University of East Anglia

I'm #studygramming!
A Netnographic Exploration of Study-Oriented Social Media Content Creation Practices

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Abstract

Numerous online spaces have emerged and formed online communities around different topics. Of these online spaces, the online study community (OSC) hosted on *StudyGram, StudyBlr* and *StudyTube* has thus far attracted little academic attention. This thesis considers the voices of OSC content creators- *StudyGrammers*- their engagement and interactions, identity, and experiences. In doing so, this thesis proposes a conceptualisation of 'study' within OSC and reveals the impact it has on *StudyGrammers* at three levels: academic, personal, and social.

To explore these content creators and their practices within this community, a netnographic approach was deployed, coupled with an auto-netnographic account of myself as both researcher and *StudyGrammer*. Informing the findings of this research were interviews with four *StudyGrammers*, online observations, an immersive journal and the researcher's own content creations across OSC.

Thematic analysis reveals that OSC is based on aesthetically pleasing presentations of studying, carefully and creatively crafted around beautifying the process of studying. Through these practices, *StudyGrammers* challenge traditional perceptions of 'study' as both hard and tedious, transforming it into a fun, enjoyable and aesthetic activity. Findings reveal that in OSC, 'studying' entails more than just reading and writing to learn information; it also involves a social dimension in the form of creating and sharing content and interactions with audiences.

StudyGram is shown to be a Community of Practice (CoP) Wenger (1998) but adds a fifth dimension to the four types of learning – *learning through doing, through communication, through experience, and through becoming* which is *learning through study.* Goffman's dramaturgical approach (1956) is also used to explore both the frontstage and backstage of OSC and offers insights into the process of content creation. This thesis calls for a wider consideration and engagement with *StudyGrammers* and their practices to better understand and leverage their overall student-life experiences.

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Abstract

ASMR   Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response

CoP(s)   Community/ies of Practice

COVID19   The novel Coronavirus disease

CV   Curriculum Vitae

DIY   Do It Yourself

DMs   Direct Messages

100dop   100 days of productivity

DSLR   Digital Single-Lens Reflex Camera

Gif   Graphics Interchange Format

OSC   Online Study Community/ ies

PWM   Plan With Me

SD card   Secure Digital

SWM   Study With Me

UNI   University

Chapter 1: Introduction

As technology is deeply embedded in our lives, our everyday practices, communication, interactions, and relationships with the world have changed. Among this technology is the use of social media that is increasingly becoming a ubiquitous part of everyday routines for many people. Different social media platforms allow users to create and interact with different content. Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) classified six genres of platforms that are part of social media: microblogging sites (e.g. Tumblr), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), content communities (e.g. Instagram and YouTube), collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life) and virtual game-worlds (e.g. Warcraft). Though much has changed since 2010, social media continues to grow and diversify, presenting new ways of engaging and interacting with and through technology. The affordances[1] of each social media platform have helped to grow and evolve certain online communities which are formed by a group of people who have a shared interest. For instance, people form online communities around cooking, sports, commerce, crafts, books, tourism, reading, DIY (do it yourself), running, and many more practices. Studying is one of the interests that people have gathered around, forming what is known as online study communities (OSC) (also referred to in this research as *StudyGram* community) which is the core topic of this study.

StudyGram is relatively new and unknown to many people, but it is also a prosperous and growing online community. In fact, an internet search on Google yielded around 3,300,000 results at the time of writing. This significant number calls for research to delve into *StudyGramming* within OSC. Therefore, this research aims to explore the *StudyGram*

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[1] The term 'affordance' was first coined by Gibson in 1979 in ecological psychology to refer to a certain form of interaction between the environment and the animal. To Gibson, people consider the affordances that an object provides rather than the physical object itself. Later, Norman (1988) appropriated the term in the context of human computer interaction and described it as an object's design feature. While Gibson's original concept of affordances emerged out of visual perceptions, Norman's affordances were grounded in human computer interaction, particularly in the design elements of the online platforms.

In social media research, researchers have used affordances differently, for instance boyd (2010) focused on the social structures emerged through the technological features. While others like Graves (2007) used the term to refer to the technological tools provided on online platforms. In this thesis I use affordances to refer to the technological design features provided and developed by social media platforms to facilitate users' content creation and interaction.

community and its practices through a netnographic design. This chapter will introduce the study first by setting out the contextual background, followed by research aims and questions. I will then explain the relevance and significance of my research and my motivation to conduct the study. I close the chapter by offering a roadmap of the thesis.

Contextual Background

Born in 2014 on the microblogging platform Tumblr, the #studyblr hashtag evolved as an online trend. Soon more people followed this hashtag and re-blogged it to form what is known as the #studyblr_community. Under this hashtag, users who are purportedly mostly students or learners, share their beautiful handwritten notes, calligraphy, study spaces, desks, stationery, and motivational quotes (Tiffany, 2017). They have also shared study-related content, hence the name *study+ blr* (Tumblr). With the growth of #studyblr followers, what started with the posting of beautiful notes with congruent colour themes of fonts and highlighters, soon became a home for sharing ideas and advice about everything study or academia related. Then the trend moved to other famous platforms where more neologisms appeared, mainly on Instagram known as #studygram and on YouTube as #studytube. It is also present on Twitter *(#studytwt)*, TikTok (#studytok), Discord, and Reddit (Adegbuyi, 2021). This shift to other platforms has led to the expansion and development of OSC as each platform provides new affordances which in turn are used by members: so-called *StudyGrammers* generate more content and develop more creative ways to present themselves and communicate with others around the subject of studying and of being a student.

Over the past eight years, one of the reasons why *StudyGram* has gained attention and reached such a high number of followers and some attention from researchers is probably the COVID19[2] pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns. This has impacted the ways students utilise social media and meant they needed to find new ways to keep motivated for doing schoolwork and succeeding in academia, despite quarantine, lockdowns and the closure of educational institutions. During this time, #studygram gained more attention and its popularity among internet users increased significantly. Interestingly, data collection for this PhD happened at a

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[2] COVID19: the novel coronavirus disease

critical time when everything went digital, and students were encouraged to use digital devices to study. Therefore, some students, as many other people, found themselves obliged to use social media to communicate with others and motivate themselves to pursue their studies, without the face to face contact with teachers and peers.

During COVID19, the #with_me hashtag also gained great popularity on YouTube with content creators sharing videos of themselves doing and saying things to the camera for various reasons, including motivating others and providing a sense of companionship (Internet Impact[3], 2020). For instance, activities that are usually done individually were presented under this hashtag such as cleaning, reading, eating, crafting, and studying. Some of them included ASMR which refers to Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response. Interestingly for this research, this was the time when *study-with-me* (SWM) videos grew its wider audience as well, therefore attracting attention to the *StudyGram* phenomenon.

Notes on Terminology (Choice of Terms *'StudyGram'* and *'StudyGrammers'*)

In this thesis, I distinguish between the different niches on the three platforms (*StudyBlr*, *StudyTube* and *StudyGram*) under study. But the way I use the terms in this thesis recognises that they are all part of the same community. Therefore, the terms *Study culture*, *OSC* and *StudyGram* are all used in this PhD project to refer to the same phenomena and for clarity and conciseness, I will use them interchangeably. I use *StudyGram* most often because it is the most popular among users (#studygram has over 16 million posts at the time of writing- September 2022 and is still growing). Also, *StudyGram* was the common platform among my focal participants and was among the criteria of their choice to participate in this study (as detailed in Chapter 3).

I also refer to the content creators (my focal participants) as *StudyGrammers* in congruence with using the term *StudyGram*. Even though they are present on *StudyTube* and can be referred to as *StudyTubers*, the term '*StudyGrammers*' is more suitable as they all have a *StudyGram* account and my interactions with them centre around this identity of theirs.

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[3] Video can be watched here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WFLotPHQ2w

In the first data chapter, more nuanced information will be shared about what different hashtags of the *StudyGram* community entail and what the trends and differences are (*StudyBlr*, *StudyTube* and *StudyGram*). But as mentioned, the purpose of this study is not to focus on the differences between the platforms, but to explore the students' practices online and what they share as content. Moreover, the data chapters will narrate what happens when *StudyGrammers* shift between platforms.

Another reason why I refer to the community as *StudyGram* is because Instagram is more than just a social media platform (Leaver et al., 2020), where aspects of *StudyBlr* and *StudyTube* are enmeshed within the *StudyGram*. To make it clear, for instance, a famous genre of *StudyTube* content is #studyvlogs[4] and on *StudyBlr* it is #studyspo[5]. On *StudyGram*, both genres can be found in the form of Reels and posts with captions underneath. Another example is *live study-with-me* on YouTube. This can also be found on *StudyGram* platforms which covers aspects of both *StudyTube* and *StudyBlr* and seems to be more popular with users. It therefore also reflects the intricacies of this research, as will be shown in the data chapters.

<u>Motivation for This Study</u>

My interest in the *StudyGram* community grew gradually since I first encountered the *StudyBlr* trend on Tumblr. It all dates to 2016 when I was browsing on Tumblr, procrastinating over my essay or upcoming exams. I stumbled upon a #studyblr post that included a beautiful study spot with all those pretty study supplies assembled in an aesthetic, appealing manner. There was something special about that kind of image as I felt really motivated and inspired after seeing that picture. I remember going further to discover this type of pictures. When I first read #studyblr and #studyblr_community written in the caption underneath this picture's genres, it was ambiguous and did not make sense to me. Then, after delving between the folds of these hashtags, I realised that this was a genre where people post pictures of their study spaces, stationery and share study-related content. In fact, this was an entire niche (*StudyBlr community*) dedicated to post study-related content and was inhabited and followed by different students from different realms of life and different parts of the world. I followed the niche on Tumblr and used it mainly for 'fuelling my motivation' when I needed to start studying. I have

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[4] #studyvlogs: under this hashtag, *StudyGrammers* share a study-related vlog that usually include what happens in a 'study day'. It includes elements of their routines of being a student.
[5] #studyspo: this hashtag refers to posts that are regarded by members as being inspirational.

also learned many things from the ways notes were written and organised. Soon, I could see the way my notes changed into the #studyblr style pictures, getting neater, prettier, and more enjoyable to make and study from. It is also worth mentioning that, since my childhood, I have always been interested in stationery and study-related matters. In fact, I am deeply interested in education, teaching, and digital spaces. Therefore, *StudyGram* provided insights for me as a student, a researcher, and a future teacher/ lecturer.

Two years later, I was given the chance to pursue a PhD degree. The main advice in choosing a PhD topic was always about having passion for the topic, among many other important elements. In my case, investigating this community was the perfect enactment of this advice. At first, my initial proposal was around the Tumblr niche and its relation to motivation; then my topic grew to investigating wider perspectives enacted through *StudyGram* and *StudyTube* as they have evolved and flourished over the years.

The study took its present trajectory after a personal observation that the *StudyGram* hashtag was growing and gaining more attention. I was curious about the opportunity to study 'studying' as an activity and as a form of performance within an online community. Especially, I was interested to know how these *StudyGrammers* crafted their platforms to transmit their content and what was happening behind-the-scenes.

Because of my deep interest in OSC and my immersion in netnography, I am aware that I bring baggage with me as a researcher that includes my values, culture, views, history, assumptions, and dispositions; hence, my insider positioning. Therefore, I reflect upon my positionality and role as researcher in the methodology section (Chapter 3).

Research Significance

The growth of different content production and consumption on social media platforms highlights the need for research in this area. The content and practices of *StudyGram* are of particular relevance to the education sector. Increasing attention is being devoted at all levels of education to uses of technology in formal education. Companies are developing and producing digital pedagogical tools that are being integrated and trailed in classrooms. Yet little attention is being given to the ways students and learners utilise and build technology into their

own study routines. This research aims to give voice to students and this kind of studying as a practice.

This research is also significant because it is linked to multiple fields: education, digital sociology, and technology. All have an impact on the practices and behaviours of students generally and on *StudyGrammers* specifically. In a nutshell, a study like this can be important for educators, parents, and learners. Insights can be used to support students as well as educators and parents, by revealing how and why *StudyGramming* exists, and how it mediates the process of studying, which is a key component of learning and education.

Despite the recent shift to studying and researching online communities academically, there is still a paucity of research with regards to online communities specifically designed to share study-related content. OSC is an under-researched topic, perhaps mainly due to the newness of this phenomenon. There is a growing need to provide effective and engaging learning environments and to do so, it is important to understand students' online practices. Following what students post on study specific platforms is crucial to this endeavour. The aim of this research was to provide an in-depth study of *StudyGram* focusing on content, practices, *StudyGrammers* and its impact on their academic, social, and personal lives. This was possible through netnography, a methodology to data gathering and analysis that enabled me to observe, listen to and ask about both content and practices. Moreover, in order to understand the deeper meanings and decisions that are usually hidden behind the scenes, I decided to participate as an auto-netnographer in this study as a method to support the netnography and to add more richness to the overall investigation. Therefore, I contributed through sharing content and communicating with others. Basically, I became a *StudyGrammer*. As such, the research presented in this thesis is also of importance to digital researchers interested in methodologies.

Research Questions and Aims

The research questions that I have tried to answer in this thesis are as follows:

> 1) What are the features of OSC?
>
> 2) How does the concept of 'study' manifest in the community?
>
> 3) How do *StudyGrammers* exist in OSC?

4) What is the impact of this community on their (*StudyGrammers*) academic, personal, and social life?

These questions were formulated to help fill in what I perceived to be gaps in the literature (reviewed in the next chapter) and to make a suitable contribution to the broader field of learning and education.

My research aims to reveal the untold stories of the personal lived life of students, specifically *StudyGrammers*, delving behind the scenes of *StudyGrammers'* lives and yielding information of how they deal with their lives behind and in front of the camera. Here netnography was deemed the most useful methodology to explore the participants' outer and inner levels of online participation, to shed light on the hidden part of the iceberg and not just its tip. That is, this thesis sheds light on the behind the scenes of content production, including the feelings, decisions, and practices of *StudyGrammers*. All can be subsumed under the *StudyGram* culture that is yielded from the *StudyGramming practices*. For instance, sharing a post on Instagram will reveal only a small segment of information but subsequent interviews reveal the complexities lying behind that specific post. That is, when scrolling through *StudyGram* we see these posts but only through talking to the *StudyGrammer* (or being one) can the decision-making and feelings behind these posts be understood.

<u>Summary and Thesis Overview</u>

This chapter has introduced the study by providing a contextual background of the *StudyGram* phenomenon and introducing the research aims and questions of this research. It has also explained my motivation for conducting this research and its significance, particularly in the field of education.

In the next chapter (Chapter 2), I undertake a review of relevant literature and studies in related fields. I also set out the theoretical concepts through which I approached and analysed the findings. This is a combination of communities of practice (CoPs) (Wenger, 1998) and elements drawn from Goffman's work on self-presentation and dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959).

In Chapter 3, I set out my methodological approach of Netnography, and the unique perspectives I bring to this approach through adding the auto-netnographic element. I also explain my research design, the rationale underpinning my choices and discuss research ethics.

The four substantive data chapters follow Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will identify the features of OSC, revealing how this culture relies heavily on visuals and on presenting high quality posts and videos that are primarily academic study practices- related. It will also shed light on the participants and their trajectories, presenting their thoughts about OSC and examining trends and content across OSC (#studyblr, #studytube, and #studygram). Chapter 5 will seek to discuss the different enactments of the core concept of *studying*. Casting the light on the content creators, Chapter 6 will discuss their personal use of the community, their identities presentations and the different interactions and behaviours that characterise the online study culture. Chapter 7 discusses the impact of being a content creator in the OSC from three different perspectives: academically, socially, and personally.

Chapter 8 brings the thesis to a close with a final discussion. Chapter 9 concludes the study, highlighting its contributions, implications, and limitations before making recommendations for future research. Final thoughts and reflections about this research are also shared.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Concepts

Introduction

This chapter aims to review the relevant literature around *StudyGram* and the main concepts relevant to it, in line with my research questions and aims. Initially, and given the paucity of research on *StudyGram*, I will highlight literature around online communities, 'studying' and social media content creation to situate *StudyGram* within that wider scope. After that, I will review studies that have directly investigated the *StudyGram* phenomenon. After situating *StudyGram* in literature, I will identify the gaps in existing research and the ways in which this research will address those gaps and contribute to knowledge.

Theoretical concepts used as lenses through which to explore the data and interpret the findings of this netnography study will be accounted for. This includes Communities of Practice (CoPs) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and Goffman's self-presentation theory (Goffman, 1959).

Situating *StudyGram* within Wider Context

The main aim of situating *StudyGram* within the broader research is to highlight the importance of conceptualising and delineating the boundaries of 'studying' as a *'practice'* on the internet; this will enable me to theorise 'studying' within *StudyGram* practices, which is the aim of this research. But what have others written about *StudyGrammers* and their practices?

To answer this question, I will first draw a broader map within which *StudyGram* can be situated. This includes online communities and study-related online content and creates a context for the review of studies that have investigated *StudyGram* since its first emergence. It is also worth mentioning that due to the paucity of academic research on *StudyGram*, I will also consider articles found on the internet (grey literature). This includes articles from websites, media companies and digital magazines and will be mainly used to discuss *StudyGram* and the larger phenomenon of OSC.

Online Communities

For over a century, sociologists have been discussing the concept of 'community' (Mulligan, 2010). The most common definition of community "emerged as a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings" (MacQueen et al., 2001, p. 1929). With the pervasive use and ubiquity of the internet in everyday life practices, its easy access and the extensive availability of smart phone devices, internet users have found ways to move their interests online and establish gatherings in what is known as *online communities* (Rheingold, 1996). As such, social media platforms have gained more attention and use as their affordances are frequently updated, mainly to improve the quality of participation (Jaidka et al., 2022).

In an early study of online communities, Nip (2004) suggested that online communities manifest in unique ways that are contingent on the limitations of digital technologies. She highlights the way technology shapes the communication environment, the available resources of online communities, and the modes of communication and engagement. Nip (2004, p. 424) notes specifically that an understanding of online communities must consider the "context in which communication takes place". Other early work differentiates online communities from offline communities by highlighting the move away from a focus on groups and towards networks. In their 2002 study of the changes in the notion of communities bought about by the internet, Wellman, Boase, & Chen (2002, p. 161) note:

> Each person is a switchboard, between ties and networks. People remain connected, but as individuals, rather than being rooted in the home bases of work unit and household. Each person operates a separate personal community network and switches rapidly among multiple sub-networks. In effect, the Internet and other new communication technology are helping individuals to personalize their own communities. This is neither a prima facie loss nor gain, but rather a complex, fundamental transformation in the nature of community.

Effectively, they argue, one of the most fundamental shifts in our understanding of online communities is this move towards the networked individual who engages with the forms and functions of technology to manifest unique identities in personalised communities. As this thesis will argue, *StudyGram* represents one such manifestation of a networked community.

When thinking of *StudyGram* as a group of students who formed a community and gathered (online) around their interests (studies and academia), one thinks of the concept of online

communities. This concept has been defined by different scholars, with early pioneering research into online communities suggesting that online communities garner people around a common interest, providing a forum in which to interact with each other. For example, Rheiengold (1996) describes online communities within the framework of computer bulletin boards and networks where a group of people gather to "exchange words and ideas" (Ludlow, 1996, p. 414). Additionally, Ridings et al. (2002, p. 273) defined the concept as: "groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism". Since the 1990s, many different ways of communicating in online communities have been developed, including the use of images and videos, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Individuals may join different online communities for different reasons, some of which are for ideas, discussion, knowledge exchange, building connections and finding company (Preece, 2000). It is also important to mention that the online nature of online communities has made it possible for people from various parts of the world to join without having to physically travel or having to see each other in person. Listservs, bulletin boards and chat rooms were the first types of online communities which were mainly based on text communications (Malinen, 2015). However, more modes of online communities emerged due to the dynamic affordances presented by social media platforms such as videos on YouTube. The term *community* highlights certain characteristics that play a big role in online communities such as socialisation, information, experiences, trust, belonging, togetherness, connectedness and emotions (Burnasheva et al., 2019; McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Interestingly, online communities have attracted many scholars' attention across a range of disciplines, providing a rich context to look at them from different angles. Nimrod (2014) for instance, has looked at the benefits of participation in seniors' online communities, finding that it has positive impacts that include 'joyfulness', 'stimulation' and 'companionship'. The study also highlights some of the challenges that are related to the system or to other community members, resulting in a negative experience (Nimrod, 2014). Others have looked at more negative concepts of envy, social comparison and depression within Facebook online communities (Appel et al., 2016).

Covering a wide array of websites, most studies have focused on active sites, exploring issues such as health, hobbies, communities of practice for learning or professionals, social media platforms, wikis, question and answer websites. The number of participants has varied from

millions of people to niches of a small number of users (Malinen, 2015). Research has also identified users having different motivations to participate in online communities, depending on the type of community. In Wikipedia communities for instance, it has been suggested that people are motivated to participate because of altruism and ideology (Rafaeli & Ariel, 2008). In creative communities, researchers suggest that users are driven to add more content and to interact due to the opportunity given to share their skills and creative work and to seek feedback (Cook et al., 2009). Motivations seemingly differ from community to community, meaning that there is a need to establish why and how people engage with specific online communities. All of these observations around *community* led me to the decision not to focus on specific factors that pre-determine '*community*'. Instead, I was informed by this literature and its diverse definitions to allow my observations during fieldwork to be open to emerging definitions. As an initial focus, I was interested in how a community begins to form around the idea of '*study*'. This may include content creators as well as the audience that responds and interacts.

It has been suggested that online communities created for learning are gaining popularity among users because they provide voluntary opportunities to learn in a different environment (Schou et al., 2022). Literature around online communities in the educational field are often located within the framework of learning. For instance, using a netnographic approach, Kulavuz-Onal (2015) investigated "Webheads in Action", an online community of practice of English language teachers. Her findings revealed the collaboration and support practices that had developed between members of this community. Another instance is Dovchin's (2015) research which similarly explored English learning practices on Facebook; her study showed that members of the community exerted different views of authenticity, despite their belief in its importance. These two studies illustrate two important aspects of such communities: on the one hand they are about support and collaboration but on the other, they are also platforms for differing viewpoints.

StudyGram can also be positioned within the online communities that have proliferated on the three platforms: Tumblr, Instagram, and YouTube. More recent research on online communities from the early 2000s has explored online communities that are instigated by passionate members around certain topics, namely eating, food, books, and fitness. These latter topics have been studied by researchers of Muckbang*, foodstagramming* practices,

bookstagramming practices and *fitspiration*. The Mukbang phenomenon where different YouTubers stream themselves eating food (Kircaburun et al., 2021) has captured the attention of scholars. Kircaburun et al. (2021) concluded that the Mukbang phenomenon has both beneficial and harmful consequences, such as combatting feelings of loneliness, constructing a community but also promoting dis-ordered eating. On Instagram, Arumsari & Agung (2019) unpacked the aesthetics of Indonesian *foodstagram* as a cultural artifact, concluding that followers liked posts that celebrated food aesthetically through colours and "pleasing compositions". Another example of online communities that has created a culture on the internet is the fitness culture, known through the neologism *fitspiration* or *fitspo* on Instagram. This has been explored by researchers from various angles, including the need for health information, self-esteem, body image among young females and motivation (Dessart & Duclou, 2019; Jong & Drummond, 2016). It is worth noting here that much of the research in recent years focuses not only on the activities and topics of the communities, but also the formats and aesthetics of these communities.

Among the many online communities that have emerged and been studied by scholars, are book-related communities. The BookTube phenomenon has gathered avid readers and book-lovers from all over the world as a sub-community on YouTube and it is also prevalent on Tumblr and Instagram as #booklr and #bookstagram, respectively (Perkins, 2017). Research around these online book communities explores the *bookish* side of the internet as part of digital literacy and theorises about reading practices on the internet (Anderson, 2020; Ehret et al., 2018; Hughes, 2017; Perkins, 2017). Findings from these studies highlight the importance of the BookTube phenomenon in connecting 'book-lovers' and encouraging them to foster their reading practices (Anderson, 2020). Moreover, the #Bookstagram community on Instagram was found to be useful in enriching adolescents' choice and reading pleasures through being present in an enthusiastic community (Hammoudi, 2018). Therefore, such online communities contribute to fostering elements of motivation and encouragement among like-minded people. Other research has also considered different aspects of the ways in which BookTube might be incorporated in the field of education and classrooms as a reading tool (González, 2019). In a similar fashion to #studygram, #booklr prevailed on Tumblr, and on Instagram via #bookstagram (Thomas, 2021). This research suggests communities can form and thrive online around scholarly practices, acting as a means of encouragement and learning.

Given this context, my research aims to investigate the different elements of community that are emerging and developing within the OSC and the different ways that *StudyGrammers* exist and contribute to the overall OSC. This includes their motivations for joining the community, their interactions, engagements, content production, experiences and coping with different situations. I also aim to observe and map key aspects of the *StudyGrammer* community, including their content, interactions and aesthetics. In other words, I aim to explore the intricacies behind forming an online community around *studying*.

Online Content

Internet users share their interests through new forms of content creation across emerging platforms, through a range of uses and combinations of text, images and videos. Everyday social media content and practices nowadays rely heavily on visuals which are very essential to online communications (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). Given the variety of content creation on social media and both producers and consumers online, researchers have been keen to investigate different aspects of content, looking at the myriad ways that they speak to these online communities. As such, research has focused on online content about food (Arumsari & Agung, 2019), eating (Anjani et al., 2020), health and fitness (Dessart & Duclou, 2019; Jong & Drummond, 2016), Fandoms (Gerrard, 2017), sports (Fenton et al., 2021), fashion and beauty (Cohen et al., 2019; Dekavalla, 2020), lifestyle (Devos et al., 2022), pets as influencers (Berzleja & Kertész, 2019), travel (Ribeiro et al., 2014), games (Walther, 2022), books (Anderson, 2020; Dezuanni et al., 2022; Ehret et al., 2018) and support (Poor et al., 2022). These areas are only few examples of the wide range of content that exists online, and the distinct communities and interests they serve. The breadth of research highlights that content is equally broad and dependent on many factors such as the topic of the community and the platforms and technology they use. It is also worth mentioning that these studies explore content hosted on a range of different social media platforms, including Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, Reddit, YouTube, Pinterest, TikTok and Instagram, among others.

Researchers have investigated social media content both quantitatively and qualitatively. While the quantitative approach has proved useful given the existence of big data and rich-data sets, there has been a call by researchers to implement qualitative approaches in order to provide a critical understanding of the context and practices that might have gone unnoticed using

automated quantitative processes (Highfield & Leaver, 2015). Moreover, researchers have called for more in-depth research into "user practices, shared experiences, and approaches to content" (Highfield & Leaver, 2015, p.5). In fact, the call has grown since 2015; for instance, Dyer (2020, p. 168) encouraged researchers to consider "more than one or two" social media platforms in order to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the intricacies that are happening in user's daily lives. He further highlights the importance of "consider[ing] the perspective of the users, as it is their interpretation of how they engage with the features that reveal the importance of these for their actions and interactions online." (Dyer, 2020, p. 165).

Given this context, my research considers more than one platform and focuses deeply on the StudyGrammers' experiences and interactions online (in addition to my auto-netnographic account). Given the array of platforms and the vast possibilities for content, this project aimed not to focus on specific forms of content, but to be driven by my understanding of key content for *StudyGrammers*. It is therefore guided by my observations, interviews with *StudyGrammers* and auto-netnographic notes. Details of this process of immersion are provided in the methodology chapter.

Study-Related Content and Platforms: Welcome to StudyGram!

In the light of this background, another type of content has found its way to popularity, especially in the last eight years (since 2014), which is study-related content or what is known as the online study community through the heavily used hashtags #studyblr, #studygram and #studytube. Since study-related content has proliferated on the internet, it has been referred to with different terminologies describing the phenomenon. Initially, when it first emerged on the microblogging platform Tumblr in 2014 (Tiffany, 2017), the phenomenon was called *StudyBlr* which is a combination between the common interest "study" and the platform "Blr" (Wong, 2018). Soon after, as it gained more followers and its popularity increased (Widita, 2020), *StudyBlr* extended and migrated to other platforms, mainly Instagram and YouTube, following the same labelling premise, and referred to as *StudyGram* and *StudyTube*, respectively (Wong, 2018).

More recently it has appeared on several other platforms such as Discord[6], Twitch[7], Reddit, Twitter and TikTok (Adegbuyi, 2021). Interestingly, Discord has gained more attention[8] recently; students gather on this platform for various reasons, one of which is to stream live *SWM* sessions which others can join. Similarly, thousands of students are joining *live SWM* streams on Twitch where most streamers are women studying medicine (Rennolds, 2022). These live streams originated in South Korea, then becoming a trend on the internet known as *Gongbang,* which means studio broadcast (Delgado, 2021). This *Gongbang* phenomenon is the most famous genre in the *StudyTube* sphere where *SWM* videos are gaining more viewers daily (Ewe, 2021). For example, the most watched 'famous'[9] videos (at the time of writing, have reached over 9.5 million views on YouTube (Merve, 2021). According to Adegbuyi, (2021 para. 8): "Study Web where students return again and again, seeking comfort and counsel from their favourite creators, regardless of what they're studying or where they go to school". Given the changing dynamics of this community, this research aims to offer a definition of the *StudyGramming* community.

Moreover, On Twitter and Reddit, study content is shared under hashtags #studytwt and r/getstudying, respectively. Additionally, *StudyGram* content is also prevalent on Pinterest and TikTok via #StudyTok (Adegbuyi, 2021). As a portmanteau, Adegbuyi (2021) labeled the study content on all these platforms as *The Study Web* which she defines as "a constellation of digital spaces and online communities-across YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, Discord, and Twitter-largely built by students for students." (Para. 5). The content is shared via different formats with high attention given to aesthetics and visual presentation (Tiffany, 2017). The aesthetics of content will be explored further in this research. Over the years, *StudyBlr*, described famously as this "*beautiful, stressful wonderland*" (Tiffany, 2017) caught the attention of the press and several internet blogs dedicated their pages to describing the phenomenon. For instance, TheVerge.com brought to light aspects of aesthetics that prevail on *StudyBlr* which are underpinned by the assumption that education is important (Tiffany, 2017). In the Guardian,

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[6] Discord is a free voice, video, and text chat app used by tens of millions of people ages 13+ to talk and hang out with their communities and friends. https://discord.com/safety/360044149331-What-is-Discord

[7] Twitch is where millions of people come together live every day to chat, interact and make their own entertainment together. https://www.twitch.tv/p/en/about/

[8] Discord platform has been proved to be useful as a learning tool, in a recent study that focused on learning to speak confidently (Ramadhan, 2021).

[9] Video can be watched via this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ex_bNIFR1A

there is reference to 'Edu Tube' (Stokel-Walker, 2019) and the BBC has stated that these study YouTubers are making studying "*look cool*" (Brugen, 2018).

StudyGrammers, *StudyTubers*, or *StudyBlrs* are labels referring to the content creators of the study- related content. Izquierdo-Iranzo & Gallardo-Echenique (2020, p. 119) define the StudyGrammer as being: "a student who exercises, through Instagram, a peer-to-peer mentoring role in the academic field, not only sharing notes and outlines, but also transmitting advice, encouragement and experiences". Interestingly, they have further labelled them as '*learning influencers',* active users who dedicate their platforms to showcase "what students usually exchange via WhatsApp: notes, doubts and/or encouragement" (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Gallardo-Echenique, 2020, p. 113). These labels of 'influencer' and the mentoring role of the community will be explored further in this study.

Despite the positive information that has been reported by the above-mentioned sources, and as any gathering or community, there are also concerns. For instance, famous *StudyTubers* recently decided to raise awareness on their channels about some issues that the community faces such as over- hyping certain stationary items, consumerism in general and the hustle culture[10] (Alice Cappelle, 2021; Mariana's Corner, 2020; tbhstudying, 2020). I have experienced and observed both the pushing of specific branded products as well as the '*connectedness*' of this community, as will be discussed in the data chapters.

Informal Learning and Studying Online

Within the wide array of videos posted daily, videos of tutorials and tips attract a large audience. These videos, among others, provide an opportunity to learn from YouTube. This can be considered as informal learning (Lange, 2018), often defined as a type of learning that happens outside institutions and is not bound by a curriculum. It is "characterized by a low degree of planning and organizing in terms of the learning context, learning support, learning time, and learning objectives" (Kyndt & Baert, 2013, p. 274). This type of learning can be on any subject and it relies for the most part on learners' autonomy and their determination and motivation to learn. Informal learning is usually defined in opposition to formal learning as in informal learning, results are not predicted before the process begins and is not led by an

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[10] Hustle culture is when people keep working nonstop and only taking little breaks to achieve their goals. More about this concept is presented in Chapter 5.

instructor. However, the latter's learning outcome is usually specified ahead of time and the process happens in a context designed for learning (Kyndt & Baert, 2013).

Learning from social media can be framed within the realms of informal learning; at the same time, formal learning may also include the use of social media platforms in teaching/learning. YouTube offers a wide range of affordances that makes it a popular and accessible platform for informal learning (Lange, 2018). However, in this thesis I wish to focus more specifically on *studying*, in keeping with the labelling of *StudyBlr*, *StudyGram* and *StudyTube*. *Studying* can be viewed as a specific effort/practice of learning. More conventional literature shows us that *studying* is a cognitive process that is seen mostly as a solitary activity done in isolation. For instance, it has been defined as: "a special form of reading that is associated with the requirement to perform identifiable cognitive and/ or procedural tasks." (Anderson & Armbruster, 1980, p. 1). Given the date of this definition, I was curious to see what special forms of acts -reading or otherwise- were involved in understanding the phenomenon of studying as it was enacted in online study communities.

Research on the Online Study Community (*#studyblr*, *#studytube* and *#studygram*)

#studyblr on Tumblr

It is important to review literature around what students do on the social media platforms where online communities are hosted-in situ, in other words. Students are present on a wide array of social media platforms but in this chapter, only literature around students' use of Tumblr, YouTube and Instagram will be considered.

Tumblr as a microblogging platform was first launched in 2007 and has grown significantly to become a hub of niches and sub-communities with diverse practices, cultures and experiences (Krutsch, 2022). Despite being called "forgotten" within the social network bundle, in comparison to Instagram and YouTube (Anderson, 2015; Attu & Terras, 2017), its feature of social networking attracts users to build communities and network with each other (Anderson, 2015). Findings from a pioneering review by Attu & Terras (2017) about studies of Tumblr have shown that academic research on Tumblr is evolving. The authors argue that when studying Tumblr, most researchers explore conceptual issues and analyse the content of messages sent. Despite the affordances available on Tumblr (multimodality, traceability and long text formats), researchers faced serious limitations mainly due to the lack of demographic,

temporal and spatial metadata, and the fleeting nature of some posts (Attu & Terras, 2017). In fact, this latter affected my experience as well and hindered my immersion in the *StudyBlr* community (see Discussion Chapter 8).

In relation to education and learning, Tumblr has been explored as hosting different types of libraries (Anderson, 2015). In a more recent study, Marsoit (2022) has explored the effectiveness of using Tumblr when writing argumentative essays and recommended the use of Tumblr to English teachers in Indonesia. However, research on study-related content on Tumblr is very limited. Despite *StudyBlr*'s emergence through *#studyblr* on Tumblr in 2014 (Tiffany, 2017), the body of research that has focused on this is limited. In fact, in the initial stages of this PhD study, there was hardly any academic literature around the phenomenon. Web search results for StudyGram[11] were mainly pages of StudyGram itself, content that included *StudyBlr* posts and *StudyTube* videos. Results also generated articles that had been shared in blogs, online magazines, newspapers and web pages but no actual academic research until 2019 when Nguyen & Teichert investigated *StudyBlr* (Nguyen & Teichert, 2019). This study was followed by a few more studies on *StudyTube* and *StudyGram*. This indicates a paucity in academic research that addresses these online study-focused content spaces. Hence, the present research was born to address this gap, by exploring *StudyGram*.

The first academic research on *StudyBlr* (Nguyen & Teichert, 2019) was originally written in German which made it somewhat difficult for me to fully understand as I had to rely on Google translate. Using a survey, Nguyen & Teichert (2019) explored the *StudyBlr* community in relation to the influence it has on the learning motivation of its members and on their overall coping skills. This study reveals that the *StudyBlr* community is an autonomous, supportive, centre-oriented place of learning and social resource. The authors argue that the *StudyBlr* community supports individuals constructively and creatively with difficult learning situations while also experiencing self-efficacy. To my knowledge and to this date (June 2022), this study is the only one that has explored the *StudyBlr* community. Therefore, this indicates the lack of research focusing on the *StudyBlr* community on Tumblr. I therefore looked at both YouTube and Instagram to see whether academic attention had been paid to OSC on these platforms.

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[11] The internet search included all the terms and key words related to the *StudyGram* community including hashtags (#studyblr, #studyrgam, #studytube, SWM videos, #studyblr_community, and #studyspo).

#studytube on YouTube

YouTube first emerged in 2005 and was acquired by Google in 2006. Through the affordances offered on the platform, it is easy for users to upload and consume content on various topics. This has made YouTube a hub for an unfathomable number of videos over the world (Lange, 2018). Moreover, the ease of searching and accessing information through typing keywords make it central for many teenagers and it has been regarded as their "main search engine" (Scolari et al., 2018, p.809). Given its ease of access and its reputation, academic research on YouTube online communities has been evolving since its emergence. The creativity of audio-visual content creators has made the growth of YouTube possible as well as its affordances that provide exciting research perspectives (Khan, 2017). Nowadays, various communities can be found on this platform, finding enthusiastic audiences according to their interest, ranging from lifestyle and beauty channels, gamers, educational videos, and cooking tutorials to bookish videos and even *studying*.

Researchers from different disciplines have shown an interest in YouTube. Lange (2007) for instance, uncovered the different experiences of YouTube users, illustrating the way YouTube members utilise the technical and symbolic features to create a social network in the realms of publicness and privacy. Other research has looked into the use of YouTube for politics (Carlson & Strandberg, 2007) and in the medical field (Gomes, 2008). Significantly, given the focus of this research is in the educational field, YouTube attracts learners studying various topics such as anatomy (Barry et al., 2016), language skills (Pratama et al., 2020; Purwanti et al., 2022), and mental health (Choi et al., 2021), among many others. Clifton & Mann (2011) recommend the use of YouTube to nursing students for both teaching and learning for its usefulness for both learning and developing critical thinking skills. In a recent study, some students stated that YouTube videos were fundamental in their language learning classes and that it enabled them to learn from native language speakers (Purwanti et al., 2022). These studies indicate that YouTube is a useful portal for users to learn about specific topics but there is also a need for research into how YouTube supports 'study' more broadly, beyond subject-specific knowledge.

With this in mind, another form of content that has been trending in the past five years is study-content related videos. Under the umbrella term *StudyTube*, *StudyTubers*, who are mainly students, share with their audience tips and methods on how to study, manage time and learn

effectively (Watts, 2021). Moreover, they share other content; notably, productive routines, university vlogs and motivational SWM videos (*Gongbang*). This latter is a genre that has caught the attention of many viewers, especially during-and-post COVID when viewers needed a "sense of companionship" through the quarantine (Ewe, 2021). Either pre-recorded or live streamed, as brief as five minutes[12] or as long as 12 hours[13], SWM videos are simply videos where the *StudyTubers* film themselves studying (Semio, 2020). In her video, Semio also noted that these videos have increased in popularity, especially during COVID19, because people considered them as part of an "online library" where they can be accompanied by other students who are not only doing work but also taking breaks. According to Semio (2020) this leads to more effective study sessions (Semio, 2020).

Emergent research has been keen to understand SWM videos and the reasons behind their popularity, despite the limited interactions between the *StudyTubers* and their viewers (Lee et al., 2021). Although *StudyTube* has become increasingly popular, notably in the last few years, only two studies (to the best of my knowledge) have been located (at the time of writing June 2022). These two qualitative studies were conducted in the same year (2021) a few months apart (one in May and the other in August). Lee et al. (2021) provided a first overview of the SWM phenomenon, detailing the characteristics of SWM videos. They argued[14] that according to YouTube, the number of views of SWM videos increased in 2020 by 54% in the US . SWM videos were used by viewers as a lower cost study ambiance environment, to keep themselves accountable and for emotional support (Lee et al., 2021). Not surprisingly, SWM videos have gained viewers due to quarantine, lockdowns and school closures when people had to stay at home for various reasons and were looking for ways "to create an effective studying environment*"* (Lee et al., 2021). In their qualitative study, Lee et al. (2021) propose a three-factor model that explains the creation of a "satisfying study session". This model includes internal factors, external factors and the outcome. In other words, outcomes of the studying session will be affected by both the student's internal state (motivation, focus, distraction, etc.) and the overall study environment. Their research posits students use SWM videos as a tool to create a personalised and satisfying *study* ambiance to achieve effective *self-regulated learning*. This latter implies that learners try to manage and control their learning environment for the best outcomes, despite the constraints that have been imposed on them due to the

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[12] This type of videos is in timelapse mode where the activity of studying is shown fastened.
[13] These are real time videos, usually live streamed.
[14] Video can be watched via this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jm8jTmhHbwI

pandemic. These findings are therefore more relevant to a particular time period (Lee et al., 2021). Nonetheless, its relevance in terms of helping students to be self-regulated learners is not confined to the pandemic. Wang and Zhang (2021) highlight the usefulness of livestream SWM on Bilibili[15] in facilitating self-regulated learning and argue that the various SWM video activities also support a sense of community, particularly for learners who may be isolated for a number of reasons.

Collectively, these two studies demonstrate the importance and usefulness of SWM videos as a tool to improve studying efficiency through the creation of a personalised ambiance (Lee et al., 2021; Wang & Zhang, 2021). Aside from these two studies, however, there is a lack of research focusing on *StudyTube* content in general, including other types of videos and content within that realm. Furthermore, in both studies, the analytic focus is largely on how it improves learning and engagement for students, rather than on the act of 'study' itself. There is also little research on how *StudyTubers* themselves stream their content and manage their presence online. In this regard, the results will be more nuanced and informative if the *StudyTubers* themselves are the main participants. My research builds on the findings of these studies, contributing to the literature through both the focus of investigation and the methodological choices taken. As such, auto-netnography provides another dimension that represents the enmeshment of myself as a researcher, a *StudyGrammer* and an avid follower of the OSC.

#studygram on Instagram

Instagram is a famous photo and video sharing social media platform that was first launched in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. Later bought by Facebook in 2012, Instagram is image-oriented and relies for the most part on visuals, as it provides an array of affordances that help edit pictures before being posted (Lup et al., 2015; Malik et al., 2022). This includes main functions such as filters, hashtags, profile bios (description) and ease of access and communication between users. Moreover, it contains affordances that support engagement and interactions between users, such as live videos, stories, likes, shares, comments and sending direct messages. This visually based platform has gained popularity over time with billions of images (Marshall et al., 2020) and has attracted diverse people including footballers, fashion influencers, singers, actors, mothers, teachers, companies, comedians, health carers and students among many others (Lup et al., 2015). In fact, with more

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[15] Bilibili is a Chinese video sharing website.

than two billion users, Instagram is one of the largest social media platforms, used especially by young adults throughout the world (Malik et al., 2022).

Congruent with the pervasiveness of Instagram-use among people from diverse disciplines, research on that has equally grown exponentially (Lup et al., 2015; Marshall et al., 2020; Faelens et al., 2021). For instance, different studies on Instagram have been located in its relation to art and museums (Suess, 2018), food (Arumsari & Agung, 2019), mental health (Faelens et al., 2021), tourism (Conti & Lexhagen, 2020; Femenia-Serra et al., 2022), online brands and marketing (Vinerean & Opreana, 2019), identity and self-esteem (Seibel, 2019), pre-birth, post death and grieving (M. Gibbs et al., 2015; Leaver & Highfield, 2016, 2018; Abidin, 2022), among many others. With this variety in disciplines and researchers' interests, Instagram studies have been approached from various perspectives. For instance, Manovich focused on the nuances of Instagram aesthetics within a rich historical and cultural context (Manovich, 2017). Others have looked at Instagram as a platform of self-presentation and shaping identity (Shumaker et al., 2017; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019).

Existing literature around social media and its use by students focuses on different aspects including advantages, disadvantages and everything in between. Studies have explored the effect of social media on the academic performance of students, their time use and engagement in academic activities using social media (Sheeran & Cummings, 2018; Wohn & LaRose, 2014). Studies have also shown that students use social media to connect with peers and classmates (Lim & Richardson, 2016). Other research has found that students who study medicine find Instagram a useful way to learn anatomy (Brown, 2020). They regard Instagram as tool that complements traditional face to face learning to enhance their knowledge about anatomy. Brown (2020) also found that students who used the platform regularly maintain social relationships with others and are motivated through it.

Importantly, for the present research and in the learning and educational field, Instagram's use by students has attracted scholarly attention (Ellison, 2017). For instance, it has been used to motivate students to learn English and it has also been found to be beneficial in improving their learning competence (Pujiati et al., 2019). Against this background of students' use of Instagram in the educational field, Instagram has also attracted content inspired by both #studyblr and #studytube and attracted more followers and content creators, i.e.,

StudyGrammers. The OSC has thus found a new host space where more than 16 million posts (Instagram, June 2022) are tagged #studygram. This indeed, calls for "an empirical investigation of the phenomenon" (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Gallardo-Echenique, 2020, p. 115).

When I initially proposed this study topic, to my knowledge no academic research had been conducted to investigate the *StudyGram* phenomenon. A few articles discussed the phenomenon focusing on *StudyBlr* such as flowjournal.org (Vickery, 2015), theodessyonline (Stevenson, 2016), TheVerge.com (Tiffany, 2017) and diggit magazine (Dumoulin, 2019). A number of podcasts had focused on the *StudyGram* phenomenon, for instance, The Bliss Bean Show (2020) and Quilliec (2021).

#studygram Studies

Having positioned *StudyGram* within the context of other similar areas that include online communities, content creation and studying, this section will highlight the literature related to *StudyGram* specifically on Instagram (for the moment). It is worth highlighting that this is a largely under-studied area, with only a few studies published, a lack of peer-reviewed work and work in English to date. My attempt to understand the content of papers located (written in Spanish and Portuguese) was hindered by the often difficult to decipher and unreliable meaning produced by machine translation. Therefore, I decided to exclude them from this review.

What is clear is that research into *StudyGram*, so far is limited but emerging. The earliest and most cited academic research found on the *StudyGram* phenomenon was published in 2020 by Izquierdo-Iranzo & Gallardo-Echenique. Through the use of a questionnaire, discussion groups and online observation, they explored the characteristics of *StudyGrammers* as a type of user on social media. Dubbed as "*learning influencers"*, they defined the *StudyGrammer* as: "a student who exercises, through Instagram, a peer-to-peer mentoring role in the academic field, not only sharing notes and outlines, but also transmitting advice, encouragement and experiences" (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Gallardo-Echenique, 2020, p. 119). Their study suggests that the *StudyGrammer's* role entails aspects of influencers, including: "mastery of the aesthetics, and monetization of online activity, where the academic purpose adds its own characteristics" (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Gallardo-Echenique, 2020, p. 119). This study focuses solely on the Spanish context and would have been of more relevance if it included participants from other

parts of the world. In addition to the term *learning influencers* (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Gallardo-Echenique, 2020), the BBC refer to *StudyGrammers* as *StudyTubers* (Brugen, 2018) and *revision content creators* (BBC, 2019) in two articles that discuss this newly emerging phenomenon.

StudyGrammers can be situated within the broader realm of social media influencers. Recently, researchers have shown considerable interest in social media leading figures, also known as *influencers* and *micro-celebrities* (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Abidin, 2015; Khamis et al., 2017). Within this realm, influencers are social media figures who have accumulated many followers over time and are seen as leading figures in a particular domain. Microcelebrity can be understood as : "the concerted and strategic cultivation of an audience through social media with a view to attaining celebrity status" (Khamis et al., 2017, p. 196). *StudyGrammers*, through their content sharing practices, manifest aspects of influencers (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Gallardo-Echenique, 2020). This concept will be further explored in this research through discussions with *StudyGrammers* about how they understand the term 'influencers'.

The second aspect that was highlighted in the located literature is the usefulness of *StudyGram* as a tool to enhance learning. Specifically Baisden & Pope (2020) propose that the use of *StudyGram* helps students to study and to improve their understanding of course material . They content that "content delivered in a familiar platform also increases retention of information" (Baisden & Pope, 2020, p. 358). They found that *StudyGram* as a tool helped students to retain information through scrolling and seeing content and reduced procrastination because students found it an enjoyable way to revise; hence, their results improved. As noted earlier, whilst this focus on how users of online study materials improve their formal learning is useful, this research aims to explore *study* in its own right and to understand the perspective of *StudyGrammers*.

Overview of the Reviewed Literature

In sum, studies about *StudyGram* across platforms are emerging but still limited to only some aspects of the community. This paucity calls for investigation of this rich space where students congregate. Previous research has indicated the importance of researching this new phenomenon, given the number of participants (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Gallardo-Echenique, 2020). As such, one can observe from the studies that *StudyGram* emerged and flourished

during and in the aftermath of the Covid19 pandemic when students were forced into online education and confronted with longer hours in solitude and so turned to social media for social integration (Alenezi & Brinthaupt, 2022).

Another common aspect between the five studies about OSC reviewed here is that they all focus on a single platform, i.e., *StudyBlr* (Nguyen & Teichert, 2019), *study-with-me* videos (SWM) (Lee et al., 2021; Wang & Zhang, 2021) and *StudyGram* (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Gallardo-Echenique, 2020; Baisden & Pope, 2020). This thesis, however, set out to study the different practices of *StudyGrammers* beyond one social media platform, to encompass the three main platforms that host these practices, i.e., *StudyGramming* practices across Tumblr, YouTube and Instagram. This focus responds to the call from researchers to explore more than one or two specific social media platforms (as discussed previously) (Dyer, 2020). The inclusion of the different affordances that each platform offers, has generated nuanced and rich data. Moreover, performance, identity presentation and engagements are also affected in this regard. As Dyer (2015) states:

> "Or, to butcher the words of the bard; all the web's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. How we play and perform, and how we understand our roles is, importantly, shaped by this staging, as we perform on, in and through it" (p. 238).

Additionally, from reviewing the literature, it appears that experiences of *StudyGrammers*, their habits and practices have been underexamined. Thus, this thesis pays close attention to the intricacies behind their content creation practices and activities. Understanding the *StudyGrammers'* experiences within the OSC context has elucidated nuanced meanings about the enactment of 'study' as a practice through the content shared and the discourses generated in the community. These insights are useful for the education sector if it is to build on students' informal study practices.

The other contribution my study makes is to investigate the socio-cultural elements of the *StudyGram* phenomenon. Another gap identified in the literature reviewed is the lack of an account for the practice of *studying* itself that is the core of the OSC. Existing studies, most notably the one by Izquierdo-Iranzo and Gallardo-Echenique (2020) focus on the *StudyGrammer* as an individual. This means that an analysis of the complex practices, interests, identity representation and impact is lacking. Hence, this netnography delves deeper into the *StudyGram culture* in order to generate a detailed and comprehensive account of the main individuals behind this culture, i.e., the *StudyGrammers*.

Finally, on the methodological level, to the best of my knowledge and up to the time of writing, ethnography- oriented investigations were absent in the body of literature reviewed. Therefore, this study is the first to explore *StudyGrammers* and their practices through the adoption of a netnographical approach. Furthermore, the presence of my voice as a researcher and a *StudyGrammer* (my auto-netnographic account) adds a further dimension to this research and contributes to the overall literature around the OSC.

Research Questions

This research develops an in-depth account of *studying* as a practice within the wider *StudyGram* community, through accounting for the following aspects of studying as an online culture: features of the *StudyGram* community across platforms; and *StudyGrammers'* existence in the community and the impact this has on their academic, personal, and social lives. In other words, the aim is to theorise and conceptualise the concept of *studying* within the OSC context. Hence this research addresses the following questions:

1. What are the features of the online study community?
2. How does the concept of 'study' manifest in the community?
3. How do *StudyGrammers* exist in the community?
4. What is the impact of this community on their (the *StudyGrammers*) academic, personal, and social lives?

The research questions that have led this PhD project were chosen mainly to contribute to theorising studying in the digital sphere, given that this is under-theorised and that more research is needed about *StudyGramming* practices. The questions have been addressed through investigating *StudyGrammers'* negotiation and enactment of 'studying' online through their practices and identity/ self-presentation on their *StudyGrams*. This research aims to provide an understanding of *StudyGrammers* as complex unique human beings and not only as students, providing the *full package* (Dyer, 2015) of their emotions, private life, aspirations, hopes, fears and regrets and not only what they present online. The depiction of this *package* has been possible using a netnographic approach which is delineated in the next chapter (Chapter 3). The next section discusses the theoretical understandings shaped by the theories chosen in this research to deepen and understand the findings of this netnography.

Theoretical Concepts

This thesis attempts to conceptualise the under-theorised aspect of *studying practices* on the internet, that is on the OSC via *StudyGramming*. It is important to highlight that *StudyGramming* in this thesis refers to the practices operated and manifested on the OSC by *StudyGrammers* who create study-oriented content within #studyblr, #studytube and #studygram. This section discusses the two main theories used as lenses through which to view the data, with the aim of providing a better articulation for the research findings. This study is anchored in Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice [CoPs] (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and Goffman's self-presentation theory (Goffman, 1959).

I argue that these theoretical lenses, read together, have an elucidative potential to explore and understand *StudyGramming*. In this light, these theories helped me to understand the practices shared online and the impact that they have on students. I start by introducing the concept of CoPs (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and its relation to the OSC. I will then move on to Goffman's theory of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). Theoretical concepts that I was familiar with prior to data analysis have been put to use in understanding the data, and vice versa, in a dialectical relationship.

