

# The Psychology of Social Media: Connection or Comparison?

Advanced (C1-C2)



## WARM UP

Choose the option that feels more true for you, then explain why.

1. 📱 Scroll before bed or read before bed
2. 💬 Message friends or meet face-to-face
3. 📷 Share highlights or keep life private
4. 🎥 Reels or long-form videos
5. 🌐 Online community or real-world group

Which of these habits make you feel most connected — and which cause comparison?



## READING TEXT

### Part 1. Read the following text.

#### The Psychology of Social Media: Connection or Comparison?

Social media promises connection: global networks, instant communication, and platforms for creativity. It allows people to share ideas, express emotions, and find belonging. Yet psychologists warn that the same platforms encourage constant comparison. When feeds are full of filtered perfection, users measure their lives against idealised images, often leading to envy, anxiety, or discontent.

Connection and comparison are intertwined. Likes and comments can lift self-esteem but also create dependence on approval. Algorithms amplify emotional content — the shocking, the beautiful, the extreme — shaping what we see and how we feel. The question is not whether social media connects or harms us, but whether we use it consciously enough to stay in control of our wellbeing.

### Part 2. Match each idea to its example from the reading.

- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Social media fosters connection | A. Likes and comments shape our self-esteem          |
| 2. Social media fuels comparison   | B. Users must stay in control of wellbeing           |
| 3. Algorithms affect emotions      | C. Platforms amplify extreme content                 |
| 4. Validation brings dependence    | D. Global networks and belonging                     |
| 5. Conscious use matters           | E. Users measure themselves against idealised images |

**Discuss:** Which idea do you personally relate to most, and why?



## VOCABULARY & SPEAKING

### Part 1. Match the terms to their meanings.

Social validation

Curated identity

Parasocial relationships

Algorithmic amplification

Digital dependence

Envy spiral

Online disinhibition

Wellbeing paradox

1. \_\_\_\_\_ A carefully managed self-image presented online.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ A cycle where comparison leads to envy, fuelling further comparison.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Reliance on technology that undermines autonomy or balance.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ When algorithms push content likely to provoke strong engagement.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Psychological boost gained from likes, shares, and feedback.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Strong emotional bonds formed with media figures who don't know the individual.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ The tendency to behave more aggressively or openly online than offline.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ The idea that social media can both improve and damage wellbeing.

### Part 2. Read each sentence and fill in the gaps. Decide if it's true for you, false for you, or sometimes true. Then share your thoughts and give examples where possible.

1. My \_\_\_\_\_ online shows a version of me that isn't always real.
2. I've experienced an \_\_\_\_\_ when scrolling through other people's posts.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ often pushes content that affects my emotions or mood.
4. The \_\_\_\_\_ explains why social media can make me feel both better and worse.
5. I sometimes feel \_\_\_\_\_, checking notifications even when I don't need to.
6. I use social media for \_\_\_\_\_, and I notice how likes and comments influence me.
7. I've developed \_\_\_\_\_ with creators or influencers who inspire me.
8. I've noticed \_\_\_\_\_ — people (or even me) saying things online they'd never say face-to-face.

**Part 3. Read each statement and decide if you agree, disagree, or partially agree. Then explain why.**

1. Social media brings people closer together.
2. Comparison is unavoidable — it's part of being human.
3. Algorithms have too much control over what we see and feel.
4. Online relationships can be as real as offline ones.
5. Digital balance is more about mindset than screen time.

**Part 4. Read each situation and discuss what you'd do or think.**

1. You feel jealous after seeing a friend's "perfect" holiday. What could you remind yourself?
2. You post something meaningful but get fewer likes than expected. How do you respond?
3. You follow a public figure who inspires you, but it's affecting your confidence. What's your next step?

**Part 5. Choose one statement and provide details.**

- Most people use social media mainly for connection, not comparison.
- The wellbeing paradox explains why we keep scrolling even when it harms us.
- In the near future, algorithms will shape identity more than culture itself.

**Part 6. Rank these from 1 (most valuable) to 5 (least valuable) for you personally.**

- ☐ Global community
- ☐ Creative expression
- ☐ Social validation
- ☐ Information access
- ☐ Entertainment

**Discuss:** Which one has the biggest effect on wellbeing — and why?

## REFLECTION

**Discuss the following questions.**

1. How does social media affect your own wellbeing and identity?
2. What boundaries help you use platforms more consciously?
3. Has your relationship with social media changed over time?

## WRAP-UP TASK (OPTIONAL HOMEWORK)

**Write a short article (180–220 words):**

***“How can we stay connected without falling into comparison?”***

- Use at least 4 vocabulary items (e.g., curated identity, envy spiral, algorithmic amplification, wellbeing paradox).
- Give one example from your own experience.

