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The impact of digital idealisation of happiness on the emotional state and self-esteem of education seekers

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Abstract. The aim of the study was to identify the characteristics of the digital idealisation of happiness in social networks among education seekers. The methodology for examining the concept of happiness in the digital environment included a comprehensive analysis of interdisciplinary literature, a theoretical generalisation of the transformation of the concept under the influence of digital culture (particularly in the social networks Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook), and a content analysis of public accounts belonging to young people, with emphasis on the phenomena of digital idealisation, social comparison, and online self-representation. The study revealed that success in the digital environment for young people in Kyrgyzstan is shaped by a complex interplay of digital idealisation, social comparison, and online self-representation. It was found that young users post content that highlights material achievements, travel, career success, and an active lifestyle, thereby constructing an idealised perception of happiness. It was further noted that this content is often accompanied by positive vocabulary, metaphors, hyperbole, and hashtags, which amplify emotional impact and foster a high level of audience engagement. Simultaneously, this creates additional pressure on young individuals striving to meet these perceived standards, frequently resulting in cognitive dissonance and stress due to the mismatch between real life and digital “ideality”. The study also observed that audience reactions increase the perceived importance of digital validation of success, leading to a shift in values from genuine happiness to its virtual representation. This phenomenon manifests not only in attempts at self-realisation but also in emotional fatigue, anxiety, and heightened social sensitivity. The findings indicated that the perception of success among young people in Kyrgyzstan within the digital environment is shaped by an idealised virtual image of happiness, driven by social comparison, positive online self-representation, and a dependence on digital validation. The practical significance of this study lies in its potential application by educational institutions, psychologists, and social workers to develop programmes for digital hygiene, critical thinking, and psycho-emotional support for young people navigating the digital space

Keywords: emotional well-being; virtual images; psychological discomfort; social comparisons; technological influence

■ INTRODUCTION

The digital idealisation of happiness, shaped by social media and online content, is increasingly influencing students' perceptions of reality. Constant comparison of one's own life with visual representations of “ideal happiness” can result in emotional exhaustion, feelings of dissatisfaction, and reduced self-esteem. Young people, who are in the process of forming their personal identities, are particularly vulnerable to external digital influences. This necessitates an examination of how idealised portrayals of happiness in the digital space affect students' psycho-emotional states

and their levels of self-esteem. Researchers across various contexts have examined how the digital environment and social media influence perceptions of happiness, emotional well-being, and self-esteem, particularly among young people and students. For instance, A. Zhunushalieva *et al.* (2025) found that the idealisation of appearance in the digital environment served as a mediator between the desire for novelty, active social media usage, and demonstrative consumption among students. This suggests that students strive to conform to digital standards of beauty

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and success disseminated in the virtual space. The findings indicated a strong relationship between social comparison online and a decline in self-satisfaction. In particular, G. Madaminov *et al.* (2023) demonstrated that traits of interpersonal attractiveness contributed to feelings of happiness only when there was a low level of uncertainty in interactions. Their study showed that Facebook users experiencing informational uncertainty exhibited lower levels of emotional well-being. Simultaneously, positive feedback from other users significantly influenced individuals' perceptions of their own attractiveness and happiness. K. Burnell *et al.* (2024) summarised experimental data concerning the impact of social networks on the mental health of young people. They concluded that frequent social media use was associated with anxiety, depressive symptoms, and lower self-esteem. The researchers emphasised that comparison with idealised digital representations of others poses a particular threat. Y. Shi *et al.* (2024) explored the impact of digital facial processing on users' subjective happiness through the framework of discrepancy theory, which addresses the gap between the real and ideal self. They found that the greater the discrepancy between real-life and digital appearance, the higher the level of emotional discomfort. This effect was especially pronounced among young women who actively used beauty filters on social media. F. Fastoso & H. González-Jiménez (2020) discovered that congruence between the ideal self and the visual imagery of brands fostered emotional attachment. This effect was characteristic of individuals with high levels of materialism, who aspired to ideals commonly portrayed in digital advertising. Research has shown that digital representations of happiness can cultivate emotional dependence on external indicators of success. Finally, A. Siddiqi *et al.* (2024) reported that viewing Instagram photos depicting the seemingly happy lives of others led to lower self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy. Young people who actively engaged with such content – through likes and comments – were especially vulnerable. The authors highlighted the importance of critical thinking in interpreting visual digital content.

A study among adolescents with mental disorders, conducted by K. Winds *et al.* (2024), found that professional photography increased self-esteem and improved emotional state. The authors emphasised that a positive visual representation of oneself could serve as a resource for strengthening psycho-emotional well-being. The study also revealed that even short-term interventions could have a long-term effect in boosting confidence. F. Sibilla *et al.* (2021) conducted a study among MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game) players, which demonstrated that harmonious involvement in the game contributed to increased self-esteem and well-being. Conversely, obsessive involvement negatively impacted the psycho-emotional state, resulting in decreased life satisfaction. The authors underlined that the nature of interaction with the digital environment determines whether its influence is beneficial or harmful. M. Yi & S. La (2023)

found that motivations for self-presentation on social media influenced the enjoyment of cultural events and the overall quality of life. They observed that participants who actively shared their experiences reported higher levels of positive emotions. This highlighted the significance of digital self-actualisation in the pursuit of happiness and emotional comfort. A. Salas-Vallina *et al.* (2020) focused on the relationship between leadership style and employee happiness in a professional environment. Their study showed that inspirational leadership enhanced engagement and positive emotional states. These findings can be extrapolated to the educational context, where a teacher, acting as a leader, may similarly contribute to students' emotional well-being. Despite the valuable insights provided by the aforementioned researchers, notable gaps remain in the literature – particularly the insufficient attention to age and cultural differences in the perception of digital images of happiness. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical data on the impact of the digital idealisation of happiness on students in the educational context, especially when considering their academic and social challenges. The aim of the present study was to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the relationship between digitalisation and the state of happiness, focusing on the psychological and emotional well-being of students. To achieve this objective, three main tasks were undertaken: firstly, an analysis of the theoretical and methodological foundations for studying the concept of “happiness” was conducted, allowing for the identification of scientific approaches to understanding this phenomenon; secondly, an assessment of digital representations of happiness in students' social networks was carried out, particularly focusing on the content they create and consume; thirdly, a practical application of the model of digital idealisation of happiness in the student environment was implemented, which helped identify the mechanisms through which digital content influences the psycho-emotional state and informed the development of recommendations to mitigate potential risks.

■ MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in several stages using a combination of methods. At the first stage, a theoretical analysis of philosophical, psychological, pedagogical, and sociological literature – comprising 39 sources – was carried out to examine the evolution of the concept of “happiness”. Particular attention was given to classical conceptions of happiness found in the works of Aristotle (2009) and Epicurus (1994), as well as to modern scientific approaches, such as the hedonic and eudaimonic models. Within this stage, key components of the concept of happiness were identified according to criteria including emotional, cognitive, sociocultural, and existential dimensions, which are particularly significant for students – namely, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, self-realisation, and social support.

The second stage involved a comparative theoretical generalisation of the concept of happiness and its transformation under the influence of the digital environment.

Special emphasis was placed on the concepts of “digital idealisation”, “social comparison”, “online self-representation”, and “digital culture”. In particular, attention was directed towards the phenomenon of digital idealisation – the tendency to present exclusively positive, idealised images of life on social networks such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. Through a combination of theoretical and empirical analysis, the study investigated the manifestations of digital idealisation, social comparison, and online self-representation, as well as the formation of digital culture on these platforms. The objective of this stage was to identify key digital trends linked to these phenomena, considering their widespread popularity and influence on young audiences. The selection of Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook was based on their high levels of use among young people and their strong emphasis on visual content, which plays a significant role in fostering digital idealisation and social comparison. Statistical data were obtained from large-scale surveys and studies conducted by leading analytical and research organisations, including Pew Research Center (Faverio *et al.*, 2025), Deloitte Insights (2023), and Common Sense Media (2018).

Using the method of content analysis, five public accounts of users from Kyrgyzstan who actively represent the youth and student demographic on social networks were analysed over a two-week period (April 2024). The sample included the following accounts: Bekbolsun Asanov, who shares motivational content, discusses personal achievements, and provides lifestyle insights; Nurzada Amangeldieva, whose account showcases travel, concerts, and an idealised personal life; Asylbek Taalaibek uulu, whose blog is dedicated to self-development, education, and entrepreneurship; Aziz Mambetov, an education seeker who creates entertaining content with elements of self-irony and indirect social comparison; and Zhazgul Zhumabaeva, an activist and student whose page combines content on gender equality, educational initiatives, and personal achievements. The content analysis was carried out using qualitative criteria that enabled the identification of key elements of digital influence on perceptions of happiness. Specifically, signs of digital idealisation were examined – namely, portrayals of exclusively positive, often idealised aspects of life such as travel photos, material accomplishments, and participation in notable events. Indicators of social comparison were also considered, particularly those highlighting elevated social status, success, attractiveness, and achievement relative to others. A significant aspect of the study involved analysing the visual style of the accounts as a component of digital discourse, particularly features of online self-representation: the use of self-portraits as a means of identity expression, the application of filters, photo captions, motivational rhetoric, and self-appraisal statements. Another important criterion was the presence of signs of social approval – namely, the nature of comments, the degree of audience interaction, and other engagement metrics. Psycho-emotional markers were analysed separately, including references to happiness,

stress, fatigue, inspiration, and self-realisation. These components were used as tools to illustrate theoretical concepts regarding the digital idealisation of happiness and mechanisms of social comparison. The aim of this phase, within the broader theoretical framework, was to interpret cultural and semiotic patterns.

All accounts analysed were public and intended for wide audience consumption. The value of these accounts lies in their representation of various facets of digital self-presentation among Kyrgyz youth, reflecting common behavioural patterns, value orientations, strategies for constructing the image of a “successful” life, and mechanisms of digital idealisation. This made it possible to identify typical patterns of social comparison, emotional self-regulation, and the development of conceptions of happiness within the digital environment. The study adhered to ethical standards in accordance with the provisions of the Declaration of Helsinki (2013), and written consent to use publicly available content was obtained from the account holders. The final stage of the study involved a theoretical modelling approach, through which the author’s model of the impact of digital idealisation of happiness on the psycho-emotional state of education seekers was developed. The model comprised the following interrelated components: the impact of digital content; the perception of an idealised image of happiness; social comparison; emotional reaction (e.g., decreased mood, anxiety); change in the level of self-esteem. This model was constructed on the basis of an analysis of the digital platforms of education seekers in Kyrgyzstan.

■ RESULTS

Analysis of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study of the concept of “happiness”

In philosophical discourse, the concept of happiness has acquired various interpretations depending on the historical era and prevailing worldview paradigm. Notably, Aristotle (2009), in his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, regarded happiness (*eudaimonia*) as the highest goal of human existence, attainable through virtue, rational activity, and a harmonious life in accordance with human nature. According to Aristotle, happiness is not an immediate pleasure, but the culmination of a long process of moral self-improvement. This approach holds particular relevance for the educational environment, as it underscores the development of an individual’s inner potential – nurtured through learning, upbringing, and socialisation. The classical philosopher Epicurus advanced a hedonistic conception of happiness, defining it as the attainment of pleasure and the avoidance of suffering. However, it is important to note that Epicurus differentiated between physical and spiritual pleasures, placing greater value on the latter. For him, key conditions for happiness included inner balance, freedom from fear and excessive desire, and friendship as a vital source of emotional support. These ideas have since been expanded upon in modern psychological research, which highlights the importance of emotional well-being, social interaction, and support in shaping a happy personality.