Communities of Practice (CoPs)

Communities of practice (CoPs) as a concept was first introduced by Lave & Wenger (1991) in their book entitled 'Situated Learning'. Since then, it has been substantially elaborated on by Wenger (1998; 2002). A CoP refers to a group of people who share a similar passion and who are in the process of learning about the same thing (Wenger, 1998). In this thesis, I consider how the practice and community of *StudyGram* have manifested online using the characteristics laid out by Lave and Wenger (Wenger, 2000) which are the *shared domain* or interest, *community*, and *practice*.

In this light, the shared *domain* between the members of the CoP "creates a common ground and a sense of common identity" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 27). The *domain* is the fundamental element to cultivate a CoP through the inspiration it provides for its members to be an active part by producing and sharing content. Moreover, the *domain* allows members to establish and know the contours of what and how to share their content and practices (Wenger et al., 2002,

p. 28). In the context of the *StudyGram* community, practices of studying seem to be the equivalent of the '*domain*' that brings the community together.

The second fundamental element of CoPs is *community*. This latter is crucial because it "fosters interactions and relationships" and it is at the heart of the learning process which is "a matter of belonging as well as an intellectual process" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 28). Considering this, I show how this is one of *StudyGramming's* crucial elements, this sense of belonging and building a community between members. Hence, the interactions between *StudyGrammers* and their followers in the community plays a central role in cultivating *StudyGram* as a CoP. In fact, it is these mutual interactions between members that help them communicate and extend the *domain* (*study*) of the community.

The third element in the CoP which articulates the essence of the community is *practice.* In the context of this research, the *domain* of the *StudyGram* community is *study*-related content, and interactions and engagements fuel the *community*; *practice* "defines what the members do" (Zhang & Watts, 2008, p. 56). Moreover, other dimensions identified by Wenger (1998) will be used in understanding *StudyGram* which are *mutual engagement*, *joint enterprise*, and *shared repertoire*. These elements elucidate the way in which "practice is shaped in a community and how practice shapes a community" (Zhang & Watts, 2008, p. 56). As such, *mutual engagement* reflects the reciprocity of engagements and relationships between members in the community. *Joint enterprise* mirrors the mutual understanding that members of the CoP have and develop about the goal and essence of the community. Moreover, the *shared repertoire*, as explained by Wenger (1998, p. 83) embodies all the "routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice". Given that much of the engagement on social media emerges in the form of various content enacted through different affordances, this concept of a *shared repertoire* is particularly useful to understand the *StudyGram* phenomenon (see Chapter 8). Within a CoP, these three ideas-*mutual engagement*, *joint enterprise*, and *shared repertoire*- are connected and mutually supportive. They offer a foundation for comprehending how members associate, work together, and build their collective expertise. Therefore, CoPs will be a suitable lens to understand *StudyGrammers* and how they actively engage with one another, work towards a common goal, and utilise a common repertoire (Wenger, 1998).

CoP as a theory marks a shift in the way we see learning, as it challenges some of the assumptions around it. For example, whereas learning might be seen solely as an individual process, separated from other everyday activities, CoP provides a lens to see learning as occurring on a continuum (Rogers, 2014) that includes all forms of learning, including "accidental/ incidental learning, through task-conscious learning, through self-directed learning to non-formal and formal learning" (Rogers, 2014, p. 21). CoP conceptualises learning as situated in social participation within the community. In this regard, in order to understand the *StudyGramming* practices within the boundaries of CoP characteristics, 'community' as a concept was of key importance to this PhD project, to understand the ways in which certain students came to establish online communities around studying and learning (including the creation of study-focused content). The framing of CoP allows for an exploration of how the practice of 'study' is enacted in this community.

Interestingly, recent academic research has shown that online CoPs are growing rapidly on social media platforms (Miguel et al., 2022). This includes a range of interests including beauty bloggers and YouTubers (Gannon & Prothero, 2018), academic bloggers (Dennen, 2014), BookTubers (Sorensen & Mara, 2014), and Foodie influencers (Miguel et al., 2022), among many others. For instance, Miguel et al. (2022) show how the focus is on practices and mutual engagement between foodie influencers who enjoy learning from one another.

The relevance of CoP to this PhD project can be illustrated as follows: the centre of the OSC is both the *practice* of *studying* and *StudyGrammers*. Therefore, this is linked to three characteristics of CoP delineated above (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) which are *domain* (study), *community* (*StudyGrammers*) and *practice* (*StudyGramming*). Given that there has been little attention paid to *StudyGram* as a community of practice, this thesis attempts an account of this OSC as a CoP. Chapter 5 will focus on examining how study manifests online and how *StudyGramming* practice is carried out. Moreover, the discussion chapter (Chapter 8) will go into more depth to examine how OSC might improve our understanding of communities of practice.

Goffman's Dramaturgical Approach and Self-presentation Online

Goffman's theory (Goffman, 1959) is used as another lens to understand the different practices that the *StudyGrammers* manifest through *StudyGramming*. As such, it has the potential to elucidate the meanings behind *StudyGrammers'* self-presentation online and the intricacies behind their content creation and sharing of practices. Specifically, this is possible through Goffman's theory of *self-presentation* which includes the concepts of *dramaturgical approach*, *impression management, and front/ backstage*.

In his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1959), Goffman postulates a framework to understand social interactions that take place on a daily basis. Through the metaphor 'all the world's a stage', the dramaturgical approach provides a lens through which to consider identity that describes how people perform roles in their everyday lives, as if on a stage in a specific bounded setting. As in the theatre, Goffman suggests, certain roles are explored and performed with different goals in mind, depending on what the audience want to receive from the performers and how the performers want themselves to be perceived by the audience. In other words, as Goffman explained, individuals are aware and conscious that they are *being watched* by others; therefore, they behave according to the situation or as Kerrigan & Hart (2016) put it: "adhering to certain rules and social conventions" (p. 1705). Goffman's theory posits that the social interaction between individuals is actually a *performance* (Goffman, 1959). The crux of dramaturgical social theory is the analysis of how individuals cooperate to create a successful performance. Goffman also postulates that individuals present an "*idealised* rather than *authentic* version" of themselves (Kerrigan & Hart, 2016, p. 1704). He posits that individuals present a performance that they would like their audience to see, which they more often believe is the real self. This theory can be usefully applied to analyse/ interpret how *StudyGrammers* might present the best version of themselves by speaking from their study desks for instance, or depicting a particularly productive day.

Impression management describes the techniques people employ to try and influence how others view them (Goffman, 1959). Through this process, Goffman introduced the notions of *front* and *backstage* personas. In the *front stage* persona, Goffman suggests that individuals are conscious actors of the observation of others, which leads them to behave accordingly. On the other hand, the *backstage* persona is a hidden and personal space where individuals are not obliged to act because there is no audience.

On social media platforms, numerous social behaviours and practices are performed which is why researchers have been drawn to Goffman's theory to provide a more in-depth explanation of users' practices online. This unique postulation of self-presentation has created fresh potential for applying this framework to examine online interactions (Aspling, 2011; Nesvadba, 2017). Early literature showed the use of *front* and *backstage* notions being intermingled in the social media context (Miller, 1995). Hogan (2010) also explored facets of Goffman's work and suggested the use of the metaphor of an exhibition rather than a stage. More recent studies have applied Goffman's framework to understand online social actions and interactions between users. For instance, Dyer (2015) examined young people's use of online social media platforms, contending that these exchanges form social identity and are created for certain social contexts. Baker & Walsh (2018) used Goffman's framing to look at how Instagram's design shapes particular identities around a community of shared interests.

Users share different types of information online, including personal, sensational, political and casual (Osatuyi, 2013). Depending on the type of information shared and with whom, the *backstage* can sometimes manifest similar characteristics of a *front stage*. Allowing followers to indulge in a performer's personal life may generate a sense of intimacy as it represents an act of sharing (Abidin, 2015). Despite the openness of influencers and their disclosure of segments of their private life to audiences, backstage is still present behind the scenes. Abidin (2015) describes how influencers do not fully disclose their private lives but 'aestheticize' parts of the backstage to elude their followers.

Due to the affordances of online environments such as the potential to create and perform different identities, the use of avatars, and *masking identity* through pseudonyms, there has been considerable scholarly interest in re-examining the notions of *front* and *backstage* online across platforms (Ross, 2007; Pearson, 2009; Hogan, 2010; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013) and on YouTube videos (Bowman, 2010). For example, Gilmore (2014) through her research has illustrated how *backstage* data helped to add depth to her *front stage* analysis in order to improve engagement in online education. She sheds light on the importance of accounting for the idea of 'the whole student' to optimise the process of learning, taking into consideration the 'behind the scenes' that are part of students' lives.

Beyond the two Goffmanian regions of interaction (front and back), Ditchfield (2020) extends Goffman's work to online contexts and especially Facebook to present what she called 'rehearsal stage' of online interaction. She explains it as the preparatory stage that happens before posting on social media "where users can change, edit, or completely restart an interaction before sharing with the intended audience." (Ditchfield, 2020, para. 2). Ditchfield piece is useful in this context of the *StudyGram* community to explain the dimension that is embedded within the rehearsal stage which elucidates users' practices and their self-presentations online. Therefore, the rehearsal stage will also be useful as a lens to view my data and particularly to explain how *StudyGrammers* polish and perfect their posts during the rehearsal stage.

Building on these concepts, this study explores the *StudyGram* community and attempts to unpack the different self-presentations portrayed by *StudyGrammers* in the OSC, especially in relation to how *front* and *backstage* are negotiated and maintained. Moreover, in the light of *impression management*, *StudyGramming* practices will be analysed to provide a frame for theorising 'studying' within the OSC. In this context, Goffman's theory of self-presentation will be used to analyse *StudyGram* to better understand how *StudyGrammers* strategically create and maintain their online study personas. In addition to giving insight on the dynamics of self-presentation and identity performance on social media platforms, it offers a lens for analysing the motives, behaviours, and interactions within this online community.

Conclusion

This literature review has attempted to provide a foundation to understand this study's research questions that are primarily focused on theorising 'studying' through *StudyGramming* practices within the realm of OSC.

This chapter showed that there is a paucity of research on the *StudyGram* community and highlighted the research gap by focusing on key participants' experiences of being content creators on these platforms. Throughout this review, I have argued that the *StudyGram* phenomenon provides a fertile/ rich context for research as it entails many aspects that are worthy of exploration. Addressing these can be valuable for both education and digital social sciences. I have also set out the main theoretical influences of Lave and Wenger (1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002), namely their development of CoP, and Goffman (1959),

particularly his notion of impression management, which I draw on to analyse the findings in later chapters .

The next chapter will outline the methodology adopted in this research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

<u>Introduction</u>

In this chapter, I provide a methodological overview of the process and different steps taken to answer the research questions. My research deployed a qualitative approach inspired by a netnographic strategy. To provide the flow to this chapter, I will use the research onion[16] model proposed by Saunders et al. (2019) whereby I explain, discuss and justify my choices through the layers of the onion; i.e., the research philosophy (interpretivism), research approach (inductive), methodological choice (qualitative), research strategy (netnographic model), time horizons (quasi-longitudinal) and techniques and procedures used in this research (participant observation, online interviews, immersion journal and content creation), and data analysis (thematic netnographic analysis). Figure 1 illustrates the different choices taken in this research depicted through the research onion model. I will also reflect on ethical considerations which are an indispensable part of any social research, discuss my role as a researcher and close the chapter by accounting for myself and my approach in a reflexive way.

As described in the introduction chapter, the aim of this research was to obtain rich accounts for *StudyGrammers'* content creation practices online. More specifically, it sought to explore how *StudyGrammers* engaged with the *StudyGram* culture on OSC across the three platforms (#studyblr, #studygram and #studytube) with a central focus on Instagram. This is through considering two facets: content creation and *StudyGrammers'* personal experiences and practices. It also aimed to explore the different underpinnings of the concept of 'study' and the impact of these practices on *StudyGrammers*. As a reminder for the reader, this research was guided by the following research questions and the areas explored under each question:

1. What are the features of OSC?

Finding out about the platforms as a space for content and features, describing this online phenomenon (StudyGram).

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[16] In 2007, Saunders et al. developed the research onion model to help lay out the different research steps. The suggested six layers of the onion represent in detail the steps of the research process. Moving from the outer layer, the researcher starts 'peeling' the onion, moving to more details with each step (Saunders et al., 2007). This model provides a systematic approach to developing the research methodology and helps the researchers to progress effectively throughout their research journey.

2. How does the concept of 'study' manifest in the community?

'Study' and the community (the different ways the narrative of studying is manifested, discussed, and negotiated).

3. How do *StudyGrammers* exist in the community?

Their engagements, activities and interactions, online presentations of 'study' and their identities.

4. What is the impact of this community on their academic, personal and social life?

This is according to their personal experiences shared with me in the interviews and my auto-netnographic notes.
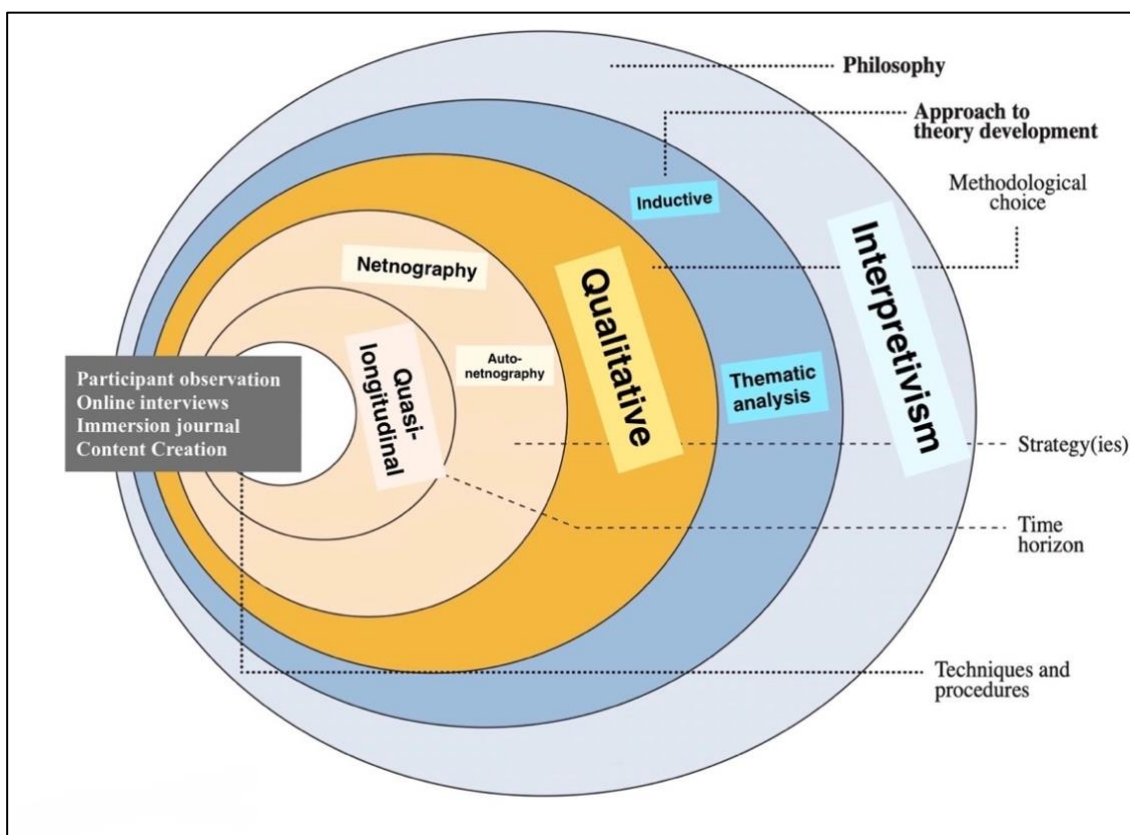
Figure 1. Adaptation of the Research Onion model[17] highlighting my research proposed framework.

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[17] The original source is: ©2018 Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill.

Research Philosophy

Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology

Research philosophy "refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 130). It provides the framework through which the researcher approaches their research, assisting them to arrive at the best answers and understanding through applying a clarified research design (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Research philosophies can be simply looked at through three types of research assumptions which will inform the methodology: *ontology, epistemology* and *axiology* (Saunders et al., 2019).

Ontology refers to "researchers' assumptions about the nature of the world and reality", *epistemology* considers "assumptions about knowledge" and *axiology* refers to "the role of values and ethics within the research process, which incorporates questions about how we, as researchers, deal with our own values and also with those of our research participants." (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 159). My research is guided by a subjectivist ontology which considers the different opinions, perceptions, feelings, and narratives shared by the research participants as well as my own views, reflections, and experiences in the OSC. Its main purpose is not to generalise results but to explore and understand the various social realities from different social angles of that specific community during the research timescale. Unlike the positivist ontology, subjectivism is not based on one true reality but has multiple meanings (Saunders et al., 2019). Given the exploratory nature of this study, a subjectivist ontology seemed the most suitable as it would allow for multiple meanings and experiences of *StudyGrammers* as well as my own. This also suits my interest in understanding the diversity of realities rather than reducing it to singular or simple explanations.

Epistemologically, I position my research as interpretivist which allows for the exploration of rich and complex phenomenon (Crotty, 1998) such as the OSC, the multiple platforms habits and practices. According to Saunders et al. (2019, p. 159), unlike objectivist epistemology which focuses on "the discovery of truth by means of observable, measurable facts", subjectivism focuses on "the social actors' opinions, narratives, interpretations, perceptions that convey these social realities". Therefore, interpretivism allows for more interaction between the researcher and informants, which helps to provide rich and nuanced data (Jacob &

Furgerson, 2012). This is emphasised using qualitative methods and analysis whereby the focus is upon "the details of subjective meanings and social phenomenon and the realities behind these details" (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 119).

The third aspect in the research philosophy is the axiology or value. In qualitative studies, it is salient to understand the context, the beliefs, and the values of the participants because it is an unremovable aspect of their personality. Axiology also highlights the need for the researcher to clearly state their *positionality* in the research context and in relation to the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As Yilmaz (2013, p. 316) notes, "[The] researcher openly discusses values that shape the narrative and includes his or her own interpretation in conjunction with the interpretations of participants". Therefore, the values I brought with me to this research are ignited by the interest I had in the ways in which *StudyGrammers* study, present themselves on social media platforms and the impact it has on them. This meant that where I needed to take a critical perspective, I made sure that I was not simply being judgemental. This required critical and reflexive questioning of my own positions too. Moreover, my presence in this study is central and cannot be separated; hence, the subjectivist epistemology. My role as a researcher represents a very crucial aspect in this research: being a participant observer in the community contributes a lot in making sense of the data through interpretation, considering the different views of people and what they think. This can be viewed from two different perspectives: all the views, reflections, and assumptions I gathered when I was a lurker in the community and the ones after I deeply delved in the community (and was perhaps, still a lurker). Saunders et al. (2019) also argue that interpretivist researchers are aware that their interpretation plays a significant role in the research process; therefore, they inevitably adopt an 'empathetic stance'.

As I will discuss later in this chapter, and in the subsequent analysis chapters, my own positionality as a participant observer allowed a closer reading of the experiences of the participants during interviews. For instance, the trust aspect: after building some kind of trust with them through the entrée into the community and the engagement online, I found that asking them about a story to share at the end of the interview was very fruitful. This can be noticed in their reaction to the question and the depth of the answers they shared. This highlights that the kind of interactions I had with my focal participants impacted the information they shared.

My intention in this research was to explore the *StudyGrammers'* practices and daily habits/activities in the community, as well as engaging in my own practices in the community; thus, this fits an interpretivist approach to epistemology within a subjective ontology. Moreover, in order to unpack the different ways in which the term 'study' is enacted and understood in the *StudyGram* community, the interpretivist approach allowed for an exploration through the implementation of a qualitative approach, centralising the multiple meanings of participants and their experiences. The following Table 1 extracted from Saunders et al. (2019, p. 145) is provided as a summary of this research's philosophy.

Table 1. Interpretivism paradigm- Extract from (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 145).

Ontology (Subjectivism)	Epistemology (Interpretivism)	Axiology (Instrumental value)	Typical Methods (Qualitative)
Complex, rich, socially constructed through culture and language. Multiple meanings, interpretations, realities. Flux of processes, experiences, practices.	Theories and concepts too simplistic. Focus on narratives, stories, perceptions, and interpretations. New understandings and worldviews as contribution.	Value-bound research. Researchers are part of what is researched, subjective. Researcher interpretations key to contribution. Researcher reflexive.	Typically, inductive. Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be interpreted.

Research Approach and Methodological Choice

Accounting for the philosophical stance of this research paved the way to explore the second layer of the research onion which is the chosen approach to theory development. An inductive approach has allowed me to explore the *StudyGram* culture, i.e., moving from observations and data to analysis and using theoretical lenses. Gibbs (2018, p. 192) defines induction as: "the logical move from a number of specific statements, events or observations to a general theory or explanation of the situation or phenomenon". Given this, I immersed myself in the field to collect data and interview my focal participants and then moved on to building possible explanations. In other words, I did not start with theories/ hypotheses to test, but rather,

explored the field and allowed data to direct me towards possible explanations (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

In congruence with the research philosophy delineated above (subjectivism, interpretivism and inductive approach), the qualitative approach seemed to be the most suitable methodology. Given the fluidity and dynamic nature of the internet as a field site, qualitative research enabled me to explore the *StudyGram* phenomenon as the centre of my research, focusing on the shared experiences and practices of focal participants (*StudyGrammers*). The quantitative approach focuses more on generalisability, prediction and causal explanations, which can imply that the researcher is a more objective outsider (Yilmaz, 2013) and this did not seem helpful in answering my research questions. Hence, I adopted a netnographic approach, which would allow me to explore the different online practices, rich descriptions, and details of the online phenomenon (Kozinets, 2009, 2020). In addition, the emergence of the pandemic meant that this proved to be the most viable and pragmatic option too.

Strategy

In order to explore and understand *StudyGrammers'* complex practices and access their multi-layered accounts, I employed a netnographic design based on Kozinets' suggested guide to qualitative social media research (2020). This is mainly done through following the six movements of netnography detailed in his third edition, which are: initiation, investigation, interaction, immersion, integration, and incarnation (Kozinets, 2020).

Before explaining these movements and their implementation in this study, I will first shed the light on netnography in relation to ethnography and social media qualitative research and justify my choice. I will then introduce auto-netnography and explain my rationale behind choosing it as a supporting tool in this research.

From Ethnography to the 'Recipe' of Netnography

Ethnography is a qualitative method that literally means "to write about a group of people" (Guest et al., 2013, p. 11). With roots grounded in anthropology, researchers immerse themselves within the communities under study for a certain period of time (Dumont, 2022). As described by Fetterman (1998, p. 31), ethnography is that "human instrument" seeking to explore cultures and social situations relying on sense, thoughts and interpretations. Therefore,

the main aim of the ethnographer focuses on understanding the culture of certain people through observing and analysing the ways in which they interact with each other within their environment. It represents a "cocktail of methodologies" having personal engagement with the subject as a focal point to have insights of social situations and cultures (Hobbs, 2006, as cited in Kozinets, 2009, p. 59). Hobbs also describes the components of this method as follows:

> "Participant observation is the most common component of this cocktail, but interviews, conversational and discourse analysis, documentary analysis, film and photography all have their place in the ethnographer's repertoire. Description resides at the core of ethnography, and however this description is constructed it is the intense meaning of social life from the everyday perspective of group members that it sought" (Hobbs, 2006, p. 101, as cited in Kozinets 2009, p. 59).

In the above quote, Hobbs includes participant-observation that is also present in every definition of ethnography, in addition to the other components that can be added to the 'cocktail', including interviews and other qualitative data collection tools, all of which are used for the goal of describing the meaning of everyday life.

In another definition, O'Reilly (2012, p. 10) argues that ethnography "is then more a theory about how research should be conducted than a recipe for techniques that can be employed". This implies that a lot of ethnographies are somewhat hard to delineate in terms of the step-by-step procedures that the ethnographer should follow. In other words, ethnographers learn how to do their fieldwork by actually being in the field site.

With the advent of social media and their capacity to "enable users to engage in a variety of different content creation, circulation, annotation, and association activities" (Kozinets, 2020, p. 4), researchers' attention has shifted towards developing methods to explore and investigate online phenomena in their complexities and through users' practices (Bowler, 2010). There are several names for ethnography that is conducted online using 'networking computing devices' (Kozinets, 2020). This includes the first coined term 'netnography[18]' by Kozinets in 1995, followed by a series of terms including 'cyber-ethnography' (Ward, 1999), 'virtual ethnography' (Hine, 2000), 'network ethnography' (Howard, 2002), 'webnography' (Puri, 2007), and 'digital ethnography' (Murthy, 2008).

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[18] Netnography comes from interNET ethNOGRAPHY.

These methods generally are online-based ethnographies which focus on using computer-mediated technology as a source of data (Kozinets, 2010). Despite the immergence of netnography in the field of consumer research by Kozinets in 1995 and marketing (Weijo et al., 2014; Kozinets et al., 2017), it has been applied in different fields including education (Kulavuz-Onal, 2015), public relations (Toledano, 2017), tourism (Mkono & Markwell, 2014), nursing (Witney et al., 2016) and sports (Fenton et al., 2021), among many other fields.

Regarded as "a portmanteau combining network, internet, and ethnography", Kozinets (2020, p.6) argues that netnography differs from the above-mentioned ethnographies done online in its application, i.e., praxis. Therefore, and moving from this idea of the need for a recipe, he proposes what he calls '*a clear direction*' to social media research after many refinements of netnography since 1995 when he first coined the term. He argues that netnography now is "a detailed, sophisticated, and differentiated set of techniques" (Kozinets, 2020, p. 7). Therefore, this study follows the suggested "recipe" that Kozinets introduced which will be detailed in the next section, after accounting for the reasons behind choosing a netnographic strategy for this PhD study.

Why Netnography?

When I first decided to research the OSC, my idea was sparked by the #studyblr hashtag on Tumblr. My first thought was to conduct a mixed approach with interviews, questionnaires, and surveys to explore a wide range of who are posting and why. The amount of information and types of data under #studyblr led me feeling the need to implement a method that would allow me to dig deeper in the data and garner the essence of the #studyblr. Stumbling upon netnography, "a form of qualitative research that seeks to understand the cultural experiences that encompass and are reflected within the traces, practices, networks and systems of social media" (Kozinets, 2020, p. 14), I found it fitting as a methodology to unpack not only #studyblr but to explore the multifaceted phenomenon of #studygram community (on three platforms[19]). Netnography is also congruent with the philosophical underpinnings adopted in this study as it "subscribes to the methodological connections and principles that animate how its practices relate to [interpretivist] epistemology, [subjectivist] ontology and axiology" (Kozinets, 2020, p.15). It helps my focus on human experience (studying and content creation), grounded in

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[19] On Tumblr, Instagram, and YouTube

deep appreciation of the context (social media), and informed by a 'sense of self-awareness' of both the researcher and participants (myself as a *StudyGrammer* and my focal participants).

The netnographic design ticked most criteria to address my research objective to explore not only *StudyGram* as an online phenomenon. It also provided the tools to put emphasis on the *StudyGrammers'* personal experiences and enabled me to generate in-depth data through the interviews. I believe this would not have been possible if I had used quantitative methods. Moreover, due to its flexibility, netnography allowed me to move back and forth between the platforms (Instagram, YouTube, and Tumblr) and facilitated the immersion process and observations. Furthermore, the interactions with participants and platforms created an exciting avenue through which to explore and collect unique and rich data that exclusively occurred at a certain time with certain people. It is important to mention that netnography requires interpretive skills from the researcher and it is hard to generalise results to groups outside the communities under study. Therefore, I tried to the best of my ability to improve my interpretation skills and widened my knowledge on the process. There are, of course, considerable ethical issues and concerns, which will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Why Include an Auto-netnography Element?

Netnography allowed me to immerse myself deeper in the community as a participant observer, establish a close connection, engage, and interact with the participants. I found myself writing notes in my initial e-diary about how I felt, what I did and noticed that I started to engage in the same practices of *StudyGrammers*, mainly creating content (SWM time-lapse videos on my phone and *StudyGram* style pictures). This led me to read more about this practice and think of a way to transmit my in-depth experience not only as a netnographer but also as a *StudyGrammer*. This aligned well with the concept of auto-netnography where participant observation is mingled with auto-biography (Kozinets & Kedzior, 2009).

Developing auto-ethnography into the practice of netnography, Kozinets and Kedzior (2009) suggested the term auto-netnography and applied it to study 'the avatar driven inquiries' in virtual environments. They define it as "an approach to netnography that highlights the role of the netnographer's own experiences of his or her own online experiences" (Kozinets & Kedzior, 2009, p.12). It focuses on the personal reflections on participation in social networks (Kozinets, 2020). It is deeply tied to "self-experience and its relationships with others (users),

the interactions and the culture of one's own people" (Villegas, 2018, p. 5). Auto-netnography has been applied to the research of different subjects; for instance, online teaching and learning (Henning, 2012), athlete research (Basabain et al., 2021) and collaborative Facebook groups (Vik et al., 2022), to name a few. Moreover, auto-netnography can be used as part of a netnography or as an independent approach (Kozinets & Kedzior, 2009). In this research, it was implemented as an additional perspective to complement the more traditional netnography.

Auto-netnography was chosen because it considers the researcher's own feelings and experiences as vital data to be explored and analysed (L. Anderson, 2006). I was thus able to be immersed in this culture both as researcher and as participant, to understand the #studygram phenomenon. This allowed me to include details that are usually less studied, such as pre-production practices, content decisions, behind the scenes and the overall experience and intricacies of being a *StudyGrammer* from my own experience. Doing this during lockdown allowed me to analyse these details without having to solely rely on the availability of participants or placing undue burden on them during this complicated time.

Another purpose of auto-netnography is to unpack and express the inner knowledge lived in the cultural experience (Adams et al., 2017). Thus, auto-netnography supported the data gathered from the netnography and provided an extra lens through which to view the *StudyGrammer* experience vis-à-vis the objectives of this study. It is to this end that auto-netnography mingled with netnography allowed for descriptions of daily experiences that might look mundane but are actually very complex. I believe this blend assisted me very well to gather unique data that might not be captured through another method.

Choosing a Time Horizon

Referring to the research onion model presented at the beginning of this chapter (Figure 1), the time horizon is the fifth layer. According to the model, two-time dimensions can be selected: cross-sectional and longitudinal. The former is more limited and seeks to explore "a 'snapshot' of a particular research setting at a particular time" (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 190). This type is employed for limited time experiments or specific case studies seeking to describe, for instance, a phenomenon in a given period. A longitudinal research design "tracks events over time" (Saunders et al., 2012) and is mostly used in research projects that require data collection over

a longer period. In fact, the term 'long' is quite hard to identify depending on the approach and intricacies of every research project.

My research was conducted over a *quasi-longitudinal* time span. This is compatible with the netnographic approach, like ethnography, which requires long time immersion in the field. Therefore, I collected data over two years, specifically 28 months. Longitudinal research is mostly used to track changes (Saunders et al., 2012) while this research did not focus primarily on the changes as much as on the exploration of the *StudyGram* phenomenon and provided an in-depth observation over those 28 months (from April 9th 2019 to August 16th 2021). At different points, different methods took centre stage. The major chronological steps in this netnographic design are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Chronological steps taken in this Netnography

Time span	Major Steps
April 2019	Created my accounts on the three chosen platforms (YouTube, Tumblr, and Instagram), applied for ethics approval and posted my 'entrée' posts. (Initiation phase).
September 2019	Ethical approval granted. Data operations started (investigation, interaction, and immersion).
October 2019	First YouTube video.
February 2020- August 2021	Deep immersion in the field and 'incarnation step' whereby I started analysing my data.
May/June/Aug 2020	Interviews with the four focal participants.
August 2021 till present	I stopped creating content; however, I kept a presence in the community sometimes interacting with my participants and 'keeping an eye' on the community without adding to my data.

Techniques and Procedures

After peeling all the layers of this research (onion), we reach the centre which holds the techniques and procedures used to accomplish the research (data collection tools and analysis). This study applied Kozinets' (2020, p. 139) six procedural movements of netnography that are embedded within the four main 'operations': Research focus operations (initiation), data collection operations (investigation, immersion, and interaction), data analysis and interpretation operations (integration) and research presentation operations (incarnation).

Therefore, my netnographic data collection tools included: online participant observations, online interviews with four focal participants, keeping an immersive journal and my own auto-netnography which included content creation (on YouTube, Tumblr, and Instagram). The analysis chosen for this study was thematic analysis.

Application of Netnography

When it comes to ethnographic approaches, the notion of having simple and linear steps to follow turned out to be far from the reality of conducting this research. This is due to the nature of ethnography that is qualitative, flexible and "undoubtedly more complex and far more contextualized than any bare bones procedural guideline can address" (Kozinets, 2020, 137). Nonetheless, outlined steps assist novice researchers (such as me) to begin their netnography with a clear structure. Thus, the following Figure 2 and Table 3 visualise the data collection methods in this project.
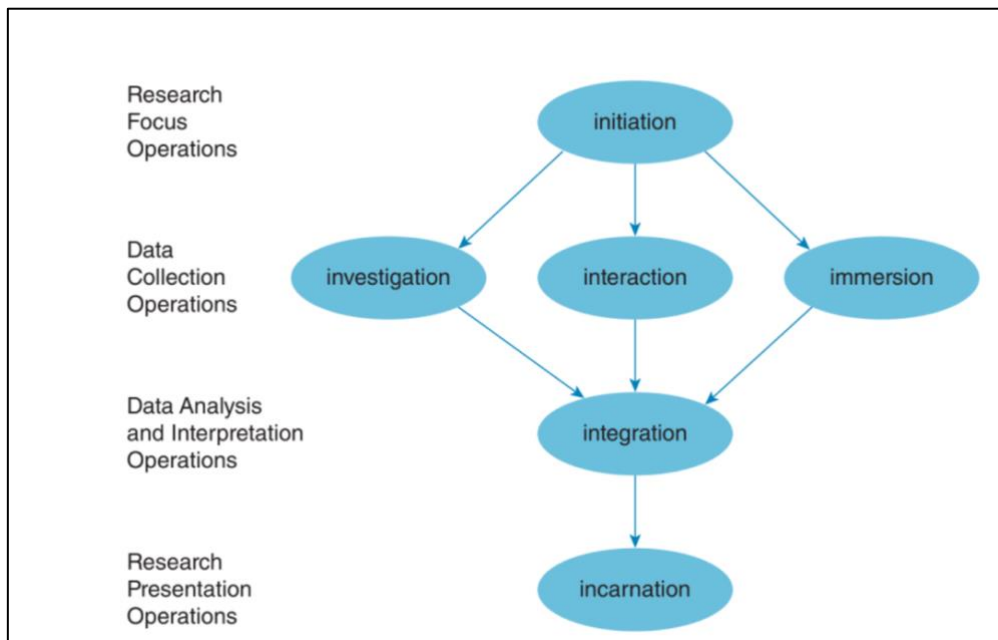
Figure 2. The six procedural movements of netnography, taken from Kozinets (2020, p. 139)

Table 3. Movements of Netnography in relation to instruments used adapted from Kozinets (2020, p. 139)

Steps of netnography	Movements	Data collection instruments/ praxis
Research focus operations	Initiation	Profiles creation, Initial observation participant observation Initial Fieldnotes
Data collection operations	Investigation, immersion, interaction	Content creation, interviews, online interactions, engagement, immersive journal.
Data analysis and interpretation operations	Integration	Data preparation and analysis.
Research presentation operations	Incarnation	Writing the findings and conclusions.

Move 1. Initiation (Planning, Entrée, and Ethics)

In order to approach the study communities with tact, it is recommended that researchers access these communities before entering to the field (Abidin, 2013). Initially, this stage involved selecting the field, defining, and polishing my research aim and questions in order to focus the research. Kozinets (2010, p. 89) outlines guiding principles to assist researchers in selecting the communities they want to investigate. He suggests that communities should be: (1) relevant, (2) active, (3) interactive, (4) substantial, (5) heterogeneous and (6) data-rich. OSC fits all the criteria suggested by Kozinets as it is relevant to my research aim which is exploring the #studygram culture. The field of this study is the OSC as manifested on Instagram through #studygram, on Tumblr via #studyblr and on YouTube known as #studytube. Therefore, the field site for this netnography consists of those three social media platforms where I have created my research-focused accounts[20]. My choice and identification of platforms was after a considerable period of informal observation before I embarked on this research, as I was already a follower of the *StudyGram* culture and had interest in it. This level of knowledge of the community helped me in that I was already familiar with the culture, including the different terms used, language, hashtags, trends, features, some users, in addition to the overall flow of the community. The OSC is also both active and interactive, whereby members create recent and regular contributions to the community and there is a flow of communication between members (comments, DMs[21] and likes). Moreover, I viewed the OSC as substantial because of the type and 'energetic' feel of the content shared. The fifth criterion is heterogeneity. This is also a characteristic of the community as it encompasses people from all over the world. The last criterion, data-rich, was also easy as OSC has always included content that encompasses a range of text types, visuals and audio-visuals.

After deciding on the platforms, research questions were formulated to provide the basis for this research and to clarify its focus. It is worth mentioning that research questions leading a netnographic study are characterised by their flexibility (Kessler et al., 2021), moving to more crafting and refinement over the course of the research, based on the observations and data;

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[20] Links to my accounts:
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/marystudiessunshine/
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6Zc-YyxvYc4IFH2DMSafoQ
Tumblr: https://marystudiessunshinee.tumblr.com
[21] Direct messages

however, the main anchor themes that expanded these questions revolved around: (1) features of the community, (2) the practice of 'study', (3) *StudyGrammers* and (4) impact.

Another critical part of the initiation stage is to apply for ethics approval and consider all the ethical issues before embarking on the data collection. Kozinets (2010) emphasises the need to be creative when reaching out to the communities through creating a good entrance (entrée). Therefore, I made sure to personalise my three accounts according to the overall features of the *StudyGram* culture and ensured the disclosure of myself as a researcher in line with ethics considerations (these will be discussed later in this chapter). Figure 3 illustrates the initiation and entree stage of my research on the three platforms (A, B and C).
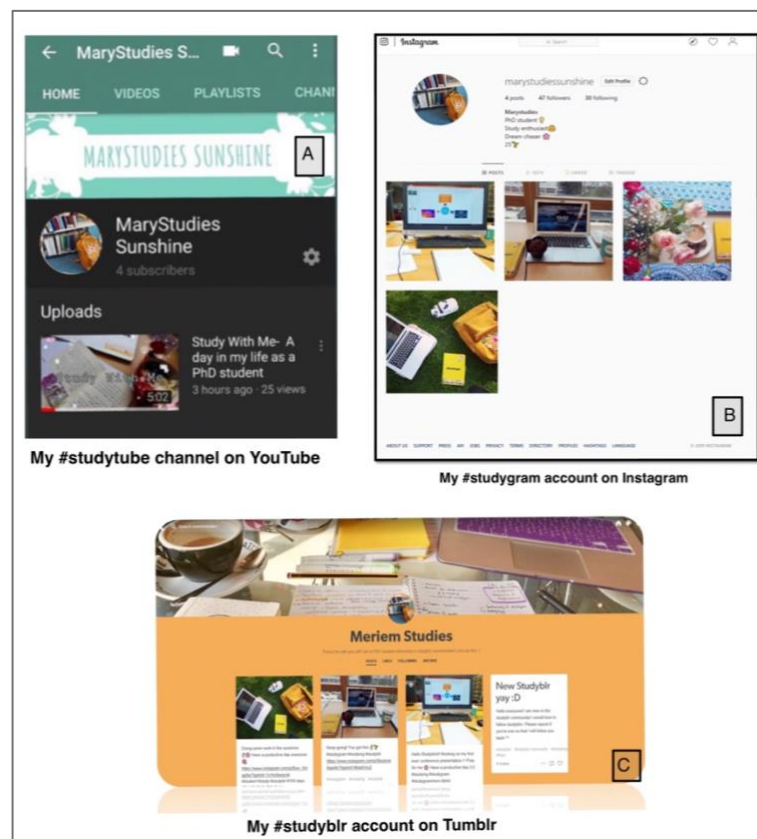
Figure 3. A compilation of my 3 accounts at the start of this research (2019).

Ethical considerations included a careful account for the major issues related to social media research. Therefore, I ensured confidentiality and anonymity[22] of my focal participants and their content. Moreover, open and accurate description of the research purpose, focus and interest were detailed in the research participation sheet and when approaching the focal

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[22] This will be reflected on later in this chapter (in ethics consideration section) and why I decided not to disclose their names despite their consent.

participants for interviews (see Appendix A). Informed consents were also granted by my four participants. In a similar fashion to ethnography, netnography accentuates the role of the researcher as a data collection instrument. Therefore, later in this chapter I will account for the different roles I played as a researcher in addition to my reflexive notes which further highlight my positionality and values.

It is also worth mentioning that another aspect of preparation for the next phases was shopping. I bought my own gear to get ready to immerse myself fully in the community, included practical technology such as a DSLR camera, a tripod, and a microphone. Moreover, I also acquired functional and aesthetic 'tools' common in *StudyGram* such as cute stationary, fake flowers, Mildliners (highlighters that are famous in the OSC), decorations, sticky notes and a backpack, among many other items. The list of items kept growing, especially after my immersion in the community which influenced me to buy more. This step helped me to better immerse myself in the culture of the *StudyGram* community in line with the ontological positioning of this project. I also learned how to film and edit videos and pictures both by experimentation with the technology and watching guide videos and content. All these requirements took me some time to learn, and I was enthusiastic about the entire process. So, I did not only participate in the community but was enthusiastic in my participation, which I believe helped to drive my project and obtain the data I got. During that time as well, I was lurking in the community, which means watching content passively without interactions but documenting my auto-netnographic notes as well.

Moves 2,3,4 Data Collection Operations: Investigation, Immersion, and Interaction

These data operations do not have clear boundaries in terms of time occurrence due to their flexibility and the originality of each netnographic study. Additionally, while investigation paved the way for interaction and immersion, after they all took place, I kept moving iteratively while collecting data. Therefore, the reason they are presented in this way is to provide a flow to the chapter. After gaining my ethical approval, I started the official data collection phase.

a. Investigation: Participant Observation

Netnography centralises the idea of investigating 'online traces' created by users which are "plentiful, variegated, complex and widespread" and presented in different forms: textual, visuals, and audio-visuals (Kozinets, 2020, p. 16). Therefore, online participant observation

was the main tool for this stage. It allowed me to familiarise myself with the different practices, values, members, language and icons of the community. Also, reading through the archives of past content online helped me to determine which aspects would be part of the research. In this context, participant observation differs from normal observation in the sense that the researcher observes the group extensively through becoming an active member of the studied group, whereas in normal observation, the researcher is totally external in the context and not interacting. The observations were iterative, starting with a broad early observation of the OSC across the three identified platforms (YouTube, Tumblr, and Instagram), looking at past and present content, before reflectively narrowing down my focus to specific content and modes of interaction.

The initial online observations were very wide and included anything related to the community. They were mainly for the purpose of reading/ understanding cultural information in order to ponder upon it and to find out how to be a member of the community (for the next moves of *interaction* and *immersion*). I started on the first platform Tumblr using the following hashtags: #studyblr, #studyblr_community and #studyspo and I followed some random high-profile and active accounts. I moved to Instagram and focused my search on these hashtags: #studygram, #studygram_community, #studyspo, #study_motivation, #studyblr and #studytube. It is important to highlight the fact that my observations of Tumblr were not very nuanced as I found the site somewhat hard to navigate; however, I recorded written fieldnotes that were insightful in the later phases which then informed my experience on the other platforms. Observations from Instagram were more sophisticated and in-depth: I made general observations of what I saw on the platform but focused on my focal participants' posts which were selective and helped me at a later phase when conducting the interviews. For YouTube, my primary observations were through using the search terms: *StudyTube, study-with-me* and *a productive day with me* videos. I followed popular and active channels and focused on the most viewed videos of my focal participants who owned a *StudyTube* (Belle, Anna and Leila). I spent two hours in total immersing myself in the field daily but sometimes more, due to the nature of social media[23]. Other days when immersion was low, I made sure to recompensate my immersion whenever possible.

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[23] This is mainly because some days there was more content and interactions; therefore, more things that drew my attention.

It is important to highlight the fact that the traces selected to investigate are "shaped by the netnographer's decisions, interests, perspectives, and observer effects and can never be completely free from them" (Kozinets, 2020, 193). Therefore, my observations were shaped by my views and what I thought was important data to gather and 'investigate'. In other words, if another researcher were to use the same hashtags to explore the OSC, they might have chosen other traces.

This investigation phase was very valuable in answering the first research question of this project that seeks to identify the features of the OSC and provide a working definition. It also helped in providing initial and starting points to discuss the second research question that investigates the different enactments of the term and practice of 'study'. Investigation paved the way for the next data operations which were immersion and interaction.

b. Immersion

After becoming a more active member in the *StudyGram* community, my level of participation increased gradually. This allowed me to gain more experience in the field and improved my immersion practices. The increased level of participant observation led me to auto-netnography (as explained previously). Immersion is a key element in netnography because it focuses on developing data richness (Kessler et al., 2021). Therefore, immersion operations in netnography centralises the richness of data and need to be documented in a way that will "preserve as much of the original context of the data as possible" (Kozinets, 2020, p. 194). This leads me to the concept of the *immersion journal* as introduced by Kozinets (2020). It represents the fieldnotes captured by the researcher; however, it is more selective of data and presents more depth and richness. It is similar to ethnographic fieldnotes and is: "a specific type of field journal that captures electronically mediated research experiences" (Kozinets, 2022, p. 8). Therefore, I started an immersion journal and this became a vital element for my research. I documented my fieldnotes in both a handwritten physical journal and a digital one (using Microsoft word and GoodNotes[24] app on the iPad). In the former, I wrote my fresh and unfolding feelings in a diary style where I included the dates, setting and used colours, stickers, diagrams, and highlighters (Figure 4). In the Word documents, the fieldnotes captured observations from the platforms and I included my screenshots as it was convenient (Figure 5).

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[24] GoodNotes is a note-taking application available on the iPad. I found it very useful for my analysis as it allows for flexibility in taking notes, editing, annotating and adding pictures.

In the last type of fieldnotes, I used the iPad to annotate screenshots and compile similar ideas (Figure 6).
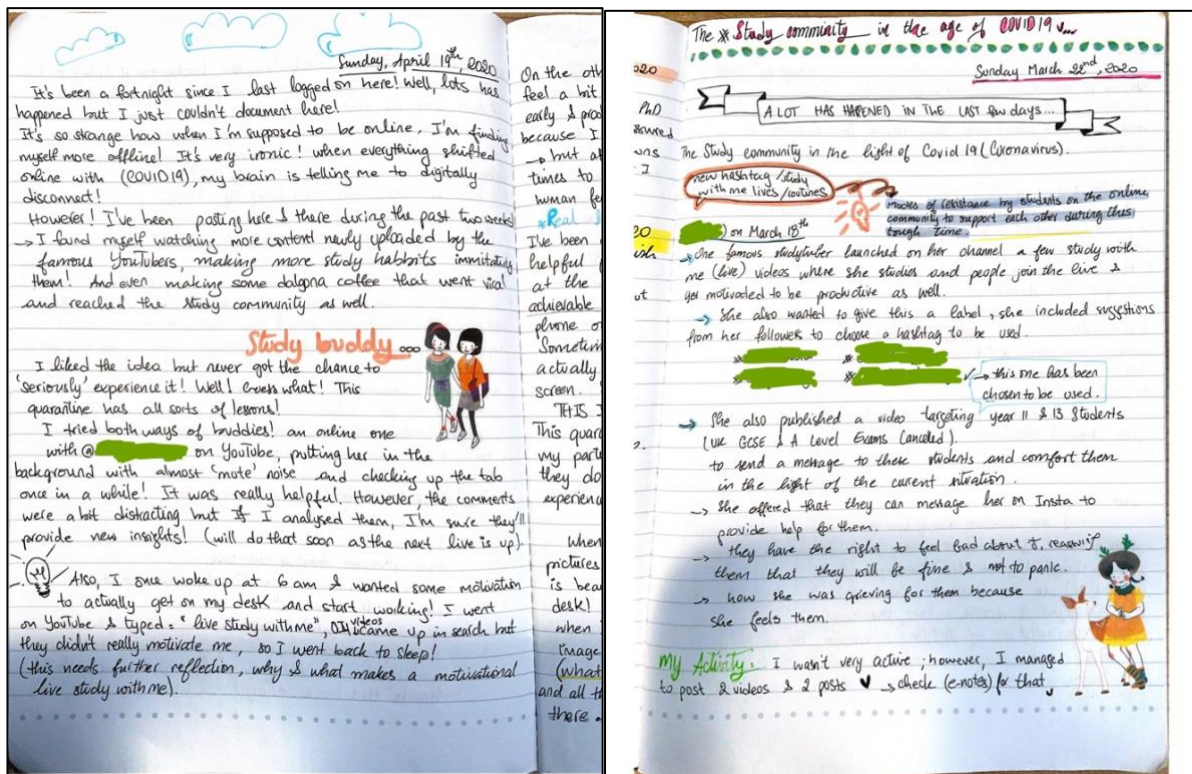
Figure 4. Entry examples in my physical immersion journal.
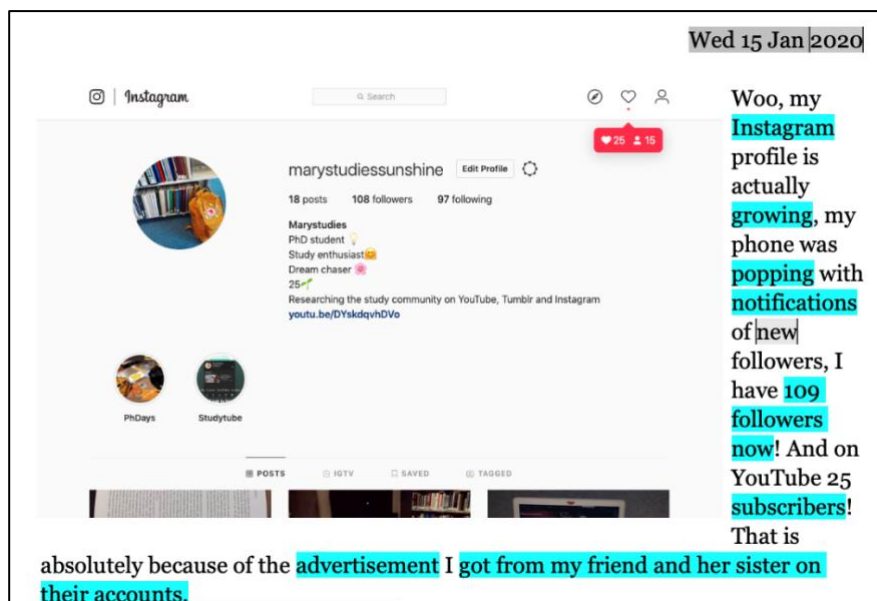
Figure 5. An example of my e-fieldnotes using MS word document.

Figure 6. Example of fieldnotes on iPad where I annotate on screenshots

In his guide (2020, p. 301), Kozinets highlights the importance of reflective writing in making the immersive journal: "a tale of intellectual, emotional, social, and cultural wandering through the mind space of social media". Therefore, the immersion journal used for my auto-netnography had a major focus on documenting my feelings, reflections, and deep thoughts about my experiences of being a *StudyGrammer*. Moreover, what helped the immersion journal notes to expand and yield new ideas was the repeated and iterative visits to the platforms and the fact that it was based entirely on immersion paved the way for the analysis.

Immersion also included my content creation (Figure 7) and contribution in the community through auto-netnographic practices. This included videos on YouTube of my studying sessions and vlogs. Additionally, on Tumblr and Instagram, my blog and page included posts about studies, tips, photos of my study desk and my overall experience of being a student. My

auto-netnography was guided by three notions to understand: my identity as a *StudyGrammer*, my relationship with members and the experiences lived in that community (Adams et al., 2017). As such, I participated in the community tags (#100daysofproductivity) and engaged with members to the best of my ability. Through my participation, creation of content and autoethnographic fieldnotes, I was able to collect unique data from participants and platforms, which were analysed to gain a better understanding of the OSC.
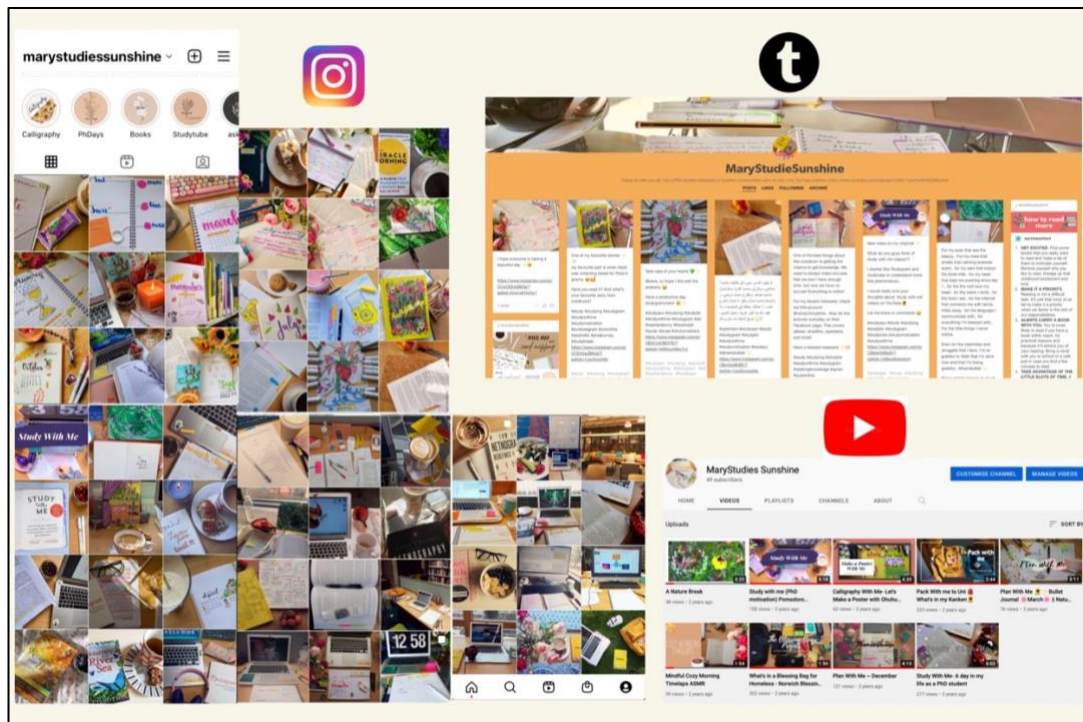
Figure 7. A compilation of all the content I produced on my three accounts for this research.

c. Interaction

In this study, interaction with members added significant depth to the findings and analysis. This is mainly through the online interviews with the four focal participants and the interactions and engagements with the members of the community through posts, comments, DMs, likes, shares, and support. This sub-section will outline the interview procedure and participant sampling.

