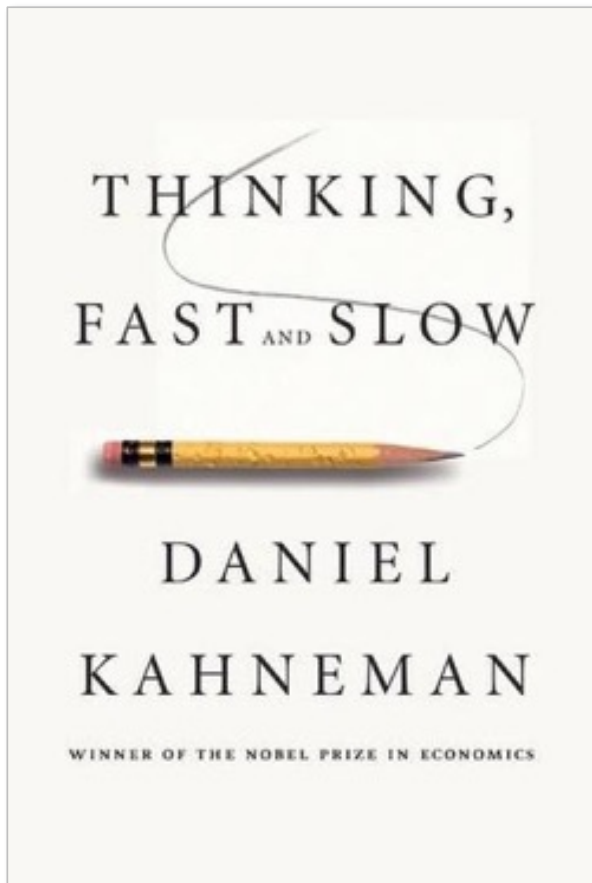
S2 (reflective):
slow and conscious



System 1 often wins the race

Dual-System Theory

Two Systems in Judgement and Decision-making (Kahneman, 2011)



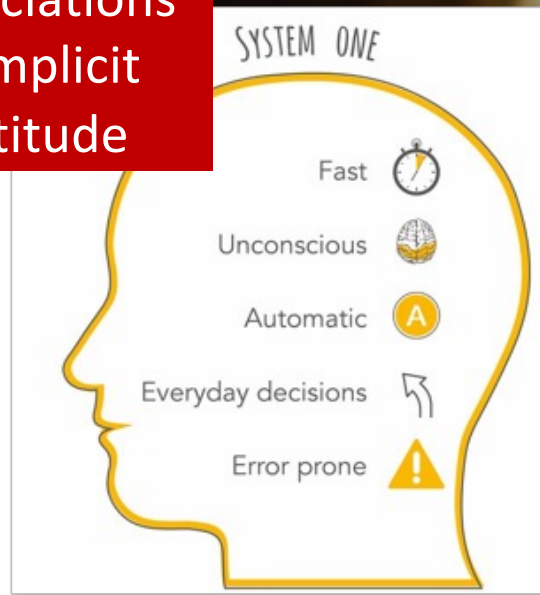
*"Thinking is to humans as swimming is to cats;
they can do it, but they'd prefer not to."*

Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*

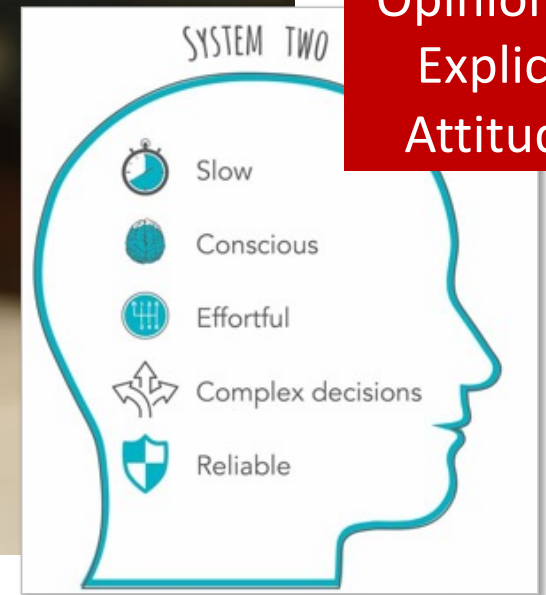
Dual-System Theory

Two Systems in Judgement and Decision-making (Kahneman, 2011)