Within the analysis of contemporary scientific approaches, particular attention was given to the hedonic and eudaimonic models of happiness, which are extensively employed in positive psychology. The hedonic model defines happiness as a collection of positive emotions and life satisfaction. It is based on the premise that a happy person experiences more pleasant emotions than unpleasant ones and is generally satisfied with life. This model was notably developed by E. Diener (1984), who introduced the concept of subjective well-being, comprising three components: the frequency and intensity of positive emotions, the infrequency of negative emotions, and an overall assessment of life satisfaction. Conversely, the eudaimonic model, proposed by C. Ryff (1989), emphasises self-actualisation, personal growth, a sense of life purpose, autonomy, and positive interpersonal relationships. Within this framework, happiness is not viewed as a fleeting emotion but as a sustained state arising from living in accordance with

one's values and aspirations. For example, a student engaged in volunteer work may not always experience immediate pleasure but may derive a profound sense of meaning and fulfilment from their actions – an indication of a high level of happiness according to the eudaimonic model.

Drawing on classical philosophical concepts (notably those of Aristotle and Epicurus), as well as modern psychological models (hedonic and eudaimonic), four principal components were identified: subjective well-being, life satisfaction, self-realisation, and social support. These components reflect the multidimensional nature of happiness and its significant role in shaping students' personalities and promoting a successful educational process. Below is a table providing a concise description of each component along with the criteria for their identification within the educational environment. Table 1 presents an overview of the key components of happiness in the educational context and the corresponding indicators used to determine their presence.

Table 1. Key components of happiness in an educational context: Characteristics and criteria

Happiness component	Characteristic	Key criteria
Subjective well-being	An individual's sense of life satisfaction and emotional balance. Reflects a positive perception of personal life circumstances and psychological comfort.	■ comfortable educational environment; ■ ability to independently choose an educational trajectory; ■ support from teachers; ■ emotional stability.
Life satisfaction	An overall positive assessment of quality of life, including personal, academic, social, and material well-being.	■ balance between study and rest; ■ harmonious family relationships; ■ financial stability; ■ opportunities for self-expression and leisure.
Self-realisation	Realisation of the inner potential of the individual, achievement of goals, development of abilities and awareness of one's own worth.	■ participation in competitions, conferences, projects; ■ professional self-determination – purposefulness; ■ compliance of activities with personal values.
Social support	A system of positive interpersonal relationships that provides emotional support, a sense of belonging, and security.	■ support from family and friends; ■ friendly atmosphere in the teaching team; ■ trust in teachers; ■ developed communication skills and social interaction.

Source: created by the author based on E. Diener (1984), C. Ryff (1989), Epicurus (1994), Aristotle (2009)

Digital idealisation, as one of the dominant phenomena of contemporary culture, is reflected in users' desire to showcase exclusively positive, successful, and visually appealing aspects of their lives on social media platforms. According to a study by Deloitte Insights (2023), more than 55% of young social media users admit to carefully editing their photos before posting them, in order to present a more attractive image. This creates the illusion of an idealised reality that does not necessarily reflect actual experience, yet strongly influences perceptions of happiness – both for the content creator and for the audience, who may engage in unconscious social comparison. Social comparison is another key phenomenon associated with the use of social networks. Individuals frequently and unconsciously compare their own lives with those of others online, which can provoke feelings of inferiority, envy, or dissatisfaction. For instance, a study by the Pew

Research Center found that approximately 60% of young people aged 18-29 experience emotional discomfort as a result of comparing themselves with others on social media (Faverio *et al.*, 2025). This process often contributes to reduced self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and symptoms of depression. Closely linked to digital idealisation is the concept of online self-representation. Users not only highlight their most successful attributes but also construct a type of “digital avatar” – an identity that may not align with their actual self. This is supported by findings from Common Sense Media (2018), which report that 58% of teenagers feel a constant need to maintain a positive image on social media, even when they are experiencing stress or personal difficulties in real life. Ultimately, these intertwined phenomena underscore the pervasive and often detrimental impact of curated digital environments on the psychological well-being of young people.

Assessment of digital representations of happiness in social networks of education seekers

Digital culture, in general, has contributed to changing perceptions of happiness. This study analysed public accounts of young users from Kyrgyzstan who actively maintain profiles on Instagram and TikTok. Within the digital environment, the concept of happiness is increasingly associated not with an internal emotional state, but with the visual portrayal of life, social recognition,

and quantitative indicators of success. Such representations place additional pressure on young individuals who attempt to align with the expectations of the virtual world – often at the expense of their real psychological well-being. Table 2 illustrates the characteristic features of digital representations of happiness across youth accounts in Kyrgyzstan, highlighting the main elements of digital idealisation, social comparison, and the emotional impact of such content.

Table 2. Examples of digital strategies for self-presentation of happiness in the accounts of Kyrgyz youth

Account	Content type	Illustrative signs of digital idealisation (visual, verbal)	Social comparison	Digital self-presentation strategies	Examples of digital approval/interaction	Tokens and images that shape the emotional atmosphere
@bekbolsun	Motivational content, lifestyle, personal achievements	Travel photos, positive posts about achievements	Direct demonstration of success through material goods and self-realisation	Frequent use of selfies, inspirational quotes, sayings about personal effectiveness	High activity	Inspiration, happiness, self-realisation
@nurzada.official	Music, concerts, travel, lifestyle	Bright photos from performances, glamorous images, idealised personal lives	Visual demonstration of higher social status	Filters, studio photos, captions with quotes about success and love of life	High level of interaction	Happiness, fatigue after touring, inspiration
@asylbek_kg	Self-development, education, entrepreneurship	Photos from speaking engagements, books, business events	Comparison through academic achievement, business goals	Structured posts, educational style, motivational quotes	Intermediate level, active student audience	Stress, goals, self-realisation, happiness
@azik_mambetov	Entertainment content, humour, self-irony	A less pronounced but idealised image of a cheerful, successful student	Ironic comparison with others (through humour)	Frequent videos with filters, humorous captions, presenting himself as a “simple but cool” guy	Very high level of interaction	Happiness, self-irony, sometimes mentions of fatigue
@zhazgul.zhumabaeva	Activism, gender equality, education, personal achievements	Photos from educational events, activities, personal stories	Comparison at the content level: showing an active, conscious student	Captions with a strong social message, selfies without filters, constant emphasis on values	Moderate activity	Inspiration, happiness, sometimes stress, desire for change