Building upon the data collected from the previous movements (investigation and immersion), semi-structured interviews were used in this study. Interviews are a very widely used method in qualitative research and across various disciplines (Bryman et al., 2012; Forsey, 2012). They have also been used in almost 52% of netnography studies according to Kozinets (2020). This is mainly due to their potential to access the participants' opinions, views, thoughts, preference,

and perceptions about a certain phenomenon and their experiences. Therefore, the use of interviews in my research opened doors of exploration into my focal participants' minds and experiences.

From the wide array of interview formats, the semi-structured interview was chosen primarily because it includes open-ended questions that can yield the participants' thoughts and do not distract from the flow of their ideas. Semi-structured interviews also give the researcher the ability to improvise with questions they think would be suitable for that moment in the interview and allow them to ask questions according to the participants' responses (Gray, 2013). In this research, interviews gave more insights and details about the participants perspectives and practices in the OSC and their engagement with the *StudyGram* culture. It also opened up discussions about the different experiences they lived, the choices they made, some stories they found worth telling and especially, their genuine and unique experiences of being a *StudyGrammer* in the community that would not have been possible to obtain if I had conducted questionnaires, for example.

Initially, the plan was to conduct face to face interviews where I would meet the participants. However, given the COVID19 situation, online interviews were deemed the most suitable for my research. Therefore, the online cloud-based conferencing application Zoom was utilised because it is easy to access and free as well as because of its recording preferences and my familiarity with using it. Zoom just requires internet connection and an account from the researcher; my participants were happy with this choice as well. I recorded the four interviews both with audio and video (only one participant did not reveal her face). I also used my phone to record the interviews as a backup and took notes during the process. The interviews were saved in my personal OneDrive and personal computer, secured with a password. The interview questions were based upon my research questions and finalised after multiple consultations with my supervisors (see Appendix H). It is also worth mentioning that the questions were not all asked in the same order for all the participants because of the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews as well as the different personalities and approach of each participant. The length of the four interviews also varied from 35:47 minutes being the shortest to 72 minutes, the longest, the other two lasting 48:26 minutes and 54:05 minutes.

Interviews revealed important information about 'the *backstage*' through the insights provided by the participants. Participants were asked about studying as a practice and what made the

communities flourish online in addition to their personal reflections on the motivation elements that they get from their participation in the community. They were also asked about how they first joined the community, their motivations behind their presence, their identities, and the impact of their participation. The interviews were conducted in English except one which was conducted using a mixture of the mother tongue of the participant and English, as it was her preference.

As a preparation method for the interviews, I deeply analysed my focal participants' accounts on the platforms, watched their videos and tried to get to know them more for the purpose of providing flow for the conversations and obtaining rich data. This step also assisted me in building trust with my interviewees, putting them at their ease and making them therefore more comfortable about openly sharing their experiences.

d. Participant Selection

Interview participants were approached and identified during the early investigation stage in line with ethical approval. At the beginning, I hoped to interview seven participants; however, I only managed to recruit four focal participants. This was mainly due to COVID19 quarantine, their availability, and the nature of their presence online. As I approached famous figures in the community, only two accepted to participate in the research, the others did not reply. I contacted them via their social media, mainly DMs on Instagram and those with more followers, I contacted them via the email provided in the 'about' section of their YouTube channels. Participants were chosen so that they would give me a rich description of the phenomenon. Despite the small number of participants 4, I made sure to spend considerable time with each participant to address all my interview questions and get rich information from them. The participants were chosen both purposefully (3 participants) and via snowballing (one participant was suggested by another) for the purpose of this netnography. Criteria for selecting my focal participants were as follows:

(1) They must be present with produced content (active content creators) in at least two platforms from the 3 selected ones (YouTube, Tumblr, and Instagram).

(2) Identify themselves as part of the OSC.

(3) Their accounts must be public.

(4) Consume and engage with *StudyGram* content on at least two platforms.

(5) They only define their content in line with *StudyGram* content.

(6) Signed informed consent from focal participants.

(7) Above 16 (for consent purposes[25]).

It is worth saying that my research did not take into consideration the demographic features (age, study speciality, discipline, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc). These factors might have influenced the research; however, I did not include them because the focus was more on exploring the phenomenon of the OSC regardless of the demographic aspects of the participants.

Move 5. Integration: Analysis

The integration movement in netnography represents the data analysis stage. In his guide, Kozinets (2020, p. 142) notes that "the lines between data collection, interpretation, and analysis are amorphous in ethnography and netnography". This is in line with the netnographic iterative nature of moving back and forth between data, field and analysis. Therefore, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used in this research to decipher meaning from the data obtained from participant observation, semi-structured online interviews and auto-netnography. Therefore, I followed the six steps of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) which are illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Thematic analysis steps followed in my study (adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006)

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[25] Account holders on YouTube can sign up, with parental permission from 13, though there is evidence that children aged 12 and under maintain accounts on these platforms. For both Tumblr and Instagram, the minimum age requirement is 13. For that reason, I have only collected data from users above 16. Unsurprisingly, there were users who do not include their ages; in that case, I did not include their content in my observations, and have only kept notes on content from users explicitly above 16 in their profile details.

Step 1. Familiarisation With the Data

In this initial step, I organised my data sets and made sure they were all available to me in text format to allow for the next phase of coding. This included: the four interviews, the fieldnotes from observations, descriptions (from content and interactions), selected videos transcripts of my focal participants, my e-diary and my physical immersion journal.

At first, I started the transcription process by typing on MS Word document. Then after finishing the first one, I decided to transcribe the three remaining interviews manually using the GoodNotes app on the iPad, which means I wrote them manually and made sure to leave some space between the lines and on the margins to pave the way for the next phases (Figure 9 and Figure 10). This step was quite arduous given the length of interviews; however, the manual preparation of data and coding increased my familiarity with the data and yielded new themes and ideas each time I visited it. Moreover, I really enjoyed writing the transcripts and felt more connected to the participants compared to when just typing on a computer- there was something special about writing them down using a pencil as it engaged some sort of reflection-yielding effect. Another element that I liked about this transcription process and that I found helpful in the later stages, is that I highlighted quotes that I thought I would use in the final text, as I went along.

Figure 9. Sample of interview- typed transcript (GoodNotes screenshot)

Figure 10. Sample of interview- handwritten transcript (GoodNotes screenshot)

Step 2 and 3. Generating Initial Codes and Searching for Themes

After organising the data, I started coding sentence by sentence and used "complete coding" that helped identify "anything and everything of interest or relevance" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 207), whereby I highlighted important concepts and generated initial codes which were descriptive in nature (Figure 11). The codes varied from single words, short phrases to occasional sentences which were the basics for reflective memos. During this stage, I generated as many codes as I could as Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest. Using GoodNotes enabled "playing with the data" (Yin, 2011, p. 191) through using colours, doodling, moving words, inserting codes, arranging and rearranging codes. For the other typed fieldnotes, I used highlighters, and the comments features available in MS Word (Figure 11 and Figure 12). Moreover, for my immersion notes in the physical notebook, I used pens and highlighters. During this stage, some themes started emerging so I put my research questions into four anchor themes (features of the OSC, studying, *StudyGrammers* and impact) and gave a colour to each to help me to organise the codes. This was very helpful as it helped me stay focused and not diverge to other topics, as the data was rich and it would have been easy to go down various rabbit holes. As I delved deeper into the coding and analysis process, similar codes were brought together, and sub-themes and themes were generated.
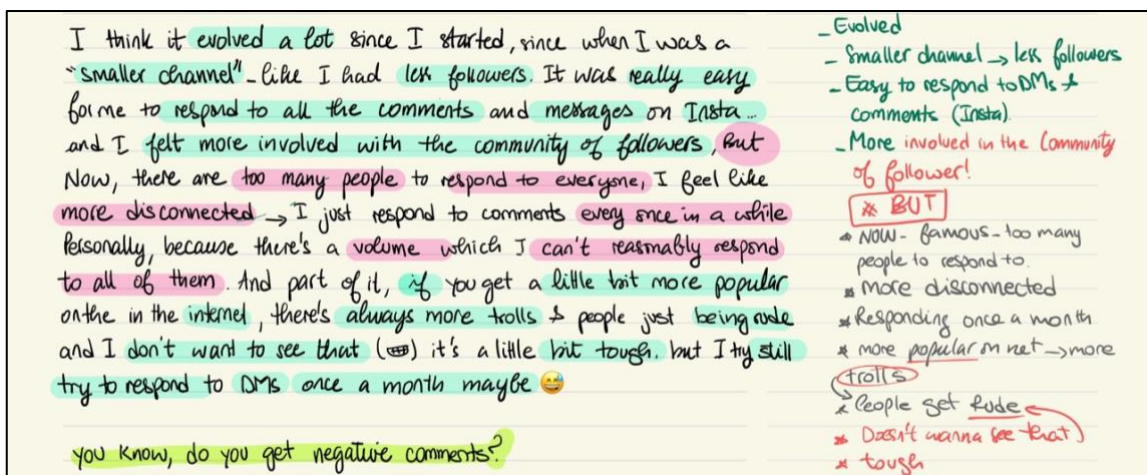
Figure 11. An extract that shows the coding process of an interview.

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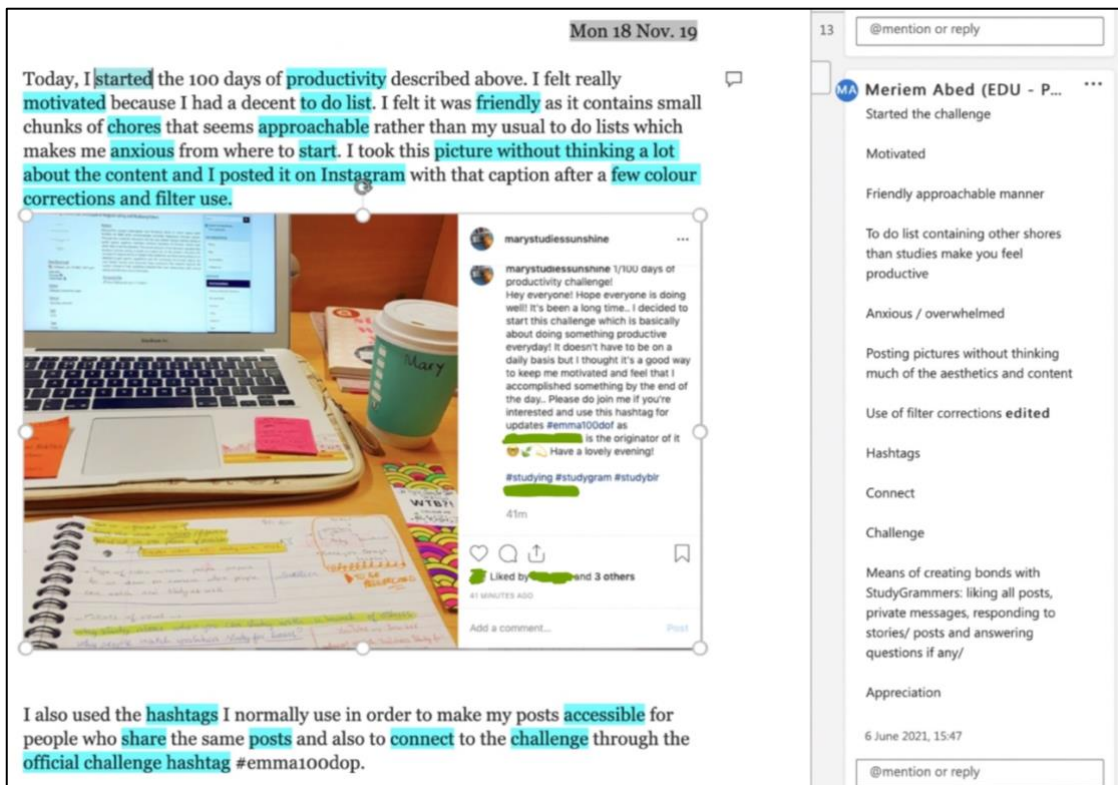
Figure 12. Coding process on MS Document of my e-fieldnotes.

Step 4 and 5. Reviewing Themes and Defining Themes

Themes emerging from all the data sets during the analysis process were grouped under the relevant anchor themes of my research questions which formed the titles of my data chapters (Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7). During this stage, reflective memos were very helpful in describing the sub-themes and adding depth to the analysis. This also helped to polish further the themes and choose the right names to use for them. I used a table to group the themes which I kept adding to and referring to- back and forth to add more insights. As the process of analysis was iterative, immersing myself in the data, re-watching the videos, and continuing with the transcripts helped me to 'deep dive' in the data and to become more familiar and closer to the participants.

Step 6. Writing up

In this final step of the analysis, I wrote about the themes and added the relevant quotes from my data sets that I thought would illustrate further the themes and yield more discussion. This paved the way to writing the findings of this study that are reflected in the following chapters (4, 5, 6 and 7).

Move 6. Incarnation- Presentation

Presented as the last movement in the application of netnography, Kozinets (2020) explains this last step as "representing in a concrete form" and "communicating" the results of the research. Although presentation of netnography can take various forms from videos, posters, conferences, books, the aim of this research is to present this netnography in a form of a thesis for the purposes of this PhD. At the beginning, it took me some time to figure out how to write the findings from both interviews, observations, and my own auto-netnographic notes. The approach I followed is to mingle all the data and present them according to the anchor themes of the research questions. This is primarily due to the nature of the data obtained, as it is very rich and nuanced and is very easy to divert and delve into other topics. Therefore, the anchor themes of the research questions helped me to keep the focus of the research as reflected in the four findings chapters.

Ethical Considerations and Concerns

Research ethics are a very crucial part in any research and might be of a complex nature when dealing with online data and content creation (Kozinets, 2010). This is mainly because of the nature of the internet as a field site where boundaries are hard to be contoured, in addition to dealing with human participants. I applied for ethical approval at the ethics committee at UEA in July 2019 and obtained approval in September 2019. This step was very critical for this research project because it required a detailed account for the next steps (mainly interviews and participant observation). The application considered all the facets of this project vis-à-vis the requirements of the UEA Education ethics committee. The major ethical considerations discussed in my ethics application were public Vs private content, researcher disclosure, consent from focal participants, anonymity, potential risk or harm and reflexivity in qualitative research.

Accessing the Online Study Community and Public Vs Private Content

Access to online communities for research purposes can be complex. Though these spaces are public in nature, this does not constitute tacit permission for researchers to use these spaces without declaring their presence and intent. Nonetheless, given the temporal nature of online content, I could not simply declare my presence in the comments section of a YouTube video and reasonably expect other commentators to see this. Therefore, I looked at historic content

as well as ongoing posts, videos and images. I believe, nonetheless, that observations of these communities and their content has been conducted in an ethical manner. Therefore, in line with recent discussions into digital ethics, I have maintained a public open account, and maintained strict anonymity with the data collected in observations by anonymising any identifying information. Moreover, everyone was clearly informed that my accounts were created for the specific purpose of my research and that any content uploaded was part of my auto-netnography.

Disclosure and Role as a Researcher

Because of the public nature of online spaces, members' rights should be respected. All participants should have their rights respected in research, though this is particularly acute in online spaces. Conforming to ethical guidelines in doing research online, I fully disclosed myself as a researcher across the platforms under study. This was done through my public profile descriptions (bio) that clearly indicated the research aim of my online presence. When I posted my content, most of the time I mentioned something about my research, making it clear that I was openly exploring the OSC. This was especially on YouTube and on Instagram. I believe this step contributed to make a larger number of the audience aware of my research in case they did not read my bio.

Being an instrument of data collection was my initial role in this study. Looking at the community through the lens of members themselves and experiencing their participation through the full immersion and spending time in the field site were applied to the best of my ability. This was both through participant observation and auto-netnography which also gave me the role of a *StudyGrammer*. On the other hand, I played the role of an interviewer by interviewing focal participants and asking them questions to shed the light on their perspective and the different aspects that my research was interested in investigating. Another role was as interpreter of data through analysis of the data obtained and reflecting on my own experience.

Consent from Focal Participants

To mitigate any obligation to take part in these content creators, on my public accounts I included an opt-out procedure, suggesting that any content creator or member of the community could email me to let me know that they did not want me to observe and keep notes

on their content. The interview participants were given consent forms asking for their permission to participate in the research. I contacted them through their contact info provided on their accounts. In that regard, the research details were provided to the participants. In addition, I gave them the freedom to choose whether to be anonymised or share their names, because they were well-known on these platforms and amongst their community. Despite their agreement to use their names, I decided not to include their real names nor their usernames known in the community, to provide extra protection. This decision was mainly taken after the data analysis revealed how open they were being and were providing personal stories that really mattered to them; therefore, I aimed for full protection of their identities. I also asked for their permission, as part of the observations, to transcribe some of their videos. As described above, the four interview participants were over the age of 16, meaning there was no need for parental consent.

To sum up, the rights of the participants were respected and they were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time from the research for any reason. I fully disclosed myself as a researcher on my public accounts and included details of the research and why it was being conducted. Both anonymity and confidentiality were respected. Moreover, when recording and transcribing the interview participants' videos and interviews, permission was asked. Finally, participants were also reminded that the data obtained from the research would be used for my PhD thesis, publications and conferences. I applied those principles to my own auto-netnography, i.e., I was careful to protect my identity and my privacy needs and was cautious about not over-sharing or revealing too much, especially as none of us can be sure of what our future selves might regret.

Researcher's Reflexivity

In this research, both focus of inquiry and analysis of data is deeply intertwined with my identity as a researcher. Therefore, it is crucial to clarify the different roles I played in the research process. My initial interest in the #studyblr community led me to the focus of this research: my love for stationery and study items, my need for a like-minded community and positive experience of watching #studygram content on YouTube and scroll on Tumblr and Instagram, led me to investigate the phenomenon. Therefore, there is an implicit bias of my own perceptions and views of *StudyGram* culture. However, my involvement in the community and its trends helped to enrich this research and provided a unique set of data especially in

tandem with the auto-netnography. Moreover, my experiences as a *StudyGrammer* and role as a researcher armed me with detailed understanding of the phenomenon and assisted with conducting a deeper analysis. One other aspect of this research that might have balanced any personal bias is the netnographic observations and the four focal participants' experiences.

Potential Risk or Harm

There was no expected harm from participation in this research through the interview, as their participation was informed and voluntary. The observations were not intended to harm the content creators but as detailed above, I made sure my presence was overtly known and options were provided to withdraw from observations. Any potential offensive discourses or materials found through the research were discussed with my supervisors and were thought about carefully. As Kozinets mentions in his book *Netnography* (2010), in an ideal situation, the netnographic researcher should weigh the public benefit of disclosing participants and balancing this against the potential harm that might possibly befall them as a result of this decision.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed description and justification of the research design implemented in this PhD study. This has been done following the suggested onion model by Saunders et al. (2007). Within an interpretive, subjective worldview, this PhD study sought to explore the *StudyGram* phenomenon through qualitative enquiry, applying a netnographic strategy. This included interviewing key people (four *StudyGrammers*), participant observation in tandem with an auto-netnography where I engaged in 'being' a *StudyGrammer* through content creation and engagement/ deep immersion in the field. Fieldnotes were documented in an immersive journal (both physical and digital) where I recorded my observations and immersion. Timespan was quasi-longitudinal in that I spent 28 months in all exploring the community, observing the posts and immersing myself in the community. This chapter has also discussed the thematic analysis process applied in this research. Finally, ethical concerns considered in this study were highlighted, including the researcher's disclosure and reflexivity.

Reading the Findings and Analysis Chapters

The subsequent four empirical chapters are dedicated to presenting and analysing the findings of this research (Figure 13). The empirical part of this thesis is structured according to the four core research questions that revolve around the following anchor themes: *features of the community, studying* as a practice, *StudyGrammers* and *impact.* Each of the four chapters informs the answers to each research question.
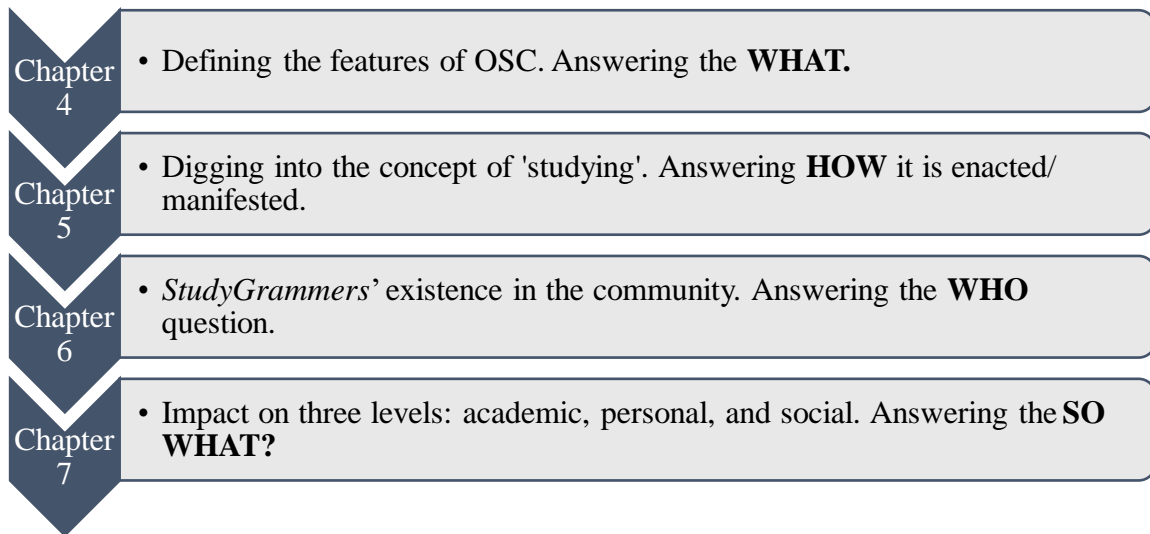
Figure 13. Findings' Chapters roadmap.

Chapter 4: Defining OSC Features

Introduction

This chapter is the first of four that presents the findings obtained in answering the research questions posed by this research, namely: *what are the features of OSC?* Using netnographic data and the understandings, experiences and narratives of my focal participants and myself as a *StudyGrammer* through my auto-netnographic data, I will define OSC features by attending to the early experiences and trajectories of focal participants, content and trends (*StudyBlr*, *StudyGram* and *StudyTube*), and *StudyGrammers'* descriptions and thoughts about the community. Through these features, this chapter will further frame what is and what is not regarded as part of the *StudyGram* culture.

Before presenting the findings of my research, it is crucial to introduce the focal participants in addition to myself as the researcher conducting an auto-netnography. It is also worth mentioning that the information below about my focal participants is relevant to the time period when I was collecting my data, as statistics and life conditions change over time. Moreover, I have based my introduction to the focal participants in the ways in which they introduced themselves in the interviews. As discussed previously in the methodology chapter, participants are anonymised (given pseudonyms) and screenshots provided are all from my accounts (where also identifiable names are hidden). Figure 14 illustrates the main elements presented in this chapter.
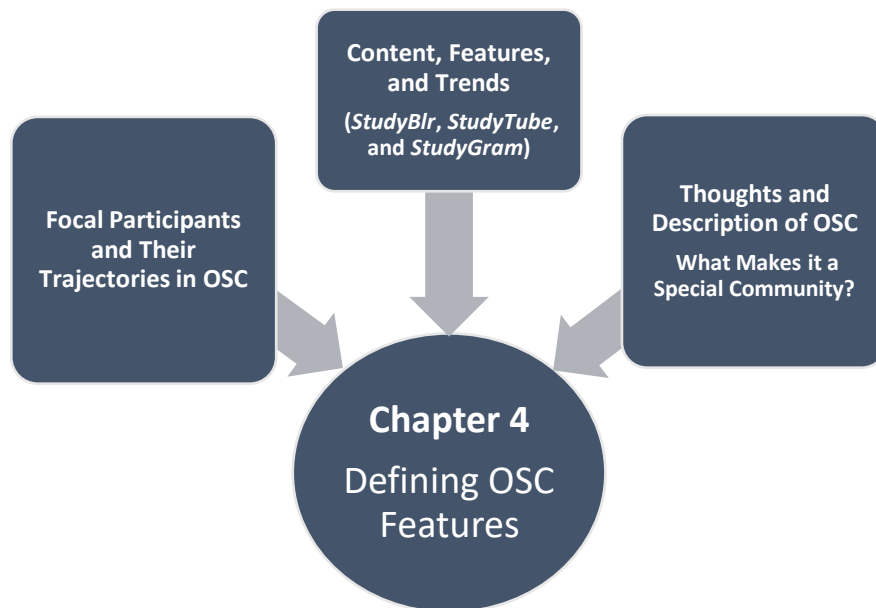
Figure 14. Visualising Chapter 4- Defining OSC Features

Focal Participants and Their Trajectories in OSC

Focal Participants

Leila

Leila had just graduated with a masters' degree in biological sciences and was mostly active on YouTube (has 27 video*s a*nd 792 subscribers, at the time of writing) through making SWM videos, an early *StudyGrammer* and follower of OSC since its early beginnings. She loved *StudyBlr* and could often be seen lurking on it. She was among the first *StudyTubers* in the area she is from. She enjoyed writing stories and poems. She was fond of teaching English and recently started her small business of selling handmade soap.

Belle

Belle was a third-year medical student. She liked painting, drawing and being productive all the time. She found it relaxing to mingle art and studying on her *StudyGram* (artsy *StudyGram*) and *StudyTube*. She had more than 47K followers on Instagram and more than 44K on YouTube with more than two million total views on her channel (at the time of writing). She also designed educational flashcards that she sold online.

Anna

Anna was an incoming college freshman. She had been running a YouTube channel dedicated to study-related content since 2016 (*StudyTube*). She also had a *StudyGram* account associated with her *StudyTube* channel. Her content was all about student life, studying and advice about these topics. At the time of writing, she had over 63 million total views and more than 900K subscribers on her *StudyTube* channel. She was an early pioneer of the study community and well known among members. On her *StudyBlr* account on Tumblr (and across OSC platforms), she shared pretty notes, bullet journal spreads, notetaking techniques and ideas, planning and organisation tips in addition to printables[26] available to download.

Rstudies

Rstudies was a second-year medical student and an early follower of OSC on the three platforms. She owned a *StudyBlr* and had recently started documenting and sharing her study experience on Instagram. She enjoyed reading, self-care and helping others. She had over 3.4K followers and over 70 posts on her *StudyGram* at the time of writing. Rstudies was interested in inspiration, motivation, lifestyle and aesthetics. On her *StudyGram*, she shared mainly motivational posts, answered her followers' questions and gave tips, especially on studying medicine.

Marystudiessunshine (Me)

This username reflects my personality to which I added the suffix 'studies*'* as most users in the community do. I started my accounts towards the end of my first doctoral year as a tool to understand the phenomenon. It was a humble start until I started gaining followers. At the time of writing, I had 303 followers on my *StudyGram* with 57 posts, 48 subscribers on *StudyTube* with 1178 total views on the nine videos I had posted, and two followers with seven posts on *StudyBlr*. I started my life in the community in 2016 as a 'lurker' and joined properly as a content creator in mid 2019 (and still lurking). Figure 15 presents screenshots from my accounts on Instagram, YouTube and Tumblr that were created for the purpose of this study.

---

[26] These include motivational stickers, wallpapers, To Do lists, weekly planners, calligraphy practice sheets, binder covers, etc.
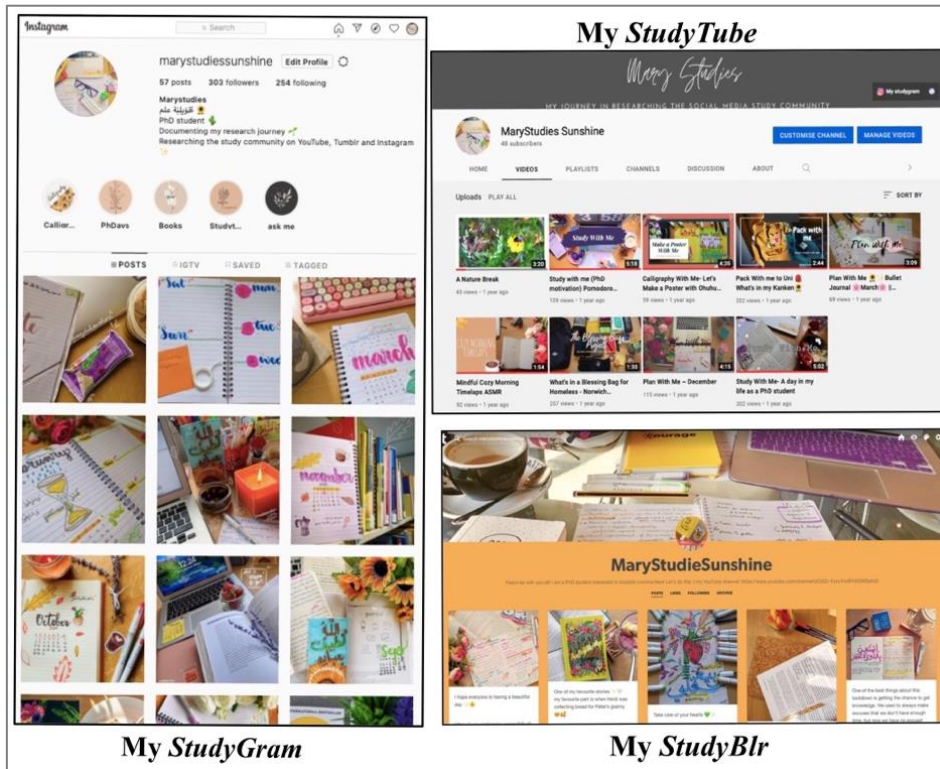
Figure 15. My OSC accounts on Instagram, YouTube, and Tumblr (a desktop view[27])

Early Experiences and Moving Across Platforms

In the initial stages of this research, I did not have a clear sense of what OSC meant to others. Therefore, it was somewhat challenging for me to respond to people asking about the community, to describe it and to communicate its essence to them in a coherent way. Hence, I thought it was crucial to investigate the features and essence of the community to formulate a definition that described the features of the *StudyGram* community and framed its boundaries. It is important to highlight that the word *features* in this chapter refers to all aspects that help in defining the community, including visuals, audio-visuals and text. These are drawn from the descriptions and narratives of my focal participants, my netnographic observations and auto-netnography. This section will present their (and mine) first encounters with the community along with their reasons, feelings and emotions, in order to describe the first layer of the OSC picture, before I explore the content in the next section. So, how did my participants first encounter the community and what were their trajectories moving between platforms*?*

---

[27] I share the desktop view to better capture the content on the page.

Anna was among the early 'pioneers' both in terms posting and following on OSC. She started on *StudyBlr* before shifting to YouTube and Instagram. On her *StudyBlr*, she shared study resources and all advice linked to studying and being a student. She thought that the last one to 'get on the bandwagon' was *StudyTube* because of the efforts required to produce content. She narrates her early experience:

> *This is something I can't quite trace exactly, I did start about five ish years ago and the first place I came across was Tumblr, although I don't know which platform any of this really started on, that was my first starting point, because it seems like, that was where there was a bunch of the resource links and things were located. Whereas the more aesthetic side seems to be more based on Instagram. And then YouTube seemed to be the least developed at the time of me getting involved in study social media, because [on] a YouTube channel there's a lot of more work on it, more than on Tumblr and Instagram... it seemed that when I got started in 2016, I was one of the first couple of study YouTubers to really get involved...* (Anna, 12/ 06/ 2020).

Anna also mentioned the notion of aesthetics and linked it with Instagram. 'Aesthetic' is a somewhat hard term to define given its subjective and complex nature and relation to both taste and beauty. According to Cambridge dictionary, aesthetic as an adjective refers to an "object or a work of art is one that shows great beauty", whereas as a noun it relates to "the enjoyment or study of beauty". In this research, I use it to refer to highly stylised, beautifully presented, sophisticated, organised, neat, filtered and visually pleasing pictures. Further discussion and illustrations of the *StudyGram* aesthetic will be presented later in this chapter.

Both Leila and Belle had their first encounter with *StudyGram* on Instagram. In fact, Leila was among the first people to get into *StudyGram*, dating back to when OSC was a very small niche and not that popular amongst users. However, she did not maintain her Instagram account solely for study content. Instead, because of the overwhelming nature of social media, she shifted her study content to YouTube and created her *StudyTube* channel:

> *...I actually did create a StudyGram, and I called it... umm... I think 'Witchcraft Degree' because I am a Harry Potter fan, I started posting (it was a long time ago), I started posting from pictures, short study-with-me videos... but then it stopped because I got used to sharing the things on my personal Instagram when I first liked it, umm... I share various basic things, and I don't mind it on state of when I am actually studying and I feel really inspired... and I would like to look at it before I share pictures...* (Leila, 12/ 05/ 2020).

Leila discovered *StudyBlr* after creating her *StudyGram,* and she was fascinated by the content she found there. Even though she did not run a *StudyBlr* herself, she used her Tumblr account to repost others' *StudyBlr* content. She explained how she found it difficult to manage numerous social media accounts at the same time, and that this was the reason why she did not use *StudyBlr* that much and left it only for free scrolling sometimes. Therefore, she was more active on Instagram and YouTube:

> *...then I joined Tumblr and I found it very interesting! I really loved Tumblr by the way- I was surprised when I joined Tumblr and I found a lot of study accounts. It was amazing, I really love them, it was aesthetic and beautiful and then I went to YouTube. So, from Instagram, Tumblr and then YouTube* (Leila).

Belle thought straight away of *StudyGram* when she heard the term 'online study community'. She started her *StudyGram* after seeing *"StudyGrammers constantly working and motivating others"*. It started from her personal account, uploading art and some of her notes; then she decided to start creating more content when she saw people's interest in her *StudyGram*, as she narrates:

> *I used to see posts on Instagram about notes and people studying. It was motivating for me! So, I thought to myself I'm constantly studying as well- you know when you're doing medicine you have to constantly study, but sometimes you lose motivation- and seeing other StudyGrammers constantly working and motivating others, got me thinking like "maybe I should just make a StudyGram!"* (Belle, 13/ 05/ 2020).

On the other hand, Anna thought of Instagram as a platform that was *'a bit shallower',* one that did not give enough space to share a lot of content. She also shared how she was not as involved with *StudyGram* as she used to be:

> *I am not as involved in StudyGram aspect of it as I used to be... just because Instagram isn't really great for my mental state if I'm gonna be honest... just because it's shallower and more status based and it doesn't really help me! So, I just avoid it when I can...* (Anna).

Therefore, Anna preferred YouTube for disseminating her study content even though she was still posting on her *StudyGram* and maintaining her *StudyBlr* account which she used to share resources and tips. It is also interesting here to note how Anna still paid attention to the effect that Instagram had on her mental state. This reveals that despite her engagement with creating content, Anna prioritised her mental health and created content where she was most

comfortable, in this case YouTube. This suggests that the platform on which the content creator produces content has an effect on them. In fact, this is congruent with Dyer's research that the platform design has an impact on the users' behaviours and performance online (Dyer, 2015). This suggests that the preference of each *StudyGrammer* on where they prefer to create content and engage with users, influences how the trend has grown and therefore, where the prevailing trend is.

Rstudies narrated how she found herself enjoying scrolling through the *StudyGram* community to change her mood and gain some inspiration to get her back to studying. Like Belle, Rstudies was herself a medical student and because of the nature of this course, studying was a fixed activity in her daily routine. Rstudies first discovered the community through YouTube via SWM videos and study tips. Then she discovered *StudyGram* when she was looking for more tips:

> *I entered Instagram when I got my A-level results, searching for medicine accounts and people who did Medicine... But my first encounter with the community was on YouTube where I used to watch people studying – study-with-me videos and also tips to improve my studying...* (Rstudies, 14/ 08/ 2020).

As shown in the findings, it seems that the focal participants echoed different experiences of the platforms depending on their preferences, circumstances and situations. In my case, my first encounter was through Tumblr. The following is an extract from my fieldnotes where I reflected on my early experience with the community, in a diary writing style:

> *Once upon a dull studying afternoon, I was feeling very demotivated to keep studying for my next linguistics exam that was coming in a week's time. At that time, Tumblr was the new application I had downloaded on my phone, and I really liked the inspiring quotes and profiles I found there. Religious posts, self-improvement tips and English language pages were on my follower list. Until I stumbled upon this StudyBlr hashtag!*
>
> *When I first saw the aesthetically pleasing notes, the good vibes associated with it and the aesthetic pictures, I was really motivated and I used to use it as a source of motivation, especially because during my university years at that time, I did not have the right surroundings that would motivate me to work hard and get good grades.*
>
> *As humans, we tend to love taking pictures of different things for various reasons. For instance, when I was in high school, I used to take these pictures of my study space and my study items as a way of inspiring and motivating myself. There was a satisfying feeling about reviewing back these kinds of*

pictures. A feeling that would make me get back to studying and do my best because it tells me that I was productive and worked hard on my assignments.

This included a calculator with my maths notes, physics and even some drawings that reflected my mood at those moments. So, essentially, I was making StudyGram pictures without me knowing that this was a thing or even before it emerged as a trend! (Fieldnotes, 08/11/ 2018).

After stumbling upon the *StudyBlr* phenomenon on Tumblr, I was amazed at the 'study wonderland' I found. I found pleasure in analysing every single detail of these pictures, starting from the items presented on the picture, the handwriting and carefully designed calligraphy, the background, the details of the stationery, coffee, drinks, and all that was presented. It did not stop at just observing these nice pictures, I would download them and keep them in my tablet, use them as a wallpaper for my devices, print them and stick them on my wall next to my desk and most of all, try and mimic them. I observed that my personal studying experience improved, especially after finding a very accessible community of likeminded people who shared their studying journey online (mostly positive messages). Figure 16 demonstrates my very early *StudyBlr* style picture that I found on an old SD card. After immersing myself in *StudyBlr* and frequently encountering new content, I discovered *StudyTube* and *StudyGram* through what members shared on Tumblr. During that time, I never shared any content and did not do so in fact until I started this research.
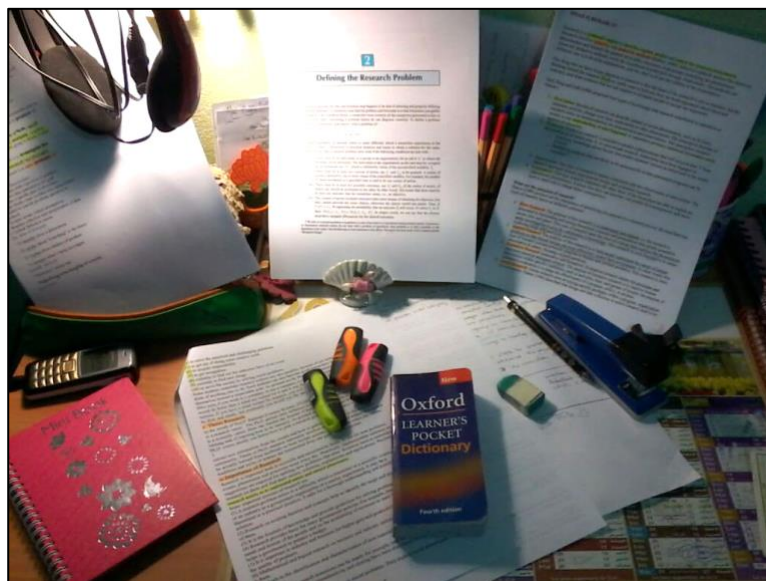
Figure 16. StudyBlr style picture from 2015

From these early experiences, it seems that the common factor was the study-related content, regardless of the platform it was being presented on. Before I delve deeper into the content and

trends of OSC, it is worth noting that *StudyBlr* seemed to be less used by my focal participants, despite being the first to emerge within the OSC bundle. Instead, they all eventually shifted to both *StudyGram* and *StudyTube*. This led me to consider asking them about the reason for this remarkable shift. Interestingly, Belle did hear about Tumblr but did not really use it herself. "*Before Instagram came out, I never used to do social media that much*", she explained. Both Leila and Rstudies used *StudyBlr* but did not create content on it. Rather, they had both used it for re-blogging others' posts and for inspiration. Interestingly, Rstudies used her Tumblr account as an 'index page' where she would draft and pin motivational quotes for later use as captions for her *StudyGram*. Moreover, when she spoke about Tumblr, she mentioned its similarity to Pinterest, noting that:

> *It's a great platform, because when you enter Tumblr, it's like Pinterest! it contains lots of pictures and inspiration. When you come across StudyBlrs, you'll surely be motivated and inspired and willing to study... I think it's a good platform for studies...* (Rstudies).

Here, she uses the term 'surely', expressing her views on the positive effect of these *StudyBlr* posts on her when she scrolled. This includes being motivated, inspired and willing to study (both motivation and inspiration are immerging themes in this study and will be both explored in Chapter 5). Rstudies further explained her experience of using her Tumblr account:

> Rstudies: O*kay, you know... Tumblr was more personal to me [laughs], it's so funny... because I changed it into an 'index page' where I draft all the motivational quotes! So it is easy for me to copy/ paste it on my own StudyGram posts...*
>
> Meriem: *So, did you consider posting it as StudyBlr content?*
>
> Rstudies: *umm yes... but I never really did... mainly because Tumblr is not really that famous here in [her country] and not many people know about it here...*

Despite her positive experience with consuming *StudyBlr* posts, Rstudies did not consider posting on it mainly because the Tumblr app was not very popular in the place she is from, and most users use Instagram and YouTube. Again, in this instance, we can infer that the popularity of a certain platform influences the number of users on that platform and therefore effects the trends prevailing there.

Among all the participants, Anna was the only one who kept posting on her *StudyBlr* from time to time but moved with more content onto YouTube. She felt that the community there fitted well with her personality: she loved it and wanted to experiment with the editing skills, filming and with aesthetically presented content. She gained her early subscribers from her early established *StudyBlr* account. Anna also mentioned that she preferred YouTube over Instagram, "*...because Instagram is a little bit shallower because it's just the photo and there's not really much room to advise! Whereas on YouTube, you get a long format where you get to talk and give tips*", she explained. Again, this suggests that the platform design and affordances do influence how content creators produce content and their behaviours.

In a nutshell, these experiences with the early start and shift between platforms, provides insights not only on the history and context of OSC, but also help to understand the current centre of the community and what content creators (*StudyGrammers*) prefer and why. In this case, it seems that *StudyBlr* as a trend lost its appeal when more people shifted to other more engaging platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. It seemed from the interviews that aspects such as platform design, affordances, popularity, easy and comfortable access, and trends are contributing factors to the current centre of the OSC among *StudyGrammers* as content creators.

This is also reflected in my auto-netnographic observations where my presence on Tumblr was not as strong as on *StudyGram* and *StudyTube*, despite my attempts to participate there. Aspects such as the lack of time and spatial option hindered my navigation there. Moreover, I found it hard to trace the originator of the *StudyBlr* posts there, especially when posts are re-blogged multiple times. Despite this, from my observations, I noted that *StudyBlr* functions as a repository of study-related content and resources to visitors, mainly because of the blogging features on the platform where it is easy to attach documents and add links.

Therefore, from the early experiences of the participants and their trajectories in the OSC, it would seem that at the time of research, the centre of OSC was *StudyGram* and *StudyTube*. This suggests that the platform has an influence on the engagement and *StudyGrammers'* content creation behaviours. This will be discussed further in the following section where I explore the content and the trends of each of the platforms (*StudyBlr*, *StudyTube* and *StudyGram*).

Content, Features and Trends (*StudyBlr*, *StudyTube*, and *StudyGram*)

This section will discuss what distinguishes an OSC in more depth, through exploring and presenting the main outstanding features and trends across the three platforms. It is noted from the observations that there is an emphasis in the main content shared on visual elements that invite the audience to study hard whereby users share their daily experiences. This section can also be seen as the 'front stage' (Goffman, 1959) where the props and kit used by *StudyGrammers* to present their study spaces are visualised. The following are the prominent elements that emerged from my deep immersion in the community.

StudyBlr Features and Trends

Observations of the *StudyBlr* community revealed key elements that are present within a typical post. These can be categorised within three aspects: pictures shared, captions and hashtags. Figure 17 shows an annotated screenshot from my *StudyBlr* to highlight the main elements as shown on Tumblr.
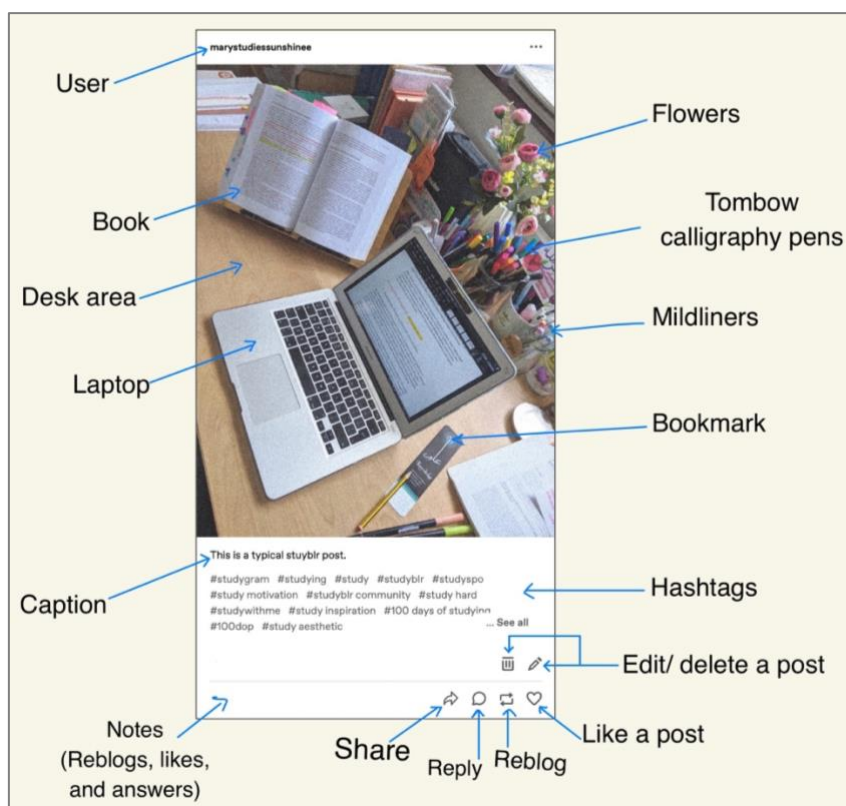
Figure 17. Anatomy of a StudyBlr post

Figure 18. Visualisation of typical StudyBlr style pictures

In Figure 18, I tried to present pictures that depict most of the elements featured in a typical *StudyBlr* post. I noticed that the common feature in all *StudyBlr* posts is the presence of an element that signifies 'studying'. This is typically linked with reading, writing or both: electronic devices including laptops and tablets, books, notebooks or paper and stationery supplies. Other elements are decorative in nature, including flowers, drinks (coffee and tea), food, bags, furniture, sticky notes, bookmarks, washi tapes[28], lamps, etc. The visuals also show some other elements with regards to what is shown on the laptop screen (A and D) and what is written on paper (A, B and C). In this instance, picture (A) shows a Google Chrome extension widely used in across OSC, Momentum[29]. Calligraphy and organised pretty notes are also widely present within *StudyBlr* content; for instance, picture B shows calligraphy in my bullet

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[28] Washi tapes are pretty, decorative tapes that stick well to a variety of surfaces and come in various colours and designs.

[29] This application shows a daily new tab dashboard that shows time, weather, to-do lists, greeting with one's name and a motivational quote that is updated daily.

journal and picture A, calligraphy as a title in my notebook. More detailed description of characteristic aspects in the *StudyBlr* community are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Elements presented within a typical StudyBlr content

Images	Captions	Hashtags[30]
Still images, mostly aesthetically pleasing. Details are carefully paid attention to with the right angles and specific supplies and items. *StudyBlr* images are sometimes presented in a grid format that represents the whole study day. This might include the time the photo has been taken, break time or outside but the crucial element is the study indicators. Study depictions of aesthetically pleasing notes with beautiful handwriting and calligraphy titles congruent with a chosen colour scheme. Most of the time, the notes are not meant to be read because the focus of the image is on the overall organisation of the picture, not the knowledge content presented. Stationery and supplies the famous *StudyBlr* stationery items are identifiable due to the aesthetic manner in which they are presented and to the repetitiveness across other *StudyBlr* accounts. The most well-known are the following: Bags: fjällräven kånken backpacks, tote bags, lunch bags, etc. Pens and highlighters: Mildliners from Japan, Muji gel pens, washi tapes, Tombow brush pens for calligraphy, etc.	Generally describing the status of the content creator, their schedule, what has been done and what will be achieved, but is personalised according to the users... Language is mostly inspirational as self-help words are used as are long captions containing useful academic advice and generally sharing links and app names with followers. Downloadable calendars, study templates, printable items, calligraphy training sheets, note-taking formats, etc. Other captions feature studiers' study days, usually written in a diary style, where they share what they are going to do or what they have achieved. It is worth mentioning that captions in *StudyBlr* accounts are special compared to *StudyGram*. Some *StudyBlr* content creators share long captions full of materials dedicated to a specific	Top hashtags on Tumblr with the word search '*StudyBlr* community 'are the following: #study_inspiration, #study_space, #study_aesthetic, #study_blog, #studygram, #study_notes, #study_inspo, #studyblr, #studying, #study_motivation, #study_tips, #studyaesthetics, #gradblr, #studybrl, #study_hard, #studyspiration, #studywithme, #100_days_ of_productivity, #study_aesthetic, #study_spo, #studystudystudy, #study_notes

---

[30] The order of these hashtags is subject to change when refreshing the search page.

Food (study snacks): coffee is the most popular, water, fruits, breakfast bowls, smoothies, and other snacks.

Bullet journals: this is a whole community but is well spread on *StudyBlr* as well where users share ideas and pages of what they have designed in their planners and how they plan their days.

Electronic devices: computers especially MacBooks from Apple, tablets (the iPad Pro was trending at time of writing), Mini printers, timers, smart phones, smart watches, etc.

Setting and decorations: study desks, plants (both fake and real), libraries, universities and coffee shops, candles, stickies, bedrooms, etc.

Applications: Fliqlo clock, momentum, Forest, Pomodoro, etc.

theme within the *StudyBlr* community. The blog style allows for detailed information sharing and the ability to add links and resources, unlike Instagram's captions which are restricted to 2200 characters and links cannot be added.

Another famous trend within the *StudyBlr* community is reference to challenges. Members engage with producing content and communicating with other users. This contributes to their overall experience in the community and with other members as well. A well-known trending challenge is '100 days of productivity' (#100dop) which is also present on *StudyGram*. As part of my immersion in the community, I engaged with this challenge, and I will reflect on it in Chapter 5. Similar challenges also revolve around productivity that include monthly productivity challenges (e.g., #summer_study_challenge, #February_study_challenge, #study_challenge, etc), the 30 day productivity challenge [#30dop], winter wonderland *StudyBlr* challenge [#ww_studyblr_challenge], etc). It seems that the premise of these challenges is to keep an activity within the *StudyBlr* community and to help 'studiers' study and make content online. It is interesting how these challenges also link back to the main themes of motivation and inspiration. Other challenges include answering questions about hobbies, personal information, and other questions that are mainly related to studying, motivation and productivity. I also observed that these challenges are flexible in nature and can be introduced by anyone in the community and participation is also voluntary. This reveals that

within *StudyBlr*, studiers engage with different creative activities, in addition to posting tips and experiences and creating/ engaging with challenges.