Associations = Implicit Attitude

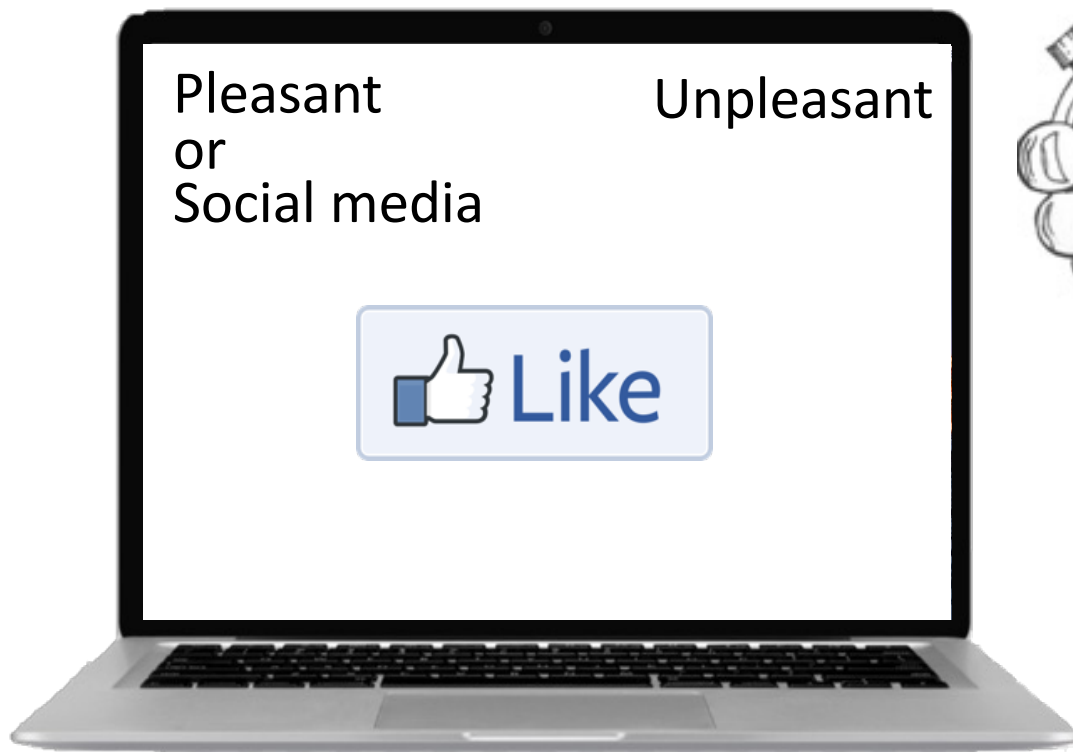


Opinions = Explicit Attitude



Implicit Association Test (IAT)