Source: created by the author based on content analysis of student accounts

According to the Table 2, all of the accounts studied demonstrate a certain level of idealisation of reality – most commonly through visual imagery (e.g., travel, concerts, and successful events), as well as through motivational captions or posts. Social comparison is evident both directly – through the display of status and achievements – and indirectly, through humour or participation in social initiatives. Online self-representation ranges from aestheticised portraits to activist content, yet the common focus lies in promoting success, self-realisation, and emotional well-being. The audience's response also plays a significant role: accounts with a higher level of engagement tend to reinforce a positive image, whereas accounts with moderate interaction are more likely to reflect on social issues or offer critical perspectives. Psycho-emotional markers – such as inspiration, happiness, fatigue, stress,

or a desire for change – reflect the multidimensional influence of digital content on personality. Analysis of social media content reveals frequent use of positive vocabulary by users, particularly words that convey joy, happiness, and emotional uplift. Posts commonly include words such as “happy”, “joy”, and “smile”, as well as diminutive and affectionate terms like “sun” and “joyful little one”, which enhance the emotional tone of the content. This type of vocabulary serves an important function: it contributes to the creation of emotionally warm and expressive posts, which generate a positive impression of the author and foster greater audience engagement.

Hashtags occupy a special role in this type of content. In addition to categorising posts by theme, they perform a symbolic function – signalling emotional states, personal values, and a sense of community belonging. The most

frequently used hashtags include: #happiness, #joy, #love, #life, #smile, #harmony, #soul, #inspiration, #bakit (Kyrgyz for “happiness”), #baktiluu (Kyrgyz for “happy”), #zhashoo (Kyrgyz for “life”), #behappy, and #happymoments. These hashtags serve a dual purpose: on the one hand, they help organise content, and on the other, they foster a sense of unity among users who seek positivity, support, and opportunities for self-expression. For example, the hashtag #happiness has over 31.5 million posts; #happinessinlittletings, 2.9 million; #happy, 8.3 million; #happinesstobehappy, 794 thousand; #bakit, 143 thousand; #baktiluu, 61.2 thousand; and #behappyinlife, over 29 thousand. These hashtags often accompany photos of significant moments, such as the birth of a child, engagements, weddings, holidays, gifts from loved ones, and travel experiences. These images tend to be bright, edited, and stylised in order to create an attractive appearance. As a result, an idealised notion of happiness is formed – one that is presented as a widely accepted norm. Viewers of such content may unconsciously begin comparing their own lives with this “filtered” reality. This can foster a desire to imitate what they see – in terms of appearance, emotional expression, and even celebratory rituals – potentially leading to a distorted perception of reality.

The digital space increasingly dictates the standards of what constitutes a “normal” life, and any deviation from this ideal often leads to anxiety and dissatisfaction with oneself. Simultaneously, experiences of hardship, doubt, and failure are rarely portrayed online – creating the illusion that problems are not a natural part of human existence. It can be assumed that, due to the dominance of idealised digital content, users’ levels of empathy may decline, and genuine communication about negative emotions is often avoided. Moreover, the language used in such publications tends to become formulaic, repeating similar phrases, constructions, and clichés. This not only impoverishes linguistic expressiveness but also complicates authentic interpersonal communication. Satisfaction is increasingly deferred – shifting from the immediate experience to the reaction of the audience. This reflects a shift in value orientations, where digital validation takes precedence over happiness itself. On platforms such as Facebook, users actively form groups with names like “happiness”, “add joy”, “I want to be happy”, “hope”, “smile more often”, and “family happiness”. These group names reflect a shared aspiration for positivity, harmony, and the creation of a supportive and safe environment for sharing personal experiences. The use of emotionally charged words in group titles helps to foster an inviting virtual space for communication and self-support.

Emotionally charged names of social groups on digital platforms perform several key functions. Firstly, they contribute to audience engagement, as potential members tend to identify with the positive values embedded in the group name. Secondly, such names establish a specific discursive context in which communication entails not only the exchange of information, but also emotional interaction, mutual support, and the creation of a shared community

of interests. An analysis of such group names from the perspective of cognitive linguistics allows for the identification of emotional concepts that hold the greatest relevance for social media users. The frequent use of words associated with happiness (e.g., bakyt, baktyluu), hope (umut), and smiling (kuluk) indicates a dominant positive emotional orientation in digital communication. This aligns with the understanding of language as a social tool that fosters and strengthens interpersonal connections within the digital space. It is worth noting the widespread use of group names such as “Happiness”, “Joy”, and “Bliss” – with approximately 350 such communities on Facebook alone, excluding compound group names containing these terms. On the Odnoklassniki network, the number of similar groups reaches around 23,000. In contrast, only one Facebook group uses the Kyrgyz word “bakyt”, despite the popularity of this name among users. On Odnoklassniki, just three such groups were identified, each with no more than two to three members. This can be attributed to the symbolic meaning of these words: whereas in Russian culture the word “happiness” functions solely as an abstract concept, in Kyrgyz culture Bakyt is often used as a personal name.