StudyGram Features and Trends
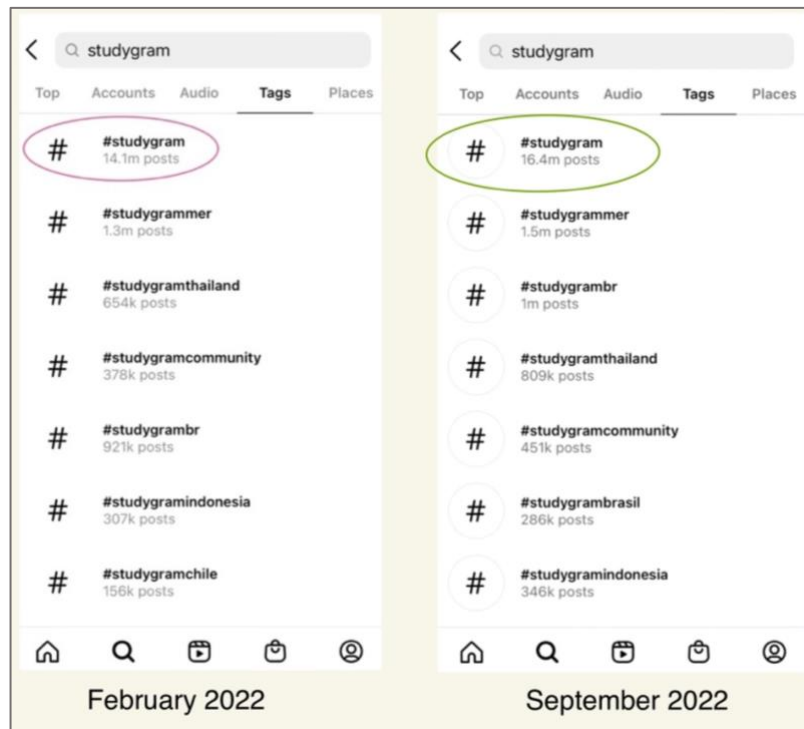
Figure 19. StudyGram hashtag search on Instagram in February and September 2022

On Instagram, the rise in the number of #studygram hashtag posts is interesting to highlight. In October 2019, the hashtag marked 5.9 million posts. As shown in Figure 19, the posts continued to rise, reaching 14.1 million posts in February 2022 and 16.4 million posts in September 2022. This reflects the increase in popularity of *StudyGram* among users and the sharing of more posts within that hashtag.

I explored the *StudyGram* community through hashtags. I found accessing Instagram through the application on my smartphone much easier than using a desktop. Prominent hashtags used within the *StudyGram* community lead to public posts that appear in the community. On the Instagram hashtag page, other related hashtags appear respectively: #studywithme, #studygrammer, #studyaccount, #studytime, #studystudystudy, #studynotes, #studyspiration, #studymode, #studycommunity and #studyhard. The structure of the hashtag page marks two

columns TOP and RECENT and contains all posts tagged as #studygram. Content changes each time the page is refreshed and appears in a grid format. Upon clicking on one of the posts, various details start to appear. In the *TOP* section, posts most liked appear. It seems that they are created by profiles which have thousands of followers and likes. These posts are high quality and are in an aesthetically pleasing format containing more study related content. In the *RECENT (most recent on desktop) section,* posts appear according to their time of upload, regardless of who posted it and the number of followers. The quality of posts varies in this section and the posts belong to all kinds of users. The hashtag profile is presented by a different picture, each time being refreshed. The hashtag symbol is at the bottom of the picture which is circulated in a colourful halo symbolising the 'stories' people have shared under the same hashtag.

Figure 20. Anatomy of a typical StudyGram post

The following Table 5 garners the prominent and noteworthy features observed within *StudyGram* posts within two main categories: profiles and posts. These features are further illustrated in Figure 21.

Profiles	Posts
When clicking on the post, the profile name, picture and location (if any) appear above the post.	#studygram posts can be either pictures (one or multiple) or videos (both with sound and mute). Each post can be tagged using tags that direct the user to the corresponding profile or profiles. Aesthetically pleasing photos with colour coding. Well organised and arranged stationery around the shot.
The profile page contains a picture, a name, and the bio or 'about' section which are all available for everyone to see. Most of the profile pictures reflect a study theme, but not always. The same with the names: some *StudyGrammers* prefer to add the verb 'studies' to the name. Location, age, occupation, degree, other accounts links, and personalised topics can be found in this section.	**Stationery:** Mildliners, Tombow brush pens for calligraphy, kawaii (cute) stationery, …
	Well written and presented notes: with different banners for titles, drawings of plants and anatomy of the human body, doodles, etc.
	Devices: MacBooks, iPads, iMacs, iPhones, Hp computers, beats headphones, smart watches, speakers, wireless keyboards in appealing colours, etc.
The profile picture is placed in the left top section of the page. Next to it are the statistics of the page: number of posts, followers, and profiles this person is following. Below that is the 'about' section followed by the options of getting notifications, muting, unfollowing, or blocking the user. Next is the Message option which anyone can use to send DMs (direct messages). There is a small pointing down arrow which by clicking on it, will suggest other similar accounts.	**Other decorative items:** cosy socks, plants, coffee, tea, coffee shops, water, fruits, smoothies, stethoscope, glasses, cookies, books, bullet journals spread, lamps, desks backgrounds, sticky notes, autumn leaves, book stands, laptop stands, Fjällräven Kånken bags (a Swedish brand), …
	Videos: doing calligraphy and lettering using different brush pens (Tombow, Mildliners, Stabilo), doodles, banners, different font tips, painting …
	Memes: study memes, procrastination, Harry Potter, productivity, motivation, etc.
	Captions: they vary according to the topic; sometimes they mirror what is shown in the pictures and other times not. Other *StudyGrammers* use captions to engage with their followers through asking daily questions or asking them their opinion concerning a topic.
	Language: the language most used to write about it is English, and the actual content in the pictures/ videos varies from English, Spanish, French, etc.
	Likes: it goes from thousands of likes to no likes at all depending on the popularity of the profile and the number of followers. It is presented by a red heart done by clicking on the empty heart underneath the picture or double clicking on the actual photo.
	Comments: the first comment usually has all the hashtags that appear after the caption. Comments can also be liked

by clicking on the small heart on the right side of the comment.

Time uploaded: shows underneath the picture in the form of (… ago).

From the two tables presented to describe the features of both *StudyBlr* and *StudyGram* (Table 4 Table 5), one can see a noticeable overlap between a typical *StudyBlr* and a *StudyGram* post. This is not surprising given that *StudyGram* emerged from *StudyBlr*. With this shift of platform, other trends have emerged within *StudyGram* because of the features and affordances of the platform. For instance, the 'stories' and 'Reels' options on *StudyGram* yield more content with 'stories' where *StudyGrammers* share snippets of their study days, in an easy and quick manner. Also, *StudyGrammers* share short study vlogs in their 'Reels' where they compile the highlights of their day.
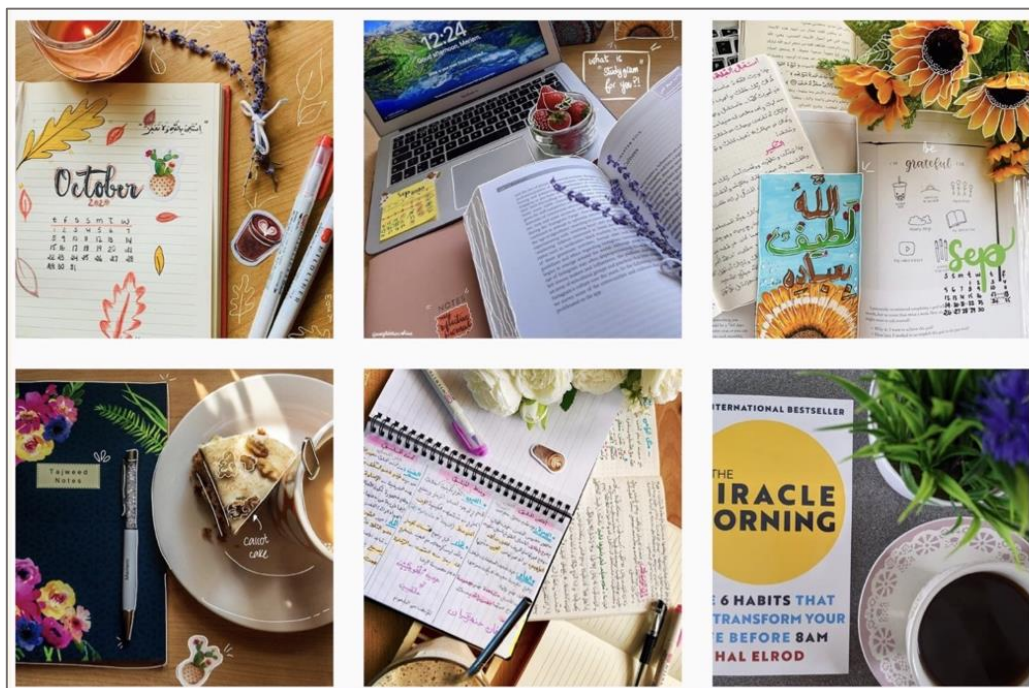
Figure 21. More StudyGram style pictures from my account

StudyTube Features and Trends

On YouTube, the *StudyBlr* community has found more space for content creation and creativity. *StudyTube* is generally known with academia-related tips and SWM videos. The most prominent *StudyTube* content features giving tips to other students on different topics that are study related. This latter includes effective study techniques, productivity and how to combat procrastination, planning and organisation tips, note-taking strategies, stationery hauls and giveaways, back to school series, calligraphy and bullet journal spreads, college tips, university vlogs, students' routines, among many other instructional videos that are usually requested by audiences from the *StudyTubers*.

SWM and plan-with-me (PWM) videos are another popular genre within the *StudyTube* community. These videos are more practical as the studiers film themselves studying while getting millions of views. Usually, the viewers are intended to be people who are also studying or planning while having the video playing in the background. The premise[31] of these videos is to mimic the environment and to create a similar vibe to 'study-friendly' environments with peers, such as libraries, classrooms, or a student room where students can get their studies done. The common content in the *StudyTube* genre features students studying, revising for exams, preparing for school/ university, routines, organising, or just sharing their experiences concerning topics of relevance to other students. What and how things are presented plays a vital role in the spread of videos, including colours, editing style, filming quality, *StudyTubers'* engagement with audience, topics, and setting (library, coffee, home, garden, etc).

The following are some titles for videos shared within *StudyTube* that I watched during my time observing the community: Uni/ college day in my life, day in the life of a particular course student, pomodoro[32] sessions, late night SWM, realistic SWM, early morning SWM, intense SWM, all day SWM, A levels SWM, cramming for exams study vlog, anatomy/ psychology SWM, SWM and my cat, SWM with breaks, last minute SWM, SWM at uni/ library/ at home, productive and aesthetic SWM, productive day in my life, pen writing SWM, study vlog, need to study? SWM for 50 minutes, what is in my backpack, what I eat in a day, etc.

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[31] More about the motivations behind creating this type of content will be discussed in the following findings chapters.

[32] A technique used to manage time (25 minutes studying with 5 minutes break in between, a longer break after four pomodoro sessions).

Some *StudyTubers* prefer to stream live SWM videos while others prefer to post time-lapse style ones. Moreover, some *StudyTubers* add voiceovers to their videos while others prefer to just type and communicate via written text on the video.
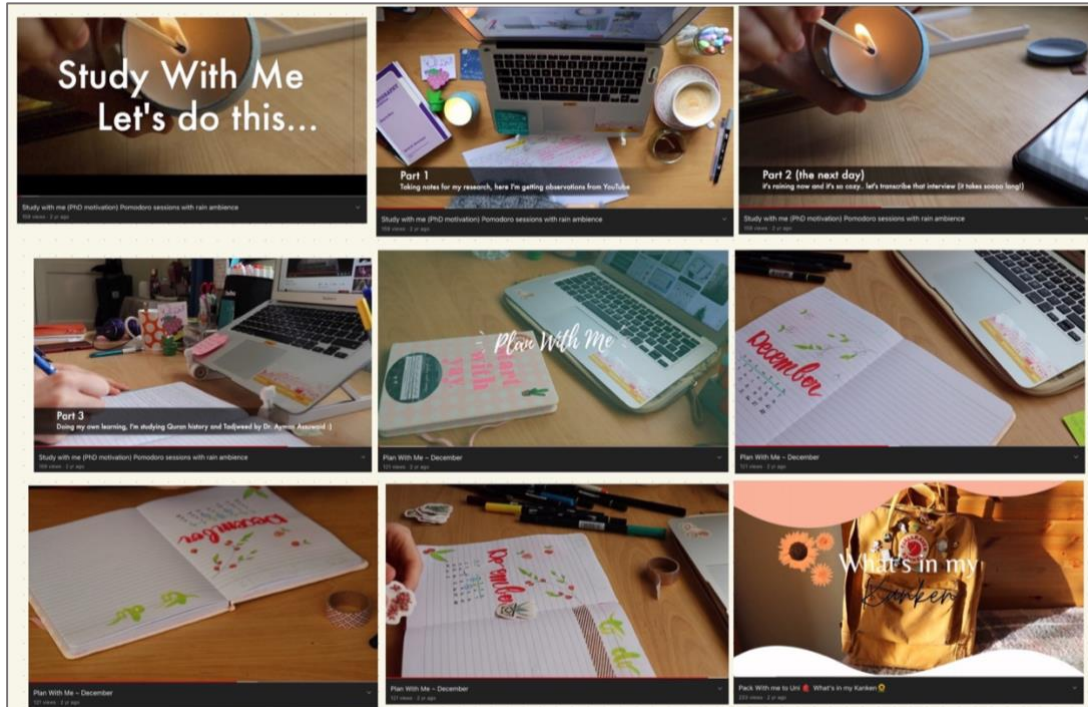
Figure 22. Snapshots from my StudyTube videos
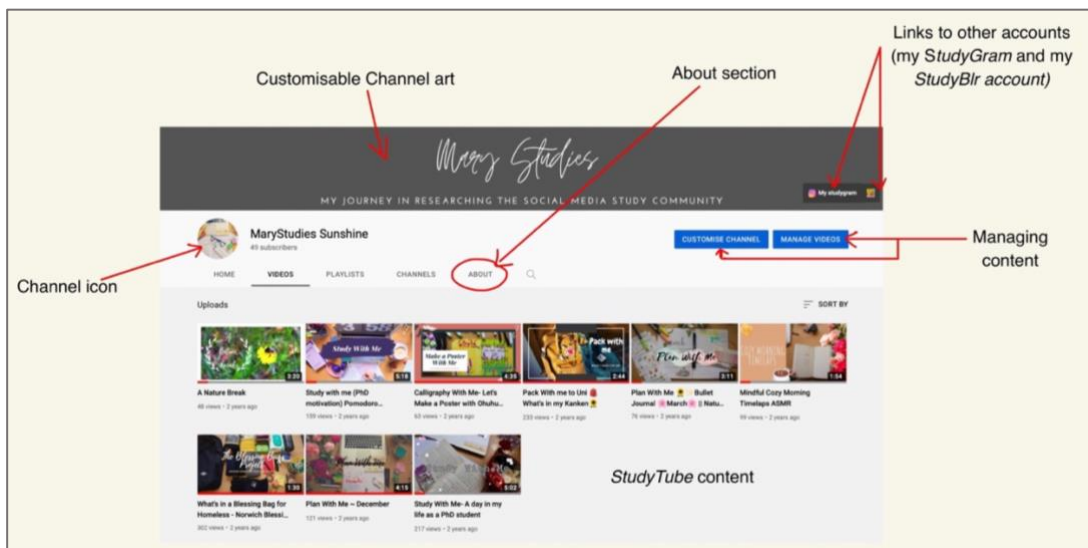
Figure 23. StudyTube channel main elements

From my participation in the *StudyTube* content, I tried my best to keep posting within the framework of study related content; however, two videos were filmed and posted on my YouTube channel that are not among the *StudyTube* genre. In the first video entitled *A Nature*

Break, I shared some footage filmed from my garden featuring nature (bees, flowers, trees and clouds), and in the second video (*What's in a Blessing Bag for the Homeless*), I documented the items people had donated to a charity project organised by a team that I was a member of at the time of data collection. Reflecting on that, the reason I shared the first video was because it was during quarantine, and I was inclined to post it. The second video was shared because I wanted more people to contribute to the project and it was an easy way to communicate the idea with a wider audience. This helped me to understand why some *StudyGrammers* might start other personal accounts where they can share other content that is not study related. In the interviews, Rstudies told me that if the content shifts from the study content, followers start to drop in number, mainly because when followers follow *StudyGram* accounts, they expect it to be solely dedicated to that particular content (studies).

As shown in Figure 24, I spent some time ensuring that videos that I shared on my channel have endings that say, "thanks for watching". Most *StudyTubers* communicate in their videos using the voiceover function, while others communicate through leaving a text on the screen (the approach I followed mainly because I did not feel comfortable recording my voice and sharing it). For my focal participants, those who post on *StudyTube* all used their voices in their videos. I also observed that this is one of the features of *StudyTube* videos where both the video opening and closing plays a role in attracting the audience and giving context. The description box at the bottom of the video is another important feature where *StudyTubers* share information; in most cases, they provide links to their filming gear or the items that are presented in their channels. This makes it easy for viewers to find such items, especially if the *StudyTubers* are being constantly asked for this information.
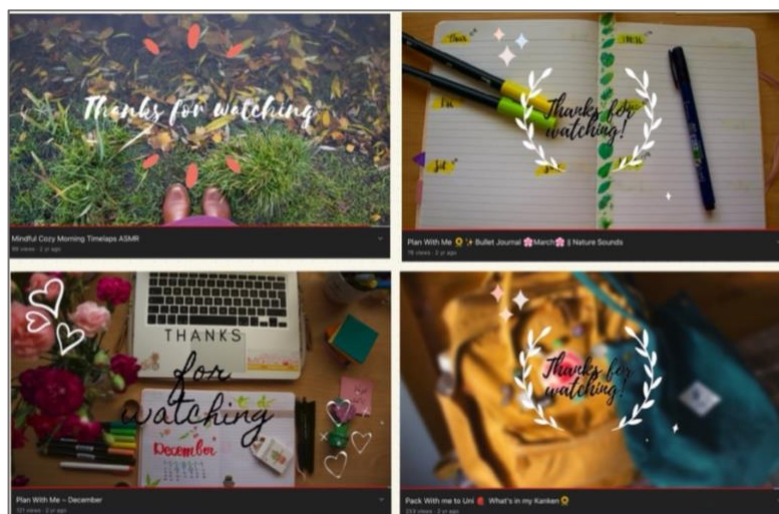
Figure 24. Screenshots showing the endings of videos within StudyTube

What Does This Tell Us About OSC?

The observations of the salient features of OSC reveal that the community is dedicated to sharing aesthetically pleasing notes of the process of studying but not necessarily tied to a specific knowledge-based courses, unlike other educational videos on YouTube. There are, however, some exceptions where some *StudyTubers* decide to explicate certain topics in a lesson style; but most of the content is about the process of 'studying' and what can make it easier/ more enjoyable.

Moreover, we can infer that features of OSC across platforms are very similar in content. The difference lies in the affordances each platform offers. Therefore, *StudyBlr*, *StudyGram* and *StudyTube* are all intertwined and overlapping in terms of content and trends, given that most users are present across the three platforms; therefore, content will be posted, mimicked, replicated and shared across OSC. Additionally, *StudyGrammers* across all these platforms share the same terminology and hashtags, illustrating how intertwined they are. It is also important to highlight the high emphasis on visuals and aesthetics in OSC which makes it a prominent feature of how the concept of 'study' is presented and visualised. This includes a focus upon certain apps, stationery, bags and study aids. Though not a subject of this study directly, this suggests the attention to the *consumerist* dimension of studying that can be linked to the aesthetic nature of the content produced on all three platforms.

I have also observed that within OSC, usually the best tips and in-depth written information and resources are found in *StudyBlr*. The more aesthetic side and 'commercial' side can be found on *StudyGram* whereas, within *StudyTube*, the dynamic, more practical side is shared, especially through *SWM* videos where students can join and study alongside the *StudyGrammer* and find 'virtual study companions'.

Thoughts and Description of OSC- What Makes it a Special Community?

OSC Through Focal Participants' Eyes

In order to further refine my understanding of OSC and add clarity to its features, I asked my focal participants to describe OSC in a few words. All the participants took some time to think

of a description in response to this question. The purpose behind this question (and asking them to limit their definition to a concise form) was purposefully done so that they would filter their thoughts and provide me with the most important aspects of the *StudyGram* community to them as *StudyGrammers*. For instance, Leila's choice of words to describe the community were: '*educational, motivating and inspiring*'. Belle described it as "*a bunch of students of any age, trying to stay motivated and motivate others- and it's full of productivity- basically motivation and productivity.*"

The words that Leila chose to describe *StudyGram* reflect the most aspects of the community that are most important to her, namely, learning and affect. Some theorists (like Massumi, 2002), understand affect as pre-personal, and as clearly distinct from feelings (personal and biographical) or emotions (social). Affect is understood as prior to consciousness. It can emerge through relations, in a collective (Braidotti, 2019). It can be an intensity, circulating between and within bodies. Affect and emotion are not interchangeable but can overlap. Sara Ahmed (2014) plays down the distinctions between feelings, emotions and affect because of their interactions and overlaps. The role of affect in this community can be detected. Interestingly, Belle's thoughts are also in harmony with Leila's when she referred to productivity and motivation. Another observation here is that neither of them mentioned other aspects of the community such as the hustle culture and the over-emphasis on aesthetics.

Belle's description reveals the effects that she feels the community has had on her. The three key elements are education, motivation and productivity. Having education as a core, here she suggests that the learning that takes place contributes to her education, whereas motivation and productivity may be the effect of participating in the community. One other observation here is that Belle focuses on highlighting the positive part of the community which reveals that this is the dominant feeling she has about the community. She adds: "*yeah, definitely one of the most positive communities in the range of communities*", she then compares it to the beauty and fashion community, stating that such communities have more negative aspects than positive ones:

> *... I feel like the beauty community has more negativity; the fashion side has a lot more of negativity. I feel like the study community can't really go wrong, because what you're doing is studying and benefiting yourself- I feel like it's more positive than negative and that's why I personally got into that- there's a lot of motivation and inspiration that you take from people...* (Belle).

Interestingly, the comparison between OSC and the beauty bloggers came up in one form or another in all the interviews conducted. This is key in this discussion because *StudyGrammers* are viewed as people who have an influence on their followers (which will be explored further in Chapter 6). This influence may take different shapes and forms, but it is still there. Given this, Belle's description also reflects the aspect of mutual learning that happens in the community and affects exchange, mainly motivation and inspiration (which are discussed further in Chapter 5).

From this description as well, one can see that Belle makes a big assumption that studying is a completely beneficial activity, by saying it *'can't really go wrong'*. However, other *StudyGrammers* and people in the community postulate that there is another side to studying that is not always positive: for instance, if done excessively, it might lead to burn out (Dodd, 2020).

One way of understanding the comparison between the beauty communities and study communities is in how they view the overall topics of both study and beauty, perhaps with beauty being considered as inferior to studying. Beauty is linked more to leisure, perhaps even something fleeting or superficial, while studying is linked to more worthy ideals such as education and working towards a prosperous career. Comparisons to the fashion or beauty online communities help reveal that accomplishing studying is seen as equally beautiful and worthwhile, which can be seen in the prevalence of aesthetics, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. Traditionally, studying can appear to be boring or unattractive because it feels: (1) an invisible activity that happens inside the brain/internally, and (2) individual, which makes it a lonely process. Therefore, *StudyGrammers* are shifting these two qualities through posting study related content on OSC. They are making *studying* visible and community-based through taking pictures of the actual process as it happens and sharing it with others. Also, the dynamism of studying is captured well in the time-lapse videos as they show 'work being done'. Moreover, because studying requires deep focus, when someone is studying, they tend to focus wholeheartedly on what they are doing and lose sense of the outer world. But through filming the studying process and the other practices surrounding it, studying is enacted. This contributes to the affective side of the *StudyGrammer*, that they are studying and working hard. Additionally, *StudyGrammers* reinforce the idea of 'togetherness' and 'sense of community' which will be further detailed in Chapter 6. Despite the feelings of loneliness that are usually

associated with studying, one of the key features of the *StudyGram* community is that it builds a connection between *StudyGrammers* and members.

In the realm of various online communities on the internet, it appears that the 'sense of community*'* makes the community stand out. For instance, Leila highlighted that users in OSC support and encourage each other; indeed, it is more about that community engagement than any of the other reasons. Leila expressed her feelings for the community immediately at the beginning of our conversation, using the verb 'love' and explained the reasons:

> *I think, honestly, from my experience, I love this community, because it really motivated me and made me want to study and to learn more- because I was in my own bubble and I didn't have "studious friends" … and my family- like I have older sisters that don't need studying and a younger sister, like she wouldn't be a role model for me- So, I did look up to the online study community a lot! And it was really helpful for me... So, I think it's mostly positive, I would say positive. Yeah...* (Leila).

Leila linked her positive experience with the motivation and eagerness to study that she gained from the community. Therefore, another distinguishing aspect of the community for Leila is that it made her want to study more, which can be linked back to both motivation and inspiration. Interestingly, the notion of 'role model' was mentioned here and was found helpful within the community, referring to "*studious friends*" that she found connected to her "*own bubble*".

This signals that the community extends beyond geography and is built around a shared practice, which is in this case 'studying'. *StudyGrammers* formed their community primarily around studying. This is congruent with other communities that are similar to *StudyGram*; for example, #booktube community around books, #foodstagram around food and #fitspo around fitness. Theoretically speaking, studying in this case can be seen as the *common interest* of CoP (Wenger, 1998); this will be discussed further in the discussion Chapter 8.

Rstudies, on the other hand preferred to describe the community by mentioning the followers and what she thinks about the reasons behind their presence in the community. She focused mainly on followers who are motivated, have a desire to succeed and those who 'stalk' people and check their life updates:

> *I think 80% of the followers of this community are really motivated and they want to succeed… they want to succeed! and they have goals to achieve in their lives… and the rest are there to stalk people and check what is happening...* (Rstudies).

Interestingly here, it seems that Rstudies pays attention to her followers and to the type of people present in the community and some of their motivations. Moreover, this claim aligns with other Instagram communities where users just create accounts without sharing content. Anna further added that the community is:

> *...a way to look at studying- which is often looked at as a thing that you kind of have to slug through- in a very positive way, like sure adding pretty things does not necessarily make something good but it makes it more enjoyable and more bearable and getting through the real hard work of studying and that's what the community focuses on! (Anna).*

Anna's comment reveals a very interesting insight regarding OSC. The descriptions above seem to focus on motivation and how this helps to encourage better practice. Here by contrast, the focus is on 'seeing' and 'looking'. It is a shift towards aesthetics rather than practice, towards affect rather than behaviour. This finding is very insightful as it seems to suggest that more than acting as a community of practice, it might be also regarded as an ontological community that chooses to perceive the world in a certain way (this will be unpacked in the next chapter). More specifically, *StudyGrammers* in the *StudyGram* community are changing something usually viewed and is regarded to be arduous (studying) into something beautiful, bearable and good. This seems to be an interesting finding as it moves away from just a community of practice into an aesthetic community of affect.

It appears that *StudyGrammers* valorise the act of studying through presenting it in the best possible way that is appealing and creative. Therefore, one of the core *StudyGram* features is the way it looks, the visual and representational aspect of the process of studying. Considering this, *StudyGrammers* are changing the perspective towards 'study' through 'romanticising' and 'beautifying' their practice. This is done via photography and special props and items included in *StudyGram* culture. This invites an important question: how can aesthetics contribute to changing the overall perspective around studying?

Anna mentioned the struggles of studying and how being in this community might help to reduce the daunting process of having to study at all. Knowing that others are going through

the same thing helps a lot. Because studying is a hard thing to do, it can feel like the work to be done is huge/overwhelming etc. Also, it is something done in isolation**,** hence both the need for community and for pretty things.

From the different descriptions of the participants, an initial word cloud would be useful in visualising the main themes used to describe the community (see Figure 25).
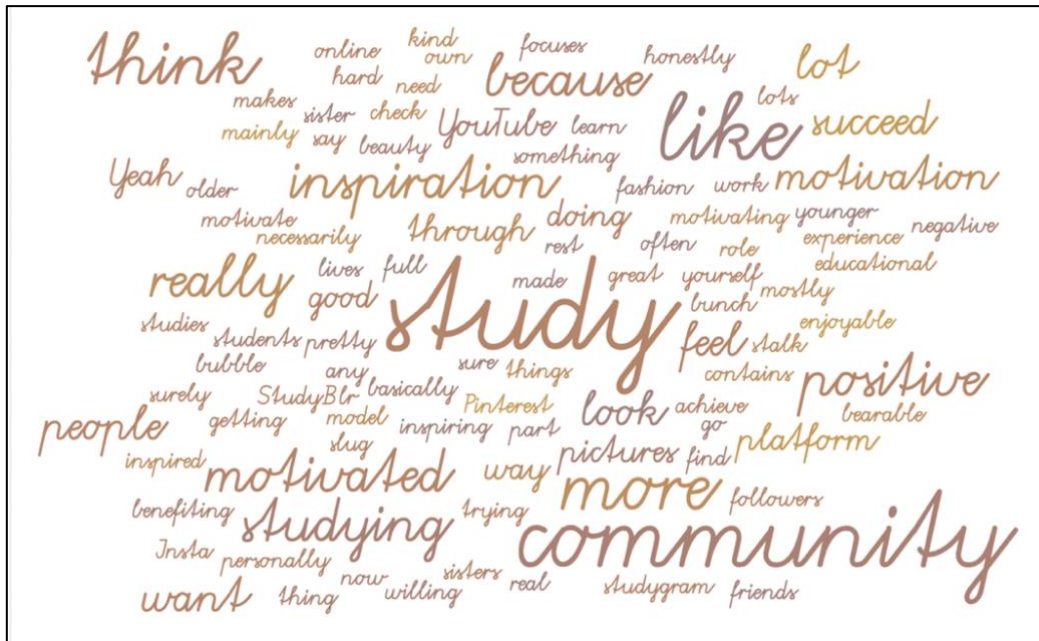
Figure 25. Word cloud assembling StudyGrammers' thoughts about OSC

From the word cloud, the following words are central: study, community*,* inspiration, motivation and positive as the first key elements that the *StudyGrammers* chose to describe the community.   The following description of OSC can be derived from these words: *"an educational, motivating, inspiring, and a positive space (despite some negatives) with the aim of making the task of studying more bearable, enjoyable, and approachable".* To refine this definition, I used a tag idea (the #studygram tag challenge) to ask my followers about the community and analysed their rich responses.

The #studygram Tag

To gather more descriptions about OSC features, I used a tag challenge with the aim of depicting the community through *StudyGrammers'* eyes within the community itself on

Instagram. This latter was chosen because of it is easily accessible to active members and because of the affordances the platform provides such as the use of 'stories' and 'mentions' (tagging other users). I shared a post on my *StudyGram* account inviting *StudyGrammers* (as shown in Figure 26) to simply share a post or a story describing the community and touching upon the way they viewed it. Under the post, these tags were shared as well to attract people to contribute and find the post: #studying, #studygrammer, #studyblr, #studytube, #studyspo, #studygram and #studymotivation. Unsurprisingly, each of these hashtags contained the root 'study' in it. A possible comment on this is the centrality of studying in the community. This can be seen as the starting point to reveal the layers of *StudyGramming* practices which will be detailed in the next empirical Chapter 5.
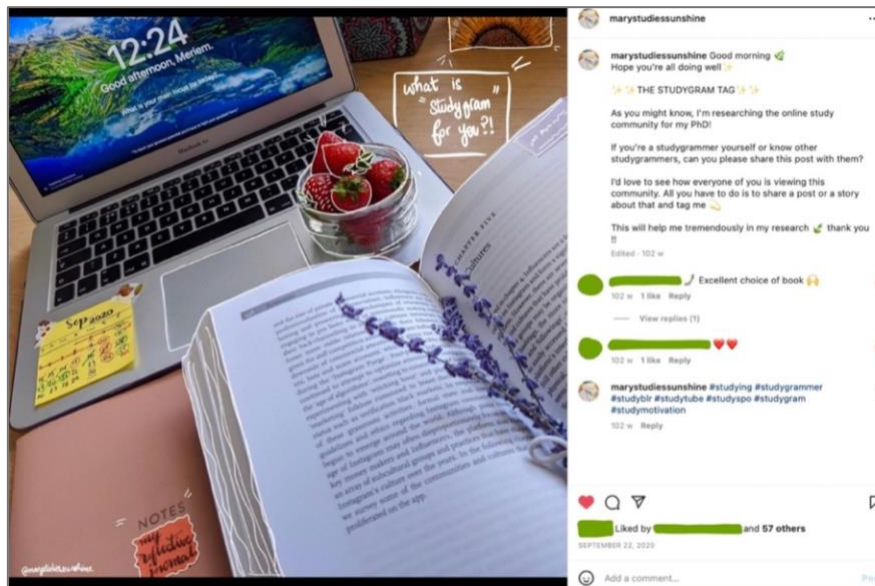
Figure 26. The StudyGram tag post I shared on my StudyGram to get more insights about OSC

> *Note.* I used this picture and doodled on it to attract as many *StudyGrammers* as possible. Also, in the caption, I disclosed myself as a researcher and clearly highlighted how the contributions of *StudyGrammers* would benefit my research. A sample of the analysis of the results of this tag is shown in Figure 27.
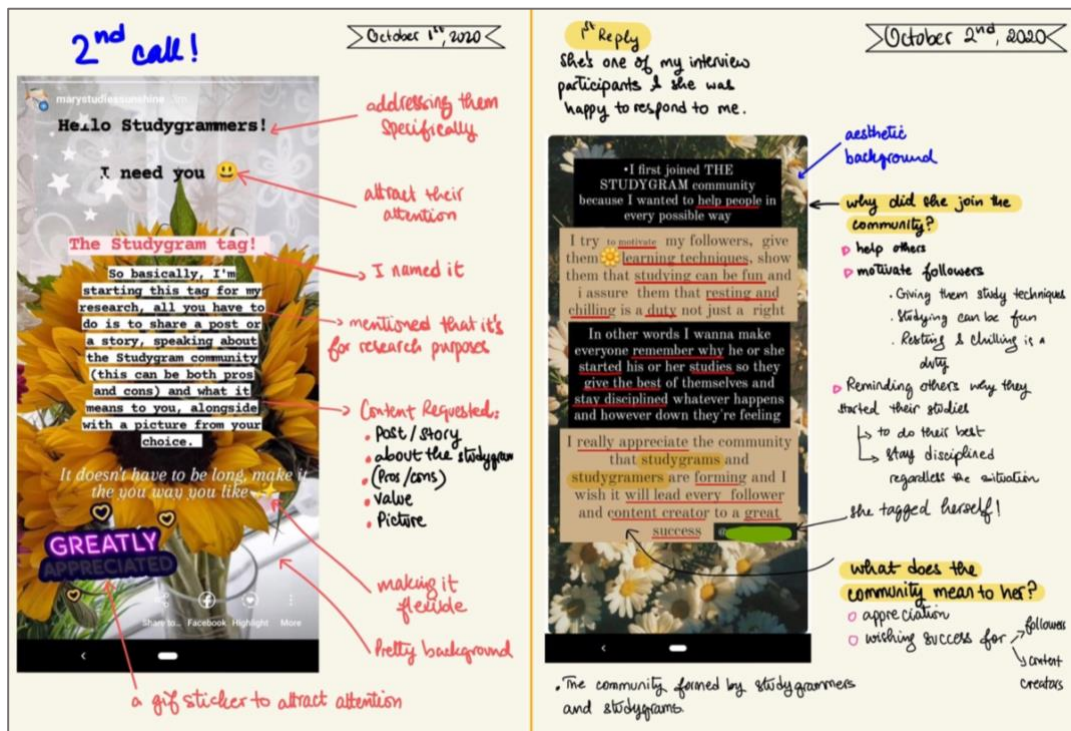
Figure 27. Stories screenshots as part of the StudyGram tag and analysis.

Even though the responses were not as rich as I expected them to be (only two users shared a story with the tag), I used another helpful feature from Instagram which is asking questions in a 'story'. The 'story' was seen firstly by my followers because it appears in their feed and can also be seen by any user who clicks on my profile, as this latter is made public. Only three responses were received, even though the 'story' had been seen by a lot of followers (Figure 28). The main themes emerging from the tag and story questions fell into two categories; *reasons* for joining the community and *the value* it gives them, as shown in Table 6.
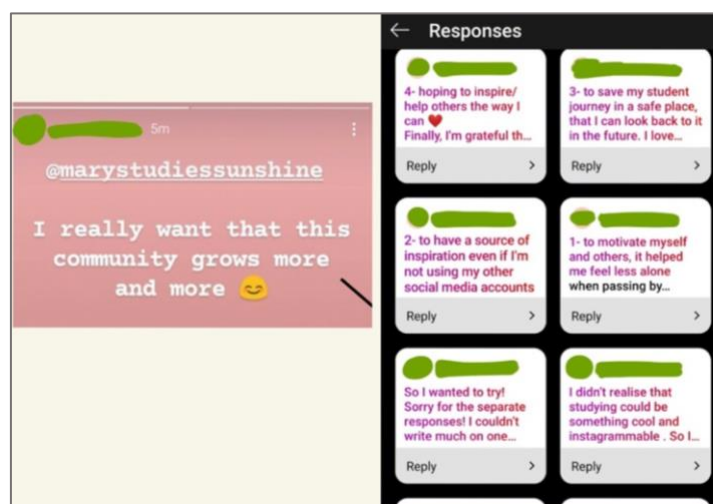
Figure 28. Responses to the StudyGram tag question (screenshot from the Instagram story)

Table 6. Main themes from the #studygram tag

Reasons for joining the community	Value
Motivation	Appreciation
Inspiration	Optimism
Provides help	Enjoying studying
Discipline	Loving the community
Archiving students' experiences in a safe space	Wishing for success and growth between members
Company	

The *StudyGram* tag tool revealed important information that showed *StudyGrammers'* thoughts about the community. They mainly framed their thoughts about *StudyGram* within two main categories: reasons for joining and the value they got from participation. Their reasons for joining the community will be explored in relevant sections of the coming chapters. Interestingly, the second themes echoed the affective features that they gained from the community that include appreciation, love and enjoyment of the community as a space. One response wished for the community to grow more which mirrors an affective relationship with the community. Despite the limited contribution from members as mentioned previously, the few responses mirrored that the *StudyGrammers* who replied to me really cared, as they sent me private messages asking for further details and promising that they would respond when they had time. This latter can be seen as reflecting the ties and support built in the *StudyGram* community, exemplifying a 'sense of community'.

Summing up Key OSC Features

OSC as a Virtual Study Space/ Library

From all the observations and descriptions revealed previously, I propose that *StudyBlr*, *StudyGram*, and *StudyTube* are somewhat analogous to a digital study space or a library. Most libraries have different kinds of study spaces and spots: single pods, silent floors, group study rooms, bookable computers, books, reading spaces, etc. These preferences have been carefully employed to accommodate a vast number of students, according to their study preferences and learning styles. Likewise, OSC can be viewed as a library on different platforms, starting from Tumblr, moving to Instagram and YouTube and other platforms such as Twitter with the

hashtag *#studytwt* and recently on TikTok with *#studyTok*. On these platforms, *StudyGrammers* select the most suitable platform for their content creation practices and engagement with their audiences. This is also applicable to audiences who can find a wide array of study-related accounts that they can choose according to their preferences and interactions. OSC content serves as a repository of what students might need, including previous experiences, resources, help, support, motivation, inspiration, and much more.

Aesthetically Pleasing Studying

The notion 'aesthetically pleasing' is frequently used by Instagram users in general and has also been mentioned by my focal participants in interviews. This, coupled with my own observations, suggest that aesthetics play a crucial role in OSC across platforms, especially on *StudyBlr* and *StudyGram* as detailed previously. In this community, aesthetic elements are used as part of a decorative visual narrative that *StudyGrammers* employ in their content in order to beautify the process of studying and present it in a beautiful way to attract a wider audience. Manovich (2017) uses the term *Instagramism* where he links Instagram tightly with the notion of aesthetics, contending that: "if Google is an information retrieval service, Twitter is for news and links exchange, Facebook is for social communication, and Flickr is for image archiving, Instagram is for aesthetic visual communication." (p. 41). This is true as Instagram is highly based on visuals and aesthetics. However, aesthetics "do not happen in a vacuum: planned and unintended uses develop out of multiple contexts, including the visual and the mobile" (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 40). Thus, there seems to be a process dedicated to achieving a certain facade (front stage) that is described as 'aesthetically pleasing'.

Referring to my focal participants who have similarly engaged in aestheticising their accounts, Belle describes her account on Instagram as "*Artsy StudyGram*" where she mingles art and drawings with study-related content to achieve that *aesthetically pleasing* look of her account. Anna uses her calligraphy skills and neat handwriting to beautify her content. Both Rstudies and Leila invest effort in applying different filters to their posts to make them *aesthetically pleasing*. Consequently, it appears that *StudyGrammers* try to post their content within that aesthetic through implementing different elements and paying attention to detail, including photography quality, lighting, colour congruence, items presented and their arrangement, filters, etc. This aspect of achieving the "*aesthetically pleasing*" look of content has also been documented in my auto-netnographic experience where I kept observing other posts and

improved my own photography skills to try to achieve 'the aesthetic look' usually presented in the community.

Significantly, it can be inferred from the observations that *StudyGram* aesthetics are created by *StudyGrammers* through effort and time and do not just happen haphazardly. Used in different ways, some *StudyGrammers* prefer to have a themed profile where they post 'repetitive templates' (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 207). In these posts, they use the same style picture with few changes in some elements each time, while keeping the same element in all posts; this can be through presenting certain items, certain settings, keeping the same feature (for instance posting the same desk and computer but with different drink and stationery each time), etc. This repetition mirrors the meditative nature of the 'study with me' videos. Other accounts prefer a minimalistic look, or they use the same colour scheme/ filter for all their images/ videos.

A prominent feature of OSC, then, is the aesthetically pleasing online presentation of studying. *StudyGrammers* explained that the beautiful, eye-catching elements within the way the content is presented seems to yield generally positive effects, transmitting motivation and inspiration to be productive. More on the effects of aesthetics in OSC will be reflected on in relation to motivation, inspiration, and productivity in Chapters 5 and 8.

Creativity and Something to Share!

Interestingly, what *StudyGrammers* and some famous influencers from the wider OSC have in common is their creativity and reciprocity that is shared online through their small 'businesses'. This is another feature that was observed in OSC whereby this reciprocity element emerged through receiving from the community and then having something to share in return. For instance, Belle sells her own creative flashcards to help people retain some medicine related lessons. Anna shares downloadable printable sheets in addition to a book about study techniques and planning. Leila shares an online shop for stationery with her sister who owns a DIY YouTube channel, and she makes her own hand-made soap and sells it online. Other instances from OSC include templates for bullet journals, flashcards, Instagram quick shared information, tips, to do lists, clothes, etc.

These examples demonstrate a range of creative elements and how *StudyGrammers* went above and beyond just sharing posts on social media but chose to use their creativity to provide their followers with more content. This has also contributed to optimising their own financial gain through their small ventures (gaining money, early career experience, etc). Additionally, I observed that this phenomenon usually happens after *StudyGrammers* gain some trust and support from their followers. This usually happens after a period of consistently producing data and being active in the community. Interestingly, this was depicted through my own experience as well. I noticed myself sharing my own notes on my *StudyGram* bio via a link in Linktree (a website that redirects to multiple websites in one click). What made me share them is the thought that people might find them useful and that I should have something to offer to the community.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have unpacked the features of OSC through crafting a definition from the *StudyGrammers* themselves and from deep immersion in OSC. Introducing focal participants and their interests provided a context to the study. OSC were defined through exploring my participants' early experiences and trajectories, features of OSC detailing prominent aspects of *StudyBlr*, *StudyGram* and *StudyTube*, the *StudyGram* tag, and participants' own thoughts and descriptions of the community. All these ideas mingled together frame what is *StudyGram* and what is not.

The findings show that the main features can be seen as elements assembled in a *StudyGram* post: study-related items, aesthetics, creativity, motivation, inspiration, and productivity. Moreover, OSC features are intertwined and overlapping but are all within the framework of sharing study-related content and *StudyGrammers'* experiences. Findings have also revealed that OSC are not dedicated to a specific subject or a fixed curriculum but are about the process of studying and *StudyGrammers'* shared experiences. Moreover, the findings have demonstrated that the most discernible aspect in all posts across OSC is the presence of an element that indicates reading, writing or both; in other words, the link to 'studying'. The highlighted items that make it a *StudyGram* style is the presence of something that has a text or a device of writing, namely books/ notebooks/ papers, laptops/ tablets, and pens. However, the presence of books alone might cause confusion with another category of posts that are known within the #bookstagram, #booklr, #booktube communities.

In this chapter, I have also explained the importance of aesthetics in OSC and how content creators try to achieve this. Linking this chapter to theory, OSC's content presents what Wenger labels 'a shared repertoire' (Wenger, 1998) of the *StudyGram* CoP, as will be shown in the discussion Chapter 8. Moreover, exploring and defining the features of OSC have highlighted the *front stage* that is presented by *StudyGrammers* (Goffman, 1959). All the props and kit found in the community are part of the performance (studying) which is performed in this front stage (OSC across platforms). This front stage is characterised by aesthetically pleasing content and is presented in a manner that is both pretty and sophisticated.

Although OSC vary to some extent in style according to the platforms and the affordances each platform provides, its content is still distinguished as 'study' posts. *StudyBlr* is more like a classroom style where detailed captions and linked resources are shared. On Instagram, the items are beautifully presented, and people can find out more about the products and buy them. Whereas on YouTube, OSC is more dynamic given the applicability of videos in audiences' routines and actual study sessions (SWM videos for instance). Within Goffman's dramaturgical lens, this chapter has explored the 'front stage' of OSC. In the next chapter, I explore 'the performance' of this front stage which is 'studying' and theorise it within *StudyGramming* practices.

Chapter 5: Enactment of 'Studying' Through *StudyGramming* Practices

Introduction

The present chapter addresses the second research question that delves into the meaning of the concept of 'study': *how does the concept of 'study' manifest in the community?* It explores the different underpinnings of the 'study culture' and how my participants view it, along with myself as a participant and a content creator. This chapter also examines the role 'studying' plays in OSC and its different manifestations and enactments.

This chapter contains three sections, as illustrated in Figure 29, addressing the why, what and how. It starts by exploring the core reasons behind *StudyGrammers'* joining the community. Then it shifts to discussing how the concept of 'studying' is projected within *StudyGram* culture, shaped by *StudyGramming* practices, through proposing a four-dimensional model (instrumental, ontological, commercial, and affective dimensions).
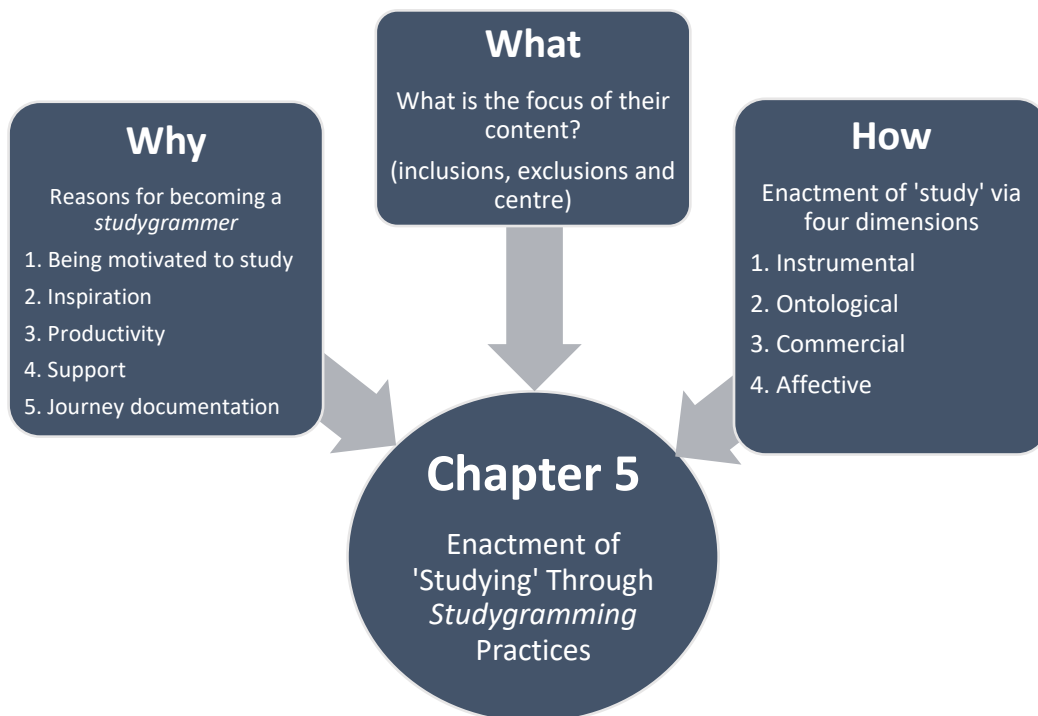
Figure 29. Visualising Chapter 5- a conceptualisation of 'studying' within StudyGram.

The Why

Before delving into the understandings of 'studying' in the community, I asked my participants about their reasons for joining OSC and eventually becoming a content creator. This was because it would provide the foundation for a subsequent exploration of their practices as *StudyGrammers* and the different ways they conceptualised and enacted 'studying'. The following Table 7 summarises the different reasons that led my focal participants to join OSC and become active members who share and interact with content.

Table 7. The different reasons that lead my focal participants to create study content

Focal Participants	Leila	Belle	Anna	Rstudies
Personal reasons for becoming a *StudyGrammer* and creating *StudyGram* content	- Enjoys this genre - Sharing - Being motivated to study -Accountability	- Related to studying medicine - Love of being productive - Art - Creativity - Desire to share that with the wider community	- Free time and curiosity - Gifted with good handwriting - Loves studying and education (all aligned well with the community and what it promotes)	- Related to studying medicine - Helping others - Being motivated to study - Accountability - Inspiration - To change her mood

I have not included myself in this table; instead, my auto-netnographic data and observations are interspersed throughout the chapter.

Anna mainly joined the community because of curiosity and free time. She also felt that the community fitted well with her personality. She further explained: "*I've been always dedicated to my studies and growing up; my parents have always instilled in me that education is how you advance in life!*". Other reasons that led Anna to expand her participation in the community were her love of studying, her neat handwriting and calligraphy, which aligned well with the community and its trends. In her words: *"... and I really like studying and really always like neat handwriting which is something I've been gifted with! So, this is how the community works!"*. Hence, Anna's way into the community was smooth, due to her having not just the

time but skills that were valued and that allowed her to align easily with the community. Other participants had similar experiences and I will explore these in the following sections. (At the time of writing, Anna's *StudyTube* channel celebrated its 1 millionth subscribers).

From Table 7, I have categorised the reasons for joining into the following five main themes: being motivated to study, inspiration, productivity, support, and journey documentation. The following section will discuss each of these reasons behind joining and participating as a *StudyGrammer* in the OSC.

Being Motivated to Study

When I first stumbled upon *StudyBlr*, I was there, I felt, merely to procrastinate. Surprisingly, this procrastination slowly turned into a zeal to study and do my work. The notions of 'motivation' and 'inspiration' are very frequently used by members of OSC. Specifically, they are used as hashtags under their posts (for instance, #studymotivation, #studyspo), found in their captions ("*I hope you guys get motivated and inspired to do work*") and on YouTube videos' titles that included between brackets (*study motivation*).
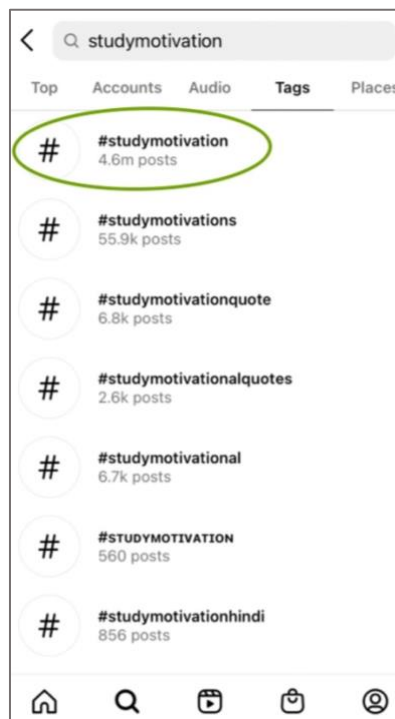
Figure 30. #studymotivation hashtag search on Instagram application

Figure 30 shows that on Instagram alone, the hashtag #studymotivation gathered more than 4.6 million posts at the time of writing. Observations of these posts revealed that most posts are on *StudyGram* and include: study desks depicting productive days; Reels including displayed notes and stationery with coffee and water bottles; bullet journal spreads both empty and filled with tasks and pretty drawings; digital devices, mostly iPads and laptops, etc).

Other posts with this hashtag depict people in their work-related uniforms like doctors' outfits and lawyers as a form of motivation for students and a reminder of what they are working for. Captions in most cases include a motivational quote and/ or an anecdote that mostly revolves around bettering the self and being successful. So, while for some content creators, the emphasis is on the act of studying and the accoutrements that accompany studying, for others, the end point of studying (a job or career) is the motivating force. Images in Figure 31 are selected from my *StudyGram* account to depict elements of #studymotivation. These picture styles are recreated by many *StudyGrammers* and are widely spread within *StudyGram* culture.
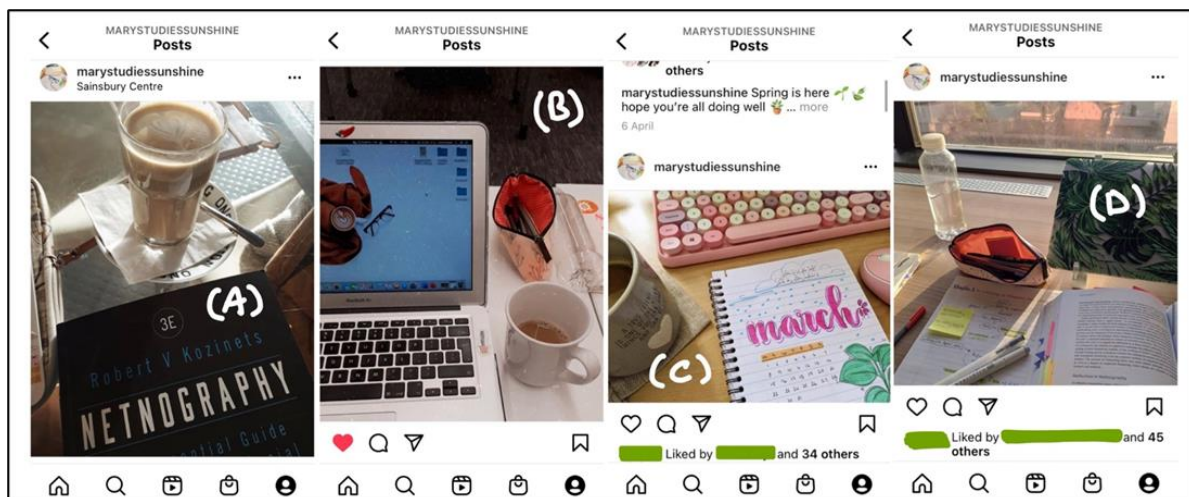
Figure 31. StudyBlr/ StudyGram style posts screenshotted from my account on Instagram application.