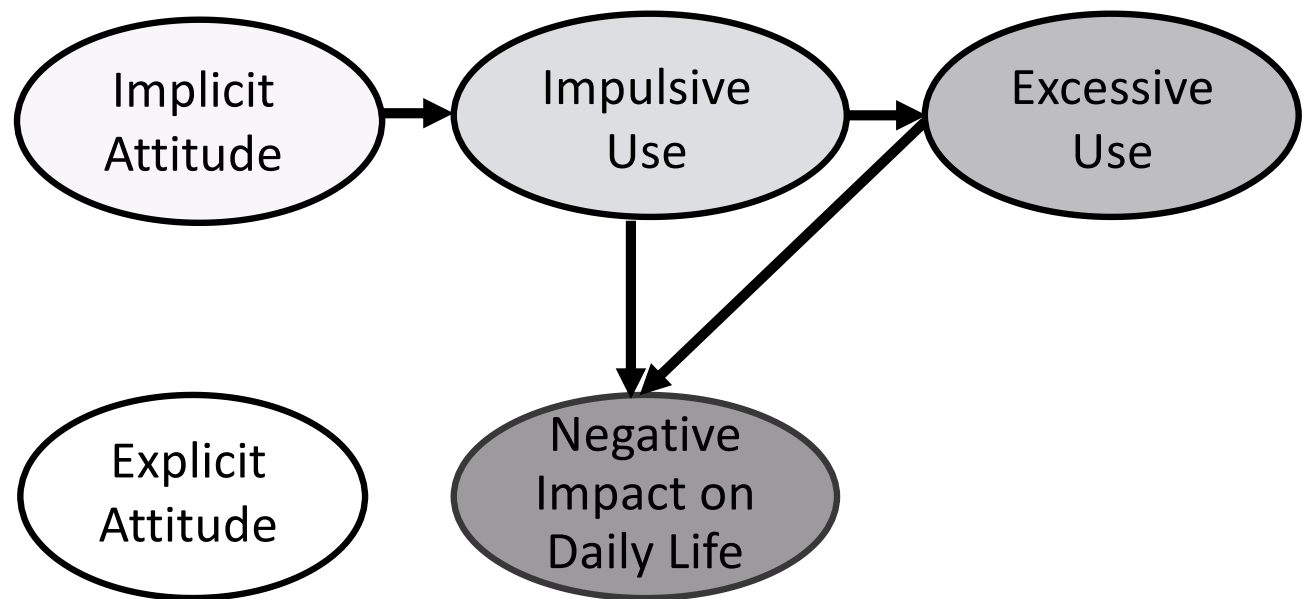
(Greenwald et al., 1998; Karpinski et al., 2006)



- **reveals automatic, non-conscious attitudes**
- measures *how quickly* people associate social media with positive and negative feelings

Finding 1: **Implicit Attitude as a Driver**

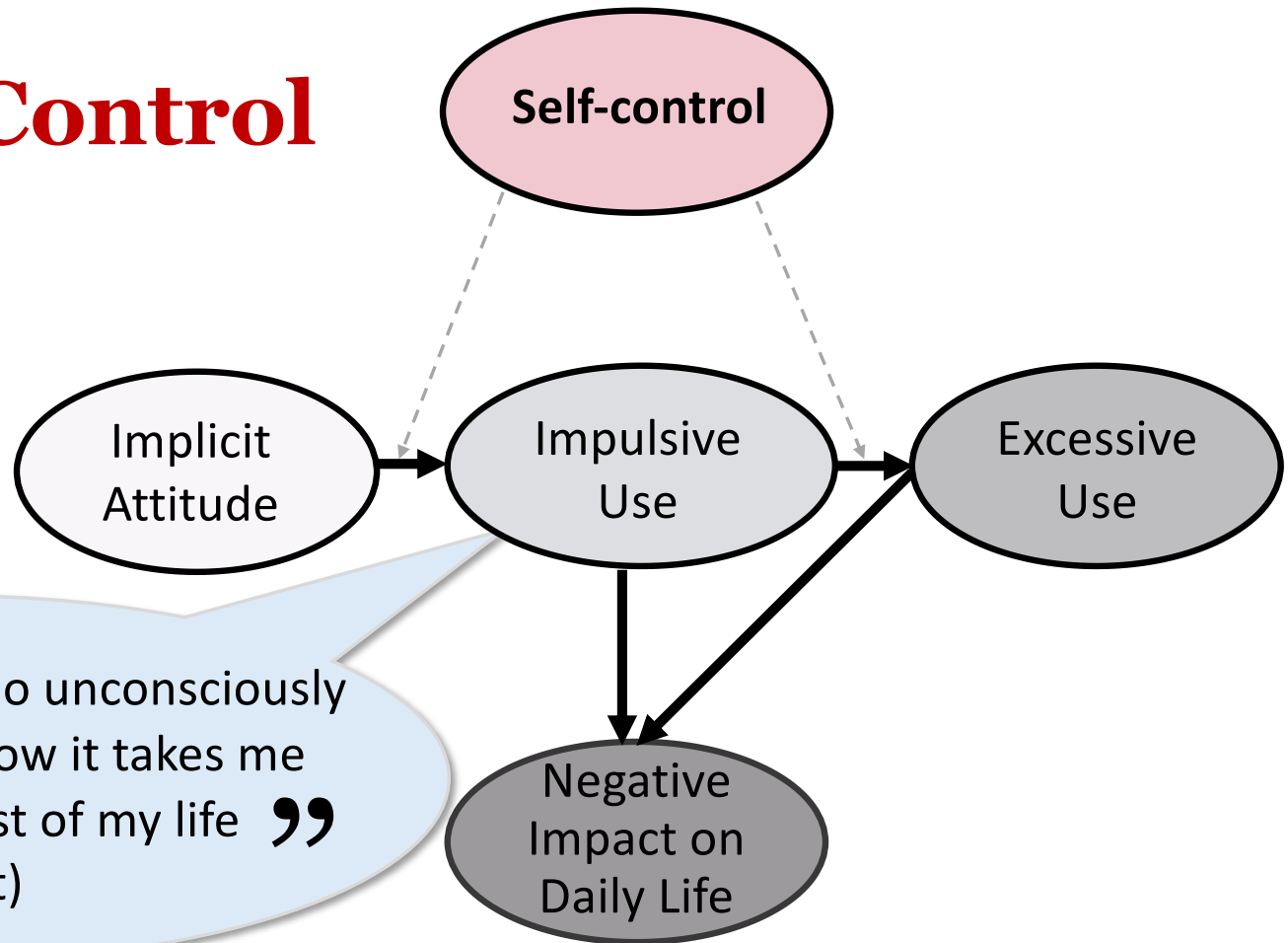
- **389 participants, 18-44 y.o.,** more than 2 hours on social media daily
- **Implicit attitude drives impulsive and excessive use**
- **What people consciously believe has little effect on their actual social media use**