Traditional Kyrgyz culture viewed names as determinants of a person’s destiny. Thus, children were often given names with specific meanings – Bakyt, Baktybek, Baktygul, Bakdolot, Taalaybek, Yrys – all bearing positive semantic values such as “happiness”, “joy”, “prosperity”, and “hope”. This cultural tradition explains why Kyrgyz users rarely include “bakyt” in group names, instead favouring other emotionally or figuratively expressive terms. A common feature of social network language is the use of figurative expressions, such as: “the heart beats like never before”, “every moment is a flash of light”, or “the world shines brighter when you smile”, which create vivid and easily recognisable emotional imagery. Hyperbolic constructions are also prevalent, including phrases like “on top of the world” and “every day is a real holiday”, which intensify the emotional saturation of the content. Metaphors associated with happiness play a crucial role in shaping its digital image – e.g., “radiant happiness”, “on seventh heaven”, “warms the heart”. Such metaphorical structures enhance the emotional tone and frame happiness as an idealised, almost unattainable state. Thus, the language of social networks actively contributes to the creation of an idealised image of happiness, which may not reflect real-life experience. The dominance of positive formulations, filtered photographs, and stylised descriptions results in a distorted perception of everyday life. The use of comparative expressions (e.g., “the best day”, “the happiest moment”) and hyperboles (e.g., “unforgettable emotions”, “the happiest of all”) amplifies the sense of social competition, potentially affecting users’ self-esteem. The linguistic tools of digital discourse construct a specific representation of happiness as a social norm – conveyed through emotionally charged vocabulary, metaphors, emojis, and hashtags. Simultaneously, such content contributes to the illusion of an ideal life, which can lead to emotional fatigue and

undermine the authenticity of communication. Table 2 thus enables to observe how the digital environment influences the construction of happiness among young people, and what mechanisms – visual, emotional, and social – facilitate the transmission of these ideas in the public sphere.

Practical application of the model of digital idealisation of happiness in the student environment

In the digital environment of Kyrgyzstan, where a significant proportion of young people spend considerable time on social media, the need to analyse the impact of digital

content on students' psycho-emotional states is becoming increasingly urgent. The widespread dissemination of idealised images of success, beauty, and personal achievement fosters distorted perceptions of happiness. These misperceptions, in turn, influence young people's self-esteem, emotional well-being, and patterns of social behaviour. The proposed model (Table 3) provides a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underpinning this influence and offers practical recommendations for fostering digital hygiene, developing critical thinking, and enhancing psychological self-regulation within the educational process.

Table 3. Author's model of the impact of digital idealisation of happiness on the psycho-emotional state of education seekers

Model component	Content/details	Mechanism of influence	Signs in the behaviour of education seekers
The impact of digital content	Consumption of information from Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, which broadcast idealised images of a successful life, beauty, wealth, and achievements	Creating a distorted picture of reality; subconscious orientation to other people's standards	Frequent use of filters, an attempt to imitate the "ideal" lifestyle
Perception of idealised happiness	Awareness and internalisation of ideas about happiness as a necessary condition for success, wealth, and external attractiveness	The emergence of cognitive dissonance between the real and desired "digital" image	Statements about "lack of fulfilment", "not the same life as others"
Social comparison	Awareness and internalisation of ideas about happiness as a necessary condition for success, wealth, and external attractiveness	Feelings of inferiority, social pressure; envy, dissatisfaction with one's own life	Decreased mood after viewing other people's content; fixation on the successes of others
Emotional reaction	Psycho-emotional consequences of digital idealisation – anxiety, decreased mood, feelings of loneliness	Increased fatigue, decreased psycho-emotional tone, worsening of internal state	Statements about fatigue, stress; seeking emotional support; decreased activity in studies
Changing the level of self-esteem	Formation or deformation of self-esteem based on consumed digital content and reaction to one's own "online representation"	Dependence of self-esteem on likes, comments; risk of developing internal instability	Frequent posts for the purpose of self-affirmation; comments about insecurity; excessive photo editing, rejection of authenticity

Source: created by the author

The presented model has practical significance for the development of educational, psychological, and preventive programmes aimed at fostering a critical attitude towards digital content among students. The author's model of the influence of digital idealisation of happiness on the psycho-emotional state of students (Table 3) holds particular relevance for encouraging self-reflection, preventing emotional burnout, and promoting the development of digital hygiene skills within the youth environment. The first step in applying this model is the recognition of the influence exerted by digital content. Students are encouraged to conduct a critical analysis of the media they consume – especially on platforms where visual idealisation is prevalent, such as Instagram and TikTok. For example, a daily feed saturated with images of luxury and success may create a distorted perception of what constitutes a normal life. A practical recommendation is to establish digital boundaries – such as limiting social media usage to one hour per day or utilising "digital wellbeing" tools that track online activity. The second component involves identifying the

moment of perception of the idealised image of happiness. Students should engage in self-reflection to assess whether their understanding of happiness is authentic – rooted in their own values and needs – or shaped by external influences, social expectations, or stereotypes. In this context, exercises aimed at developing emotional intelligence can be beneficial – for instance, keeping a personal journal to record one's achievements, emotions, and moments of joy independently of external approval or comparison.

The third element, social comparison, requires particular attention. Educators and psychologists should incorporate media literacy and critical thinking training into the educational process, focusing on the analysis of comparison mechanisms within social networks. For example, a student may come to realise that the "successful image" projected by a blogger is often the product of a marketing team and carefully staged photographs, rather than a reflection of genuine happiness. The fourth component – emotional reaction – necessitates the introduction of self-help practices such as regular physical activity, breathing

techniques, and information “detoxes”. Students should be encouraged to monitor their emotional state after engaging with social media, noting whether feelings of anxiety, discouragement, or fatigue arise. Such responses can serve as indicators that digital habits need to be adjusted. Finally, the fifth stage – self-assessment – is closely linked to one’s digital self-representation. It is recommended that educational seminars be held on the theme of “authenticity in social networks”, including discussions on “like traps”. For example, if a student’s emotional state becomes dependent on the number of reactions to a post, this may be a signal to reassess their reliance on external validation. The model ultimately aims to foster emotional resilience and the development of a personal value system that is independent of digital representation and external approval.