Leila narrated her experience in getting motivated from scrolling through *StudyBlr* and when asked about this feeling she explained:

> *From my early history in the StudyBlr community, my love for this style of pictures grew so much and I think it's cause of the feelings I get especially when I really have to get up and start working... seeing posts of... umm... for example... happy Mondays, hot coffee, open books, pens, healthy snacks, texts on screen and more items give me so much inspiration and motivation to get up and do my own work.*

Rstudies has also echoed Leila's feelings about motivation and certain items presented in posts. She explained her selection of items to be presented in her *StudyGram* pictures stating:

I feel like... from my experience that the StudyGram posts provide lots of motivation that's why I make sure to produce that content that is motivating to my followers... for me I love coffee and the smell of it...ah... when I see coffee near books or a laptop... umm... I automatically feel motivated and gain some energy... haha I don't know I feel this works for me... Does this make sense?

Upon observing pictures in figure 31, and analysing Leila and Rstudies' sayings, one can notice that the presence of certain items alludes to feelings of being motivated and are part of #studymotivation. In this case, there are hot drinks (A) and water (D), communicating to the audience that the individual is ready and about to be productive. Other items reveal similar associations, such as: a switched-on computer especially with a lecture going on or an open text (B), books (A), stationary and organised highlighters in front of books/ notebooks (D), keyboard and mouse (C). Other images contain more items from the list described in the previous chapter, such as iPads, notes, to do lists, etc. These objects/ images of objects are central to this community and signify distinct meanings that require little further explanation. For instance, the combination of a hot drink near a book or laptop that creates a motivational mood is transmitted to the audience.

Both Leila and Rstudies recognise the power of visual cues and specific items in evoking motivation. The images they encounter in *StudyBlr* and create in their *StudyGram* posts play a significant role in inspiring them to engage in their studies. These visuals, such as coffee, books, and pens, seem to trigger positive associations and create an environment conducive to focus and productivity. Their experiences suggest that visual stimuli and the presence of certain items can be influential in generating motivation and creating a conducive study atmosphere (Maksimenko et al., 2017). While Leila and Rstudies find visual cues and specific items to be motivating, it is important to acknowledge that different individuals may respond differently to these stimuli. What works for one person may not work for another. Factors such as personal preferences, learning styles, and individual motivations can greatly influence the effectiveness of visual cues in evoking motivation.

All my participants mentioned the terms 'motivation' and 'inspiration' but without providing a clear definition. Given this, examples of what they considered to be motivating or inspiring

can be inferred from their interview data; more specifically, what might be categorised as intrinsic or extrinsic motivation and what type of motivation they seek and share through their content.

Participants stated that they joined the community in order to motivate themselves to do their work and get their studies done. Interestingly, they also mentioned that their content helps them to stay motivated because through this *'commitment to post online'*, they are *'holding themselves accountable'*. This drives them to study more and therefore be more productive. These statements reflect the notion of extrinsic motivation coming from outside forces rather than intrinsic motivation that comes from within the person and is usually accompanied with a sense of responsibility.

Another instance of extrinsic motivation can be seen in Belle's account: she explains that she started receiving positive feedback from her first followers and people direct messaging her asking about different study-related things. This made her 'more determined' to share more with people and help them; so she moved to *StudyTube* where she could upload more about study-related content. Thus, the interest from followers was a strong influencing element in terms of her becoming a more active member and her increasing presence in the community.

Similarly, Rstudies mentioned she was keen to motivate her followers. Despite her audience being relatively small compared to other *StudyGrammers*, she made sure her content would be motivational and inspirational. This is discernible through her *StudyGram's* bio caption, where she described her account as being: '*Inspirational account, motivation and lifestyle*'. Further to this, captions that accompanied her posts were filled with motivational quotes that she believed would motivate people to take action and start studying when they read them.

Both Rstudies and Belle joined the community because they found themselves having to study long hours due to the nature of their course (Medicine), requiring not just a lot of time but also dedication; in this sense, they felt that the 'study content' was already there. Their main aim was to find motivation especially when it was most needed. Belle made her way to *StudyGram* when she saw the pretty notes and people studying. In her words:

> *You know when you do medicine, you have to constantly study but sometimes you start lacking motivation and seeing other StudyGrammers constantly*

working and motivating others got me thinking, maybe I should just make a StudyGram!

In this regard, the study content aspect is always present in their lives, which according to them, makes it easy to share content (after some editions and application of filters) that matches the dominant aesthetics of the *StudyGram* culture across platforms.

The interviews referred to above suggest that these content creators express a dual dimension of motivation that is cyclical between them as *StudyGrammers* and their audiences: intrinsic motivation emerges from their own sentiments and is transmitted to audiences while extrinsic motivation arises from the surroundings (their audience and the need to produce study content) and the feeling of being held accountable within a community.

Reflecting on my own journey researching OSC, I learnt more about myself as a student. Surprisingly, I found myself reaching out to the community and trying to motivate myself and get inspired by the community to do my own work. I even watched time-lapse SWM videos to boost my own motivation before I started working and while studying, I had other SWM videos, mostly 'pomodoro' style in the background.

In this next section, I unpack the notion of 'boosting' motivation, which is discernible and quite ubiquitous in the community, as well as the complexities this generates. Observations of the *StudyTube* community for instance, showed that members' most highly requested videos are the *SWM* and *'A Productive Day in My Life'* videos. This specific genre utilises props and editing style that seems to draw the attention of audiences (for example, the live stream function and the time-lapse style) inspiring and motivating them. The former emphasises companionship and support between the content creators and the audiences as it shows the process of studying in real time (Lee et al., 2021), whereas the latter; according to *StudyGrammers,* acts as a 'motivation boost'. In fact, in my experience, I found the impact of time-lapse very short-term, requiring the person to act upon their motivation and decide to do their job as soon as the 'spark' is ignited. Others found such videos useful to produce as it not only made them accountable to themselves and their followers but also documented their progress (this will be discussed further in the last theme of *journey documentation*) to a wider community.

For Anna on the other hand, the motivation to produce time-lapsed videos was because: "*it's more satisfying to see the thing [studying] being finished and they don't take a couple of hours watching*". Within this genre, *StudyTubers* pay attention to the smallest details, and they try to respond to their followers' specific requests. For instance, despite preferring the time-lapse SWM videos and providing tips, when Anna's followers requested live SWM in their comments, she filmed them to try to 'please' her audience. She further expanded:

> *I personally don't find the streams really helpful to me because when I study, I like to have no distractions on the background… and then if I'm not studying, I'm not really interested in watching somebody writing something on a piece of paper for like three hours [laughter]".*

This illustrates that though students may share practices, they also have different learning style preferences and strategies. Anna balances doing what she finds helpful herself while studying with responding to requests from the community. Thus, what these *StudyTubers* promote to their audiences is a variety of techniques and tools that can then be adapted by users according to their own style preferences and needs.

Another manifestation of motivation and inspiration that the study content also reflects is the notion of 'study buddying' which was observed and documented in my fieldnotes and auto-netnography. Here is an excerpt from my immersive journal that describes what I suspect may be a common scenario in a student's life:

> *I once woke up at 6 am and wanted some motivation to actually get on my desk and start working! I went on YouTube and typed: 'live study with me', four videos came up in the search but guess what! I didn't get motivated! And I actually went back to sleep!...*

This made me reflect upon the notion of motivation and its complexities. From the entry above, it appears that motivation for me was an impetus to start working. However, the four videos that came up from the search seemed to lack that motivating trigger that I was looking for. In that specific case, maybe it was not pleasing enough to motivate me. From my diary, it appears that I was in my 'slacking mode': I was not feeling at my best and not finding motivation in the videos was just an excuse to avoid the work. This is comparable to the example of exercising on a rainy day: if the person does not really have the inner drive to exercise, the rain will be an excuse to avoid it. Motivation can therefore be defined in relation to other aspects like mood and surroundings. So, the reality is not always flowery and amazing. Motivation in

my case disappeared because of other feelings of discomfort, in a state when I was not feeling at my best. Based on this scenario, motivation can be defined as the desire to change a current situation for a better one. For instance, some entries in my journal documented a recurring feeling I had when checking my *StudyGram* account and seeing what others had posted:

> *When I check my Instagram stories, I feel a bit uncomfortable when seeing people started their day early and productive while me just being lazy! This feeling is just because I wanna be better, not that I am jealous or envying them! But at the same time, these stories really motivate me to actually get up and get my work done... it's very complicated human feelings!*

In this extract, there is a degree of conflict that arises as a result of the difference between the role played online (motivated and motivating to study) and the reality of the messiness 'backstage'. While there are no intentions to 'deceive', the reality is that no one can be motivated and hardworking all the time, by virtue of being human and not robots. The dominant role model offered online is that of the constantly motivated worker/ student, which creates a certain affect, that arises against any conscious rationalisations. At the same time, it is true that the posts of the community continue to create a motivating effect.

Other forms of motivation were expressed relating to the COVID19 situation. Belle expressed her feelings about lockdown and how happy she had been to go back home, where she could enjoy family life and the things she likes such as art and exploring more with her notes and *StudyGram* account:

> *Because of quarantine, I've had so much time in my hands, I feel like I've been very consistent of uploading, getting things out. Because of quarantine, I had the time to explore with Art more and making notes more...*

Quarantine also gave her time to focus on her online presence:

> *I feel like there's nothing to really stress about, cause exams are not really happening, and I can't complain you know [laughter]... I'm taking more time to focus on my Instagram and grow it so I can use that platform to do better things and that's basically it!*

However, this sense of having time was balanced with the reminder from other studiers in the community that she still had deadlines to meet:

> *...on it now, getting their finals done, work, motivating people constantly... and I'm like! Wow... I still have to study, I still have to do PBL [Problem Based*

Learning], GP [General Practitioners] teaching... I need to get more work done! But at the same time, I'm also doing other things, and I like to give myself Wednesdays off... that gives me time to do what I enjoy doing... it's kinda bittersweet moment.

Belle appears to be resisting to some extent the high productivity monoculture, by finding time and space to enrich her life through activities not related to studying. However, this too remains 'backstage' in Belle's life. It is interesting to draw on Goffman here, to note that while online life creates a version of an 'idealised' (motivated to study) self, the backstage version is more of an 'authentic' self. The 'bittersweet' and 'complicated' feelings arise out of these equally true but somewhat incompatible life experiences that spill out beyond the dominant online requirements of *StudyGram* to focus on the motivation to study.

Inspiration

Another concept that is deeply tied to the community, in conjunction with motivation, is 'inspiration'. Members entering these communities refer to their search and desire for inspiration. The hashtag #studyspo has more than one million posts (at the time of writing) and *StudyGrammers* do their best to present study content that is inspirational. For instance, Belle mentioned her love of art and creativity and how the study community also serves as a space where she can express herself creatively. This is shown in her *StudyGram,* described as being an *Artsy StudyGram,* combining her love of art and creative expression with her need to engage in her medical studies. Her *StudyGram* reflects Belle's approach: she pays close attention using filters and doodling on images (similar to Figure 32), resulting in a very sophisticated content on both YouTube and Instagram that people often noted as 'inspirational' in their comments. She made sure to include as many small, cute items as she could and she arranged them in congruent colour schemes, paying attention to seasonal events such as back to school, holidays, exams, etc.

The *StudyGram* culture is filled with examples of content and ideas that have, according to my participants, an inspirational touch. From my observations, it would seem that inspirational and aesthetically pleasing are important factors in drawing in more followers.

Leila described her use of these videos and explained how there is something special about watching people doing and achieving what one should be doing/ achieving oneself. The idea is that surrounding oneself with reminders of our ultimate goal, in this case studying, makes

sense: *"It's really cool to see how other people are being productive and how they structure their days"*, Leila commented. In the same vein, she described the enthusiasm and inspiration she gets from making her own SWM videos, highlighting the shift she noticed in her life after following some of the popular study content on YouTube. Her ability to be 'productive' increased and she found herself enjoying the process of learning. Therefore, she made sure to present study content that she thought her followers would likewise find inspirational, generating the same positive feelings she had experienced. Perhaps this is an inevitable result of surfing these kinds of platforms: everything that is presented is a 'perfected' and polished version of these individuals' lives; and it is not true version. However, the effect created by immersing oneself in these study spaces is that this aesthetic and inspirational perfection is re-created in viewers' study lives (even if it is recognised as not true all the time).

Figure 32. Doodling on an image trend on StudyGram from my account

Leila spoke of needing what she called a 'motivating environment' to help her keep focusing on her studies and enjoy the act of studying. She needed a 'role model', someone that she could look up to and who would motivate her to learn more. Both the idea of a motivating environment but particularly the notion of role model can be associated with the concept of 'conformity'. Simply put, conformity is about copying others in order to succeed like them or imitate/ acquire certain aspects that appear appealing to us. This could be their behaviours, looks or ways of talking. Conformity also comes about because of the pressure to fit within a certain group. From my observations during fieldwork, OSC as a culture is highly conforming.

Examples are the trends that revolve around items and aesthetic presentations in the community. Figure 32 depicts one trend that went viral in 2020 featuring the iPad in posts which involved *StudyGrammers* doodling on the image using a digital pencil.

Another area of conformity is that content creators of this genre (*StudyGrammers*) behave in certain ways and own certain items. It does not take long to notice certain items and tools presented such as stationary and even habits. This latter is mostly presented on YouTube under the genre SWM as well as the routines videos (e.g. waking up at 5 am for a week). Another instance of conformity is the eagerness to buy and display certain trendy and valued items, 'idealised' in the community. Examples include: Mildliners, wireless cute keyboards, apple devices, especially the iPad (air in 2019, pro in 2020 and the iPad mini in 2021), MacBooks, the inclusion of plants, use of filters, the presence of some sort of a beverage (mostly coffee, tea, and/ or water), sticky notes, to do lists, to name a few. Anna mentioned that: "*I have noted that the IT stuff or stationery suddenly hyping up! And it makes you feel like you have to have that because that's the best version of this object...*". This comment suggests that *StudyGrammers'* displayed conformity is connected to the eagerness to be seen by their audience as being familiar with the latest trends of the community. Perhaps this is linked to the properties of the objects (new, expensive, cheerful, serious, appealing, etc) that are seen as transferring these qualities to the content creator, and by extension to the viewers. In fact, these items can be viewed as 'study companions' or even just 'mediators'- things that create a mood for studying, facilitate certain desirable activities or improve the way 'studying' is seen and approached.

From the above extracts, seeking and offering motivation and inspiration is a common reason *StudyGrammers* joined the community. Despite the temporary effect of motivation and the need to constantly go back to these accounts to get and in this case, produce, motivating/ inspiring content, these extracts reveal the highly significant role of these two concepts in OSC. It seems that to these content creators, motivation and inspiration are equally valued and effective. They represent ways in which to express and share their creativity in an area that is important and valued (studying) with similar others who also value that type of content. This creativity manifests mostly through visuals and the effects created. This latter will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

In summary, motivation and inspiration can be depicted through different media, mainly through tips and aesthetic visuals. The focal participants' experiences reveal the circular effects of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, and how the search for a motivational environment and role model through tips and aesthetics in turn contributes to the inspirational aspect of their own accounts.

Productivity
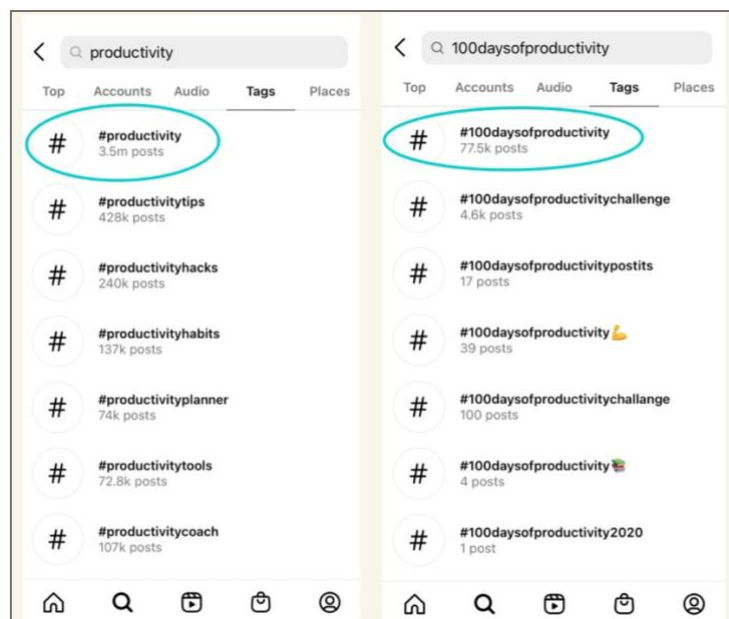
Figure 33. Word searches for 'productivity' hashtags

The productivity culture in OSC is very pervasive. Productivity is not only about academic work: *StudyGrammers* refer to any task that makes them progress in their academic life as being productive. As shown in Figure 33, on Instagram alone, the hashtag #productivity raised about 3.5 million posts (at the time of writing). Interestingly, observations of these posts revealed that they were mainly part of the *StudyGram* culture which includes a *StudyGram* style as has been detailed in the features of the community (Chapter 4). Other posts referred to different aspects of life including the fitness culture, work and career, décor, cleaning, writing, reading, cooking, babysitting and the inclusion of quotes and tips. Importantly, when clicking on them, most of these posts lead to *StudyGram* accounts which suggests that productivity plays a central role in the community. Content expressed using the term 'productivity' is also very popular in the community. This includes videos entitled "*a productive day in my life as a university student*", images and captions that describe 'productive' snippets, and tips and tricks

on how to be productive. *StudyGrammers* articulate the notion of productivity visually through their posts in various ways: sharing aspects of their days with their followers; checked To Do lists and summaries of their 'productivity' compiled in Instagram Stories; Reels of their days; photographs, vlogs and even texts and emojis.

Productivity challenges are another popular trend within the *StudyGram* culture. As such, the #100_day_of_productivity tag (#100dop) garnered more than 77K posts on Instagram at the time of writing. It was originally launched on *StudyBlr* before migrating to other platforms, with the idea that one should simply do something productive every day, not necessarily study/ academic related. Participants in this challenge would post on their accounts using that hashtag, sharing 'productive' activities they had engaged in (e.g., studying, walking, reading, cooking, etc).

The main aim of this challenge is to help with both motivation, consistency, and the accomplishment of certain tasks. Interestingly, the word 'productivity' has been associated with capitalism and neo-liberal economics, with the idea of efficiency and attaining targets. However, within this challenge, the targets are 'softer' and more affective, such as accomplishing something that is personally important to the member, something that may or may not relate to studying.

Given this, it appears that the idea of meeting a challenge contributes to increasing notions of motivation, support, and companionship. Again, this is very different from how 'productivity' is discussed in the management or economics literature. Other challenges that *StudyGrammers* have launched include SWM sessions where they announce an upcoming study session beforehand and invite their followers to join them. This latter is usually done via Instagram Stories using the 'tag feature' or going 'live'. Figure 34, Figure 35, Figure 36 feature images from my contribution to the challenge of #100daysofproductivity. They illustrate how I tried to share my productivity through *StudyGram* style posts. Figure 34 depicts an Instagram post that shows my first participation in the challenge (day 1/ 100 days of productivity). In the caption of this post, I invited my followers (and other viewers) to participate in the challenge. The picture is a replication of what can be considered a typical #studygram post where the main elements are shown (a laptop with text on screen, coffee, sticky notes, and notebooks). This then reveals the tight connection between *StudyGramming* elements and the 'feeling productive' vibes.
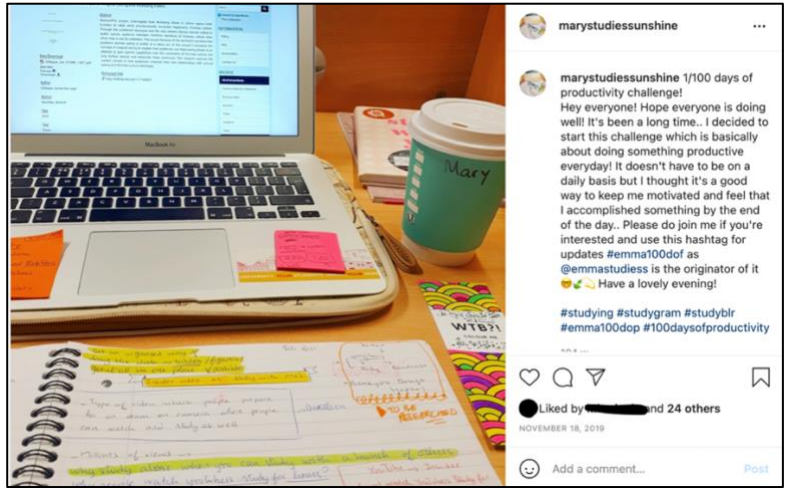
Figure 34. My first post participating in the #100_days_of_productivity challenge on StudyGram.
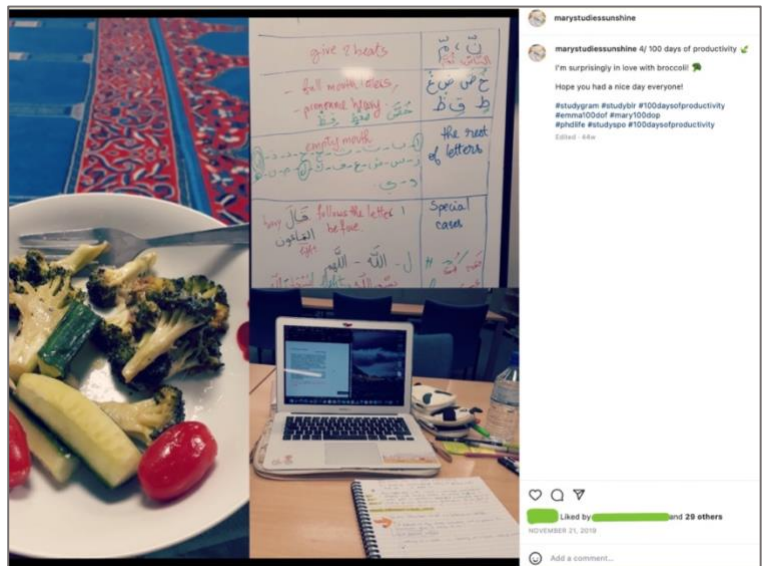
Figure 35. StudyGram post that features day 4 of the challenge

Note. Day 4/ 100: in this *StudyGram* post I tried to make a collage of three pictures instead of just one. It features three essential elements that happened during that day which I thought were productive and worth sharing (studying, healthy eating and teaching).
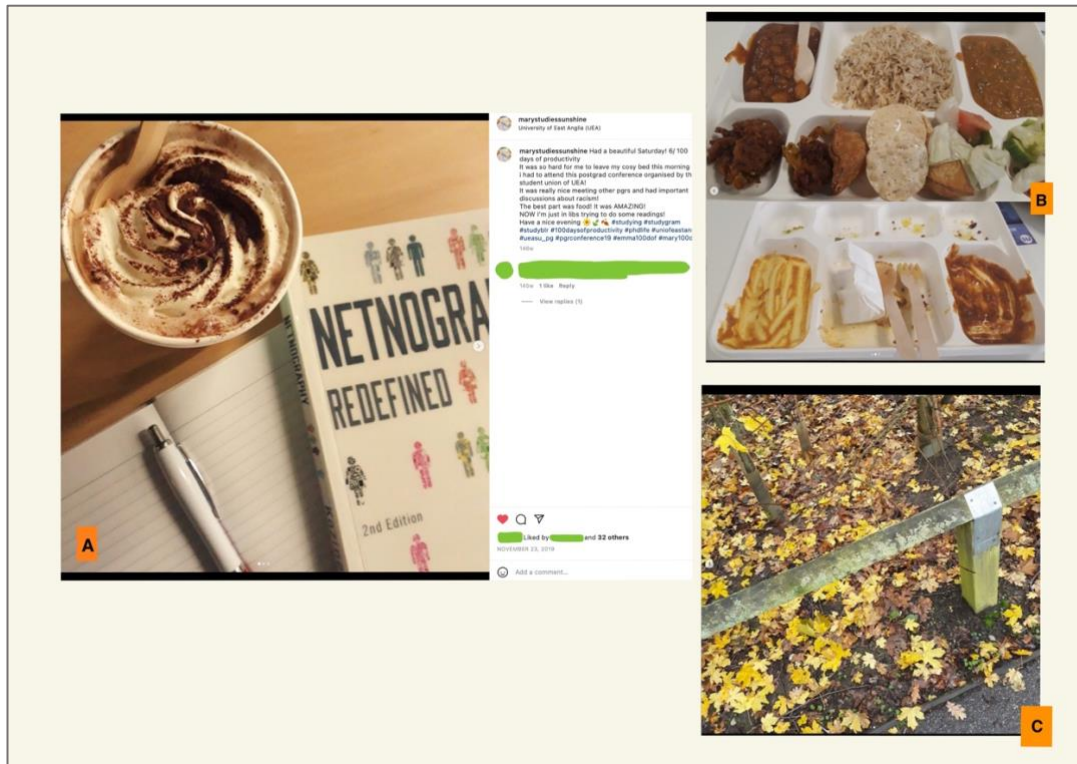
Figure 36. Day 6/ 100 from the #100dop challenge

Note. Day 6/ 100: in this post, I shared three pictures within one post that depicted a conference day. Swiping to the left, more information is given where pictures of food (B) from the conference I attended were added. Also, picture (C) depicts autumn leaves on a rainy day which creates a setting for the post.

Within this challenge, there is more flexibility in the posts which gives an opportunity for the backstage to be highlighted. For instance, in Figure 35, both caption and images reveal more about myself, beyond the typical *StudyGram* posts (in this case what I ate and did on that day, beyond just studying). In Figure 36, it is interesting to note the choice of front picture to be 'within the features of OSC', picture (A) that depicts studying. The other pictures (B) and (C) add more to the scene, through sharing food and setting (a rainy autumnal day).

From these instances, productivity depictions through this challenge of #100dop can be seen as a tool that strengthens the ties between *StudyGrammers* and themselves (documenting what they have done on a certain day) and ties between them and their viewers as they reveal more about the backstage. This relates to the theme of 'journey documentation' which will be explored in more depth later. Given the nature of content and the complexity of being a *StudyGrammer,* themes do inevitably overlap; for instance, in this case productivity is part of the journey.

Despite enjoying participating in this challenge (#100dop) and having pictures to post on my *StudyGram*, I noticed myself slacking through the process and gradually forgetting to remain accountable in terms of posting on my account, despite 'being productive', as the challenge suggested. Reflecting upon it, perhaps this is because the challenge (100 days) was an ambitious one (and might be difficult for everyone to follow through). This might also explain the emergence of similar but shorter challenges (e.g., 60 days, 30 days, etc). Perhaps, this reduction of days was designed to keep *StudyGrammers* posting. The immergence of these new challenges might also suggest that 'being productive' in this context is flexible and can be displayed in a variety of ways in this community.

'*Productive Days in My Life*' Reels on Instagram and vlogs on YouTube are very trendy in the *StudyGram* culture (at the time of data collection). Reels, as the Instagram website explains, are short entertaining videos on Instagram which offer the option of "recording and editing 15-second multi-clip videos with audio, effects, and new creative tools" (Instagram, 2020). This latter went viral and members of the community shared highlights from their days labelled 'get productive with me'. For example, members posted themselves waking up, brushing teeth, tea poured in a mug, driving, typing notes, coffee time, shopping, sunset, dinner and sleeping, among many others. An entire day would be summarised in a 60 second short clip; mostly only the positive highlights are shown. This will be further discussed in the section of how study can become part of 'hustle culture'.

My participants used these Reels to share different moments from their days. Belle became very skilful in using this feature and the Instagram Reel reached 124K views (at the time of writing). As she explained before, her aim is to show her art through *StudyGram* culture; consequently, her Reels are aesthetically presented, using appealing filters and professional style pictures. In a similar fashion, productivity is also presented using the time-lapse option, where, by seeing the timer going forward and things getting accomplished, productivity 'vibes' are spread.

Within the interviews, 'productivity' was the first concept that emerged from analysing my participants' introductions of themselves, particularly Belle and Anna. For instance, Belle stated:

> *I'm a third-year medical student and I like painting and drawing as you probably know from my Instagram, yeah, I basically like to be occupied a lot, so I would constantly do something, because I feel it's another way of being productive in my sense, but also relaxing!*

Here, it seems that actions mean productivity while doing nothing refers to being 'not productive'. Interestingly, Belle even linked being occupied and productive with relaxation, suggesting that not doing anything specific would not be relaxing for her. By contrast, Anna stated that she had nothing else to do and this was why she started creating and sharing content about productivity on the community. It seems here that creating content itself is a way of feeling occupied and active. Leila also confessed: "*I like to be productive, and I hate myself when I'm doing nothing*".

#Bujo is another famous hashtag that refers to 'bullet journal', consisting of over 6.7 million posts (at the time of writing). Created by Ryder Carroll in 2013, the bullet journal is a technique to help people plan their life and track their progress in different aspects. As described by Carroll (2018) in the title of his book *The Bullet Journal Method*, the bullet journal is a method to "help you track the past, organize the present, and plan for the future". The #bujo community has a wide presence in the *StudyGram* culture as most *StudyGrammers* use that technique and share images featuring their personal journal, share tips about it or just simply refer to it. This hashtag represents productivity and shares aspects of both motivation and inspiration. Figure 37 illustrates my bullet journal spreads that I posted on my *StudyGram* account and a word search for famous hashtags (#bujo and #bujoinspiration). In fact, researchers have been drawn to exploring the emergence of online communities around bullet journaling and planning, such as the study of Ayobi et al. (2018) that explored self-tracking strategies employed in bullet journaling, highlighting the ways in which individuals used features of bullet journaling for both "practical and emotional needs".
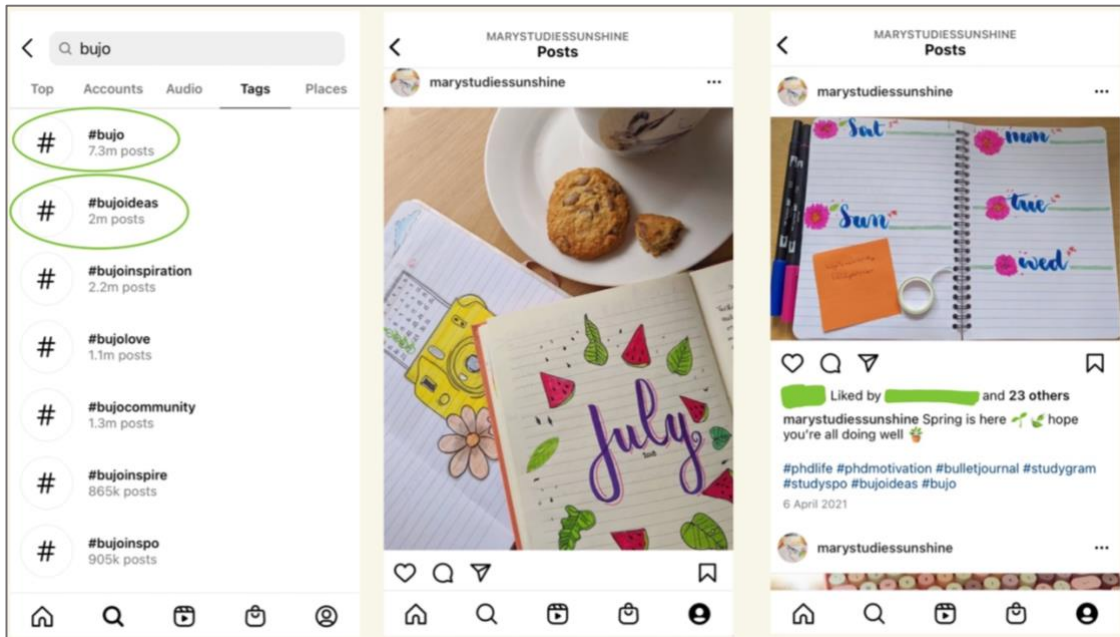
Figure 37. Bullet journal hashtag (#bujo) search and 2 samples from my account.

On my *StudyTube*, I too shared two videos[33] (Figure 38) that featured planning on my bullet journal and considered them to be part of *StudyGram*. This is interesting because despite having an entire community dedicated to bullet journaling, these planning videos are still proliferating within the *StudyGram* genre. Perhaps this is because planning is a core part of studying. All my focal participants share some bullet journal content on their OSC accounts but to varying degrees. Anna and Belle seemed to be engaging more with #bujo through their content. This is mainly because of their skills in calligraphy and art.
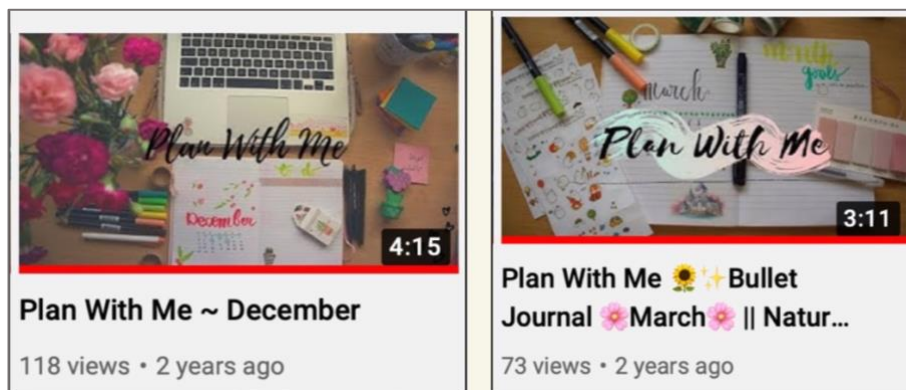
Figure 38. My second and fifth videos shared on my StudyTube channel.

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[33] Videos can be watched here:
December plan with me: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQNh_YeiIQ8&t=1s
March plan with me: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUuVh7WparU&t=1s

Leila enjoyed 'being productive' while having SWM videos in the background:

> *Even if I'm just reading a book and not really studying, I listen to them [StudyTubers]. I think it's a safe space. Kindred spirits that's the word! like Anne [laughter]...Yeah! Like you're in a bubble with like-minded people who they are just sitting there and studying and learning... Yeah, I think it's nice. But not a lot of people like it though! When I ask my sister, she says "no! why would they do that?!" But I enjoy it!*

Leila expressed her deeply felt connection to the community through referring to "*kindred spirits*" taken from her favourite book *Anne of Green Gables* where the original quote is: "Kindred spirits are not so scarce as I used to think. It's splendid to find out there are so many of them in the world" (Montgomery, 2001, p. 231). Leila considered the online community to be a 'safe space' where like-minded people sharing the same interests (kindred spirits) gather and form a community. She also mentioned reading fiction as part of being productive though not necessarily studying. This idea will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

Against this backdrop of experiencing and displaying productivity across OSC, there exists another side that is somewhat less spoken about in the community. This latter is the 'hustle culture' or what is referred to as 'toxic productivity'.

Whilst the productivity culture is highly celebrated and popular in OSC, *StudyGrammers* revealed that they are not productive 'all the time'. Instead, they select productive content to share on their accounts. It seems that they feel the need to post productive content in order to aggregate more followers and motivate them. In other words, there is a link between the three notions: motivation, inspiration, and productivity. However, the over emphasis on 'productive' depictions and displays in OSC suggest that these posts reflect a somewhat distorted reality, since someone cannot be productive all the time or in this case, always have a pristine set-up. More about what happens behind the scenes was revealed in the interviews.

Belle confessed that: *"Even though I put 10 minutes of my week on the net, and it seems like the shiniest most productive part, but in real life, I'm not perfect productive all the time!".* Belle's 'confession' suggests that by sharing productive content she is in some sense deceiving people, creating a false impression of her productivity. This might/ could lead to people feeling inadequate. Belle further noted that despite the stress of university, people still expect to see a constant stream of content. They also expect her to respond promptly to all their enquiries

which stressed her and had even led her to consider quitting the platform. She later got advice from her sister who suggested that she should take a break. Belle took this advice which helped her to get back on track. On a similar note, Anna reflected on this situation by noting:

> *It seems like people have an impression that I'm organised and good at studying all the time when I am not! Part of it, it's hard to present your weakness on the internet while it's easy to present your highlights... My content accurately represents the positive half of my life! Like I present the part of me that stays organised and knows how to study... but I'm obviously not like a productivity machine all the time and it is impossible for everyone to be productive 24/7!*

Once more, in this account, there is a distinction between front of stage and backstage performance. It seems that both Belle and Anna are aware that they only share the highlights of their days and that this 'productive' content does not represent their experience all the time. However, it is important to highlight that the way they might be perceived by others might not be the same because not everyone is equally aware of this distinction. Interestingly, *StudyGrammers* started to address this issue by explicitly referring to this on their platforms and even posting or talking about 'unproductive' moments, for instance, through narrating in captions on a particular day, that they had not done anything. This was particularly noticeable during the COVID19 lockdown when some well-known *StudyTubers* dedicated their platforms to promoting a balance between being productive and having a good self-care routine. In this extract, Leila reflected on this type of content that she was following during COVID19:

> *... they [StudyGrammers] were not too crazy about it [COVID19], they were not: 'oh okay because we're staying home, let's show that we're extra productive and that we're doing a lot of things, no we're not extra crazy about it'. They were coping with the situation, they showed us how to cope with it and if you are tired, you don't have to do a lot of things. I think they promoted for wellbeing and productivity at the same time, like for mental health and productivity... Yes go ahead and do things and be productive but at the same time, be mindful about your mental health...I think it helped because I like to be productive and I hate myself when I'm doing nothing but at the same time when you see people, because you know, if you like it or not, your mind absorbs what you see and what you read, it will absorb it... You're unconsciously just taking what you read and what you see.*

In this extract, Leila uses the adjective 'crazy' to describe the over-emphasis on displaying productivity within OSC. This is also known as toxic productivity (Haney, 2021) or the hustle culture (Costa, 2019). In a Forbes[34] article, Costa (2019, para. 4) defines hustle culture as:

> ... the collective urge we currently seem to feel as a society to work harder, stronger, faster. To grind and exert ourselves at our maximum capacity, every day, and accomplish our goals and dreams at a lightning speed that matches the digital world we've built around ourselves.

Manifestations of this hustle culture in OSC can be seen in popular *StudyGram* content such as long SWM videos including daily ones for more than 10 hours, over beautifying notes with perfectly coloured themes, full to do lists, pulling all-nighters, etc. While productivity is important in *StudyGrammers'* lives, its over-doing can easily become toxic and 'harmful' as (Haney, 2021, p. 1) describes it:

> ... toxic behaviors are behaviors that are harmful to you, your goals, and your daily life. Our culture expresses a lot of value for productivity (we reward the best students, we're impressed when others pull all-nighters, we glorify the entrepreneurs who boast about their work ethic and lack of sleep). Rarely do we celebrate when people are present, rest well, or set and meet reasonable goals.

With more content creators noticing the phenomenon, more tips and realistic goals are being posted that endorse 'healthy productivity'. For instance, especially during the quarantine as Leila noted, *StudyGrammers* made reference to productivity *and* wellbeing. Moreover, as Leila highlights, the emphasis shifted to coping mechanisms with the situation, namely, balancing productivity with mental health.

Interestingly, my observations of the hustle culture revealed some paradoxical elements with regards to the productivity displayed on the platforms and what happens behind the scenes. What is displayed is only the highlights and the *StudyGrammers'* ideal self- that makes the *StudyGrammer* feel good. However, this emphasis might be detrimental to viewers' mental health, especially if they start comparing themselves to these *StudyGrammers'* 'selected productivity' posts. As these issues have surfaced, calls for more balance portrayals and

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[34] American business magazine

speaking out about these issues have emerged among *StudyGrammers* and are being displayed in OSC.

Support

'Supportive' was one of the adjectives often used to describe the community. Data revealed that support in the community manifests in different ways and has both emotional and educational dimensions. Table 8 summarises the main subthemes within this theme:

Table 8: Main subthemes within 'support'

Emotional support	Educational Support
- Changing mindsets	- Study tips, tools and hacks
- Providing a sense of companionship	- Directions and orientations with different
- Creating content recommended by their followers	study courses
- Engagement with likes, comments, and shares	- Student's lifestyle via vlogs
	- Sharing experiences
	- Giveaways (stationary, study tools, etc)

Many study accounts are created to help others and share tips that can improve the overall quality of studying. Rstudies, for instance, told me that although she derived satisfaction from having an account, her primary motivation was to help others: "*It's true the likes make me happy and also help me stay motivated but the first aim of opening this account was to help people.*"

She went on to say that she wants to contribute to changing the mindset of most girls in her country regarding academic success, in particular, their mindset about their lives. Most young girls, she told me, dream of getting married and do not place importance on education. This is why she is keen in her posts to promote the importance of pursuing an education and to showcase aspects of academic life; through this, she wants to show them that education will not hinder their social lives but will contribute to both improvement and enjoyment of the process. Belle described how she felt after helping others:

> *Genuinely I feel happy helping someone else as well, and when people ask me how to stay motivated and they say thank you so much for the advice… that really motivates me as well to keep doing what I do so that people get motivated as well...*

Support also includes the feeling of belonging to an actual community that really cares about their feelings and does not judge them for who they are. Belle mentioned how in her first days on *StudyGram*, a kind *StudyGrammer* helped her and supported her, gave her advice, and contributed to the success she is enjoying now. In her words: *"... when I started uploading my notes, he approached me and helped me a lot with things related to the community and we actually became friends afterwards"*.

Leila described how she tried to support others through her videos: *"I recently posted that video: 'it's a good day even if you wake up late', and it did really well... yeah, and I think these videos that I post are for people but also for myself."* The ideas she tried to convey in that video revolve around productivity and approaching life with a positive attitude. Again, in this instance, there is a certain duality of feelings between *StudyGrammers*, their content and followers. This is encapsulated by Leila when she refers to her posts being '*for people but also for myself*'.

The support Anna offers to people in the community is mainly through her helpful videos in which she provides tips and hacks for students: this includes everything that can be of use to them including note taking techniques, revision hacks, stationery recommendations, getting to a specific college, etc. As veteran *StudyTuber* in the community (2016), she had more than 69 million total views (at the time of writing). She further described her sentiments about some comments she received from people: *"I really like the comments like: 'you really changed my mind about studying', 'I don't hate it anymore' and like: 'you helped me improve my grades because I felt like studying as something to be enjoyed'"*.

My observations on Instagram revealed that support mainly comes through captions and comments. *StudyGrammers* try to support their audience by sharing motivational quotes and personal success anecdotes. They also try to answer their followers' enquiries on each platform whether via comments, direct messages, Stories or voice notes. In Belle's words:

I'm getting more questions from people asking me a lot of things, and I feel like getting sometime and actually respond back because I feel it's rude if you don't and it does pile up, it does pile up a lot!

On YouTube, they share helpful tips and tricks to pass exams, to avoid or overcome burnout and to have an overall successful experience. They also share vlogs about their study days that interestingly attract many views.

'Study buddying' or SWM videos are a big part of the support provision in the community. In these videos, *StudyGrammers* attempt to provide a sense of community and companionship through sharing their individual study sessions. This was especially noticeable during the pandemic when the hashtag #with_me was trending. This latter included many activities including fitness, cleaning and indeed, studying. One SWM video had over seven million views which indicates the appeal of this genre. Usually, viewers who choose to leave comments, express their gratitude in the comments section, illustrating the sense of community and support that this genre provides (further research is needed into the audiences of this content, as I do not cover this).

With regards to my auto-netnography, the way support manifested in my accounts was mainly through engaging with *StudyGrammers* through likes, comments, sharing their content via Stories and DMs. I also used the affordance of asking questions on my Stories and to answer any questions I had received (Figure 39). People were mainly interested in items that I presented on my images and wanted to know where I got them from (A), They also asked about my course, my background and for general tips (B). This will be further discussed in the next Chapter 6 that focuses on engagement. I also shared motivational quotes via Stories as represented in images (C, D).
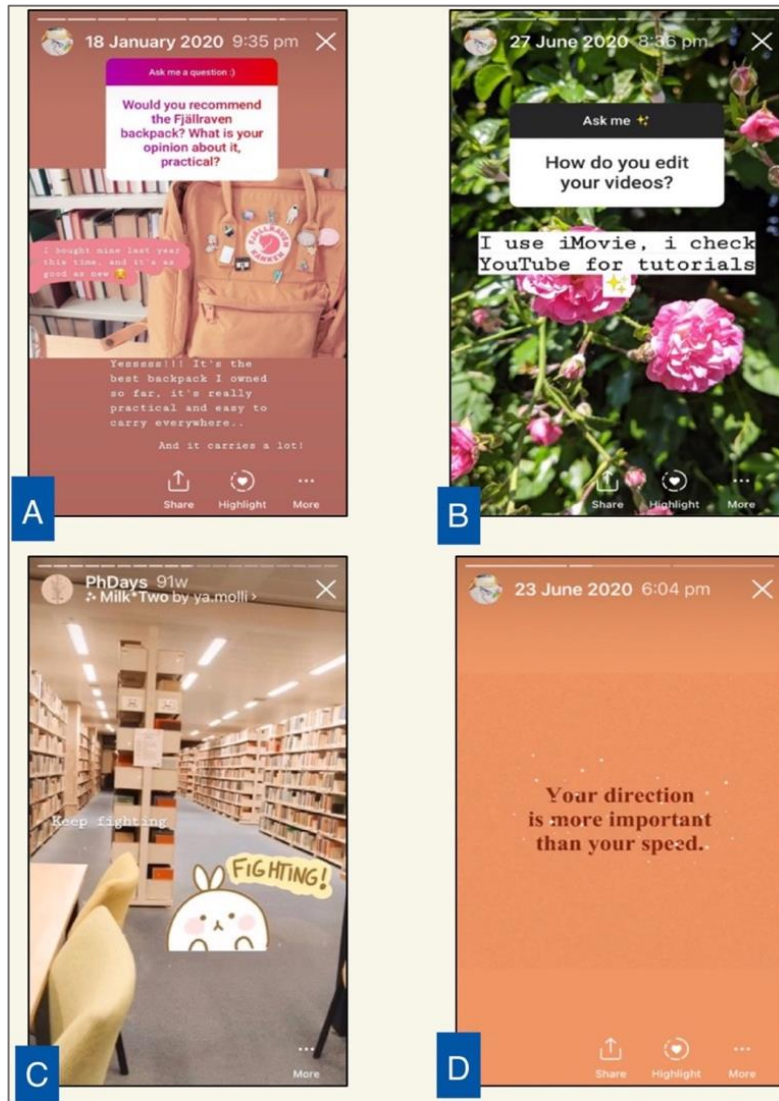
Figure 39. Screenshots from my Stories showing how support was manifested in Instagram Stories

Journey Documentation

The last main theme to emerge as a reason for becoming a *StudyGrammer* is about visually documenting their journey as a student and tracking their progress. In this sense, the platforms become a virtual diary where *StudyGrammers* document their lives in a flexible, multi-modal manner using the affordances of the platforms. The content shared reveals a lot about the details of their daily lives, from waking up in the morning, heading to lectures, cooking to brushing teeth and going to bed. It is in a way a life story documented by themselves and shared with their audience. But it is not any kind of story: it is their academic life story in which they are the heroes of their own plot. In this regard, they carefully choose what to present on their

accounts to the public, depending on what they think is right to post about themselves. This will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Rstudies explained that she wanted to keep her *StudyGram* as a nice memory for herself to look back on when she achieves her dream of becoming a doctor. She talked about how amazing it would be to flick through the posts and cherish the memories. In this sense, the account becomes a form of documentation that can be used as a reflection tool, all be it an updated version. The act of watching videos of themselves doing and achieving things tells a lot about the person. A popular *StudyTuber* had made a video which questioned people's assumptions about her. She explained that she had decided to delete some of her very first videos on YouTube because she felt she had changed and did not want both versions of herself present on the platform. She felt that the old version did not align well with the person she was at the time of the new video.

The *StudyTuber's* decision to delete her early YouTube videos raises questions about authenticity and self-presentation on social media. While it is understandable that individuals change and evolve over time, deleting past content can be seen as an attempt to erase or disown parts of one's history. This behaviour can be seen as a reflection of a broader societal trend where people strive to maintain a carefully crafted online persona, constantly refining their presentations of self to meet evolving expectations and image standards. This behaviour can be viewed through Ditchfield's 'rehearsal stage' of interaction. In this case this *StudyTuber* edited her performance and presentation of self "to make extensive changes to their interactions before sharing them, crafting and perfecting their presentations of self with each edit they do." (Ditchfield, 2020, p.940).

These actions highlight the community's emphasis on carefully managing and refining their online image. The community may prioritise projecting a certain image, aligning with societal expectations, and conforming to an idealised version of themselves (*impression management*). Furthermore, the reference to editing and perfecting interactions before sharing them suggests that the community values the quality and presentation of content. Members may invest significant effort in creating visually appealing, polished, and well-curated posts or videos.

In a similar vein, my auto-netnographic study is within itself a documentation and a change tracking process that has helped me to reflect. I like to film myself studying in a time-lapse

mode and I find it satisfying to watch it at the end of the day, as it makes me see the hard work I have put into it. In this sense, memory is being documented as a digital visual representation and this has a number of benefits. For instance, Belle described the improvement in her note taking system and how it boosted her creative side, especially after finding the GoodNotes app on the iPad. She further noted the shift in the way that she presented her content: *"I feel like the whole aesthetic of my gram [Instagram] completely changed! And that kind of led to the rise I had in numbers"*.

Captions about personal growth and lessons learned are also shared and cherished with their audiences. For instance, when getting brilliant grades or even failing an exam, *StudyGrammers* mostly articulated their growth in terms of feeling happier and more satisfied with their experience. There is less focus on failure and anxiety in the community although such shares are increasing compared to when the community first started.

For both Rstudies and Belle, COVID19 marked the start and peak time for documenting their lives and reflecting later. Rstudies came back to *StudyGram* during quarantine to post more and engage more with the community. In her case, the time and the need to be productive during quarantine pushed Rstudies to grow her account: *"I engaged the best during quarantine as well, especially on Instagram"*. Belle documented more of her study days and recorded more vlogs of her study routines during quarantine, with higher quality and improved aesthetics.

My observations revealed that some *StudyGrammers* document their academic journey in the community for future career-related reasons. They consider this as a valuable addition to their CVs and future jobs interviews. This is mainly because their accounts online show the level of dedication they had for their studies, reveal aspects of their daily lives and illustrate a range of skills that are required to run and manage their accounts, reply to DMs and enquiries. It also illustrates their abilities and knowledge with regards to making content, from finding the right gear to the lighting and aesthetics, to filming, photographing, editing, and engaging with/ responding to audiences.

In my case, my auto-netnographic data served as a great tool to document my research journey as a *StudyGrammer* and an active member in the community. Reflecting on my notes since the start of my PhD journey, re-watching my first video, I gained a lot of insights on the subject of

change and how one might document/ track it. I also noticed improvement in the quality of my content and improvement in the skills required for that practice, which was very satisfying.

From these examples, it seems that journey documentation on OSC can also work as a reflection and shows how central 'reflection' is to the idea of studying in OSC. It pushes against the idea of many that Instagram is a vacuous 'museumification' of our lives. Instead, *StudyGrammers* seem to use it as a space for reflecting on study as a practice, not just an aesthetic. As I mentioned earlier, in my own auto-netnography, while I did use the aesthetic of study, I also engaged in reflection as a practice of study.

This section has explored the main reasons participants gave for joining and contributing to the *StudyGram* culture and becoming a *StudyGrammer*. Starting the chapter with these reasons has created a foundation for understanding the nuances of *StudyGramming* practices. This section has shown that motivation, inspiration, productivity, support, and visual/ journey documentations are the main reasons why my focal participants are *StudyGrammers*. The next section delves more into the conceptualisation of studying as a practice, categorised into three main points: what *StudyGrammers* centre, include and exclude in their content.

What is Centred, Included and Excluded in The Content

Both social media and studying are deeply intertwined in *StudyGrammers'* lives which I argue, leads to finding innovative ways to discuss and share their interests online. Since its emergence via *StudyBlr* in 2014, the community has aggregated many posts and members, all centring their content around studying. Looking at the community from a wider perspective, the data reveals what kind of content is given centre stage as well as what is included and excluded.

My immersion in the community allowed me to become aware of what was **central to** their content and discussions around studying, academia, learning and being productive. These concepts are found across the three platforms of the OSC, highlighting their importance within the *StudyGram* culture. Presented aesthetically, visuals are paramount in the *StudyGram* culture; indeed, it is one of the first characteristics that spring to mind when the name *StudyGram* is mentioned (chapter 4). Members prioritise the way their accounts appear on the three platforms using stationery and aesthetic tools. They also centre their content on the highlights of their days, sharing positive and productive moments.

StudyGrammers also **include** narrations and discussions about their social lives including friends, engagements, university life, health, and family. The level of sharing about their personal lives differs depending on their personality, views, and popularity. They also comment on trending news and events happening in the world; one example is their contribution to the hashtag #blacklivesmatter in late 2020.