Zahrai, K., Veer, E., Ballantine, P. W., de Vries, H. P., & Prayag, G. (2022). Either you control social media or social media controls you: Understanding the impact of self-control on excessive social media use from the dual-system perspective. *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 56(2), 806-848.

Finding 2: Duality of Self-Control

- **High initial self-control** can reduce harmful use, but...
- **Self-control is limited** when positive implicit attitudes are strong



“ It is something I do unconsciously and don't think how it takes me away from the rest of my life ”
(Study participant)

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A photograph of a woman with long brown hair, seen from the side, sitting in the driver's seat of a car. She is holding a smartphone in her right hand and looking at the screen. The phone displays a video of a woman with dark hair wearing a beige sweater. The car's interior, including the steering wheel and dashboard, is visible in the background.

“I got into a bad car accident because I was watching Instagram makeup videos while driving. I didn’t notice a big animal crossing the road and swerved, flipped into a ditch, and broke my arm in 2 places. I’m still in physical therapy for it.

I never told my friends or family how it happened, instead saying I lost control on a slippery path. **I'm trying to break the habit** and am very grateful I didn't die that day.”
(Study participant)

What Can Be Done?

Building Resilience

1. Users

- **Focus on meaningful use:** time limits vs intention-based goals
- **Minimise social media triggers** to reduce impulsive checks
- **Curate a feed** to prioritise well-being

In-Confidence



What Can Be Done?

Building Resilience

2. Public Policy Makers

- Develop comprehensive digital literacy programs for all ages
- Require platforms to disclose algorithms and prioritise transparency
- Fund research on digital well-being