Thus, the model not only systematises the phenomena associated with the digital idealisation of happiness, but also provides a framework for concrete actions aimed at reducing the risks of psycho-emotional disorders in the digital age. Social networks play a central role in the construction, dissemination, and reinforcement of idealised notions of happiness within the digital environment. They function not merely as platforms for information exchange, but as powerful instruments for shaping cultural norms, emotional expectations, and behavioural models. Through the use of personalisation algorithms, users are presented with content that affirms pre-existing perceptions of a “normal” life – typically characterised by visually appealing imagery, positive vocabulary, and aesthetically curated posts. Social networks thus cultivate an environment in which happiness is portrayed as a socially desirable product, requiring continuous visual validation through posts, likes, and comments. Within this context, emotional authenticity is frequently supplanted by the pursuit of social approval. Moreover, these platforms intensify social comparisons, fostering feelings of inadequacy, missed opportunities, and ultimately, emotional exhaustion. As such, social networks not only propagate ideals of happiness, but also define the parameters of social success – transforming personal experience into public performance and significantly influencing the psycho-emotional state of users.

■ DISCUSSION

In the context of active engagement with social networks, students were increasingly exposed to unproductive social comparisons, which resulted in emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and, in some cases, symptoms of depression. This finding aligns with the observations of S. Jiang & A. Ngien (2020), who noted that Instagram use – particularly when driven by social comparison – negatively impacted self-esteem and heightened social anxiety. The results of this study are significant in the context of shaping both the digital learning environment and students’ personal development. It was found that the digital idealisation of happiness – specifically, the portrayal of an ideal life on social media – led to a distorted perception of reality. This supports the findings of D. Graciyal & D. Viswam (2021),

who argued that the virtual pursuit of happiness often supplants genuine emotional well-being, transforming it into a quest for instant gratification and social approval. As a result, students became increasingly vulnerable to feelings of self-dissatisfaction and discontent with their lives. Furthermore, the study by F. Ekşi *et al.* (2020) emphasised that problematic technology use during adolescence is correlated with impaired social functioning, heightened anxiety, and reduced self-esteem. These parallels underscore the universality of the trends identified in the present study, regardless of sociocultural context. At the same time, the study revealed differences in the impact of digital idealisation of happiness depending on students’ levels of digital literacy and critical thinking. Students with higher digital competence exhibited reduced emotional vulnerability to idealised social media imagery.

This corresponds with the findings of Y. Chen & Q. Gao (2023), who demonstrated that social confidence among social network users positively correlates with self-esteem and lowers feelings of loneliness. Additionally, it was found that the digital idealisation of happiness contributed to the development of inflated life expectations, which often resulted in emotional burnout. As noted by M. Gaudette *et al.* (2023), this phenomenon is not limited to students but extends to other vulnerable groups. A key outcome of this study was the observation of a shift in how students perceive happiness. It was frequently equated with visual indicators of success – such as travel, physical appearance, or the number of likes received. This finding is consistent with a broader trend; however, it contrasts with the results of M. Hasan & N. Neela (2022), who explored the electronic self-presentation of tourists as a means of enhancing self-esteem. The present study demonstrated the opposite effect, highlighting the importance of context – particularly when digital content is not created by the students themselves but merely consumed, thereby negatively affecting their emotional state and self-esteem. The consistency of the results with the ethical considerations raised by C. Burr *et al.* (2020), who conducted an analysis of digital well-being, reinforces the necessity of adopting a critical perspective towards the digital environment. According to these authors, digital well-being should be grounded in a careful balance between the benefits offered by digital technologies and the preservation of individuals’ psycho-emotional health. The findings of the current study further underscore the importance of maintaining this balance, especially within the educational context.

Particular attention was paid to music as a means of emotional regulation within the digital environment. X. Hu *et al.* (2021) found that students actively used music to improve their psycho-emotional state – an observation partially confirmed in the analysed material, where some students reported turning to musical content as a compensatory resource in response to stress caused by digital comparisons. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic also influenced the perception of happiness in the digital space. A study by P. Bhatia *et al.* (2024), which focused

on elderly migrants, emphasised that social isolation and the instability of the external environment increased the demand for online support, while simultaneously exacerbating psycho-emotional discomfort. Among students, the idealisation of digital happiness during periods of social distancing intensified feelings of alienation. Similar conclusions were drawn in the study by J. Lee (2022), which found that social comparisons in the digital environment indirectly impact psychological well-being through alterations in self-esteem and perceived social support. Likewise, the research of S. Jiang & A. Ngien (2020) emphasised that active Instagram use contributes to increased social anxiety, particularly among individuals with a strong tendency toward social comparison. These findings confirm that the issue of digital idealisation is systemic and manifests independently of geographical or cultural context. Furthermore, the study revealed that aesthetic pressure – generated through portrayals of the ideal body and appearance – led to widespread dissatisfaction with personal appearance among students, which negatively influenced their overall psycho-emotional well-being. Comparable results were reported by M. Merino *et al.* (2024), who concluded that social media usage negatively affects body satisfaction and mental health, especially when viewed through the lens of gender and cultural differences. Similarly, A. Vizcaíno-Verdú *et al.* (2025) highlighted the connection between digital image editing, body dissatisfaction, and reduced well-being – findings that fully align with the outcomes of this study.