Thirdly, most *StudyGrammers* **exclude** referring to their struggles with study and the actual painstaking process of making the pretty notes that they share or the time they spend filming and editing their videos. There is also no mention of burnouts as a result of social media use or reference to 'behind the scenes'*,* 'experiences' and 'lives'. Rstudies described the challenges of producing content on her *StudyGram* and the lack of items and technology that made it hard for her. Making a short IGTV video to share on her page took her two days to film, edit and compile: "*it's really hard for me! I'm not gonna lie. It takes me a long time to make a post or a Story, because I'm a perfectionist who likes her things to come out exactly as in my head.*" Leila had similar struggles with the content of the *StudyGram* culture with regards to stationery:

> *When it all started, it got to a point when it got a little bit too crazy, when you are a StudyTuber, you have to have a lot of stationary, beautiful pens, the MacBook, kindle... all of that. I think especially stationary, it's crazy! They [other StudyGrammers] have a lot, much much more than what they would use, or they need. And they post a lot of pictures and videos about it. And I think I got into this for a while, and actually, went and bought a lot of stickers more than I need and beautiful pens...*

Whilst they both explained that not everyone is able to get these expensive items that are 'overhyped' in the community, *StudyGrammers* do not mention this in their accounts. Interestingly, videos about this issue are increasing on *StudyTube* with *StudyTubers* discussing how certain items are overhyped in OSC and trying to emphasize that that it is not necessary to have these items in order to be a successful student.

My immersion in the community and creating content myself provided deeper insights into the processes that are not made visible in the community, such as organising items for shots, looking for the perfect lighting, taking multiple pictures and then choosing only one, drafting captions, researching to share accurate information and sources, filming, editing, and posting, among others. As such, at the start of my experience in the community, I spent a whole month simply learning about the logistics of the community, even though by then I was an avid

follower. I had to buy a professional camera and then learn how to use it properly. Furthermore, I experienced the never-ending desire to buy other things that I was convinced I needed, like a tripod, memory cards, stationery, longer tripod and many of the items that were common in the community.

What is also excluded is how to use the community and when the scrolling should stop. Due to the nature of social media, scrolling can easily become toxic. More recently, *StudyGrammers* have started initiating discussions about it, trying to raise awareness that what is shared is only the highlights and that *StudyGrammers* do not perform perfectly all the time.

It appears that *StudyGrammers* understand studying online as being a 'medium' through which they can share aspects of their study days. Focusing on aesthetics and visual appeal, they centre productivity and academia, include personal and social dimensions of their lives and mostly exclude mentioning or showing the struggles experienced with the actual process of studying and creating content.

At the same time, more recently, the need to strike a balance between studying and their mental health is being increasingly promoted. In her book *The Only Study Guide You'll Ever Need* (Bowler, 2021), Jade Bowler (a popular *StudyTuber*) discusses the idea of taking care of one's mental health while finding a way to success. Written in an informal style, she provided tips and hacks that her fellow students would need. She also highlighted important aspects that every student can relate to such as the educational system, motivation, inspiration, productivity, and procrastination. In a video on YouTube, she also mentioned how much she loves the actual act of studying, of being in her study corner, drinking her favourite study beverage, playing her favourite study playlist and 'studying'.

The How? Dimensions of 'Study' within *StudyGram*

After getting insights about the reasons and focus on content produced by *StudyGrammers* in the two previous sections, this section will deepen further the discussion and propose a model to understand the concept of 'studying' within the *StudyGram* community. From my data and analysis, I propose that the concept 'studying' can be understood within the following four dimensions: instrumental, ontological, commercial, and affective (Figure 40).
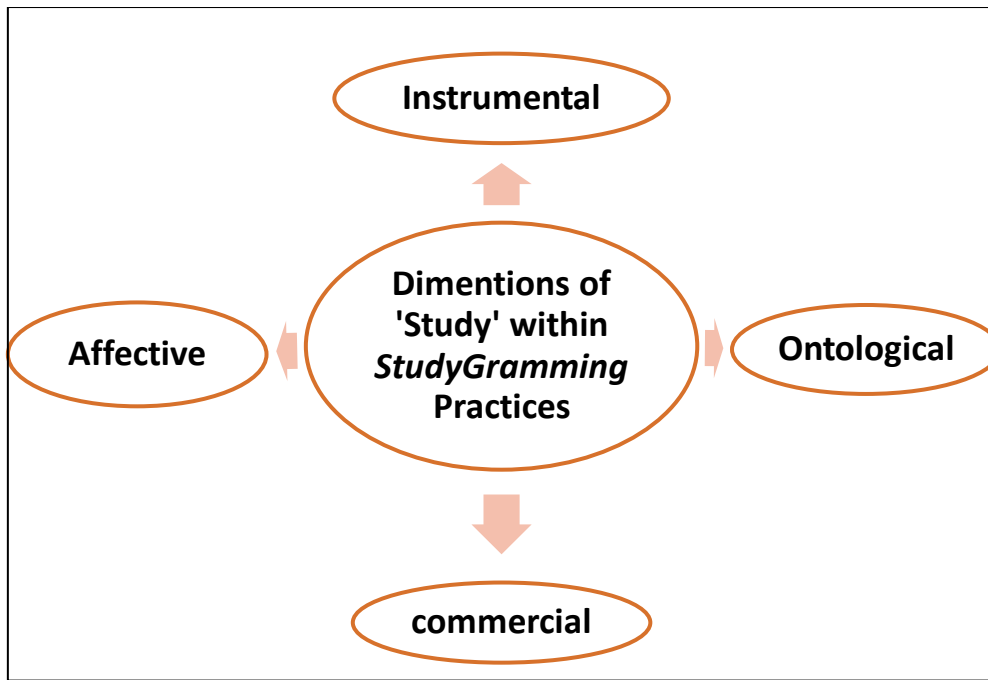
Figure 40. A proposed model for understanding 'studying' within StudyGram community

a. Instrumental Dimension: Study as a Medium

The manifestations of 'studying' as a practice can be viewed as a medium/ instrument deployed by *StudyGrammers* to voice their experiences, concerns and communicate with similar others. 'Studying' is mostly looked at as something that requires hard work, a chore that must be done and a painful journey to be undertaken. It can be proposed from the data that 'studying' on OSC is being used as an instrument to share certain narratives and experiences with similar others and establish social ties. Thus, the content of the *StudyGram* culture reflects and mirrors the students' lives and gives nuanced understandings of key aspects in their lives.

StudyGrammers are promoting a new dimension of 'study' mainly through visual representations. While previous understandings of 'study' highlighted its internal aspects and deep personal struggles, what appears from the data is a shift to external aspects of the process. Here both non-human elements and human emotions are used to express issues around studying. Further to this, the non-human elements such as technology, devices and stationery are very important in signalling the emotional dimension and ideas that the content creators want to share in the community. This instrumental dimension of studying can be seen and felt

through the content presented on these platforms. 'Studying' can be regarded as a medium of expressing the acts and feelings of students within the community.

b. Ontological Dimension: Changing Perspective of Studying

StudyGrammers are mainly sharing knowledge and helpful tips to improve the process of studying by presenting studying as something fun, aesthetically beautiful, and mostly enjoyable. One could argue that ontological assumptions about what studying is are being challenged by *StudyGrammers* when they take something as mundane as notes making and other moments of studying and making it more enjoyable and aesthetic, through calligraphy, photography and presenting things in a certain way.

Being among the pioneers of *StudyBlr*, moving to *StudyGram* and then *StudyTube*, Anna expressed her love of stationery and celebrated the fact that academic life can be done with less pain and more joy. She highlighted that the premise of OSC is trying to make the process of studying a '*less daunting one*' and that the aesthetics, while not necessarily helping to improve grades, *"makes the process of studying more enjoyable and more bearable and getting through the hard work of studying"*. There is a clear and visible shift away from assuming that studying is a solo effort, done privately and accomplished mainly through effort and discipline.

This point is an important one for educators to consider. One thinks of it as a solo effort, done privately and alone (hard work, discipline, etc - all unattractive qualities). Through *StudyGram*, studying is used as a medium that tries to disrupt all those assumptions and ontologically challenge this idea. The discourse of *StudyGram* is heavily characterised by visuals which romanticise and glamourise the process of studying. This is especially seen in the use of filters and the beautification of posts, including the calligraphy, the astonishing filters and the expensive and 'aesthetically' pleasing items and stationery. *StudyGrammers* promote the idea that the process of studying does not need to be arduous and lonely but can feel and look appealing and enjoyable. By most accounts, it seems that studying is being transformed into a more welcoming and enjoyable experience by OSC.

c. Commercial Dimension: 'Studying' Objects and Tools as a Commodity

The high reliance on visuals and objects in the *StudyGram* culture suggests the existence of another dimension to *StudyGram* which is tightly linked to commodities and items/ props. (This is further discussed in Chapter 6 when analysing *StudyGrammers* and influencers). In this case, observations indicate that *StudyGram* has grown as a fertile space for presenting study-related objects and props (laptops, wireless keyboards, iPads, stationery, pens, and even some websites and software, among many other items used by students). Consequently, *StudyGrammers* constitute a new point of contact especially for companies and educational-related institutions to collaborate with them and advertise their products. Through approaching *StudyGrammers*, certain third parties are able to reach more students. (This aspect being beyond the scope of this research, it is included in suggestions for further research in Chapter 9).

d. Affective Dimension

Studying is disseminated through aesthetically pleasing visual content that has cues indicating the general 'study vibe'. Studying within the *StudyGram* community generates different affects/ sentiments that can be clustered into two themes: community centred and self- centred.

Table 9. Themes emerged within the umbrella of affective dimension

Affect	Community	Self-centred	How?
Sense of	Companionship	Accomplishment	Relatability
	Belonging	Self-esteem	Conformity
	Togetherness	Rivalry	Concentration
	Solidarity	Encouragement	Enjoyment
	Fellowship	Motivation/ inspiration	Process
	Combatting loneliness Pressure	Productivity	Beautification
	Commonality	Self- count	Collaboration
		Skills	

In the conceptualisation of 'study' proposed in this research, the last dimension pertains to affective aspects of the community. The Table 9 above suggests that through participation in the community, *StudyGrammers* contribute to generating a range of sentiments which are mutually exchanged between *StudyGrammers* and their audience. In other words, there is a

component of reciprocity. For instance, the sense of companionship yields sentiments of caring and support. As such, *StudyGrammers* endeavour to make their followers feel that there is someone there caring for them, wanting to help them and study together. The sense of belonging and togetherness are also harnessed in the community through sharing experiences and companionship despite being strangers. It is a community that straddles geographical or demographical boundaries.

Engagement involves far more than pressing 'play' and starting to study, especially with SWM videos: one sees personal items, mood, techniques, behaviour, eating, drinking, breaks and much more. In short, *StudyGrammers* open a window onto their own life by pressing the record button and uploading. Moreover, it does not end there as the community aspects arise and are cultivated through communications and engagements after the content is shared (this is further discussed in Chapter 6).

A popular trend in OSC is the notion of 'studying together' which evokes the sense of togetherness. This latter was growing significantly at the time of writing, having become a focus during the pandemic. When speaking about encouragement, Anna described the effectiveness of time-lapse SWM videos in terms of seeing the work done quickly and the sense of satisfaction this provides; therefore, this genre is more common on her channel, but she also makes live real-time SWM videos in response to her followers' requests. By contrast, Leila and Rstudies stated a preference for real time/ live SWM which they share, pre-recorded, on their accounts, because of the sense of companionship they provide.

Feelings on the personal level involve a sense of accomplishment and productivity. *StudyGrammers* are encouraged by seeing their accounts getting attention and followers, motivating them to create more content and therefore, to study more. Another affect to emerge from the data is rivalry. Though not stated explicitly by *StudyGrammers*, I observed in OSC that elements of competitiveness and rivalry are apparent in SWM videos seeing the number of study hours being completed. Another area is in the degrees pursued (medicine for instance) or in the items owned and displayed.

Despite the social aspects and collective practices that *StudyGramming* has brought to 'studying', an element of individuality remains in the sense that everyone learns in a different way. This was further explained by Anna: *"studying is an individual thing; people decide what*

works for them". In this regard, *StudyGrammers* share what they think will help other students, but it is then up to students to choose what to take from the community. This individual and affective side of studying will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

Finally, being a *StudyGrammer* does not only imply producing content but also, crucially, being a member of the community: their participation and engagement leads to becoming an influencer. This will be the focus of Chapter 6, which explores *StudyGrammers* and their representations and interactions online.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the foundations regarding the conceptualisation of 'studying*'* within the *StudyGram* community. Three key elements of why *StudyGrammers* join the community were discussed; their practice was analysed in terms of what is central, what is included and excluded. Finally, four dimensions of studying were proposed and discussed: instrumental, ontological, affective, and commercial.

The findings in this chapter address the central questions in this research as they contribute to understanding the *StudyGram* phenomenon and offer insights into 'studying' as understood and transmitted in OSC by *StudyGrammers*. I have suggested that the community is built through a combination of both external and internal aspects of the studying process. I have argued that it represents a shift from being an individual activity to a social sharable activity. Moreover, *StudyGramming* practices transcend the traditional understanding of studying and blurring the lines between formal and informal learning, via the content creation, habits, and practices.

This chapter proposes a conceptualisation of studying that goes beyond the visible that is manifested online, arguing that 'studying' within OSC is more than reading and writing to seek knowledge but entails further and deeper intricacies including content creation, interaction with audience and dealing with the pressures associated with that. In the following chapter, the focus will be on *StudyGrammers* and their presentations online, along with the engagement and interactions that characterise OSC.

Chapter 6: *StudyGrammers* (Persona, Engagement, and Interactions)

Introduction

After analysing the concept of 'studying' and investigating the different understandings of 'study' in the *StudyGram* community, I now focus on the *StudyGrammers*, their self-presentation, and engagement in and through OSC. Understanding *StudyGrammers* and their behaviours provides more depth to *StudyGramming* and therefore to the subject of 'studying' in OSC.

This chapter seeks to unpack the ways in which *StudyGrammers* exist in the community along with other members. Furthermore, my auto-netnographic data and discussions will be provided to reveal more in-depth interpretations. Drawing upon the four in-depth interviews with focal participants, my immersion journal and netnographic fieldnotes, this chapter will focus on the *StudyGrammers* discussing three dimensions whereby I first examine the ways in which my participants negotiated their identities. This is through exploring elements in OSC of profiles across the three platforms and labels often attributed to them (*StudyGrammers*, *StudyTubers* and *influencers*). Moreover, *StudyGrammers'* self-presentation along with their activities and practices and interactions within OSC will be explored. I then move to analyse data about their engagement and interactions with their followers in OSC revealing interesting findings about types of followers and interaction aspects within the *StudyGram* culture.
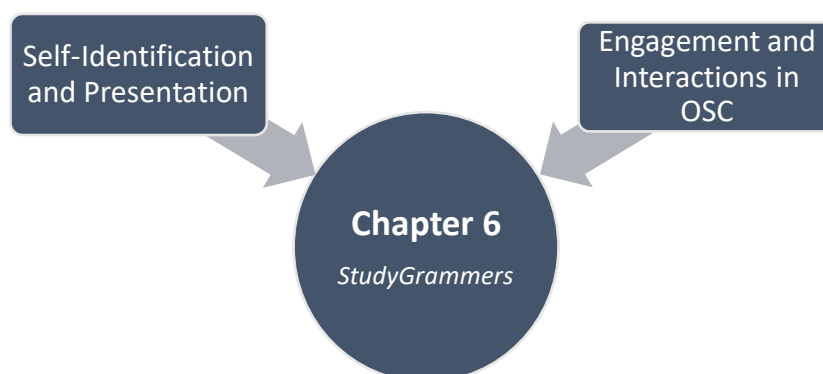
Figure 41. Visualising chapter 6- StudyGrammers

Self-Identification and Presentation

One of the discernible characteristics of the *StudyGram* culture is that it exists within a community teeming with members. These members do not all have the same reasons of joining the community nor are equal in their degree of participation and engagement. Netnographic observations revealed that the level of participation helps in shaping the type of users. For instance, 'lurkers' are usually known for their passive presence that is not indicated with participation signs (such as posts, likes, or comments, etc.). However other types of users can sometimes be lurkers in the sense that they have their own fair share of 'lurking' behaviour. Even *StudyGrammers* who post content will nonetheless spend time browsing and engaging in ways *beyond* posting, commenting, and liking. Consumption is also a large part of their behaviour mainly through scrolling. Other classification of the members in OSC can be contoured in relation to acquaintances and strangers. With a focus on *StudyGrammers*, the following sections will provide more data about how they identify and present themselves in the community.

StudyGrammers' Profiles across Platforms

When talking about the identities revealed online, I thought it is crucial to analyse and reflect upon these three salient aspects: chosen account names, profile pictures, and the biography 'About' section. These three elements were specifically chosen based both on my lurking experience and my observations. I found that they are the main visible aspects that users were asked to personalise by OSC platforms/ sites. Moreover, they are the elements most likely to catch audiences' attention while scrolling. In addition, they provide a summary of the user behind the content using visuals of both text and images including emojis.

All my participants did not use their real names as display names on their *StudyGram/ StudyTube/ StudyBlr* accounts. Both Belle and Rstudies never mentioned their real names; however, Anna and Leila shared their names at some point through their content and they are known to some of their followers. Most *StudyGrammers/StudyTubers* in the *StudyGram* culture add the suffix 'studies' to their chosen name to echo their core activity in the community. I chose a similar approach when I created my accounts using the name: @*marystudiessunshine*. This choice perhaps hints towards a segmentation of identity which my participants confirmed; all my 4 participants had a personal account in addition to their *StudyGram*. As the name

suggests, they keep their personal accounts private where they share personal snippets of their lives. For instance, Anna shares vlogs and non-study related content on her personal channel. Also, Belle shares her selfies, family, and personal events on her personal Instagram account.

These are usually subject to change by *StudyGrammers*, but they usually range among selfies, to *StudyGram* style photos, to other pictures that the account holder prefers. Given this, the profile picture serves multiple purposes, revealing some aspects of the person behind the content as well as showing their relationship towards the community. For instance, Anna and Leila used their own pictures but not in a selfie mode. While Rstudies used an anime schoolgirl holding a phone, Belle's profile picture featured some books, coffee, and stationery. In a similar fashion, I mimicked the *StudyGram* popular style photos and took a picture specifically to use for my profile[35] (Figure 42) where I chose to show my laptop, three coloured pens, glasses, decoration holder, colourful sticky notes, book, and my opened notebook.

Figure 42. My profile picture on my study social media accounts

As shown in Figure 42, only the part inside the circle shape is shown on the accounts. I used more filters and tried to position the parts I wanted inside the round part of the picture. Again, this reflects the idea of choice of representation given to the content creator. This is especially reflected upon when posting pictures because it takes many trials until the right shot is reached and then it goes through light edits and filtering. Furthermore, this emphasises the impact of

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[35] As it was previously detailed in the ethics section, my participants identifying data will not be explicitly used to ensure privacy but will be described and commented on to provide nuance data. Hence, my personal data from my autoethnography is used to elucidate the observations.

the lurking behaviour in the community whereby is used to understand the expected norms, guidelines, and trends in the *StudyGram* culture.

From the display of my profile picture, some messages can be revealed such as being a student, reading and the writing in the Arabic language that indicates my background. It also reflects some messages about the objects used such as devices, stationary, coffee, etc. and the social status associated with it. Interestingly, pictures within OSC- whether posts or display pictures are loaded with different meanings according to the items and objects presented, the ways in which they are displayed and arranged, in addition to the viewers' own perspectives and assumptions about the pictures. Therefore, the different aesthetics of OSC posts communicated through objects positioned and displayed have the potential to transfer meanings and ambiances to the *StudyGrammers* and viewers (as discussed in the aesthetics section in Chapter 4).

The third aspect that reflects a portion of their identity is the 'bio section'- also called 'About' on YouTube and Tumblr. This is an optional textual space where users introduce themselves. YouTube provides a lengthier space for self-description and the affordance to include other related websites, which makes it a great opportunity for 'fishing connection[36]'. Tumblr and Instagram are more restricted in allowing users to include key words of who they are. Most *StudyGram* accounts mention the type of their account and their category such as: 'artsy *StudyGram'*, 'personal study blog', 'digital creator', etc. Some also include their study subjects, fields of interest, age, location, hobbies, links mostly via 'linktr.ee' (which is a link that collects links and makes them easily accessible to users), and emails (image (A)), Figure 43. In image (B), my *StudyBlr* profile picture is different because I changed it, but it is still regarded as a *StudyGram* style picture. Even though I am not very active on Tumblr, it was appealing to change the profile picture.

---

[36] I use this term to refer to *StudyGrammers'* behaviour of posting their links of other accounts on different platform. This increases the chances of growing their presence on different platforms and being discovered.
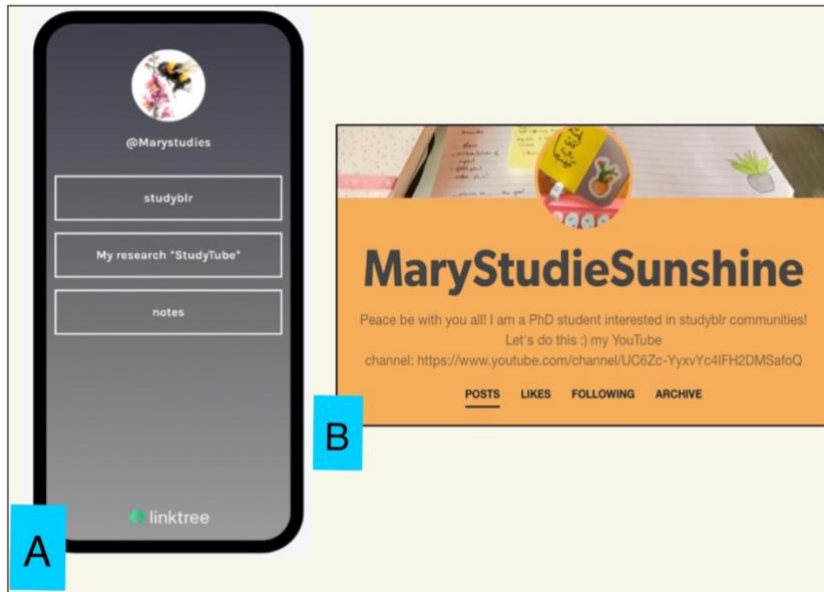
Figure 43. My linktr.ee page that redirects to other accounts (A) and my StudyBlr 'About' section (B)
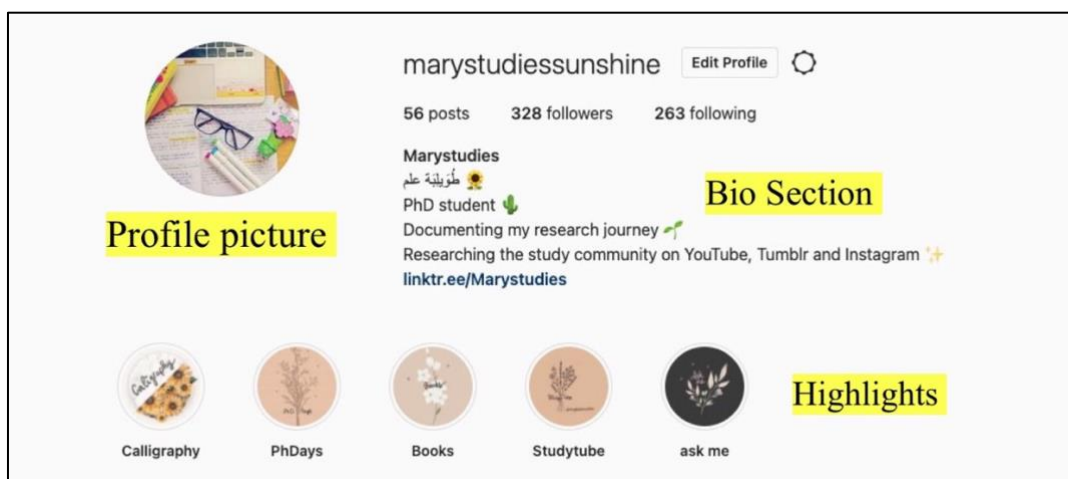
Figure 44. My StudyGram Profile front page from Instagram desktop view

As presented in Figure 44, I have noted from the observations that the 'bio section' on Instagram is also very often used for temporary links of events and trends such as businesses or charity supports. On Instagram, this highlights a space where Stories can be archived for easy reference and access. My observations revealed that most *StudyGrammers* prefer to personalise their highlights in different colour schemes and themes in congruence with the appearance and aesthetic of their profiles. Additionally, this function is used to pin their Stories. Interestingly, highlights present a wide window to the world of the *StudyGrammers* because of

the variety of themes presented there. For instance, and from the highlights in Figure 44, at a glance, one may decipher that I like calligraphy, I share PhD days moments, reading books, I have a *StudyTube* channel, and the last highlight unveils more about me because it contains answers to questions asked by my followers. Again, this is one potential assumption about me as different people may perceive things differently.
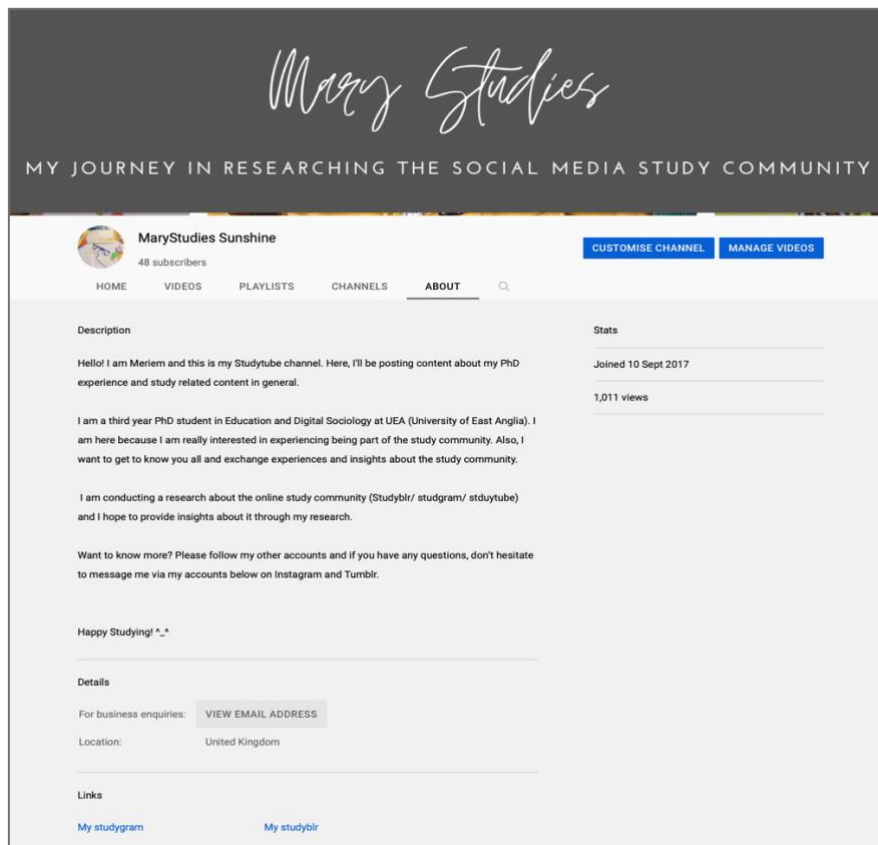
Figure 45. My StudyTube description section on YouTube

Significantly, it is worth highlighting the fact that though the format of presenting profiles is the same, it is utilised very differently on different platforms. For instance, as noticed from Figure 45, more disclosure was provided on my YouTube channel because of the affordance of writing a lengthy text. Therefore, I disclosed myself as a researcher aligning with my research ethics, provided my name, year of study (this is updated), university name, my location, and my email. The next subsection will introduce the different labels given to the content creators and how they negotiate them.

From these descriptions, it can be connoted that *StudyGrammers* present their profiles on OSC using the affordances each platform offers, in Goffman's words these are the props used by performers. This representation is primarily linked to being a student and 'performing studying'. The visual nature of 'performing studying' in OSC reveals aspects of content creators' taste, aesthetic, mood, settings, and appearance which are not explicitly said but can be deduced by others- depending on their views and assumptions too. This also includes the different arrangement of items and selection which item to display. We can therefore infer that *StudyGrammers* cater platforms' affordances to 'craft' their front stage in accordance with OSC trends and general conventions through the rehearsal stage (Ditchfield, 2020). In other words, *StudyGrammers* deliberately shape their online personas, content, and interactions to fit the expectations and norms of the OSC. This process is compared to a rehearsal stage, where *StudyGrammers* refine and perfect their online presence before presenting it to their audience.

OSC Labels: StudyTubers, StudyGrammers and/or Influencers

In this subsection, I explore the labels: *StudyGrammers*, *StudyTubers* and/or study social media influencers that are dominant labels ascribed to active users posting study related content. It was crucial to ask my focal participants about these labels and how they view them. Furthermore, I will reflect on my experience and discuss my perspective stemmed from my auto-netnography.

StudyTubers and/ or StudyGrammers

Alongside the frequently used hashtags in the community, on Instagram the labels #studytuber (over 4K posts) and #studygrammer (over 1.5 M posts) are used by *StudyGrammers* to tag their *StudyGram* content. Figure 46 shows the result of an online search for the tags on Instagram (at the time of writing).

#studygrammer
1,516,580 posts

#studytuber
4,197 posts
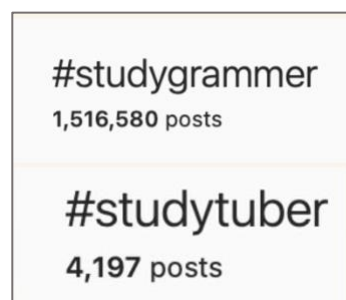
Figure 46. Hashtags numbers on Instagram dubbed #studygrammer and #studytuber

Referring to netnographic observations, most of the posts under these tags represent *StudyGram* culture content- as discussed in the two previous data chapters- with a noticeable presence of people's own pictures, namely selfies under the #studytuber posts. However, the #studygrammer posts rarely contained that (it is study related items-centred). In this regard, some *StudyTubers* and *StudyGrammers* prefer to reveal their faces online while others prefer to just show their hands or their backs while studying, i.e., not revealing their faces. I was among the latter category as I preferred to not reveal my own face neither on my videos nor in pictures. This variety in content suggests a degree of flexibility in creating content within OSC and the prevalence of this genre among users.

Despite her considerable presence on *StudyBlr* and *StudyGram*, Anna best described herself to be a *StudyTuber* because she prefers the affordances provided on YouTube and due to her large audience there (1.05 million subscribers, in January 2022). Belle on the other side, hesitated in answering noting that she does not consider herself as any of them. She then clarified: "*I'm just a student and I'm just doing what I do, putting it out there, so I can't even tell I'm a StudyGrammer or a StudyTuber but if it fits in that category side, I guess I am.*" Furthermore, she drew that distinction: "*... but at the same time, I guess I just wanna be a student who does this when I want to, I don't want to have a pressure of 'you have to do this!'*". It appears that Belle's response reveals her preference of considering posting *StudyGram* content as a passion rather than a job namely the responsibility that might be linked with the titles tied to people's expectations of constant content with a certain frequency and quality.

In Leila's case, she expressed her sentiments in attempting to consider herself a *StudyTuber*, she is not fully one yet, but she is aspiring to be one. She further expressed her belonging to the community noting that people contact her and refer to her as a *StudyTuber*. Interestingly, Leila's answer echoed how she views the label *StudyTuber* in relation to her followers' number and not how she feels about herself. Whilst Leila's followers are not as big as Belle's and Anna's, she considered herself to be an influencer who influences others to a certain degree. She also noted the big influence the community has on her as a student and an aspiring lifelong learner. In her words: *"I influence like to a small degree because my platform is relatively small as I told you and the number of followers, I have is small compared to others"*.

This raises an interesting view about numbers of followers and how this aspect influenced the way my participants looked at the labels *StudyGrammer/ StudyTuber* and influencer. Given

this, and before reflecting on the label '*StudyGrammer*', Rstudies drew a distinction between two categories of *StudyGrammers* that she encountered on the community. The first are the famous ones with a considerable number of followers whom she thought have the attitude of beauty bloggers. She explained that they share more than what a typical *StudyGrammer* would share. The second are not that famous but are very close to their followers providing help whenever they can. She then questioned labelling herself a *StudyGrammer*:

> Meriem: *ok! So, do you consider yourself to be a StudyGrammer? And why?*
>
> Rstudies: *Honestly, I don't! I share what I do to inspire people! But I don't consider myself to be one...[laughter] I don't know why [laughter]*
>
> Meriem: *Ok! So, what does it take to be a StudyGrammer?*
>
> Rstudies: *I think it's a state of mind before it is in the platform... I also think that according to my experience and from my point of view, when I post something (post, Story, challenge), people who interact are not that many... But real StudyGrammers, who have lots of followers, when they post a picture for example a lot of people will join them and start to study [laughing] that's what's in my head...*
>
> Meriem: *Ahh! so for you: to be a StudyGrammer, it depends on the interactions of your followers?*
>
> Rstudies: *hmm... yeah! It includes the followers' interaction, plus the account should be all dedicated for studies... for my case, I mingled my account for studies plus lifestyle posts, books (I love books) ... including also what helps to study with for example healthy food...*
>
> Meriem: *oh I see! So you don't consider yourself as StudyGrammer?*
>
> Rstudies: *Me! No [smiling]*

From this interview excerpt, it seems that Rstudies was confused about whether to consider herself a *StudyGrammer* or not. Her response denoted one of her aims in joining OSC which is '*to inspire people*' revealing the importance of inspiration in OSC (as discussed in Chapter 5). Moreover, in the second part of her answer, we can note that her views only cast some light on one aspect of being a *StudyGrammer* which is the number of followers. Perhaps she did not feel that she can be identified as a *StudyGrammer* because she compared herself with other *StudyGrammers* who have more followers than her. She has also highlighted other aspects she thought were important to be a *StudyGrammer* which are followers' interaction (as will be discussed later in this chapter) which is congruent with Goffman's idea of interaction between performer (*StudyGrammers*) and audience (Goffman, 1959). Rstudies has also highlight the aspect of unifying content, i.e., content should be only revolving around studies and aspects

within the broader topic of studying. In her case, she 'flavoured' her account with some 'lifestyle' posts that she thinks help to study and she gave one example of healthy food.

In a nutshell, *StudyGrammers seem to* play a major role in deciding what is presented on the platforms depending on their own views and what they think is important to share. This finding refers again to the centrality of studying in OSC and the entanglement of being both a student and a *StudyGrammer*.

Influencers

Perhaps being a *StudyGrammer* or a *StudyTuber* are deeply tied to posting study-related content. But how about influencing? Do they consider themselves to be influencers? Anna defines the 'study influencer' as:

> *A study influencer might just be someone who introduces a lot of new ideas into the study topic and make certain things more popular; like someone who introduces a study method from a niche and expand it to a wider market or something like that! (Anna)*

On the other hand, Rstudies held a different position about influencing, in her words:

> *I will never consider myself as one [influencer], because I believe that no one influences the other. The followers/ audience are the ones who decide whether they are influenced or not! So, the influence comes from the followers themselves and not from myself, they decide! (Rstudies)*

Interestingly, Anna defined the study influencer in terms of content shared, while Rstudies' view suggests that the '*decision to be influenced*' is entirely in the hands of the audience. She later detailed that she sees followers as 'free', and it is completely up to them to 'get influenced' and take the good and leave the bad or the opposite. Therefore, she discussed the idea of influence with regards to followers more than how she feels about being one. She later added: "*there's no such a thing as influencer if they didn't find people who get influenced, this 'job' never existed!*".

Furthermore, the aspect of 'agency' has also been introduced when Anna pointed out that her influence is not as large to cover large groups nor she does influence how they study, but rather she *"gives out tips and people can pick up from what she put down"*. Again, the followers' number is mentioned. Further to this, she illustrated this through the example of fashion

influencers and how they decide the trends for the season but in the case of *StudyGramming* she cannot determine the trends of studying because '*studying is an individual thing, people decide what works for them'*. There seems to be some distancing from the idea of *influencer*, as it is seen as a negative linked in to 'fakeness' and 'beauty', whereas there seems to be a focus in *study* influencing on 'realness' and 'help'.

From the above views and overall interview data, it is suggested that influencers have a tight connection to the number of followers and what they take from the 'influencers' and decide to act upon it or not. Whilst they indirectly consider themselves as *StudyGrammers/ StudyTubers*; I noticed that it was somewhat unclear for them to utter directly their identification with these labels. Even though both Anna and Belle have many followers, they still feel uneasy being identified as an influencer. This might possibly be because they were not ready for the question or because they thought it was humble to hedge their answers.

The example of beauty influencers was brought up in all the interviews. Belle believed that the term influencer does also exist in the *StudyGram* community. She further gave an example with items promoted/ presented on the famous pages and how she feels the need to buy them: "*when you constantly see something, you're kinda influenced*". She explained how by seeing these items again '*your mind will make a link to where you first saw it and you will want to purchase it as well*', she elaborated. That reflects the power of visuals in promoting objects even though the first intention of posting might not be to make people buy something. This promotion also applies to ideas and habits. For instance, the habit of waking up at 5am which is disseminated in the *StudyGram* culture through vlogs and Instagram Stories. As such, Leila posted a vlog on her channel about this challenge of waking up early. When watching the videos, subconsciously one finds themselves adhering/ adopting certain ideas and principles; hence, implying that study is in some way a routine/ behaviour.

In literature, (Abidin, 2015, p. 1) defined influencers as:

> Influencers are everyday, ordinary internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in digital and physical spaces, and monetise their following by integrating 'advertorials' into their blog or social media posts. (p. 1)

Referring to this definition by Abidin (2015), *StudyGrammers* ticked all the four boxes. This includes: the large following, their posts in both textual and visual format, sharing their personal lives (all revolving around studying), interactions and even monetising their platforms through advertising (directly and indirectly) objects. This latter includes earning money and items being sent to them for the purpose of presenting them on their platforms. Mostly sponsorships including all that relates to students and what they need. The major category is stationery and websites. Abidin has further delineated other characteristics of being an influencer including the constant sharing of personal lives and characteristics of rawness and creativity. Reflecting on the characteristics of *StudyGrammers* shows that they manifest aspects of influencers. Therefore, *StudyGrammers* can be seen within the category of influencers. In fact, this is congruent with the definition proposed by (Izquierdo-Iranzo & Gallardo-Echenique, 2020, p. 119) of a *StudyGrammer*:

> ... a student who exercises, through Instagram, a peer-to-peer mentoring role in the academic field, not only sharing notes and outlines, but also transmitting advice, encouragement and experiences... the studygrammer incorporates the influencer nature: mastery of the aesthetics and monetization of online activity, where the academic purpose adds its own characteristics. (p. 119)

When talking about influencers, the impact should also be highlighted because it is an inevitable aspect in the influencing process. This will be detailed in the next chapter (chapter 7) where the impact of OSC on *StudyGrammers* will be unpacked on three levels (academic, social, and personal).

Self-Presentation

Observations of content across platforms and people's comments and discussions about *StudyGrammers* revealed the following themes that can be classified within two aspects: how users are seen and what users present. First, observing the accounts and talking to my focal participants, revealed some assumptions and descriptions that are usually given to them. For instance, people usually ascribe to them some descriptions as being knowledgeable, study enthusiasts, nerdy students who do well at school, have the latest devices, get money from their endeavour, are popular, perhaps showing off, role models and students. On the other hand, they confessed that they represent themselves as being keen students, study enthusiast, experienced students, normal students, motivational and inspirational speakers, and vloggers.

What is posted online produces rich data about users' personalities and the way they choose to present themselves to others. Conspicuously on *StudyTube*, *StudyGrammers* use different tools to express themselves whether explicitly or implicitly. For instance, there is a lot of personality and identity aspects shown in SWM videos. Study tips, techniques, tools, advice, morning, and evening routines are the major themes centralised in their content. Furthermore, the inclusion, or the lack of personal details such as what they eat in a day, sports, hobbies, revision, aspirations, religion, mental health, houses, family, friends, etc, provides hidden information about the *StudyGrammers* and shapes their identity and personality in the minds of their viewers. Moreover, their way of speaking, dialect, language offers hints about their geographical location, intellectual level, social status and more[37]. All this content is part of the front stage (Goffman, 1959). However, it has been noticed that *StudyGrammers* strategically reveal aspects of their *backstage* as a front stage using their creativity and technological literacy. As such, filming their content from their bedrooms, kitchen and bathrooms helps in disseminating a feeling of togetherness and trust to their audience. Even though it seems that they are sharing their backstage with followers, there still exists an arena not shown online, i.e., behind the scenes including things they consciously chose not to share. This was very noticeable through my auto-netnography- which I will illustrate after revealing my focal participants' views. Here the concept of impression management can be used to elucidate the process that *StudyGrammers* pass through before, during and after sharing data. It seems that *StudyGrammers* manage their performance through selecting what they want their audience to think and 'have impressions' about them. This seems like an attempt to break the fourth wall[38] of influencer culture. It is a sort of 'realism' but it's also not totally real because it is still a presentation, but just a more intimate one that acknowledges the humanity and realness of the individual.

Self-Presentation Through Privacy and Content Sharing

Interviews uncovered salient information about privacy issues and whether their content adequately represents who they are. All focal participants articulated that they share only what they want to share. In addition, the content is revised and checked before being publicly posted online. Indeed, this echoes their control of their representation online (impression

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[37] This is subject to the audience, because people perceive things differently according to their way of thinking.
[38] The fourth wall refers to an imaginary wall that separates between performers and their audiences.

management). The following are snippets of what they said concerning the theme of privacy and level of authenticity in what they share:

> *I think everybody says that, but we share what we want to show. You know, we're not too foolish to show private or what we don't want to show. And the things that I show are not that private, because I make the videos all around being productive, so, nothing is really private! (Leila)*

> *I share my desk, my notes, but not my life! Like even if I leave this account active for 10 years/ 20 years (if Instagram still exists), even if I get married and get kids, I will never share this! OF COURSE, NO! I can share something that is not personal or has close relation to emotions (deep)... (Rstudies)*

Rstudies later expressed her happiness to share study tips and advice with her followers because it makes her feel both helpful and hopeful that she will be assisted when she needs it, emphasising her belief in the concept of reciprocity.

Being a self-described introverted person, Belle mentioned that the main reason she does not show her face on her *StudyGram* and *StudyTube* is safety reasons as well was her being shy. She also highlighted that what she shares online is her creative side where she tries to craft "*the aesthetic that wasn't there [in OSC]*" by mingling art and décor with her study notes; in her words: "*I just put up what I think I like or what I feel comfortable sharing*". Belle also noted that she does not want people to google her name and find everything about her, hence the reason why her study accounts have pseudonyms.

The details in the visuals reveal a lot about the content creator, what they share reveals dimensions of their personality and what they like/ dislike. Despite the different perceptions of people in interpreting content, it always reveals something. But there is another dimension which is that content attracts certain companies and businesses to contact them to promote their goods and they agree or disagree depending on the conditions. This usually happens via emails as Belle and Anna received. They usually 'hunt' *StudyGrammers* who have large number of followers so they will get more clients. More about sponsorships will be detailed in the engagement subsection below.

Becoming a StudyGrammer: My Experience

Participating in the community made me aware of many things that happen backstage and even though they are sharing what seems like a backstage, there is always a 'back-backstage' where

all the preparations happen and what they do not want to reveal. This is almost like a digital form of a metafiction, but without letting anyone see the production. Like being in the wings of a stage, and not fully backstage. It can be explained as an awareness of the façade, but also a clear line that hides production and effort.

Someone might ask: *what is the backstage of StudyGrammers?* This was only possible to know through the interviews as well as my deep immersion and participation in the community. Their burnout, anxiety, their search for information about a certain topic before they share it with their audience, their grades, family, preparation of the scene to take that perfect shot, preparing coffee, arranging things in a certain way, cleaning, arranging lights, fitting tripod, stimulating their inspiration through scrolling through other *StudyGram* posts or on Pinterest to see the trends and what others are posting, waking up early to delete bad comments if they receive any,...etc, are among the answers given to the above question. Overall, they curate their content around what they think would be great for audience to see and assume about them, to conform to the *StudyGram* culture and share what makes them feel better.

To elucidate the experience and provide a perspective from the eyes of the beholder, I will narrate my experience of being a *StudyTuber*, choosing my first video as an example, referring to my data and reflections and providing screenshots and excerpts from my fieldnotes and immersive journal when suitable.

Referring to the ascribed labels discussed above and from my experience of sharing data on the platforms, I truly felt like a *StudyGrammer* and a *StudyTuber*. This is simply because I was sharing that specific content within the *StudyGram* culture- study related content. Despite the number of followers, which was very low compared to my focal participants, I still felt that I was a *StudyGrammer* and felt I belonged to the community. This is also due to the other activities tied to being a *StudyGrammer/ Tuber*: arranging objects to take pictures, buying items I see in the community, owning the specific stationary, getting a DSLR[39], filming videos, editing, posting, and responding to comments and direct messages. Given this, I also found myself associated with the influencer label, not in the vernacular meanings associated with presenting items, earning money, and gathering a big number of followers; but it was more about knowing that people were watching my content and they might get influenced by it. I

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[39] DSLR: digital single-lens reflex camera.

also lived the role of a *StudyTuber*, the following excerpt from my fieldnotes (my immersive journal and my data created online) described snippets of my journey in posting the first videos.

Tracing it back to the time before I knew the community existed, I was already taking pictures of my study desk and items. Back then, I did not do it for a clear purpose, but I think mainly because I loved to take photos of everything. Fortunately, I found the following *StudyGram* style pictures stored in an old SD card- that I never thought would be useful, they date back to 2015 when I was doing my BA in Linguistics (Figure 47). Even though I had social media at the time, but I never posted them.

Figure 47. StudyGram style pictures from 2015

In 2016, I came across the *StudyBlr* community on Tumblr and started following and getting influenced by it. The following pictures show the difference and improvements in my *StudyGram* style pictures including the way my notes were taken (Figure 48), the items used, and the things presented with the way they were arranged (chocolate, notebook, stationary, decorations, notes).

Figure 48. StudyBlr picture of my study desk (26/01/2016).

Figure 49. Another StudyBlr picture of my study desk (05/05/2016).

At a first glance at Figure 49, one can feel the *StudyGram* vibes, mainly because of the presence of the laptop (MacBook). Funnily enough, this laptop was not even mine as it belonged to a friend, nor the pink phone on the left (my sister's). This situation reveals an important aspect about things presented online that highlights the famous saying "Things are not always what they seem". Other ideas can be deciphered from the objects presented on the picture; for instance, the English dictionary (I was a language student), the colourful pens (I love art), the stickies in the wall (written in Arabic, my mother tongue), the glasses box (short-sighted), etc. This offers highlights into the individuality and diversity of *StudyGrammers*, showing that behind the aesthetically pleasing images, there are unique stories and backgrounds. Moreover,

this observation invites reflection on the complexity and multidimensionality of individuals, beyond the curated images shared on social media.

The story continues, reaching to that Friday on September 27th, 2019, when I got my first DSLR camera for the purpose of creating content for this research. The following excerpt from my fieldnotes describes the scene:

> *I ordered the camera several days ago. This was only done after a long search on YouTube for the best camera to have for this project. Looking for both small, budget, and high-quality camera wasn't an easy job. Luckily, I finally decided to get a Canon 200D.*
>
> *I remember how overwhelmed I was when I was trying to buy a camera. All the names, numbers and symbols made me really conscious on how ignorant I am in this field. Reading through these notes one month ahead makes me feel reassured that no one was born knowledgeable and as cliche as it may seem, practice makes perfect!*
>
> *My excitement is real! I've always wanted to have a DSLR or a professional camera. During that period of waiting, I spent time looking for educational videos on YouTube to learn how to set it up and to get started, this includes 'how to' videos, unboxing and setting up the camera.*
>
> *While I was having my breakfast in the living room, the doorbell rang, and the postman came with the camera in hand. I didn't expect it to be mine as the box was smaller than what I expected. I was so excited that I couldn't eat the whole bowl of granola topped with banana slices and blueberries.*
>
> *I quickly ran upstairs to my room, put my phone on the recording mode and I started unboxing. I was happy until I discovered that the case and the SD card are missing but got reassured after receiving an email from the seller telling me it's going to be there tomorrow. I spent a while shooting short videos of the rainy weather outside my room, books in my room and just me! I found it a bit hard at the beginning but it's getting easier over time, and I can't wait to start filming my first ever YouTube video…* (Fieldnotes, 27/09/2019).

The entries in my diary described my days trying to learn about the camera and attempting to acquire and improve skills needed for *StudyGramming*. Therefore, my first (high-quality) *StudyGram* picture was taken, edited, and posted on both *StudyGram* and *StudyBlr* on 29/09/2019 (Figure 50). That specific picture looked different (neater) than my previous ones as I tried to mimic *StudyGram* culture style and put real effort into it.

Figure 50. My first StudyGram post using my DSLR.

> *That morning, I prepared my breakfast and I thought of sharing an Instagram-able picture online. It went well I suppose. I felt how social media creators spend time and energy just to take a picture look nice even if it's on the side of their discomfort for example being hungry. Changing of angles, correcting the colours, and putting the right items in the picture frame, multiple shots and then choosing the right one to edit and upload was a bit of a daunting process, but the final product makes you feel happy. Especially after receiving the likes and follows. I didn't receive any comments yet but will get into it.* (Fieldnotes, 29/09/2019)

I kept learning about the process:

> *...I've been learning about how to shoot stable- not shaky videos for my channel. Learning about contrast and colours. Editing is not an easy job at all! Starting this experience made me appreciate every video I watched on YouTube because people really suffer to produce the final aesthetic product that we end up watching!* (Fieldnotes, 03/10/2019)

The day finally arrived. The day I finally filmed my first ever *StudyTube* video[40]. The following entry described the process. Afterwards, screenshots in Figure 51 illustrate the video snippets.

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[40] Full video can be watched here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJ7BsWjLUHA&t=6s

Hello, today was an optimistic day for me. I woke up with a fresh mind and a happy soul. I started filming my day early as I was preparing my breakfast. I found it a bit hard for the camera angle as I didn't receive my tripod yet, but I said to myself: "do it, the first video doesn't have to be perfect, and you'll always improve". So, I put the camera aside, prepared fruits beforehand and clicked on the filming button. I paid attention to how I was cutting and putting stuff inside, I selected the prettiest bowl in the kitchen and tried to make it aesthetically pleasing!

It took me more time than what it usually did, but the final result made me happy as I have some footage now. Also, I took some pictures for Instagram and Tumblr. It was nice seeing the pictures and sharing the best of them of course after editing. Using the hashtags: #studygram, #studyblr and even #bookstagram helped me gain a new follower and 2 likes from previous followers.

So, at the moment I am jotting down this while the camera is filming me! Such a weird feeling as I am not used to it! But it has a sweet kind of effect as it helps you stay focused and do what work that you have to do! (Fieldnotes, 4/10/2019)
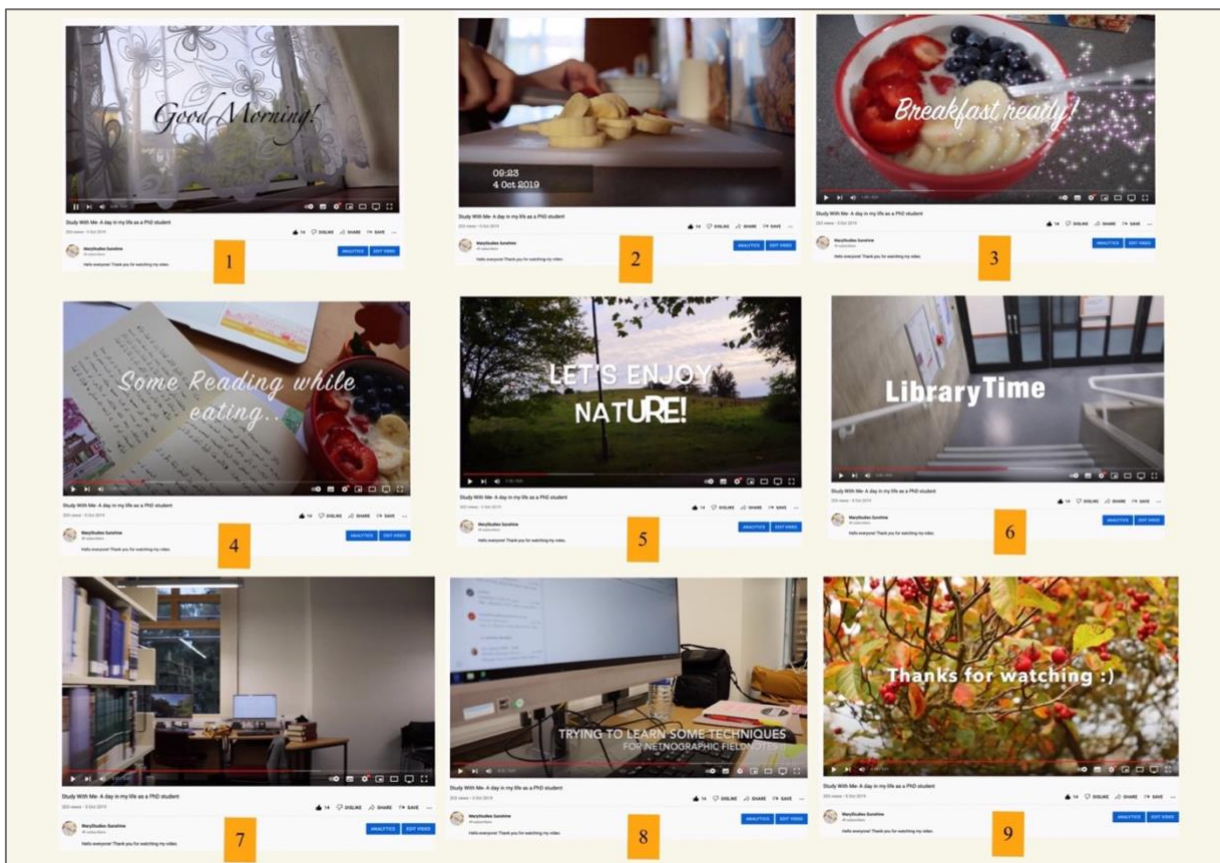
Figure 51. Screenshots collage of my first YouTube video posted on 05/10/2019.