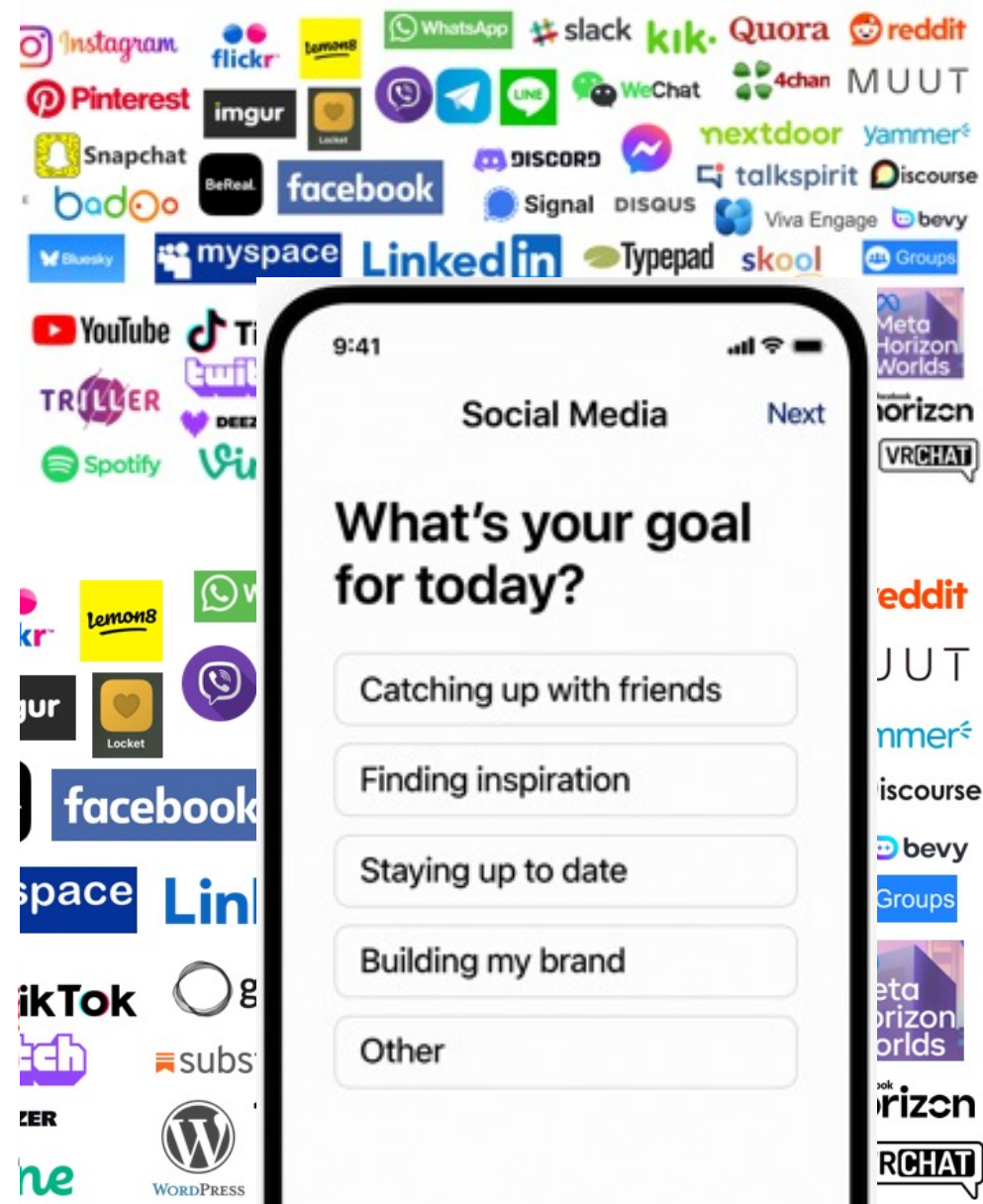
What Can Be Done?

Building Resilience

3. Social Media Companies

- Promote conscious social media use
- Display advanced personal statistics
- Exploit Artificial Intelligence (AI) to
 - Identify vulnerable users
 - Offer personalised self-control strategies