Another important theme of the study was the role of self-esteem as a mediator between digital idealisation and emotional well-being. Observations confirmed that students with higher levels of self-esteem were less sensitive to idealised digital imagery and less likely to exhibit negative emotional reactions. This finding aligns with the research of N. Nawa & N. Yamagishi (2024), who demonstrated that high self-esteem, combined with feelings of gratitude, contributes to greater levels of subjective and psychological well-being. Similar results were reported by Y. Chen & Q. Gao (2023), who found that the social confidence of social media users was positively associated with self-esteem and correlated with reduced levels of loneliness. Within the framework of the present study, it was also observed that students with higher digital competence and stronger critical thinking skills were less likely to compare themselves with idealised images and more inclined to utilise psychological self-defence mechanisms – particularly emotional regulation and cognitive restructuring. The findings further confirmed that prolonged exposure to a digitally idealised environment fosters inflated expectations from life. These expectations, when misaligned with reality, often led to chronic disappointment, emotional burnout, and demotivation. Comparable phenomena were previously described by G. Tamba & I. Iancu (2023), who noted that digital communication – especially text-based interactions – can provoke feelings of loneliness and decreased self-esteem among young people.

Similarly, A. Pearce (2024) argued that technological oversaturation contributes to cognitive overload, reduced intellectual satisfaction, and emotional imbalance. These insights are consistent with findings from the present study, in which students reported comparison fatigue, information overload, and a persistent desire for external validation. Another key aspect examined was the relationship between digital behaviour and well-being. Impulsive digital activities – such as online shopping, posting, or liking – were frequently associated with lower life satisfaction. This was supported by the study of S. Olsen *et al.* (2022), which found that impulsive online behaviour was linked to feelings of inner emptiness, mediated by levels of self-esteem. Even among students who were actively engaged in digital activities, many reported feelings of dissatisfaction, apathy, or underlying anxiety. The findings of O. Starovoitenko (2025) regarding the mental health risks associated with cybersecurity protocols in the workplace highlight a broader pattern in which technical demands create significant psychosocial stress, a dynamic mirrored in the current study's findings regarding the emotional toll of digital idealisation. Nevertheless, some participants noted compensatory strategies that helped mitigate the negative effects of digital idealisation. The most common among these were listening to music, using self-irony, maintaining communication with close friends and family, and limiting time spent on social media.

These findings correlate with the study by X. Hu *et al.* (2021), which confirmed that music consumption helps reduce stress and supports psychological balance among students. The emotional tone of digital content also emerged as a significant factor. As noted by S. Steinert & M. Dennis (2022), social networks possess so-called “emotional affordances” – features that influence users’ emotional states depending on the context and form of content. Particular attention in the study was devoted to the aspect of trust in digital technologies. Some respondents reported that interaction with digital tools – particularly artificial intelligence – affected their sense of self-worth. Similar conclusions were drawn by M. Salah *et al.* (2024), who emphasised the importance of users’ perceptions of chatbots and digital assistants in relation to self-esteem and psychological well-being. Overall, the digital environment not only introduces new standards for happiness but also directly influences the perception of one’s own value. The findings of E. Diener *et al.* (2003) and C. Tripon *et al.* (2023) further demonstrated that the interpretation of happiness is deeply rooted in educational traditions and cultural context.

Summarising the results of the study, it can be concluded that self-esteem serves as a key mediator in the relationship between digital idealisation and the emotional well-being of students. Higher self-esteem mitigates the negative effects of exposure to idealised images, reduces anxiety, and supports the development of adaptive self-regulation strategies. Conversely, a low level of self-esteem – when combined with high digital activity and an uncritical

perception of content – increases the risk of emotional exhaustion, loneliness, and diminished subjective well-being. Students with greater digital literacy and elements of critical thinking are more inclined to employ compensatory strategies, such as listening to music, using self-irony, engaging in communication, or setting time limits for internet use. This suggests a clear potential for fostering psychological resilience within the digital environment.

■ CONCLUSIONS

The study confirmed that happiness in the educational environment is multidimensional and plays a crucial role in shaping the student's personality, as well as in ensuring a successful educational process. The key components of happiness – subjective well-being, life satisfaction, self-realisation, and social support – are interrelated and complementary, forming a holistic psycho-emotional foundation essential for personal development. Providing a supportive educational environment, encouragement from teachers, and opportunities to pursue individual learning trajectories all contribute to students' emotional stability and the development of positive self-esteem. Social support from family, peers, and academic staff also serves as a vital resource for coping with stress and fostering motivation for achievement.

The digital culture prevalent among modern youth significantly transforms traditional perceptions of happiness. An analysis of public accounts of young users in Kyrgyzstan shows that digital idealisation, social comparison, and online self-representation are shaping new standards of happiness – standards increasingly tied to visual appeal, social recognition, and measurable indicators of success. This digital environment places additional pressure on young people, encouraging them to maintain a positive image even in moments of stress or emotional exhaustion. Visual depictions of travel, personal achievements, and lifestyle choices are often used to convey status and success, potentially leading to emotional discomfort due to persistent

social comparison. Psycho-emotional markers evident in users' content – including inspiration, happiness, fatigue, and stress – reflect the complex influence of digital culture on personality. The vocabulary used on social networks is rich in positive emotional expressions, fostering an atmosphere of support and community. However, the dominance of idealised imagery and repetitive patterns in messaging can hinder authentic communication and diminish empathy, concealing the negative emotions and challenges that are an inherent part of life. This dynamic contributes to an illusion of a perfect life and shifts value orientations – where genuine happiness is increasingly replaced by its digital validation through likes and comments.

Thus, the modern educational process and digital space intersect in shaping young people's understanding of happiness. This highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach to student support – one that considers both psychological well-being and a critical perspective on digital representations. A deeper understanding of the multidimensional nature of happiness and the effects of digital idealisation can aid in fostering a healthier educational environment, where students feel valued and accepted in real life, not solely through their virtual presence. Prospective areas for future research may include examining the influence of economic and political factors on students' digital behaviour, as well as conducting comparative studies across different Central Asian countries to identify regional distinctions and broader trends.