The following excerpt narrated my feelings during and after filming my first video.

> *I felt a bit the need to be as people would like me to be, but I changed that perspective as soon as I realised that I should be me. As soon as I uploaded it, I felt a weird feeling mostly happiness mingled with a bit of waiting for perception. I sent it to my friends, and they all saluted me saying how good it was as a first video. My sisters said it was shaky. I received one comment from my sister and till now 5 likes including me. Total views on the third day are 42 views. I tried to have a voiceover, so I grabbed my microphone, planned what to speak, but still I wasn't courageous and confident enough to do it...*
>
> *Overall, I feel like it's a good experience to share my routine and just how it feels while watching yourself studying. I felt motivated to continue what I am doing and to overcome any negative feelings with my hard work. On the other hand, I'm being more interactive with the Instagram study community, sharing likes, viewing Stories and likes.* (Fieldnotes, 7/10/ 2019)

Reflecting on these entries narrating details of the backstage of my journey towards producing and sharing content, which are usually behind the scenes and hidden from audiences in OSC. Going through the same situation of *StudyGrammers* by preparing the atmosphere to become a content creator helped to unfold some of the intricacies that will only be understood if being put in the same situation. This included the excitement to produce content and the hidden struggles that come with it, the efforts invested to create the content to the standards of the community. Moreover, there are some inner conflicts and feelings that I experienced such as the need to conform to what others post, and the extra care for the minute details such as choosing specific items to conform with the overall conventions of the community. We can also notice that there is a big part of watching oneself and being watched by others (even if not being featured in the film/photos). This yields different affects such as the pleasure of feeling accomplished and productive. Moreover, there is the panopticon effect of disciplining oneself to study and staying focused (holding oneself accountable). Given this, this suggests that there is significant effort given to framing 'studying' in OSC and significant backstage work, mingled with evident affective impacts. This experience of mine going behind the scenes and living the same intricacies of producing *StudyGram* content illustrates the complexities and intricacies behind being a content creator and all the backstage details that contribute in OSC frontstage.

Themes of the sentiments felt of excitement, challenges, and realisation. Table 10 summarises the main themes of my experience: a simplified sample from my axial coding:

Table 10. Main themes extracted from being a StudyGrammer experience.

Main themes 'sentiments'	Subthemes
Excitement	New camera
	Long search on YouTube
	Looking for the best quality
	Motivated/ happy
	Planning
	Training/ skills
Challenges	Confusion
	Hesitation
	Overwhelmed
	Experimenting
	Hard to keep to standards
	Daunting process
Expectations/ Realisation	Constant thirst for interactions (likes and comments).
	Behind the scenes takes time and energy
	Discomfort
	Fun
	Enjoyment

Given this, themes and subthemes presented in Table 10 reveal interesting findings about studying as a performance where paradoxical elements meet. The first theme 'excitement' is the opposite of the hard-slog version of what is 'studying' about. It seems that elements of content production contributed to this excitement. Another aspect is the challenges that the *StudyGrammers* face in their journey in OSC. This includes not only learning how to study but also learning how to be a *StudyGrammer* and building a smooth interplay in between them. This of course comes with challenges such as being overwhelmed with production work and having work overload. Studying as a performance also reveals the notion of community both studying together and in this case the interaction that happens between *StudyGrammers* and their followers. Interestingly, many of these points return us to issues that were raised in earlier

chapters- which show the interplay between themes from different data/experience. In the next subsection, I explore the engagement between *StudyGrammers* and audience in OSC including my auto-netnographic data.

Engagement and Interactions in the Community

StudyGrammers participated in the community mainly through creating content and engaging with their followers about that content. In this section, data about engagement in the *StudyGram* community will be presented through to highlight the ways in which the community is built and maintained. It is also noted that *StudyGrammers' activities* and interactions with their audiences are both intertwined and related to each other.

Activities: Building the Niche

StudyGrammers participated in creating content where they disseminated all information related to studying. Their participation primarily hinged on engaging in studying. Furthermore, it heavily relied on technology because being a *StudyGrammer* requires a certain level of digital literacy to create, edit and produce that audio-visual content. This technology-related literacy included knowing how to film videos (using camera/ mobile phone, microphone, lightings, editing software/ application), writing and performing script, practising, rehearsing, researching, checking the knowledge shared, preparing the setting, taking *StudyGram* pictures, and expressing themselves. Moreover, literacy of using social media where they exist online is of high importance to disseminate their content and contribute to creating and expanding their niche. In similar vein, I engaged in the community through thriving to craft content that aligns within the dominant aesthetics of the *StudyGram* culture. This also included investing time to make my own thumbnails for YouTube videos (Figure 52).

Figure 52. Example of a thumbnail I made for StudyTube[41]

Data also revealed that sharing study-centred content in a creative way means that they ensure staying on top of their channel/ page goals. For instance, covering the topics at the corresponding time with events (back to school videos, dealing with exams stress, writing dissertations, new year resolutions, bullet journaling, how to stop procrastination, maximising productivity during vacations, etc) as well as fulfilling their uploading times, live SWM videos, and any pre-sat activity they inform their followers about. For instance, at the time of the interviews with my participants, their schedule was the following: Belle and Leila shared daily Instagram Stories and posts. Rstudies also shared daily Stories especially morning ones and a post approximately every two days, while Anna focussed more on YouTube with two videos every month and a weekly post on her *StudyGram* account.

In this vein, participants confessed that it is not hard to create study content as they have to study anyways and keep learning, the challenge was in the aesthetic part and keeping a momentum of their feeds[42]. Moreover, they highlighted the salient role of captions under *StudyGram* posts as they complement the pictures and provide not only a potential of interactions with their followers but adds an arena to share advice or tell stories. My observations revealed the following captions' main topics: question of the day, inspirational/ motivational slogans, description of their days, description of the items presented in the picture posted, and acknowledging their followers. Captions always contained tags especially: #studygram, #studyblr and #studyspo. Usually, the first comment space is the alternative space for tags under captions or to continue caption if too long (captions are 2200-word limit). For

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[41] Video can be watched here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmIisnd8F8Q
[42] Feeds on social media here refer to the pages where content is displayed.

instance, Figure 53 illustrates a caption that contains question of the day. I tagged one of the *StudyGrammers* and received two comments.

Figure 53. An example of a StudyGram post caption

Some *StudyGrammers* engaged in the community as *brand influencers* or *ambassadors*. This was largely for those with many followers. My focal participants were not very open about sponsorships they receive but they mentioned that they try their best to promote only what they genuinely think is good based on their experiences. Both Anna and Belle received constant requests for promoting certain items especially stationery and productivity tools such as websites and applications; for example, skillshare.com[43] and Notion[44]. The following sentiments were expressed by Belle narrating her happiness when she was contacted by a company that creates creative anatomy prints:

> *OMG, they are amazing! And I used to see them everywhere! I was gonna buy some for my wall one day. When they contacted me, I was like this is a dream coming true! Because I really wanted them! And I think the prints are amazing…*

She further highlights that she discovered them via Instagram otherwise she would not be able to know anything about the company. Beyond this, Anna further added more nuance to the idea

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[43] Learning online platform with thousands of courses taught by professionals.
[44] Notion is very famous in the *StudyGram* community as it is useful for notetaking and organisation.

of sponsorships and how companies target those niches such as *StudyGram* to reach more consumers- in this case mostly students. In her words:

> *I would not say all of it- but I see a lot of sponsorship offers on my emails that I don't feel interested in and every once in a while, I see the offer… and then the item will suddenly be slightly hyped up by a certain group of YouTubers or InstaGrammers!*

It is interesting how the data reveals some of the hidden dynamics of some of the items presented on the *StudyGram* accounts. It seems that companies and brands place importance on the *StudyGram* community by "*having a couple of people hyped up, and everyone else goes with it because members feel like they're all saying it, so they go with it as well!*", Anna explained. My auto-netnographic data aligns with Anna's view as 90% of the items I got for *StudyGram* were inspired from the *StudyGram* community. For example, the recent trend of wireless keyboards and iPad.

On the other side, Leila and Rstudies did not receive any potential sponsorship from companies, but they expressed their will to consider it if they got the chance. Rstudies later reflected:

> *To be honest, if this happens [getting sponsorships and receiving items], I will not refuse I'm not gonna lie! Especially if it's a brand that I like such as STABILO[45], I will definitely say yes!*

COVID19 was an interesting time happening in the midst of collecting my data. My focal participants engagement in the community during that time was surprisingly at its peak as they got more time to be more creative, share more content and interact with their followers. Belle keenly expressed her sentiments around the quarantine and how happy she was to get back home; enjoy family and enjoy the things she actually likes such as art and exploring more with her notes and *StudyGram* account; hence, engaging more in the community through content. She further added:

> *Because of quarantine, I've had so much time in my hands, so I feel like I've been very consistent of uploading, getting things out. Because of quarantine, I had the time to explore with Art more and making notes more.*

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[45] STABILO: a brand produces fine line tips pens and highlighters.

She later detailed:

> *I feel like there's nothing to really stress about, cause exams are not really happening, and I can't complain you know [laughing], I'm taking more time to focus on my Instagram and grow it so I can use that platform to do better things.*

Furthermore, the hashtag *#with_me* witnessed a big rise all over the internet especially on YouTube at the time of the pandemic. Videos such as: *clean with me*, *cook with me*, *read with me* and *study with me* was amongst them. This suggests that *StudyGrammers* catered their platforms and adapted their activities to the COVID19 situation.

In a nutshell, the different activities *StudyGrammers* engaged in contributed to the overall birth and formation of OSC. My focal participants believed that one of the big reasons that made them continue producing *StudyGram* content was the interactions between them and audiences, which will be explored next.

Interactions: Nurturing and Maintaining the Community

Whilst *StudyGrammers'* engagement with creating content formed the basis of *StudyGram* birth, interactions with this content and keeping communication with the audience were of equal importance. Data revealed that the different interactions *StudyGrammers* engage in, contribute to the three following outcomes: strengthening the ties, building a network of enthusiastic learners, and expanding the community.

Engaging in peer support through sharing other *StudyGrammers'* accounts using tags, posts, comments, likes, and supportive messages are examples of how ties in the *StudyGram* community are strengthened. Belle elucidated this theme of support in the following extract:

> *I'm more than happy to support StudyGrammers and others from the community... and I think I promote a lot too much, I tag a lot! more than I'm supposed to but, that's just the way I think... I'm happy to support other people, because at the end of the day it's all about helping each other, that's all what's the community is about... and keeping everyone motivated and reaching our goals and... so I'm more than happy to help and promote.*

It seems that there is an effort in showing support and building links between the members of the community. Usually, one would do this for their friends, but what makes OSC special is the support shown and manifested between members of many people in a virtual community.

This suggests the hard work and effort *StudyGrammers* invest to make the community supportive.

The second theme within this category of nurturing the community was building a network of enthusiastic learners. *StudyGrammers* aggregate in the community as a group of enthusiastic students who care about their studies. Being with other members who share the same purpose contributes to their enthusiasm and future collaborations to design and perform projects together. This is interesting because it shows that they are not just a bunch of students who got together to pass exams, but this extends beyond, to other creative/ entrepreneurial ways of living life beyond uni. A recent example of that network is the *The StudyTube Project*[46] that emerged during quarantine in 2020. Its premise was to help other students through their studies, serving as a 'reference' online. Among the focal participants in this research, Anna seems to be the most contributor with tips and how to videos that are a big part of the community as a whole.

The last suggested outcome from the data as a result of the interactions between *StudyGrammers* and their followers was contributing to expanding the community. *StudyGrammers*- through their creative posts and content- we can infer that they have a certain level of creativity which allowed them to prosper as a *StudyGrammer*. Their contribution with their content in fact suggests the growth of the community through crafting more study-centred content innovatively. This can be illustrated using my focal participants: Belle and her focus on aesthetics and art, Anna calligraphy and skills in delivering information, Leila's crafting skills and Rstudies inspirational content. Given this, it helps in growing the community and crafting more study centred content innovatively. Moreover, Followers' suggestions and feedback contribute to the improvement of the overall quality of the community as they help *StudyGrammers* produce interesting and beneficial content to them.

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[46] The *StudyTube* project was born on March 19th, 2020, to help other students cope with the covid situation and closure of schools and universities. The team members are famous *StudyTubers* mostly in the UK, and they shared a video about one subject daily. Their last video was uploaded on 23/10/2020. YouTube channel can be accessed via this link: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgqGpYjhnWvhE5-QrmXLkoQ

Other Aspects of Interactions in OSC

<u>*Keen/ solid Vs Curious followers*</u>

All the focal participants agreed that one of the amazing experiences of engaging with the community is strengthening the ties with nice people that they met in the community. Rstudies expressed deeper emotions explaining that it is not for any favour in return but just to make them happy and feel that happiness as well. In her description of engagement with her followers, Leila sincerely expressed her gratitude for her followers that she named: '*solid followers*'. She explained that solid followers are those who follow every detail she posts online and interact regularly: "*...these people usually always comment, see your Stories, like your posts*". Similarly, Rstudies noted that they gained strong friendships from these types of interactions with that one follower that has a form of 'loyalty' towards ones' content manifested all the time through likes and more engagement by commenting, sharing, reacting to Stories and direct messaging from time to time. She suggested using the term 'the keen follower'.

On the other hand, when accumulating more followers (perhaps over 10K), it becomes hard to manage and reply to every single comment and direct message received. In this case, Belle and Anna explained that they try their best to interact with their 'curious followers' through creating Q&A[47] videos or on Instagram Stories (Figure 54) to provide that space for followers to send questions and communicate. They also noted that they do their best to reply to their messages by specifying a certain time as "*it get piles up a lot*" Belle explained. Similarly, Anna provided a further explanation of the situation:

> *When I was a smaller channel, I had less followers. It was really easy for me to respond to all the comments and messages on Instagram and I felt more involved in the community of followers, but now there are too many people to respond to everyone, I feel more disconnected. I just respond to comments every once in a while, personally. Because there's a volume which I can't reasonably respond to all of them. But I still try to respond to DMs[48] once a month maybe...*

From the data, it appears that focus shifts depending on the number of followers and popularity. *StudyGrammers* seem to focus on quality when there are few followers (quality of engagement and strengthening the ties of the network), while the focus seems to be on the quantity when

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[47] Questions and answers
[48] Direct messages on Instagram

the number of followers is big. This implies responding to as many people as possible and trying to satisfy as many of them as possible.

I can relate to the above reflection as I had less than 5K followers. I had one 'keen follower' that responded to every post I posted with a like, comment, and messages even if it was just an emoji. This helped in creating a nice friendship and led me to reciprocate back and engaged with her account.
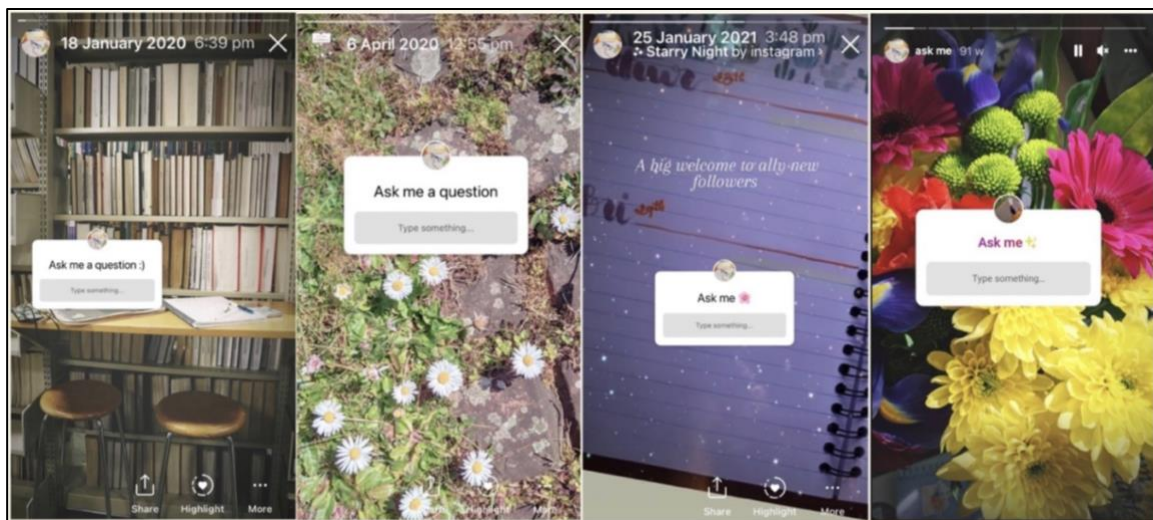
Figure 54. Engaging with my followers through Q&A function on Instagram Stories.

Screenshots in Figure 55 are examples of some for the questions received from my followers shared at different times. It is also interesting to highlight that the answers to these questions serve as a tool of *StudyGrammers'* self-representations. Furthermore, I asked my followers questions using the 'Ask me' function (Figure 56, A) and received back responses (Figure 56, B).
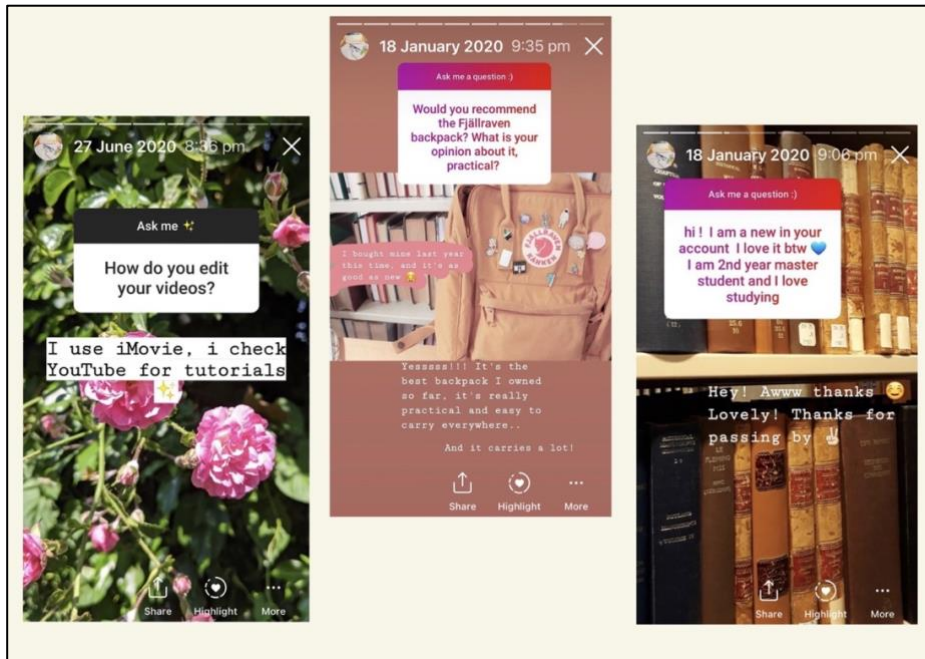
Figure 55. Questions and answers shared on my stories
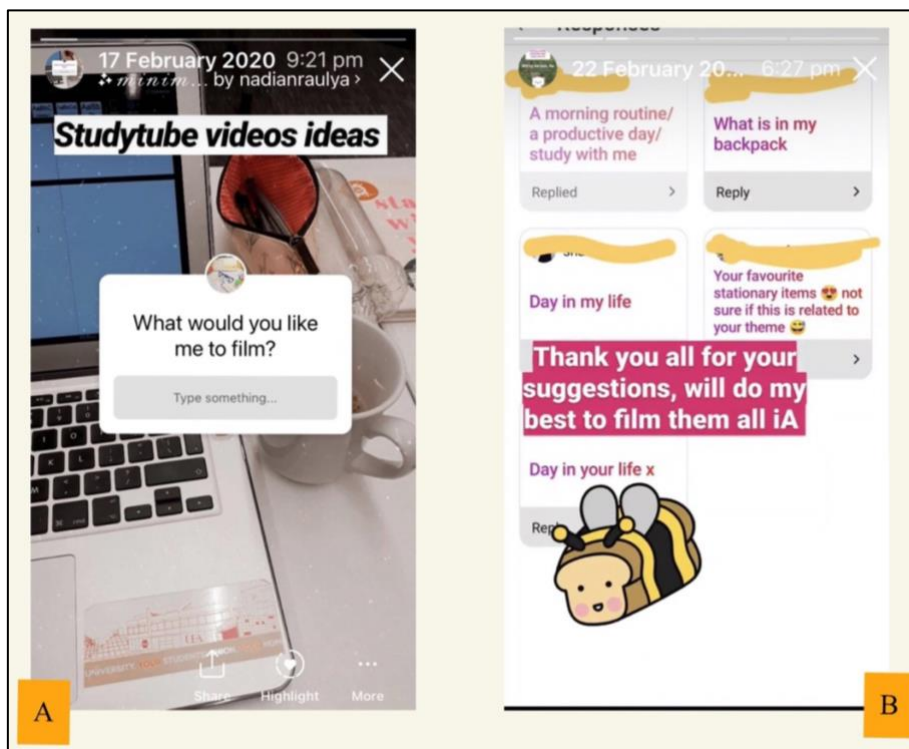
Figure 56. Gathering my followers' opinions concerning content through Q&A

This section revealed findings echoing the importance of interactions happening within OSC between *StudyGrammers* and their followers. This suggests the salient effects of interactions in maintaining the flow and dynamism of OSC which is key to keep connections between users.

Don't Forget to LCSD[49]! (Like, Comment, Subscribe, Share and DM!)

While *StudyGrammers* used platforms' affordances to produce[50] and share their content, they also used social media interaction tools to communicate with their followers. Data revealed the importance of the main interaction actions in shaping and maintaining the flow of interactions between *StudyGrammers* and their followers. Observations elucidated the salient role of crafting catchy and friendly introductions and endings of *StudyTube* videos. For instance, in some famous SWM vlog videos, putting the audience in the scene through providing descriptions and details of interest to audience such as morning routine, subject studied and even food consumption. Furthermore, reminding the audience to subscribe, like and share their content serves as a constant reminder. Phrases such as: "thank you for watching" and "happy studying" also are widely used by *StudyGrammers*. For instance, Belle liked to end most of her videos saying: "*thanks for watching and I hope you have enjoyed this video, if you did don't forget to Like, Subscribe, and also leave me a comment*". Anna similarly usually says: "I hope you found this video helpful".

When I created my study accounts on social media, I started to follow *StudyGrammers* and received back follows from them. However, what helped in increasing my followers' number was after I shared a picture (Figure 57, A) from the library and tagged my friend (who is also a *StudyGrammer*). Interestingly and without previous arrangement, she reacted sharing more information about me and asked her followers to follow me (Figure 57, B). Furthermore, her sister did the same (Figure 57, C). Figure 58 shows a visualisation of notifications received on my account (25 new Likes and 15 new followers).

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[49] Acronym I coined to gather the main functions used for interactions between members in the community: L (like), C (comment), S (subscribe/ share) and D (Direct messages).
[50] For instance: Instagram provided a large range of basic photo editing and filters that helps in crafting personalised posts
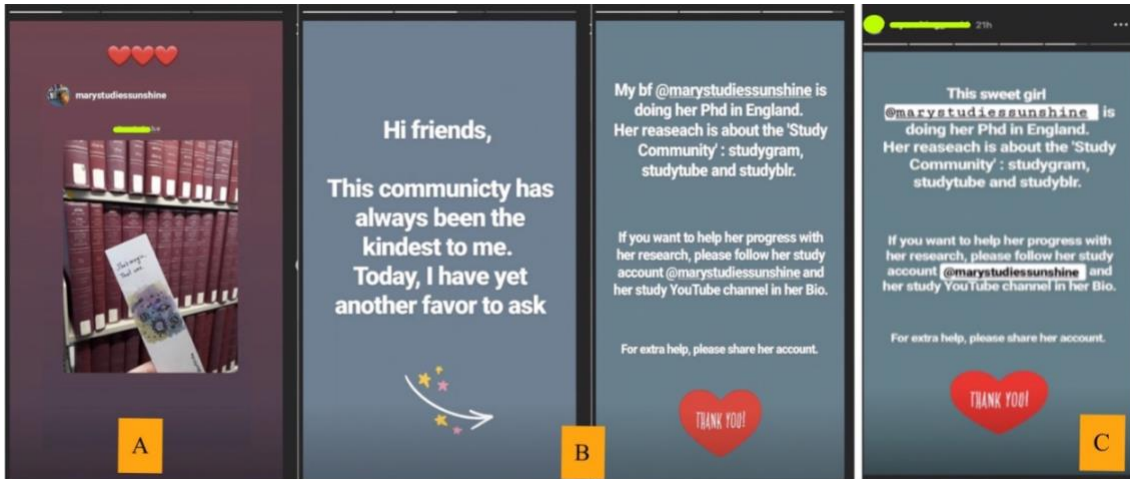
Figure 57. Screenshots of Stories that drastically raised my followers
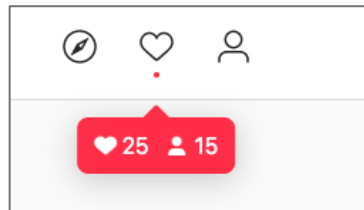
Figure 58. Likes and new followers' notifications on my StudyGram (desktop version)

This type of interaction is very common in the community and helps in accumulating more followers especially when content is appealing to that range of people. Figure 58 represents my notification corner a few hours after my friend 'publicised' my account. Similarly, *StudyGrammers* usually specify a certain day to exchange accounts and grow their followers. For instance, Rstudies picked Friday to be her 'profiles exchange day*'* where she shares other *StudyGrammers'* profiles on her Stories, and they do the same. Other *StudyGrammers* used and contributed in the 'follow loop' which is defined as: "a little concept that allows you to gain a lot of followers and make discoveries of new accounts on Instagram". This definition was sent to me by one of the *StudyGrammers* in the community (Figure 59).
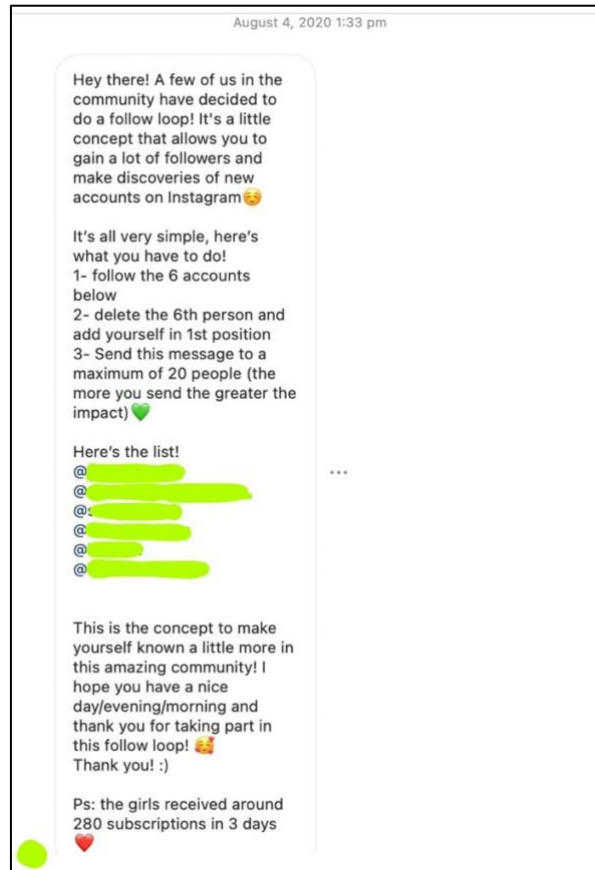
Figure 59. Screenshot of 'follow loop' request

Another famous interaction activity on Instagram is when a new follower presses the 'follow' button, many likes of previous posts notifications usually follow (bulk likes). This technique was noticed through my account most of the time. Interestingly, this interaction is reciprocated back on a Story usually with a 'thank you'; an example is illustrated in Figure 60 from my Stories. Followers go to all the previous posts and engage with them differently, some comment, like and others even share your account on their Stories and consequently receiving more followers. In similar fashion, I especially used this technique of bulk likes to attract my interviewees attention and build connection.
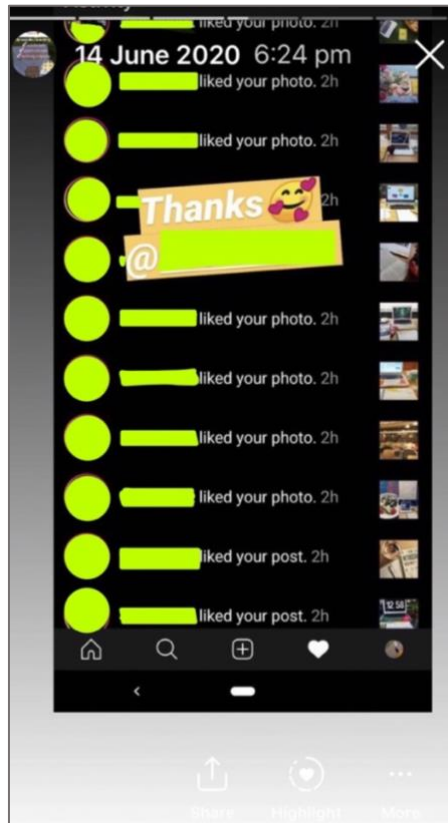
Figure 60. Example of interacting through 'bulk likes' from the same user on Instagram

Observations also showed the importance of comments in building and strengthening ties between *StudyGrammers* and their audience. This is congruent with Toepfl & Piwoni (2015) who stressed the importance of comments across different sites in generating interaction between members mentioned in Dyer (2020). Figure 61 illustrates two comments I made on a two different famous *StudyGrammers'* posts and their responses. Whilst most of the comments were positive and uplifting, two of my interviewees mentioned some cases when they received negative comments; however, I did not receive any negative comment throughout this study. This will be further discussed in the following chapter about impact of the community.
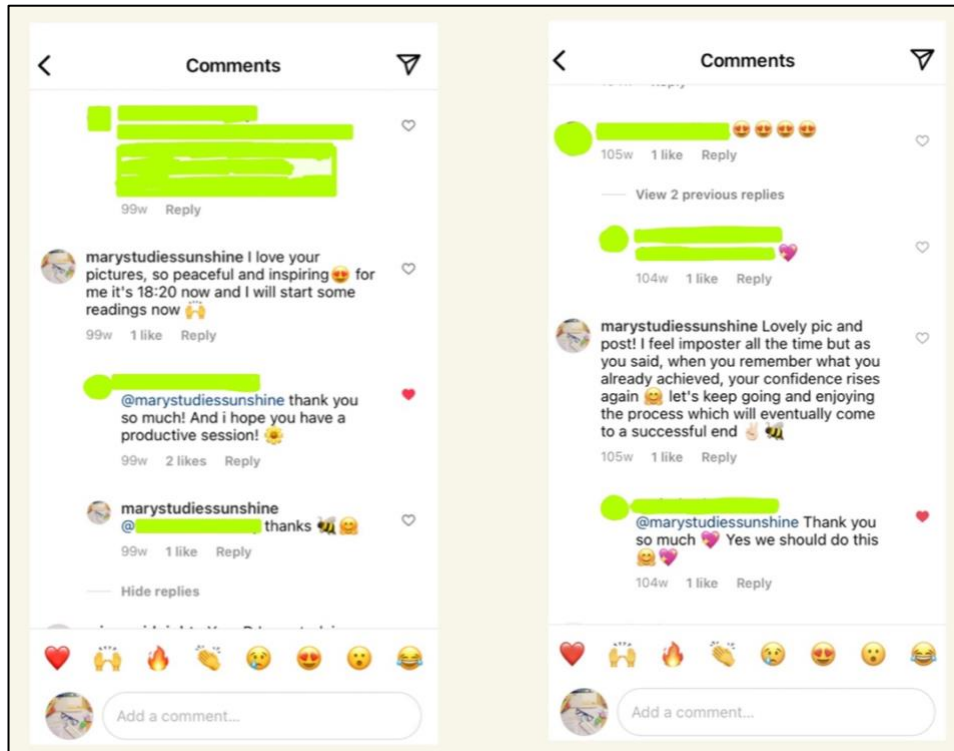
Figure 61. Example of comments I made on other StudyGrammers' posts

Additionally, direct messages served a private and flexible space to communicate with *StudyGrammers* either to send enquiries, build connections, or checking up on other *StudyGrammers*.

In Figure 62, from my immersion journal, presents an instance that I documented when I received a DM from a follower of mine. The entry shows description of my emotions. Other types of direct messages I received were asking about items they see on my account, how to edit pictures (Figure 63), questions about my ethnicity/ country, my routine, and my course. Furthermore, I received two DMs from two different people asking me about advice concerning some personal issues. Another message was sent by another follower who created her new *StudyTube* channel and asked me for my opinion and advice. This is indeed very interesting as these messages reflected some level of trust to be able to ask me certain matters. The rest of the messages are reactions for Stories mostly with emojis and acknowledgment utterances which sometimes open more discussions (Figure 64). Taken together, direct messages played a crucial role in melting the boundaries between me as a *StudyGrammer* and my followers. It also served as a 'booster' for other types of reactions for content such as watching new released *StudyTube* videos, likes, comments and sharing content.
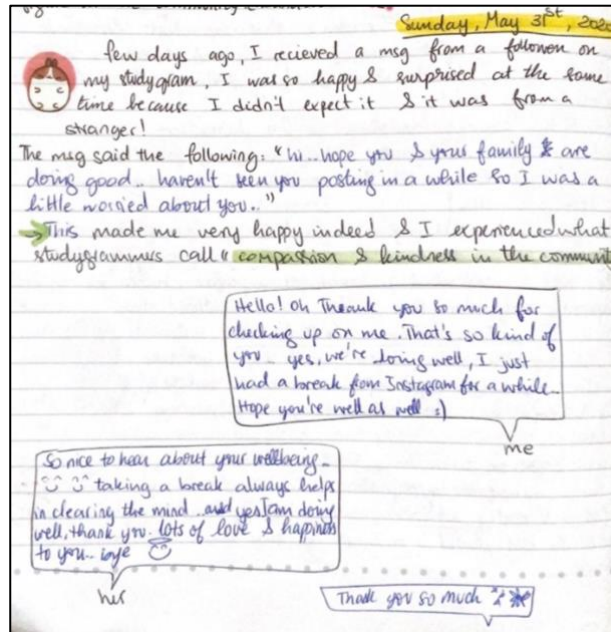
Figure 62. Sample from my immersion journal entry after receiving a private message from a follower
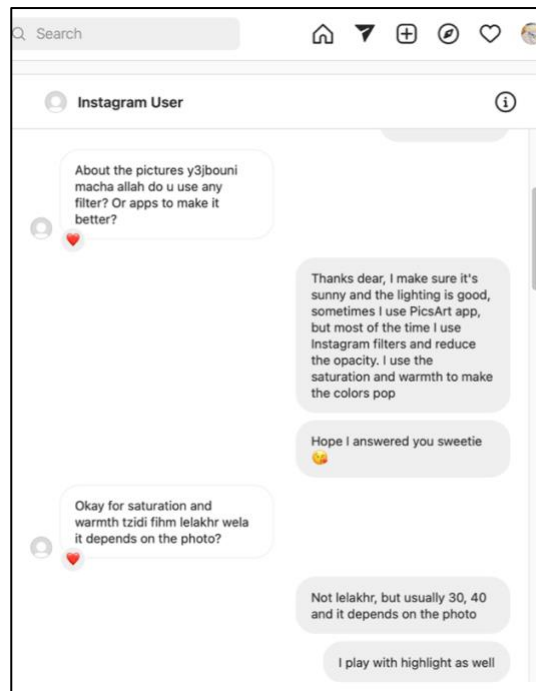
Figure 63. Direct message from a StudyGrammer asking about photo editing
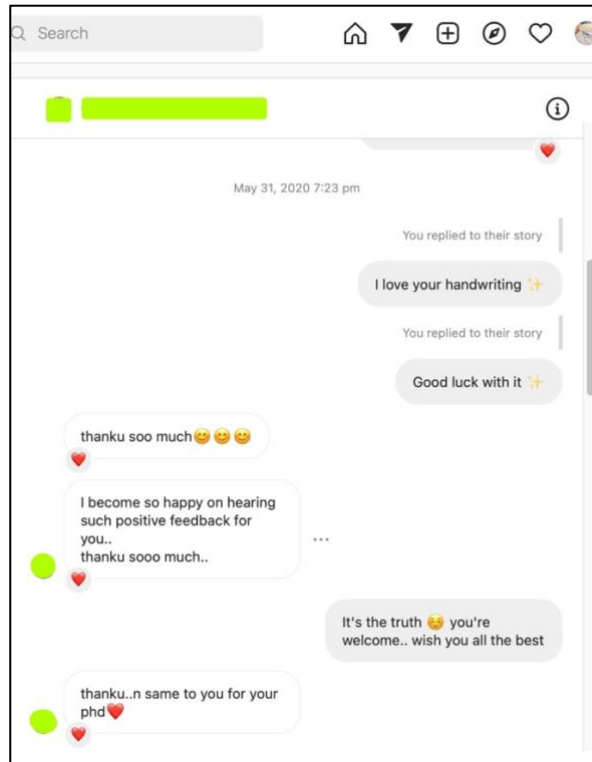
Figure 64. Another sample of direct messages in my inbox

StudyGrammers also used their creativity in reviving the community through tags on Stories. For instance, the example shown in Figure 65 is a tag created by a certain account then prevailed on the community through tagging other people. This type of Stories increases interactions between other members and knowing more about them. In that instance illustrated in Figure 65, after being tagged I filled the blanks and tagged four other accounts. One other benefit from these tags is gaining more followers. Other types of sharing included sharing new discovered accounts on one's Story (Figure 66).

StudyGrammers also used giveaways to communicate more with their followers and expand their network. Giveaways are usually made by famous *StudyGrammers* who receive certain goods (usually stationary of promotion codes of study/ productivity websites) from companies and advertise them through promising to 'give away' these items to the winner. They usually have certain rules to be able to win. Belle does a giveaway occasionally. Furthermore, Anna explained that some *StudyGrammers* "*have collaborations of making related videos of the same topic where they mention each other before the video in a form of a shout out*". Again, this contributes to both nurturing and maintaining the community.

Figure 65. Sample of 'today in GIF[51]s' tag on Instagram Stories

Figure 66. Story responding to an account that shared my account

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[51] GIF: refers to Graphics Interchange Format. GIFs are animated pictures and video snippets to express emotions and/or actions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted how *StudyGrammers* exist within the *StudyGram* culture in OSC. This included discussions about both their self-presentation and engagement in the community. *StudyGrammers* used the different platforms' affordances to communicate different information about themselves (crafting their personalised accounts). Moreover, this chapter highlighted how *StudyGrammers* negotiated labels usually ascribed to them mainly: *StudyGrammers*, *StudyTubers* and study influencers.

More nuance findings about their self-presentation were explored through their views on privacy and what they share. Moreover, and to provide a closer view about the feelings and decisions associated with becoming a *StudyGrammer*, both excerpts and screenshots of my experience were also picked and shared in this chapter.

Finally, I have mapped how *StudyGrammers* engaged and interacted for the purpose of building and nurturing the community. This included participating in creating content, engaging with technology, and offering a sense of togetherness. Moreover, findings were presented about their interactions through likes, DMs, comments, shares, Stories and tags and their role to maintain the community.

The next chapter will shed the light on the impact of the community on three levels: academic, personal, and social.

Chapter 7: Impact on Three Levels (Academic, Personal, and Social)

Introduction

After exploring data about the features of OSC in Chapter 4, the different enactments of 'studying' in Chapter 5; Chapter 6 unpacked the ways in which *StudyGrammers* exist in the community. In this chapter, I account for the impact of the *StudyGram* community on *StudyGrammers* as content creators for the aim of providing a richer understanding. This is through impacts reflected by my focal participants and my personal experience in the community. This will be classified under the following aspects: academic, personal, and social. Each of these are complex, containing both positive and negative effects in the same phenomena, making it tricky to navigate a safe route at all times. Figure 67 illustrates the main points discussed in this chapter. This chapter will start with a discussion of the impact of *StudyGram* on academic progress and achievement.
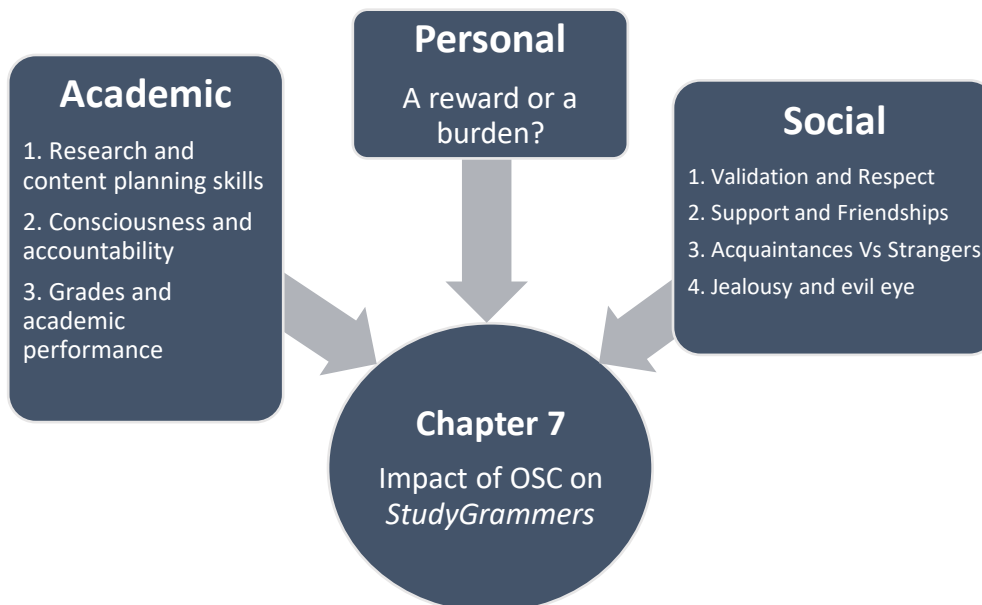
Figure 67. Visualising Chapter 7- Impact of OSC on StudyGrammers

<u>Academic</u>

The following themes emerged from the interviews with focal participants about their views on the impact of belonging to the community on them academically: firstly, in terms of their research and content planning skills, secondly in terms of consciousness and accountability, and finally in terms of their grades and academic performance.

Research and Content Planning Skills

Focal participants indicated that usually the process of sharing information with the OSC (especially technical content) requires research and preparation. This includes browsing the internet, reading books, and watching other study content online. Observations of my participants' accounts across platforms revealed key content that included tips for studying and exams, study apps, habits, productive routines, methods of taking effective notes, answering maths questions, preparing for specific exams (e.g., A levels[52], GCSE[53], medical school exam, Law school exam), tips for freshers, and general academia advice. Such a wide array of content takes notable preparation, and a process of research to extend their own knowledge. This process before sharing content impacted Belle positively as it helped her to acquire new sets of information and widened her perspectives about the range of areas related to academia and studying.

Being among the pioneers of *StudyTube* community, Anna clarified that before she makes a video, she researches her topics and plans her script. This process also allowed her to reflect on her experiences before she shares them online. She explained:

> *I think being forced to think about 'studying' a lot for my videos, helped my academics. For certain videos if I wanted to speak about my experiences, I had to actually go back and think about it and reflect on it and figure out what worked and what didn't, and I found that really helpful.*

From Anna's comment we can see research, planning, and reflecting, which are all essential elements of 'studying' and are honed and improved through this practice of producing content for the OSC. There is also a recognition here, that contributing to content on 'studying' online

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[52] Advanced level qualifications
[53] The General Certificate of Secondary Education

makes them a teacher-sharer of these skills, which requires different reflection and planning than if one was simply executing these acts for oneself.

Consciousness and Accountability

As well as honing their research skills, the focal participants suggested that producing content had impacts on their feelings of accountability. Belle signalled that she acknowledged her followers' attention which made her feel both *accountable* and *responsible*. Here she reflected on the need for more consciousness before uploading:

> *I think it is slowly taking a bigger role in my life, because I feel like what I put out now, people will question it whether it's wrong or right! So, I have to be more conscious when I upload!*

In both Anna and Belle's comments, educators may recognise the obligation to be more accountable. Although none of the participants saw themselves as 'teachers', they were aware of their position as 'sharers', 'influencers' or 'contributors' within the community. These positions are often pedagogical in nature in an informal manner compared to the more formal nature of teaching. This use of informal community-based learning to comment upon and develop skills for formal learning presents an interesting balance in terms of accountability. For instance, reflecting on her content, Anna highlighted the need for a balance between affecting audience positively or negatively. Her comment illustrated this point:

> *I think the thing that, it's always like a balance between... 'is this helping more than it's harming people?' And part of it I see that motivating people, helping them view studying as fun is great. But at the same time, there's especially on Instagram... there's overemphasis on making things look pretty and not necessarily on effective study methods!*

She further explained her view on aesthetics and pointed her approach with regards to how she views posting content that she reinforces that studying has not always to look 'aesthetically pleasing':

> *Not saying that things can't be good cuz I like pretty things, but thing is there too much emphasis on making things look pretty and prioritising the aesthetic appeal over actually economising your time the best you can for making your notes flow with what makes sense rather than with what looks nice?... emm I'm always in that border line like 'if I give people advice, I reinforce that second narrative that studying has not to always look nice and be perfect almost at all times...*

These comments illustrate some aspects of how being a *StudyGrammer* who continuously produces, and shares content might help with acquiring a sense of responsibility with regards to content produced as well as 'awareness' of what is going on in the community; hence, taking the lead to address certain issues that might arise in the community. In this instance, the overemphasis on stationary and owning a certain type of product, Anna along with famous *StudyTubers* uploaded videos on YouTube questioning this issue and attempting to provide clarifications and guidance to their audience. With this regard, these videos came as a response to what was prevailing across OSC as trends. For example, and during my data collection, there was an extra emphasis on owning an iPad and taking notes using the Apple pencil. It was very prevalent to the extent that most *StudyGrammers* that I observed spoke about it, did an unboxing video, or shared a post containing an iPad or something related to it. Responding to this 'iPad craze' and other issues in the community, videos were posted to address them frankly. As such, the example of the overhyped stationary including Mildliners and Muji gel pens, fjällräven kånken backpacks, Apple products, mini printers, and specific brands bullet journals (e.g. Leuchtturm), etc.

Toxic productivity or hustle culture that includes long study hours (which has been discussed in Chapter 5) is another trending example that *StudyGrammers* are addressing in the community. They have emphasised the importance of being productive but at the same time, overworking can lead to a very opposite result than what the target was in the first place. Discussions around mental health and the importance of studying smart rather than hard were emphasised and therefore corresponding tips were shared. Anna had an entire playlist dedicated to balancing studying and self-care. Leila has also noted the importance of keeping a routine that balances study habits with healthy ones. She explained:

> *You know something has to help, a good lifestyle has to help and for my vlogs, I try to promote like a good lifestyle: have a praying time, then have a good meal, and then sit down and study for a good while of time and then do something else productive and then take a break... I think from my vlogs, I try to promote a good healthy lifestyle...*

These entries revealed the awakening that is happening across OSC to give more consideration to healthy studying, prioritising both healthy habits and having the right understanding about the over-hyped elements in the community. This shows the level of consciousness and accountability that is blooming in the community among *StudyGrammers* and what they

promote, as well as some of the dangers that come with online influencers and influencer culture.

Grades and Academic performance

Commenting on the impact the community had on the *StudyGrammers'* grades and academic performance, Anna said that her grades did not get affected drastically: *"I think mostly they stayed the same! I didn't have drastic increase/ decrease in my grades throughout high school"*. However, she also mentioned that the process of preparation of content did consume time and that: *"could've potentially made my academics slightly weaker, because I spent a lot more of my time working on videos, I could've been studying probably marginally lower rates of return"*. This echoed her previous quote where she is beginning to question her use of time and preoccupation with prettiness. However, almost all my participants valued the 'beyond the curriculum' learning that they were gaining. For instance, Belle expressed her gratefulness to the community in terms of learning:

> *There is a lot of positive to this definitely! I'm learning a lot about what I didn't know about! For example, GoodNotes, I didn't know about a lot of apps that are big part of my life now... there's a lot of positives!*

Other impacts of being *StudyGrammers* on their academic studies were mentioned by Belle and Leila as 'positive'. The following excerpts illustrate their reflections on how the community helped them in discovering new apps, motivation to study, and increasing study time.

> *What I think is the biggest advantage for me is that I'm learning at the same time from the community and I'm learning so much more than I knew before, I didn't know about so many apps that are available for medical students, so this helped me a lot!* (Belle)
>
> *It really motivated me and made me want to study, I look up to the study community a lot, and it was really helpful for me... I didn't use to be able just to sit in desk and study for 4- 5 continuous hours, but now I can literally sit down for more than 8 hours studying continuously not stop.* (Leila)

Additionally, Leila added an anecdote that despite her graduation, she still watches SWM videos and learn other things she is interested in, the following quotes highlighted her sentiments:

> *I think, I'm really grateful that I stumbled upon the study community, you know trying to learn and getting influenced by people promoting for something that is actually good; mostly, umm... I grew to really love learning and I try to even now that I finished my education basically... I'm doing nothing, but I find myself always wanting to learn and always learning something, I sit down, open a book about whatever I'm interested in, like a book about soaps and detergents that I'm interested in now, and I literally sit down and read 400 pages and I just want to learn. I don't need to have someone supervising me or giving me a curriculum or I have an exam coming up. I just sit down and study that thing...*

From Leila's excerpt we notice that she got the potential to grow as a 'lifelong learner'. It seems that she adopted a habit that has formed through OSC and being part of it, that has increased her appetite and her love for learning. Interestingly, these examples from focal participants illustrate how they *learnt to learn* which reveals that the learning aspect is deeply rooted in the OSC. In addition to learning some aspects of a certain topic, within OSC Leila has also learnt how to 'filter' content and to get benefits from what she thinks is right and works well for her. She denoted reflecting on her ability to sit for long hours and learn:

> *... when you go to that point (studying for longer hours), I think that this is something I got from the study community, and so mostly it was a good influence. I know that I've grown more so I know how to filter things and I know how to take the good and just leave the bad that I think it's bad. Mostly that was a positive experience, and it was a really positive influence.*

Another important benefit of *StudyGram* was through its ability, or offer, of a lighter, more positive 'mood' in relation to studying. Rstudies mentioned that the *StudyGram* community for her as a medical student represents an escape from the workload of studies mentioning how she found it useful to change her mood and meet like-minded friends: "*the community helped me to change my mood and make me feel at ease, when we open StudyGram accounts to change the mood of study*".

As discussed in previous chapters, this OSC offers a different ontological 'take' on 'studying' by showing how study is companiable, fun, and beautiful. These qualities attracted Rstudies when she needed to change the mood of study to something more positive. On a more critical note, she also mentioned that making *StudyGram* content felt like a 'productive procrastination', noting that:

> *I procrastinate a lot! especially when I upload a new post and wait for responses. When I post Stories, rip to my day (all time is gone) [laughing] and the day I make lots of Stories, the result is that I don't have a productive day...*

It seems that there is a tension between what is regarded as productivity for Rstudies and the struggles that come with content production (waiting for responses). This has yielded some procrastination elements that resulted in affecting her 'studying'. Again, this suggests the interplay between content production and 'studying'.

For my experience, I have observed that my approach to seeking knowledge has improved since I have first stumbled upon the community in 2015. This includes, my note taking methods, adopting the mind maps technique that helped me tremendously in my undergraduate course, my aesthetics that made me enjoy the process of studying, and my handwriting through learning calligraphy. I also noted that my photography and editing skills improved. However, it is also important to highlight that I have also experienced some elements counter to productivity and that affected my 'studying'. Similar to Rstudies, time has been wasted in the endless scrolling and deep diving between the folds of the pretty posts of *StudyGram* culture. It seems that both the appealing nature of the aesthetics and interactions in the community contribute to catching one's attention and making them lose sense of time. Moreover, because of the learning elements in OSC, one might convince themselves that they are being productive whilst it is just another 'feeling productive' procrastination.

With this regard, it appears from the data that *StudyGrammers* also experienced a negative impact on their academic studies. They mainly mentioned that the price of content making was time consumption, which in turn could influence the general grades and performance as time had been taken from studying. This was especially true when making content for YouTube which consumed time for filming and editing.

As a contrast to worries over procrastination and being less than 'productive', I have noted that toxic productivity ideas that have prevailed in the community also affected users. This has been especially noted through their comments on SWM long hours videos. Another impact that occurred alongside 'time waste' was the feeling of inadequacy and feeling that one should be doing more studying. This might be mainly due to the comparison aspects that arises on the *StudyGram* culture which will be discussed in the next subsection under personal impact.

Overall, it seems that the participants were keen to highlight the importance of the practice of 'studying' on their academic life, and the many broadly educational benefits around learning

to learn beyond curricular matters, though it is apparent there are also educational costs, and contrasting feelings in regard to responsibility and influence more broadly.

Personal: A Reward or a Burden?