In-Confidence



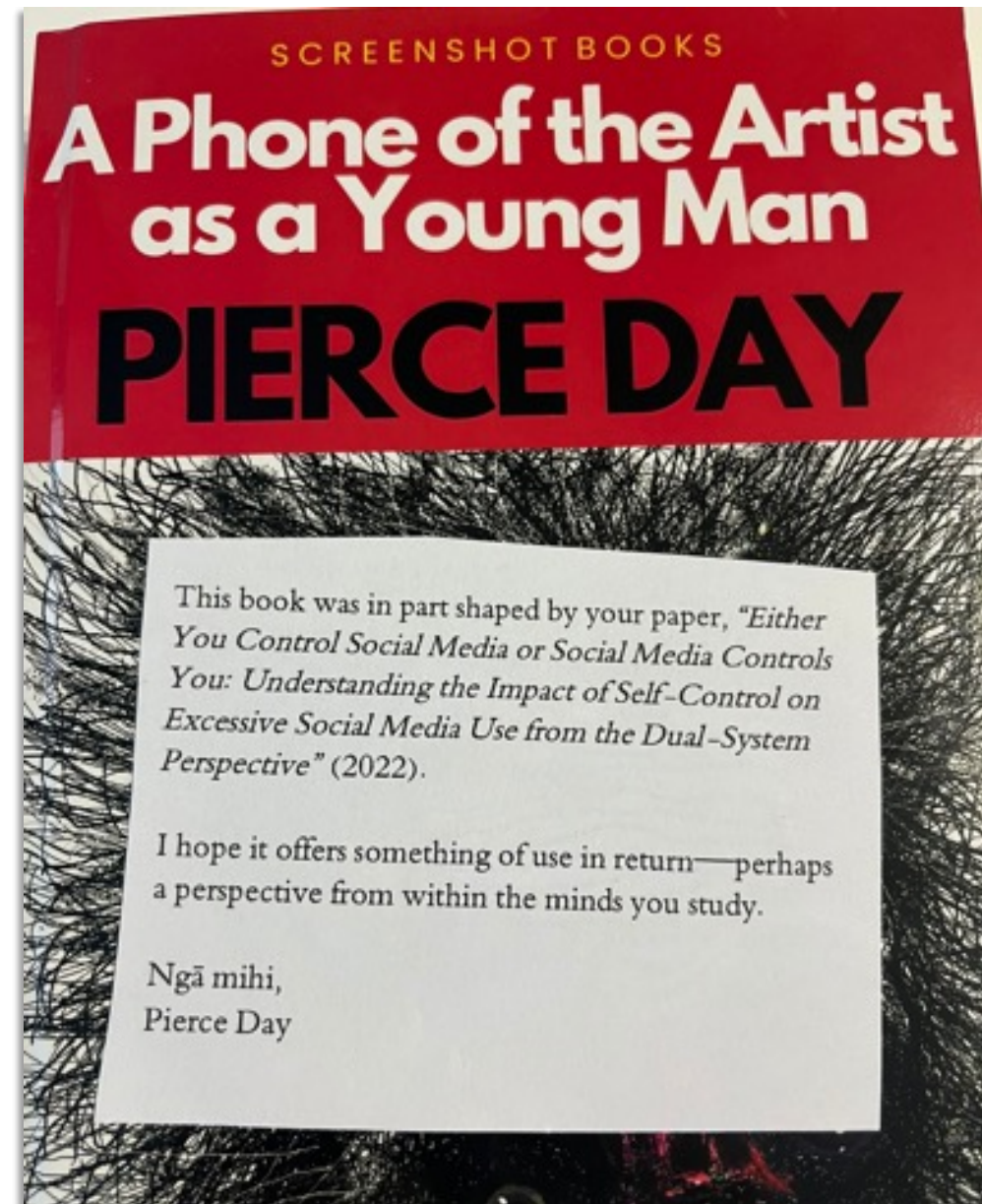
Community Response



Community Response

‘A Phone of the Artist as a Young Man’ by Pierce Day

- A story about what it means to be human in the digital age — reminding us that **behind every screen, there’s a real person** searching for meaning and connection.



Either You Control Social Media, or Social Media Controls You



**The
Guardian**

Ex-Facebook president Sean Parker: site made to exploit human 'vulnerability'

Site's founding president, who became a billionaire thanks to the company, says: 'God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains'



▲ Sean Parker said Facebook 'probably interferes with productivity in weird ways'. Photograph: Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP

In-Confidence