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Бактылуулуку санариптик идеалдаштыруунун билимге умтулган адамдардын эмоционалдык абалына жана өзүн-өзү сыйлоосуна тийгизген таасири

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Аннотация. Изилдөөнүн максаты билимге умтулган адамдар арасында социалдык тармактарда бакыттын санариптик идеализациясынын өзгөчөлүктөрүн аныктоо болгон. Санариптик чөйрөдө бакыт концепциясын изилдөө методологиясына дисциплиналар аралык адабияттарды комплекстүү талдоо, санариптик маданияттын таасири астында концепциянын трансформациясынын теориялык жалпылоосу (айрыкча Instagram, TikTok жана Facebook социалдык тармактарында) жана жаштардын коомдук аккаунттарынын контент-анализи, санариптик идеализация жана онлайн өзүн-өзү комплекстөө көрүнүштөрүнө басым жасалган. Изилдөө көрсөткөндөй, Кыргызстандын жаштары үчүн санариптик чөйрөдө ийгилик санариптик идеалдаштыруунун, социалдык салыштыруунун жана интернетте өзүн-өзү көрсөтүүнүн татаал өз ара аракеттенүүсүнүн таасири астында калыптанат. Жаш колдонуучулар материалдык жетишкендиктерге, саякатка, карьералык ийгиликке жана жигердүү жашоо образына басым жасаган мазмунду жарыялап, ошону менен идеалдуу бакыт идеясын түзөрү аныкталган. Мындан тышкары, бул контент көбүнчө позитивдүү тил, метафоралар, гиперболалар жана хэштегдер менен коштолуп, эмоционалдык таасирди күчөтүп, аудиториянын жогорку деңгээлде катышуусуна өбөлгө түзөрү белгиленди. Ошол эле учурда, бул кабыл алынган стандарттарга жооп берүү үчүн жаштарга кошумча басымды жаратат, бул көп учурда чыныгы жашоо менен санариптик “кемчиликсиздиктин” ортосундагы дал келбегендиктен улам когнитивдик диссонанска жана стресске алып келет. Изилдөө ошондой эле аудиториянын реакциялары ийгиликтин санарип тастыктоосунун маанилүүлүгүн жогорулатып, баалуулуктардын чыныгы бакыттан анын виртуалдык өкүлчүлүгүнө өтүшүнө алып келери аныкталган. Бул көрүнүш өзүн-өзү ишке ашыруу аракетинде гана эмес, эмоционалдык чарчоо, тынчсыздануу, социалдык сезимталдыктын жогорулашында да көрүнөт. Изилдөөнүн жыйынтыгы көрсөткөндөй, Кыргызстандын жаштарынын санариптик чөйрөдө ийгиликке болгон көз карашына социалдык салыштыруу менен шартталган бакыттын идеалдаштырылган виртуалдык образы, интернеттеги позитивдүү өзүн-өзү көрсөтүү жана санарип тастыктоодон көз карандылык таасир этет. Бул изилдөөнүн практикалык мааниси билим берүү мекемелери, психологдор жана социалдык кызматкерлер тарабынан санариптик гигиена, критикалык ой жүгүртүү жана санариптик мейкиндикте багыт алган жаштар үчүн психоэмоционалдык колдоо боюнча программаларды иштеп чыгуу үчүн потенциалдуу колдонууда

Негизги сөздөр: эмоционалдык жыргалчылык; виртуалдык сүрөттөр; психологиялык дискомфорт; социалдык салыштыруулар; технологиянын таасири

Влияние цифровой идеализации счастья на эмоциональное состояние и самооценку людей, стремящихся получить образование

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Аннотация. Целью исследования было выявление характеристик цифровой идеализации счастья в социальных сетях среди лиц, стремящихся получить образование. Методология исследования концепции счастья в цифровой среде включала комплексный анализ междисциплинарной литературы, теоретическое обобщение трансформации концепции под влиянием цифровой культуры (особенно в социальных сетях Instagram, TikTok и Facebook) и контент-анализ публичных аккаунтов молодых людей с акцентом на явления цифровой идеализации, социального сравнения и онлайн-самопрезентации. Исследование показало, что успех в цифровой среде для молодежи в Кыргызстане формируется под влиянием сложного взаимодействия цифровой идеализации, социального сравнения и самопрезентации в Интернете. Было установлено, что молодые пользователи публикуют контент, в котором подчеркиваются материальные достижения, путешествия, карьерный успех и активный образ жизни, тем самым создавая идеализированное представление о счастье. Кроме того, было отмечено, что этот контент часто сопровождается позитивной лексикой, метафорами, гиперболами и хэштегами, которые усиливают эмоциональное воздействие и способствуют высокому уровню вовлеченности аудитории. Одновременно это создает дополнительное давление на молодых людей, стремящихся соответствовать этим воспринимаемым стандартам, что часто приводит к когнитивному диссонансу и стрессу из-за несоответствия между реальной жизнью и цифровой «идеальностью». Исследование также показало, что реакция аудитории повышает воспринимаемую важность цифрового подтверждения успеха, что приводит к сдвигу ценностей от подлинного счастья к его виртуальному представлению. Это явление проявляется не только в попытках самореализации, но и в эмоциональной усталости, тревоге и повышенной социальной чувствительности. Результаты исследования показали, что восприятие успеха среди молодежи в Кыргызстане в цифровой среде формируется под влиянием идеализированного виртуального образа счастья, обусловленного социальным сравнением, позитивным самопредставлением в Интернете и зависимостью от цифрового подтверждения. Практическое значение данного исследования заключается в его потенциальном применении образовательными учреждениями, психологами и социальными работниками для разработки программ по цифровой гигиене, критическому мышлению и психоэмоциональной поддержке молодых людей, ориентирующихся в цифровом пространстве.

Ключевые слова: эмоциональное благополучие; виртуальные образы; психологический дискомфорт; социальные сравнения; влияние технологий