

Simple smartphone interventions shown to help with problematic social media use

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Dr Zaheer Hussain, NTU School of Social Sciences. Credit: Nottingham Trent University

Simple smartphone interventions can help to reduce time spent on social media and prevent negative health consequences, according to new

research by Nottingham Trent University (NTU).

Problematic social networking site use (PSNSU) is widely associated with poor mental health and well-being. The study by NTU psychologists examined three accessible and affordable smartphone interventions and their impact on reducing PSNSU, psychiatric disorder symptoms, loneliness, and general health.

Through a six-week randomized control trial, 110 participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups: a mindfulness group where they were presented with a mindfulness-based exercise which tackles addictive urges; a [social networking sites \(SNS\) intervention group](#) which involved being given brief tips and advice about managing SNS use; or a [control group](#) where general health and lifestyle advice was provided.

Participants were provided with instructions, such as focusing on taking deep breaths or scheduling times to stay off social media and were encouraged to use their intervention for two weeks at a time for the six weeks. After each two-week block they completed an online survey consisting of a variety of psychological measures.

Across all three interventions results showed improvements in [general health](#). Anxiety, and PSNSU levels decreased overtime. While loneliness levels increased from survey one to survey two, they had decreased at survey three across all interventions. Participants psychiatric well-being scores also decreased across time.

The findings also suggested that participants may have limited their social media use over the course of study, they may have been more mindful of their behavior. Furthermore, the interventions may have had an impact on overall social media use and well-being.

The study suggests that parents, educators, and health practitioners can create effective awareness and prevention campaigns which use simple smartphone applications to help users become aware of possible problematic use and to alter their behaviors. The research is published in the journal *Psychiatry Research Communications*.

Dr. Zaheer Hussain, lead researcher and Senior Lecturer in Psychology at NTU's School of Social Sciences, said, "The smartphone interventions we trialed would be useful in [clinical settings](#), but because they were easy to follow and inexpensive, it means that anybody who is finding it difficult to control their [social media](#) use can try them out.

"We would particularly recommend that people try mindfulness. We know that mindfulness has many [health benefits](#), and in our study, we showed that a simple mindfulness smartphone intervention could decrease PSNSU and its associated negative health impacts. It's easy to learn simple mindfulness techniques and apply them in your life."

More information: Zaheer Hussain et al, The feasibility of smartphone interventions to decrease problematic use of social networking sites: A randomised controlled trial, *Psychiatry Research Communications* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.psycom.2023.100132](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psycom.2023.100132)

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