Being a *StudyGrammer* can be regarded as an extra role among many others played by individuals which would have an impact on the personal level. My participants were open to sharing some of their experiences where the community played a role in impacting aspects of their personal lives. This includes both what they regarded as positives, negatives or, as in many cases, a mixed bag of effects.

The first impact interviews highlighted *StudyGrammers'* positive experiences in the community. From the interviews, the overall description of the personal impact of *StudyGram* was 'rewarding' expressed through 'gratitude' and 'growth'. Leila confessed the big impact that the community had on her and that she wants her little sister to also get impacted by the community to gain good habits from them. She explained:

> *When I say: it influences me a lot, I mean it. A lot. Because when you get into the internet world, or social media or YouTube, umm, there are a lot of paths that you can follow, you can either go watching the beauty gurus[54], or watch series or follow a fashion account, but when you go ahead and follow these people who promote for learning on the study community- and I see it now that my youngest sister, when I ask her and say go and watch this StudyTube because I would like her to get influenced a little bit with the studying and learning thing, because there are a lot of videos there and she could literally be influenced by anything... when you are young, you are a little bit empty, you are a pot and you can get filled with anything that you find in your path...*

Linking it to being helpful and inspiring, Leila expressed her feelings of being grateful to be part of OSC. She even went further and described the community as being 'the bright side of YouTube'.

> *I feel really blessed to be in the study community and not in other types of YouTube videos, and I think if anything everybody, because we all watch YouTube should get exposed to this study community at least a little bit because it will be helpful...*

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[54] YouTubers posting beauty and fashion related content online.

After some silence she added with excitement: "*I think 100% it would be helpful. A lot of YouTubers I would say 'content' is not great, and if YouTube has a bright side, I would say the study community is absolutely on the bright side! Yeah*".

Rstudies also mentioned the impact on her motivation noting that: *"it really helps me stay motivated"*. In terms of growth, Anna expressed her self-improvement, describing the confidence she gained from being a *StudyGrammer*. She highlighted:

> *"I kinda grew up with the internet, but I definitely feel like I got more confident from being involved, there's always something validating about having people pictures on the internet and that was probably part of it."*

She later expanded on this growth and how she improved in the way she dealt with social media and interactions:

> *I noticed some of my friends are less secure about their internet presence, they're a little bit more worried about how many likes are on their personal photos on Insta yet! That I reached the point that I don't really care that much because I don't interact with social media that often, it's easier for me to see that the amounts of likes don't determine anything, it's almost random, so that really helped my emotional relationship with social media compared to my current peers.*

It seems that Anna recognises the double effect of 'likes' on the one hand, it allowed her to gain confidence. On the other, too great a reliance on likes can detract from that confidence and hinder a healthy emotional relationship with the community.

Other similarly complex themes discussed in the interviews are analysed in this section. Many participants were aware that what may appear positive may also have negative repercussions. Leila noted that she cannot handle too many social media accounts, and that this is the reason she does not have a *StudyBlr* and has restricted her use of *StudyGram*. She noted:

> *I am someone who gets very overwhelmed from social media to the degree that I get almost depressed when I use it too much. When I look at a lot of other accounts, umm ... that's why I told you, I try to use strictly minimum of social media...*

She further explained this highlighting the impact being a *StudyGrammer* has on her mental health,

> *Because when people say they get overwhelmed from social media, it's distracting for me, I totally understand them because it is overwhelming for me 100%, it's stressful and it gives you anxiety... try to control it... sometimes it's funny because even the strongest of people like with a good mental health and wellbeing, it's funny because they get so low, their mental health gets so low... just because they spend too much time on social media and this is how bad is social media can be distracting for you...*

Leila discussed the matter by both acknowledging the problem and suggesting the solution. This is mainly through suggesting finding a middle ground in the use of the *StudyGram* to mitigate the negative aspects of distraction and comparison. She tellingly expanded:

> *When I compare myself to others- I tell myself not to compare myself to others because it's stupid, why would I ... but when you spend too much time in it, you subconsciously start comparing yourself which is silly. So, you know that saying we have... 'umm DON'T DO THE EXTREME, STAY IN THE MIDDLE'. That's the thing, and it won't be distracting, it would be useful!*

I have also observed that this tendency for comparison that might arise within the *StudyGram* culture, might also lead to aspects of 'competitiveness'. For instance, competitiveness in terms of personal performance in the academic course or competitiveness with the social media metrics and statistics (number of likes, subscribers, and followers). Rstudies noted: *"when I see others on my course studying constantly, I get motivated and determined to do the same"*.

Comparison in this case could be a double-edged sword. This is mainly because if comparison is used wisely, it can contribute to the overall performance and growth of *StudyGrammers*, this is through comparing themselves with themselves and how they improved. On the other side, comparing oneself to other *StudyGrammers* might impact their mental health, making them feel inadequate or less important.

Despite the overall positivity shared online, all my focal participants confessed in the interviews that they experienced pressures and stresses associated with being content creators in OSC. Belle and Leila in particular discussed the pressures associated with content creation. They have both stressed the point that they enjoy making content unrestrictedly, this means they would upload whenever they want depending on their availability and mood. However, they faced the issue of pressure from their followers' requests to be consistent in uploading which created an extra burden on them. For instance, Leila explained:

> *I really love creating videos, I really enjoy it, sometimes I say, I will share a video every single week, but I can't do that, this was too much for me because I find myself forcing myself to do something I don't want to do, so I told myself, you know what: let's be realistic, let's be logical, I'll share a video every month but surprisingly, I ended up sharing more than one video a month just because I didn't force myself and I didn't consciously told myself that I need to work hard and share a video every single week...*

In her case, Leila seemed to dislike the feeling of being forced to post content and preferred her own less frequent timing. Belle shared the same sentiment reflecting on her first start as a *StudyGrammer*. She has also noted that the big number of unread messages that required answers does stress her out and if she does not answer, she thought it would be rude, she explained:

> *When I first started this StudyGram I didn't think much of it at all! I just used to upload when I wanted to what I wanted to basically that was my structure, just showing my personal experiences (struggle/ not struggle) there wasn't really any impact! It was just me uploading when I want to, it was also for me to track my progress, how my notes have changes, the way I'm studying have changed... umm, but recently I feel like it has impacted my life... I do think about it more than I did before... emm ... that's only because I'm getting more questions from people asking me a lot of things... and I feel like getting some time out and actually respond back because I feel it's rude if you don't and it does pile up... IT DOES PILE UP A LOT! This does impact you because you need to take time out to reply back!*

She further mentioned the pressure associated with having to respond to companies who offer to sponsor some of their videos and send them some stationary items and promotion codes in return (e.g. they receive free items and review them on their channels/ pages) noting that it requires thinking which does impact her. She noted that:

> *With companies as well, it takes a lot of thinking and negotiating you know, you have to think about all aspects, there's something you agree on... I don't really understand how to go about things... so it does get to me sometimes when I need to take a break... I say I will not think of it for now and then I come to it after a day, and then I say what shall I say to it now?! [laughing] Does that make sense? [laughing]*

This led her to burnout and shifted her thinking to deleting her *StudyGram* account, but she later decided to take break instead. She narrated:

> *Before quarantine started, I actually was going to delete my Instagram completely, [laughing] I don't know what I was feeling, I think I was stressed with*

university, and I couldn't manage both together, I can't do both at the same time, emm, because people expect you to upload more, to respond to everything in your DMs, if you don't, they keep going back, it does get to you, and then my sister was like 'don't get rid of it, but just take a break', and I did that, I took a whole week off.. on Insta, no, I just had a complete whole week of break off social media… That did completely change me out, okay I feel better now [laughing] let me get back to what I was doing. Yes, I think it does get overwhelming…

Interestingly and unexpectedly, anger was another sentiment expressed by Rstudies that she had experienced as a *StudyGrammer*. Describing her short temper, she confessed that sometimes some users make her feel angry with their comments and especially when they send her certain types of messages. She noted that she thinks it is perhaps due to the lack of politeness and manners of expressing their requests. This quote illustrated her point:

…some people lack the polite way of communication, as in when she (the user) speaks to you, it's as if she's placing an order! So many times I had fights, not really! But there was this one, because I get angry easily!

She had later narrated an anecdote illustrating through this small incident in a passionate tone:

… this specific follower, I was organising a study challenge, I shared my stuff, so she said to me: 'so you study all the day, you don't stop?!' and that day I was struggling with a lecture of Physiology, I was very angry because of that lecture [laughing], so I responded to her DMs that I was ready to argue with her, but fortunately I deleted them, [laughing] luckily she was offline!

Rstudies later expanded on this story mentioning how sometimes some users have big expectations thinking that: *"they expect you to be holding your phone 24/7, as if you have no life! No studies! Nothing! Just you're there to answer their DMs and give them tips"*. Despite these incidents, she further described how dealing with these users made her grow more as a person and helped her to manage her anger:

After opening this account, even if I don't feel like speaking with people, I tell myself that I have to respond, I became more sociable and more thoughtful, especially because I get angry easily… I tell myself this is not worth the anger!

Usually being eclipsed in the background, Anna described the hardship and stress associated with posting content online. In her words, she explained:

It's stressful sometimes! like YouTubers who vlog, their personal lives are under scrutiny, and that must be super stressful. I only vlog one week per year or so, it's

not that bad, but it is stressful to just like have yourself on the internet as like almost a job, or like the performance of the videos or the posts almost seem like a judgement on yourself.

She also described the feelings associated with herself '*being the content*', her words adeptly describe her feelings:

...it's hard to have yourself tied to the performance of your work rather than like if you work for a company, it's more like you do the work, then it just happens and it's not really your fault or up to your personality. It's just hard to reconcile... like I AM THE CONTENT.

The above pressures felt by my participants can be summarised in sentiments related to the content creation process including piled messages, responding to companies, burnout, anger, dealing with their audience expectations, and the impact of the nature of content shared as they are the content themselves.

In this section, the rich data was very revealing of the pressures they face. But equally, they seem to have grown and learnt a lot and reflected on how to handle all this. Indeed reflection, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is a key skill the participants noted they gained by being part of the OSC. The participants also showed the key realisation that they are really not distinct from the fruits of their labour. In the previous comments, some participants noted how the content was 'already there', for example, from the medical curriculum. There was a sense that there was little effort needed to tailor it for the OSC. However, the conversations reported in this chapter show that this distinction between content and being a content creator is not really that clear-cut. It appears that even if 'content' can be drawn from a pre-existing curriculum, it can be read by followers as an embodiment of the creator. Thus, the labour of creating content, is in many ways the labour of creating one's stage persona.

Social

It appears from the data that the personal and social impacts are intertwined. This is perhaps due to the nature of the interactions and the sentiments related to the social aspects of their presence in the community. The following views were noticeable in my participants' narratives.

Among the participants, Anna noticed that other people on her course started to treat her better, with more respect, given her status as a *StudyGrammer*. She described:

> *Umm, I feel like I've always been 'nerdy' and at my school that's not necessarily a bad thing, because it's fairly academically oriented high school, I guess once people started finding out that I had this YouTube channel, I was almost like overweighed in status, to like 'ruler of the nerd!' or something like that… it wasn't exactly as dramatic as that, but it made people to respect me more, almost!*

Anna also explained this referring to the number of followers: "*As if like having certain number of followers attached to you, just like made you more interesting, even though I was the same person before and after people found out*". Data also revealed another form of social validation when *StudyGrammers* meet their followers in real life. Anna narrated her story when she met someone vlogging and they wanted her to be in their video: *"one other person was vlogging and asked me if I wanna be in their vlog- that was pretty crazy!"*. Another instance was when she met a follower in an event and felt special, she explained:

> *I've met one of my followers in person, actually a few times, mostly because I do cross-country… it's just like gathering of thousands of people in the same place and a lot of the times, I've been in the line of the bathroom or warming up in the field before my race, and someone is just like: "hey! are you (her name)?"- "yes- I am, it's so COOL that you recognise me in person!". Those are pretty Cool moments!*

One other social impact noticed in the community is the sense of companionship provided especially by the famous SWM videos. My observations revealed that this type of content consumption has increased especially during the pandemic where people needed companionship. Belle also noticed that impact on her as a student as she got motivated by other peers:

> "*I feel like the community can't go wrong, I feel like it's more positive than negative, and that's why I personally got into that… there's a lot of motivation and inspiration that you take from people*".

Positive comments are also another social impact on the *StudyGrammers*. Anna for instance narrated: *"most of my friends are very positive, like people see and they are just like WOW! That's so cool! How do you do this?!"*.

As they described, Rstudies and Leila made 'amazing friends' through the community from all over the world. This is mainly due to the common interest of studying that gathered them all in the community. Rstudies narrated:

> *There's a girl who had a StudyGram account, we used to speak and interact, she asks me, sometimes we speak about studies, when she likes my pictures… we became really close friends that we speak together, we exchanged our phone numbers…*

She has later reflected that: "*it all started with a DM than it evolved into a nice friendship*". Leila also shared an anecdote when she received an anonymous post card from abroad to later discover that it was from her follower. She expressed her sentiments:

> *… then couple days later, she messaged me and she said I sent you a post card and blah blah blah, and I have been following you, I mean this is the CUTEST THING EVER, this is the story I have and this is how I knew this person has been following me, since 2016… 'loyal follower'. That's why I tell you, if people follow you, let them follow you because they truly like your content and they will actually engage with you and, read what you write and see what you post… yeah so this is the cutest story I have.*

The quotes in this section reveal the many degrees of companionship/ friendship and respect that are shared between followers and content creators- from recognition and positive, encouraging comments to posts, to much longer-term support and friendship. This is recognised by participants, although here too, this recognition makes it tricky to easily categorise followers, as the following section illustrates.

Belle and Rstudies drew a distinction between two types of followers they noticed through their immersion in the *StudyGram* culture. The first category can be referred to as 'acquaintances', the people they know including friends, family, and course-mates. The second category are those who do not necessarily know *StudyGrammers* in real life, but they follow them, calling them 'strangers'.

According to them, the reason this distinction is important is because of the way it impacted their treatment. Belle for instance described her experience:

> *I feel like people that you personally know are the jealous ones! And the random people that just follow you and don't know you personally are so supportive! I'm*

telling you! I've had so much more support from random people from the world then people from my course! And it's really interesting to see that line!

Emphasising her point again, she further noted that:

But I'm telling you Meriem! The random people that I've interacted with through across the world, they are so so much motivating and they literally support you, but they don't know you and that's really weird to see that kind of difference between people you know and people you don't know and who's more supportive!

She has further reflected and mentioned how people from her course made her feel uncomfortable as they see her content and do not interact. She also explained that this makes her feel being judged. She narrated:

... a lot of people from my course are also my followers, so I see them they are looking at my days, and I'm like it feels really uncomfortable! Because they- I feel like they're gonna judge me... I don't know what they're gonna say, or what they probably think I'm constantly studying which is everyone in med school is studying, you have to study because that's what you're here for, you have to do it, you have to do work but one shares it, you feel like other people are judging them, even though they are doing the same thing! They'll be like: oh look she's studying constantly!

She has further explained that sometimes she wishes to delete them, but she is not able to as it will be regarded as rude, and it might create more problems for her. She tellingly echoed her sentiments:

The close people in your course, they would really look into everything you do, but will never complement, engage or interact! But you know that they are looking at your things, you know that they'll go and talk about it as well… and you're just like: 'ok! What's the point? Just unfollow me!' I personally if I had the opportunity to just block the people from my course, I'd just do it…But I know how much rude and it's gonna cause in my course and I do not wanna do that either cause I know the person and they'll be like: 'why did you block me on your StudyGram? Why did you- and this kind of conversation! And I hate that kind of activity.

From the narratives, data also revealed the aspect of negative comments and other negative feelings; mainly, jealousy and 'evil eye'[55]. Anna commented: *"part of it, if you get a little bit more popular on the internet, there's always more trolls and people just being rude and I don't*

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[55] Evil eye is a cultural and religious belief in many societies when something good happens to you, and others seem to congratulate you about it, but are secretly jealous. These negative vibes thus draw bad luck on to you.

want to see that, it's a little bit tough". Belle shared a similar view and revealed that negative side and explained that many people do not mention. She noted some instances in her account:

> *Like even in real life I get random shade thrown at me! 'oh but you have a study account', you know, or: 'you can do this', or 'how much did you get paid for that?!'And I'm like, you're saying these questions for me but you're saying it in a negative way and there's no need for that! But yeah…*

Another instance added later by Anna, illustrating one kind of negative comments related to race: "*Sometimes the things I get are racially based, tags being Asian, there are lot of stereotypes you could apply on being Asian and academic"*, then she clarified that most comments she gets are positive and that she does not: *"see that much of negative comments"*.

I noted that the two concepts of jealousy and 'evil eye' were professed mostly by Anna and Belle, perhaps this is linked to their large audience they built over the years.

The following two stories shared by Anna and Belle illustrate their sentiments and the impact of being *StudyGrammers* on their social lives. Anna narrated:

> *There is one particular example of one of my friends… I don't know how to pinpoint that, but I was getting from it that: 'you're so lucky you are famous … I wish I had that, like almost saying we all deserve it equally, so why you?' Which sort of I understand to some extent that I was lucky that the thing I do became trendy when I was doing it... But like ehh! you know, it could go either way, that's the worst example I can think of.*

In this case, Anna reflected upon the comment made by one of her friends. In fact, this comment was quite expected given how humans love fame and to be known for something specific and also their reaction when their peers get successful in a certain matter. Anna's comment: "*almost saying we all deserve it equally, so why you?*'" reveals the hidden meanings she got from her friend though it was unuttered. This might be seen as a form of a jealousy that is a reaction to others' fame and success. This jealousy is one of the pressures that *StudyGrammers* face in the community from some users. Belle's story also shows another aspect of jealousy that translates to evil eye in the following extract when she narrated her story with the suturing kit:

> *Emm, I shared on my Gram few months ago I think last year in December when my sister gifted me a suturing kit and I needed that, it was an OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Exam) station for my exam... so I shared that I*

got that kit on my story and it's so funny because it came back to me that people were caught talking about that: "oh she got a suturing kit she's gonna nail the exam! She's gonna ace this station!" and it came back to me and it just shows that there is jealousy between people about… oh let's go buy the kit as well because she's gonna get a good grade!

When I heard people talking about that, I just knew that I was gonna get evil eye at the moment! Oh yeah Meriem, I just knew! I'm not gonna pass the station even though I worked for it so hard! And look what happened to me! When I went to the station, the things fell of my hand right underneath my curtain [laughing], my girl! the examiner started laughing, I started laughing... I just knew, because at the moment I knew it's gonna go wrong! Because I knew I had evil eye. What worries me is the evil eye… And really like one thing that does hold me back is evil eye! And I do constantly think about that! And I feel like that's what gets to my mental health is that evil eye! And I feel like that's only because I've got people that I know from my Gram [Instagram], if it was 100% (her home city)*, I would not even care about it! I genuinely wouldn't... because they don't know me and don't know my face and my identity, and they throw this shade on me…* (Belle)

This story illustrated Belle's sentiments associated with sharing some content online and the impact it has on her. It is clear from her narration that 'evil eye' and jealousy made her feel that discomfort that affected her content production, academic performance, and mental health. While worries over jealousy or 'evil eye' may persist in many life experiences, the idea that being online, and open to several eyes online, clearly exacerbates this worry.

In trying to deal with the pressures and stresses concerning followers and numbers, Belle reflected saying:

It is what it is! You can't help it if you're not motivated, or you'll not really care about followers! Like even now, I'm not too concerned about followers, I feel like that just comes with it! you just keep doing what you're doing, post what you want to post

Reminding herself that she can decide what to do with her account, she commented:

I tried to tell myself: 'it's fine whatever rate you're going at, it doesn't matter because what's the point of stressing about it? Nobody knock on my door and tell me why you're doing that?!'I can take it wherever I want or move away from it!

Here it seems that Belle was trying to find some coping mechanisms to make her feel better despite some of the negative feelings she has been experiencing in the community. This is through consistent content posting in the community and avoiding to stress about the whole situation. It seems that reminding herself that she can quit the community and stop producing content anytime gives her comfort. Another coping mechanism was revealed by Anna which is to ignore the comment, she explained that when she receives bad or negative comments explaining: "*I just don't react at all, I just look at it and I'm like this person is having a bad day [laughing]*".

Leila has also outlined her approach with regards to her *StudyTube* channel:

> *For YouTube I don't put too much expectations, I just make a video, my goal is to stay in the game, keep producing and that's it... the pleasure for me is to make YouTube videos and just to be a member that people are actually watching...*

Leila stated that she does not set high expectations for her *StudyTube*. Instead, she emphasises the importance of staying active and consistent in producing content. This approach implies a realistic understanding of the competitive nature of YouTube as a platform and a desire to remain relevant within the platform's ecosystem. By avoiding lofty expectations, Leila may reduce the pressure and maintain a sense of enjoyment in her creative endeavours. Leila also put emphasis on her personal enjoyment, staying active in the *StudyTube* community, and the value she places on having her audience. This suggests a more introspective approach to content creation, focusing on intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the pleasure of the creative process.

In this section, I have tried to assemble a series of viewpoints and experiences that reveal the social impact of belonging to this OSC. By and large, these impacts can be beneficial as they are about feeling support, companionship, and respect. But as with the other impacts noted in this chapter, matters are rarely clear-cut, and participants needed to learn to cope with jealousy/ 'evil eye' aftereffects too.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the impact of being a *StudyGrammer* on the *StudyGrammers'* themselves through exploring the impact on three aspects that I thought were important to my focal participants and that emerged from the data: academic, personal, and social.

On all 3 levels, my participants' accounts revealed a great deal of complexity that went beyond just positive or negative impact. On an academic level, participants highlighted the enormous 'beyond curriculum' learning, including research, planning, and sharing skills, as well as a new- found responsibility/ accountability to their community. They also realised the pitfalls of procrastination and toxic productivity that detracted from the core activity of 'studying'. Overall, they valued the importance of practices around studying and sharing, as well as lifelong learning habits picked up along the way.

On the personal level, participants mainly discussed the rewarding aspect of the community revealing data about their gratitude and growth. However, they have also mentioned the burdening aspects arising from comparison and the associated pressures.

Finally, the social impact of being a *StudyGrammer* included discussions on their relationships with acquaintances and strangers and the impact it has on them, including needing to deal with jealousy/ evil eye effects. This chapter uncovered some 'hidden dynamics' of *StudyGram* activities and sentiments curated by *StudyGrammers*.

This chapter provides us with further richer data about the intricacies of being a *StudyGrammer*. Through the narratives and experiences shared by Belle, Anna, Leila and Rstudies, I argue that there is much more to *StudyGram* then the mere beautifully aesthetically pleasing pictures or SWM videos. The focal participants' narratives elucidated and revealed some hidden aspects and tensions that happen in the community, and some of the tensions in their positions between formal and informal learning that will be discussed more in the next chapter.

And this is accurate, as in any community, tensions and pressures happen. Also, they seem to learn from their experiences. In addition to the knowledge and content creation skills they learn and develop, they seem to learn more about themselves as individuals and more about how to deal with negative experiences and how to cope with the overall situation. All in all, the impact on academic, personal, and social aspects seems to highlight a special experience of these

students who chose to share their academic life online and get to experience the complexities of being a *StudyGrammer* and being a lifelong learner in the school of life.

Chapter 8: Discussion

Introduction

This thesis sought to explore OSC with a focus on *StudyGrammers* and their *StudyGramming* practices. Through deploying a netnographic and auto-netnographic approach, this research revealed intricacies of *StudyGrammers'* experiences and insights into the *StudyGram* phenomenon across selected platforms for this research (*StudyBlr*, *StudyTube*, and *StudyGram*). Drawing from the analysis of data presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, this chapter will present a summary of the key findings, addressing the four research questions that guided this project. Moreover, these findings will be brought together to provide an understanding within the concepts presented in Chapter 2: CoP and Self-Presentation.

Discussion of Key Findings: Answering the Research Questions

Along the path of this research, I became curious about my own curiosity: *what is it about the online study content that interests me and drives my project?* The answer to this question is shown through the findings of this research which reveal the multifaceted and complex nature of the *StudyGram* phenomenon and its growth. The findings have been organised around the four anchor themes that are presented in the findings chapters (4 to 7): features of the community, studying as a practice, *StudyGrammers*, and the impact on the three levels (academic, social, and personal). Reflecting on the four research questions, I will first address each research question separately and then discuss the themes collectively within the theoretical concepts of CoP and Goffman's work. For easy navigation, the anchor themes are illustrated[56] in Figure 68.

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[56] I thought of using my iPad to add some visualisation for easy navigation but also, to reflect the type of note taking that prevails within *StudyGram*. Importantly, this is one of the impacts of the community on my note-taking style (and 'studying' too).
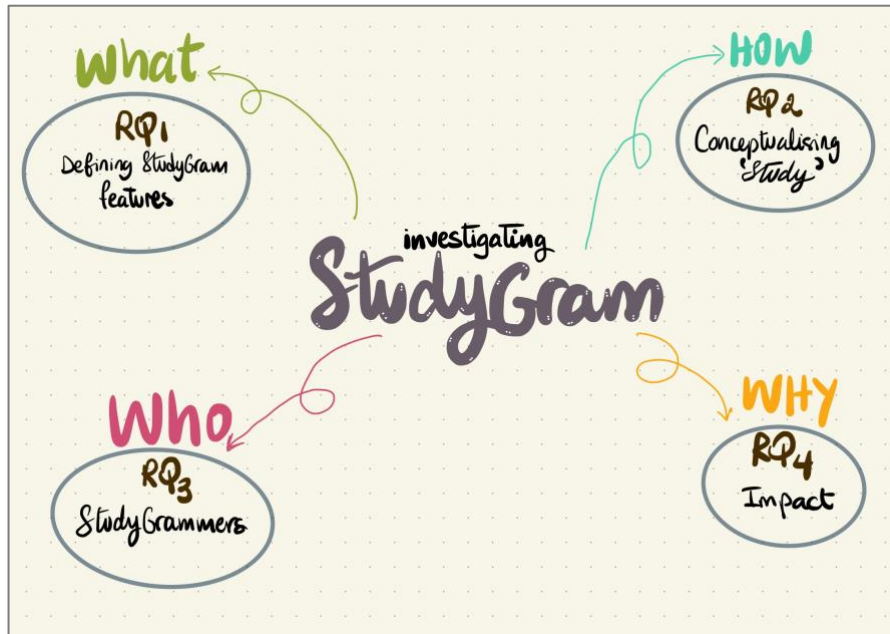
Figure 68. Anchor themes within the four research questions that guided this study.

RQ1: What are the features of OSC?

The main aim of this research question was to understand *StudyGram* through investigating its features and providing a definition (inspired by my focal participants and my auto-netnography) that encompasses the main characteristics of *StudyGram* across platforms. This question explored in Chapter 4, focused on the content and platforms as a space where *StudyGrammers* post their content. Hence and as shown in Figure 69, this definition was based on the following elements: participants' histories and trajectories in OSC; content/ features/ trends of the three platforms; and thoughts and descriptions of OSC from my participants. It is also worth mentioning that the rationale behind starting with this research question was to set the scene for the upcoming themes and to provide a foundation for the other research questions.
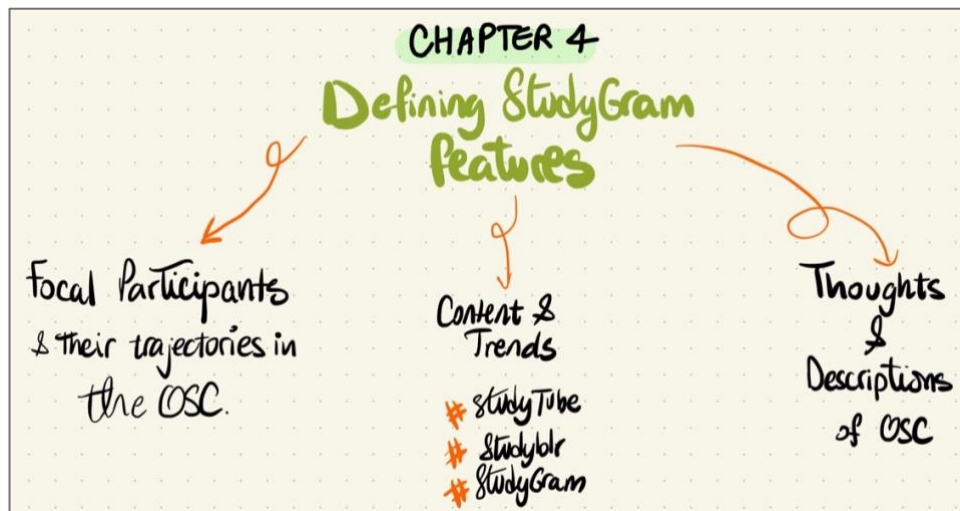
Figure 69. Key elements used to define OSC features as presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

Findings revealed the salient role that visuals play in the *StudyGram* community across multiple platforms; it is also a distinguishing feature of how the community is defined and thought of. This is accompanied not just by specific visuals but also of a specific aesthetic that delineates the content as related to the act of study as broadly defined, rather than learning for a specific topic. Thus, it is the first noticeable feature and the main characteristic the community is known for. The essence of how *StudyGrammers* view their community, constructed from the above elements, forms the definition proposed in this study:

> OSC is an educational, motivating, inspiring, and positive space (despite some negatives) with the aim of making the task of studying a shared communal activity that is more manageable, enjoyable and approachable. The aesthetics are a means to beautify the act of studying through making it more approachable and appealing. Moreover, *StudyGrammers* are the main figures in the community producing content and serving as a communication channel between the practice of studying and audiences.

The findings also showed that the content shared evokes meaning and motivation between users and provides 'a repository of aesthetically pleasing' visuals and memories of their academic experience within the *StudyGram* culture. It is worth noting that to several participants including myself, the content is not just transitory, but a 'repository' to be revisited at other times. This aspect challenges the ways in which social media is seen, often as linear, transitory, and temporal (see Dyer 2020). Instead, the reflective nature of study as a process (as discussed in RQ 2) becomes enacted in reflective posts that are revisited for further inspiration.

The visual aspect is prominent across all three platforms and contributes to the 'shared repertoire' of the CoP. It also contributes to changing the perception of the arduous act of 'studying' into something fun and approachable through beautification and aestheticisation. This will be discussed further in the next sub-section within the framework of CoP when linking the four RQs together.

With regards to the visuals, there exists an element of 'creativity' among *StudyGrammers*, much of which manifests in the creative process and aesthetics of production. The aesthetics also convey the passion and enthusiasm of *StudyGrammers* to keep sharing their content, despite the challenges that they may face in the journey of making content as well as in their own academic journey. Even though the aesthetics relate to taste and are therefore subjective, they still serve as an indicator that *StudyGrammers* need some level of creativity to align their content with the overall characteristics and features of the community. According to the experiences of my focal participants, part of this creativity already existed within their skill set (Anna for instance and her passion for calligraphy, Belle and her love for painting, art and aesthetics) as is present in broader overlapping communities built around practices such as bullet journaling. On the other hand, creativity is also *acquired* and learned from lurking in the community and being exposed over time to all the content (for instance, in my case and in Rstudies' acquisition of *StudyGramming* practices). In fact, this can be regarded as part of the 'gains' from the informal learning that happens in the community.

> Informal learning results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is not intentional. (UNESCO 2009a p 27) (from Rogers, 2014b, p. 15).

Participants in the community enact this kind of learning by 'hanging around', observing and mimicking key aesthetic features. Whilst there are some evident tensions present between informal learning *about* formal learning, and some concerns among my focal participants about how best to negotiate their position as 'influencers' of learning, it is clear that the 'gains' of creativity form a strong element of the community. This attempt to beautify the act of 'study' in creative ways suggests a reframing of the act of 'study' as a point of pride, a point which will be discussed more when addressing RQ2.

The visuals are also tightly linked to the different platforms and their designs and features. This explains the current centre of the community on Instagram and YouTube as they are platforms highly based on visuals. Moreover, the affordances of the platforms affect the ways in which users use the platform, engage and interact with content (Dyer, 2020). As such, on Instagram it is more based on posts and captions, whereas on YouTube the emphasis is more on videos and prolonged discussion, narrations and tips. The visual part is also affected by what is presented and how it is organised. This is further discussed when addressing RQ2, namely, how *StudyGramming* practices pave the way for a conceptualisation of 'studying'.

RQ2: How does the concept of 'study' manifest in the community?

One aim of this research was to understand the different ways in which *StudyGrammers* manifest and enact the idea of '*studying'* in and through OSC. The findings of this RQ2 were presented and discussed in Chapter 5, where the deeper insights of the *StudyGram* phenomenon were presented. Put simply, this question sought to understand what 'studying' meant for *StudyGrammers*, and how it was practised in the community.

Social media platforms, *StudyGrammers* and 'studying' come together in *StudyGramming* practices. Hence, the answer to this RQ2 lies in conceptualising 'studying' beyond the content shared (pictures, videos, etc.), by exploring and uncovering the hidden narratives behind and within that content. Categorised in three elements, studying can be conceptualised through answering these three key questions: *what, why* and *how* (as detailed in Chapter 5) and depicted in Figure 70.
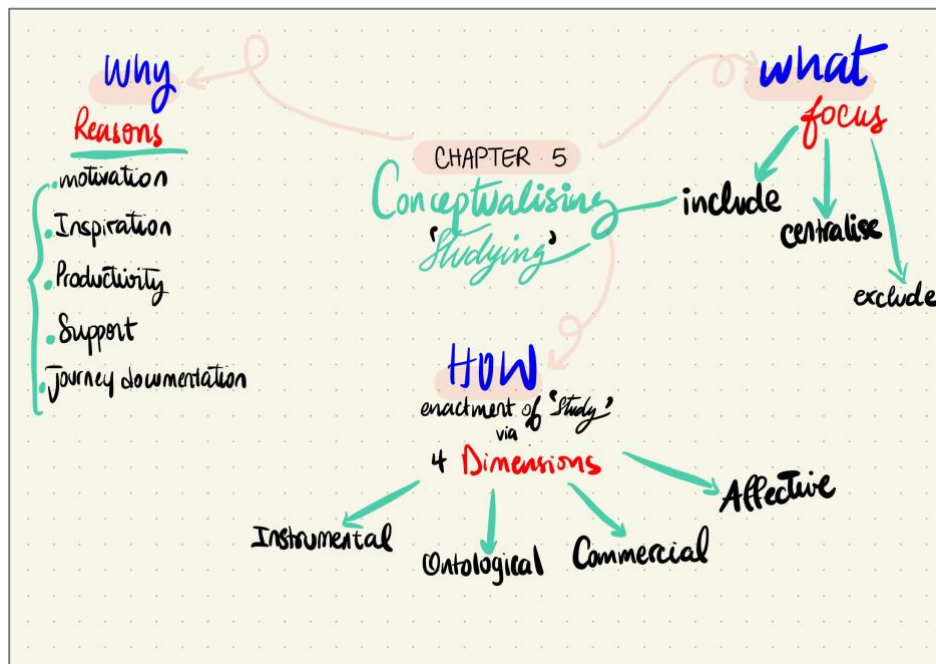
Figure 70. Key elements of Chapter 5 answering RQ2.

Findings in this section highlighted three core pillars that constitute the understanding of 'study' in this research: reasons, focus and dimensions. The main reasons behind *StudyGramming* practices which fuel participation in the community (proposed in this research) are: the experience of being able to motivate and to be motivated on the platform; the experience of inspiring and being inspired; enjoying the support of community members; being productive through the use of the platform; and being able to document/ observe their growth and development. It is worth noting that many of these stated reasons are quite altruistic and focused upon seeking and offering support for the act of study. Data revealed that *StudyGrammers* centred their discussions around study habits and tips to improve studying. They also included narratives about other aspects of their lives such as health, entertainment and social life. In terms of what they excluded, difficult 'behind-the-scenes' struggles and the surrounding pressures on their lives was often hidden. I proposed that the concept of 'studying' as it manifests in OSC can be understood within the following four dimensions: instrumental, ontological, commercial and affective. I have argued that *StudyGram* community is more than a medium to showcase the act of studying (instrumental); it also challenges older assumptions of studying being a hard, unappealing, lonely and invisible labour. By drawing on objects (commercial) and artefacts to 'visualise' the act of studying, the OSC also provides affective elements of companionship, belonging, commonality, accomplishment and rivalry.

Therefore, and in response to conceptualising studying as a practice within *StudyGramming*, 'studying' is enacted through two main practices. The first involves studying habits and activities aimed at the academic cultivation of knowledge, such as reading and writing. The second involves mirroring those studying efforts and activities online through the lens of a camera and presenting them on the platforms. In other words, *StudyGramming* goes beyond the internal process of cognition and learning by extending to content creation practices that are intended for communal consumption, through which the *StudyGram* culture is depicted and showcased online. For example, when writing an essay, the effort involved is not seen but is deeply felt. All this effort is made visible if the process of writing is filmed, especially in a time-lapse format and then shared with a wider community.

It can therefore be argued that in OSC, 'studying' involves more than simply reading and writing to gain information; it also involves a social and sharable dimension that is crafted through creating online materials, interacting with other *StudyGrammers* and audiences, and managing the pressures that come with it. This takes 'study' away from the notion of being a singular solitary practice, often aimed at a specific 'crunch' moment such as a test or a deadline and moves it to being a communal and ongoing practice that is not temporally specific, but is a continual act of improvement and community-making.

Given the importance of 'studying' academically and the impact it has on other aspects of life, findings from this conceptualisation of 'studying' are salient to deepening our understanding about the intricacies of the process. This offers significant new perspectives that merit further consideration in thinking about both informal and formal education practices. I will expand on these implications in Chapter 9.

RQ3: How do StudyGrammers exist in the community?

Findings from this third research question discussed the 'community' aspect in *StudyGram* and focused on *StudyGrammers*. As discussed in Chapter 6 and illustrated in Figure 71, I found that an analysis of the interactions between *StudyGrammers* and other members of the community provided insights into understanding the overall community.
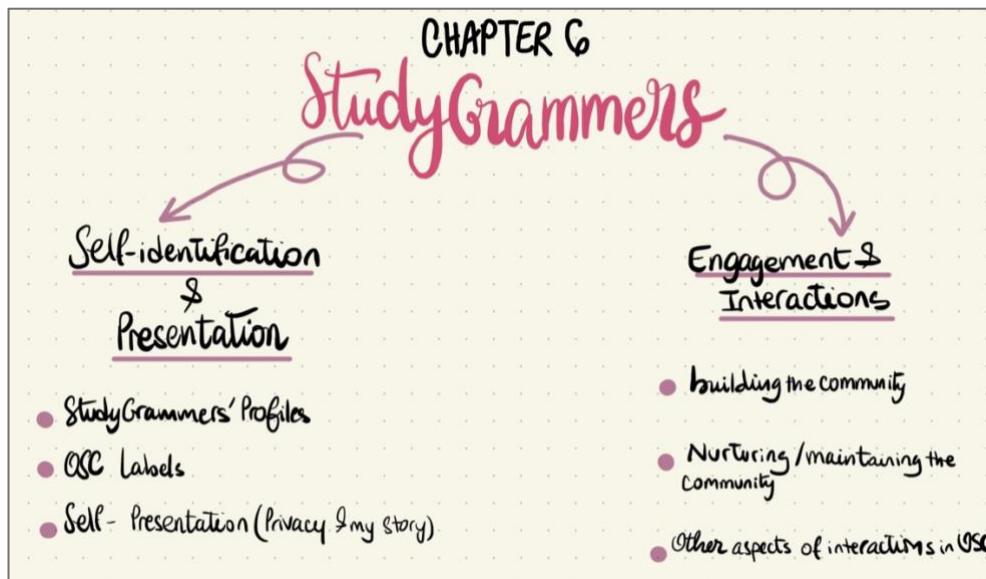
Figure 71. Key elements answering RQ3 as presented in Chapter 6.

This is primarily tied to their 'self- presentation' online and their 'engagement' and 'interactions' with content and audiences. Firstly, with regards to their self-presentation, focal participants in this research collectively defined themselves within the context of 'studying'[57]. Therefore, 'studying' is deeply embedded in their lives and constitutes a big part of their identities. Moreover, *StudyGrammers* used the different affordances of platforms to craft their identities. For instance, by responding to parameters within platforms, each *StudyGrammer* revealed aspects about themselves. Findings showed that this presentation is tied to being a student mainly through what was presented as content.

Findings also revealed how *StudyGrammers* negotiated their identities within the labels attributed to them, mainly *StudyGrammers*, *StudyTubers* and *influencers*. Interestingly, there was a desire to distance themselves from the label 'influencer'. This was mainly due to assumptions about influencers and the loaded concepts and ideas associated with being an influencer. Additionally, there was an element of entanglement between being a student and a content creator. Consequently, the following definition for the *StudyGrammer* can be proposed from the data:

> StudyGrammers are creative individuals that form part of a community
> conveying messages about excelling in academia and other related

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[57] The first things they have mentioned when asking them about who they are was that they were students or have just graduated (Leila's case).

aspects through engaging in StudyGramming practices, and they reveal their identities as students who help others (mainly students like them). They acquire some recognition through followers and giving advice and tips/ sharing knowledge on study-related topics and practices. They also have an influencing dimension that is nurtured through their practices and through amassing followers.

The core finding and answer to this research question is that the interactions and engagements between *StudyGrammers* and their followers are crucial to the cultivation of the *StudyGram* community. As such, the notion of 'community' and all the practices and activities that it entails (making content, responding to comment and DMs, likes, shares, tags, sharing stories, helping, and supporting each other, reacting to others' Stories and others [detailed in Chapter 6]) play a significant role in maintaining the flow and dynamism of the community. As I will discuss later in this chapter, this community can be thought of as a 'Community of Practice' (CoP). The specific manifestations of their practice also present new dimensions to the ways we might understand CoP, and how this intersects with informal education, a point that will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.

RQ4: What is the impact of this community on their academic, personal, and social life?

The findings emanating from this last research question suggest that being a *StudyGrammer* has a direct impact on many aspects of a *StudyGrammer's* life. Therefore, I suggest this impact can be understood at three levels: *academic*, *personal*, and *social*, as illustrated in Figure 72.
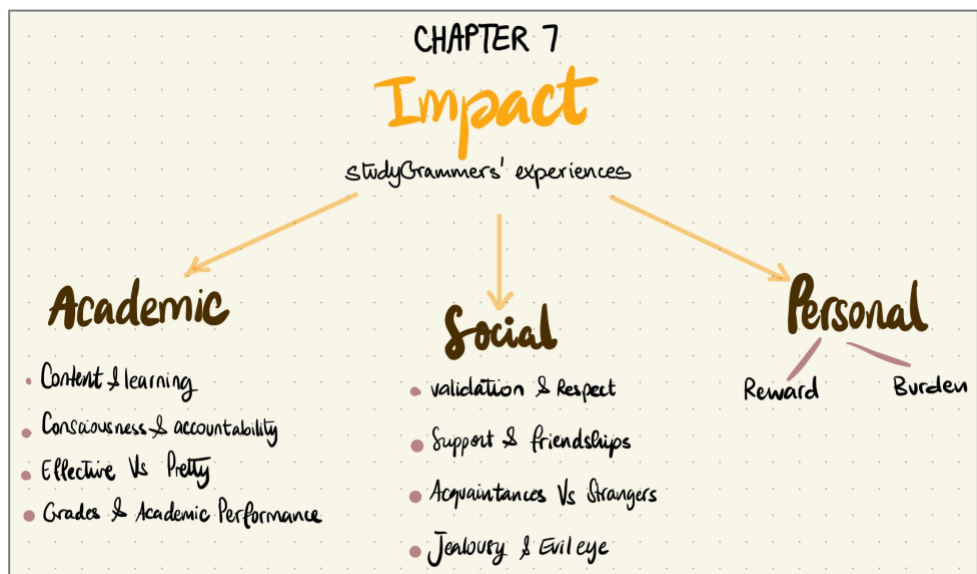
Figure 72. Key elements discussed in Chapter 7 presenting findings pertaining to RQ4

Findings unveiled some hidden and interesting aspects about how being a *StudyGrammer* impacted upon their lives. Narrating their experiences and stories, it was shown that *StudyGrammers* generally eulogised the community and enumerated the benefits of participation. This includes expanding their knowledge both in content creation skills and other knowledge-related subjects, study habits and skills, learning beyond curriculum and academic performance. The data further showed that being a *StudyGrammer* seems to generate a habit for studying (discussed in Chapter 7), turning it into a love/ thirst for ongoing learning. As noted earlier, this moves learning away from a focus on peak 'crunch' moments and instead instils a form of lifelong learning.

On a personal level, participants mainly discussed the rewarding aspects of belonging to the community, expressing their gratitude and describing how engagement in the community had led to growth. However, counternarratives and complexities were also shared, including the pressures and burdens of being a *StudyGrammer*, the jealousy and competitiveness that could be engendered and struggles 'behind the scene'. Among the pressures that *StudyGrammers* faced during their content making journey was keeping up with communication and responding to their audiences (responding to all DMs, dealing with sponsoring offers, burnout, anger and dealing with audience expectations). More personal pressures arose because being a *StudyGrammer* meant that 'they were the content itself'.

Despite these pressures, it seems that on the whole, *StudyGrammers* learn and grow through the experience, coming to terms with the pressures and learning strategies for overcoming them. Findings that arose out of RQ4 provide richer data about the intricacies of being a *StudyGrammer*. Through the narratives and experiences shared by Belle, Anna, Leila and Rstudies, and my auto-netnographic account, I argue that there is much more to *StudyGram* than the aesthetically pleasing pictures or SWM videos. The focal participants' narratives reveal and elucidate some of the hidden aspects and tensions in the community, just as any form of community will involve tensions between members.

One finding in this research is that *StudyGrammers* seem to learn from their experiences. In addition to the knowledge and content creation skills they learn and develop, their narratives were full of instances of learning more about themselves as individuals and more about how to deal with negative experiences. All in all, the impact on the academic, social and personal lives of *StudyGrammers* suggests that choosing to share parts of their life online, all oriented around

'studying' is a unique experience and that the complexities of being a *StudyGrammer* are ultimately rich and rewarding.

Linking all the RQs Together

The interconnected and interwoven themes captured in this thesis contribute to understanding the multifaceted concept of 'studying' as practised by *StudyGrammers* and their online community. Moreover, my immersion in the field through auto-netnography helped me to paint a more vivid picture of the *StudyGram* phenomenon across platforms. This vivid picture will now be framed within the theory and relevant literature that has underpinned my research.

Framing StudyGramming: Looking at OSC Through CoP, Informal Learning and Dramaturgy

This study has explored how *StudyGramming* practices unfold online among *StudyGrammers* within OSC. This main aim branches out to the four research questions discussed previously. In this sub-section, I link the findings gleaned from *StudyGrammers'* narratives and experiences and discuss them in relation to CoP (Wenger, 1998) and Goffman's dramaturgical approach (Goffman, 1959).

Findings from this research revealed that the OSC exhibits aspects of CoP. I argue that *StudyGram* manifests itself as a CoP where the broad elements proposed by Wenger (2000) are clear, namely, *community*, *domain,* and *practice* (as explained in Chapter 2). Moreover, the *StudyGram* community also features other CoP dimensions, namely, a *shared repertoire*, *mutual engagement,* and *joint enterprise.*

Regarding RQ1 within a CoP framework, it was found that the features of *StudyGram* are personalised and amassed within a shared repertoire of the *StudyGram* community. The key elements that distinguish *StudyGram* are its aesthetics and the presence of items that signify and refer to studying, that is, reading or writing or both (for example notebooks, laptops, and/ or stationary). Moreover, this shared repertoire revolves around a core central *domain* which is 'studying'. *StudyGrammers'* content (the frontstage) is study-oriented and is primarily directed towards seeking tips and information about being a student, regardless of subject (this includes everything that concerns students from tips on how to remember things to which stationery they should buy). The 'shared repertoire' in OSC, thus represents the core of *StudyGram*

culture. This is mirrored in the hashtags used, the language deployed, the concepts formed, activities developed, routines manifested, stationery items owned, values presented and the settings where studying happens. Moreover, my findings revealed that beautification of the content shared through the aesthetic presentation of the interface is done with the aim of combatting the boredom and mundanity of studying and adding a fun layer to it.

The *StudyGram* community is therefore cultivated through creating a 'shared repertoire' via the different practices that are discussed in RQ2. As such, the second element of CoP, namely 'practice', is mirrored in what *StudyGrammers* do. Finally, the third element of CoP is *community*. This latter is also very clear within OSC and was discussed within the answer to RQ3. *StudyGrammers* form a community through interactions and communications with members. Therefore, the three characteristics of CoP are exhibited and exemplified within *StudyGram*.

Significantly, this research adds more depth to the CoP model about *StudyGrammers* and the impact that both 'practice' and 'community' have on them. This is shown more clearly in Chapters 6 and 7 where the focus was directed at researching not just the 'community' and 'practice', but also at the individual's relationship to this and their feelings. Again, this shows that 'practice' is complex and affective, rather than a series of activities, and involves a front and backstage (Goffman, 1959). Using Goffman's seminal work on the presentation of self here is key as it provides insights on how *StudyGrammers* perform their content and represent themselves on stage. As explained in Chapter 2, in the case of *StudyGram* there is an interconnectedness between the front and backstage. That is, *StudyGrammers* cast elements of their backstage as a front stage (for instance, by filming SWM videos from their bedrooms, vlogging their revision day, posting pictures of their desks, to name but a few). They also edit and manage their presentations online through the rehearsal stage (Ditchfield, 2020). Abidin (2015, p.8) beautifully explained this situation:

> However, this is not to say that influencers are engaging in full disclosure and have obliterated public/private boundaries, or that they have no concerns over privacy. Instead, influencers aestheticize and package snippets of the "backstage" (Goffman 1990) to present the illusion of an intimate sharing (i.e. a carefully arranged "just got out of bed" selfie, a blogpost about a bad breakup in which only selective but highly emotive aspects are shared).

Moreover, linking to the affective factors shared by focal participants and the personal pressures they experience in the community (jealousy, evil eye, and others' assumptions), we begin to see that 'practice' has more nuanced affective dimensions. As such, practice here can be seen as an ongoing negotiation between self and community, between performance and process, between public and private.

The OSC 'shared repertoire' is showcased through aesthetics and relies heavily on the visuals presented in the community. It is the product and content through which *StudyGrammers* build the community. This content is the core of their practices and engagement. Moreover, one of the main roles of aesthetics (and generating affective features that are linked to aesthetically pleasing elements associated with beautiful items) is contributing to visualising the hidden aspects of the concept of 'study', transforming a mundane task into a beautiful event. Moreover, the distinctive interface of OSC can be explained within the lines of what Manovich called Instagramism, explaining it as follows:

> Instagramism is shaped by millions of authors connected by and participating in Instagram and other social networks... They influence each other and share advice on using mobile photo apps to create, edit, and sequence photos to be shared on Instagram. (Manovich, 2017, p. 115).

Therefore, the *StudyGram* interface can be looked at as one of Instagramism practices as evidenced from the data (Chapter 4). *StudyGram* visuals give more depth to the process of studying via the depiction of the practice on camera and thus, the embodiment of the internal process in a concrete form. The aesthetics reveal aspects and feelings of inspiration and motivation (the link to the affective ontological community) as explained in Chapter 5.

I argue that *StudyGramming* practices yield an informal learning setting whereby members learn various things together. In this study, specifically focusing on the *StudyGrammers*, they gained more insights about themselves as students, they also learned how to produce content online and engage with audiences, because this is a central part of being a *StudyGrammer*. Importantly, this idea of learning about oneself is key for education. The process of knowing and finding oneself is often seen as a struggle and sacrifice, as seen for example in the works of Nietzsche (Elgat, 2017). However, the *StudyGram* community promotes the idea that this process can be affirming and not always painful. Knowing oneself through trying different studying habits, posting and consuming study-related content and interacting and

communicating with similar others can be seen as really valuable in students' lives: it yields more dimensions to how the overall situation of being a student can be improved and if there are any problems, how to overcome them and find solutions. Therefore, this opens space for more exploration into how students can know themselves better through becoming *StudyGrammers* or engaging in *StudyGramming* practices. Such processes have been explored through, for example, reflective educational practices and models. *StudyGramming* presents a new manifestation of these reflective practices, one that the participants found particularly rewarding and useful both personally and academically. In this regard, more investigation with regards to how technology intersects with the whole process could be further explored, especially as more technology is embedded into education, presenting new possibilities to build digitally infused reflective practices and techniques.

StudyGram can also be seen as a tool that cultivates the thirst for knowledge and learning from others, not necessarily a specific topic but the broader motivation and inspiration to 'do work'. From the analysis, informal learning is seen to happen within *StudyGram*, learning how to be a student as well as how to be a content creator. In this regard, if the meaning of 'studying' is tied to formal institutions and formal learning, then when this ceases to exist (if they graduate and do not come back to academia), the process of studying is over. However, if these practices are linked to general learning that is not restricted to a specific subject/ setting or time, then *StudyGrammers* might move towards lifelong learning within informal learning that *StudyGram* is central in and helps to foster.

Referring to Goffman, features of the OSC are manifested by members, affect their identities and the way that they are perceived by others. Within Goffman's dramaturgical approach, Instagram (and other social media platforms) can be regarded as a theatrical space in which *StudyGrammers* are the players (performers) who perform their roles (studying/ sharing content) in accordance with what they think their audiences would like to see. This is by using the 'impression management' as a tool to present the front stage within the features detailed in Chapter 4. The cues used by performers to reach that frontstage include stationery, decorations, camera type and angles, filters, devices, etc., to mention just a few. All these tools provide information about their identity and contribute to fostering the visuals, the most important element of the community and its culture.

Alone Together: They are Not Lonely Anymore!

Findings emphasised that *StudyGram* has created a collaborative network between students within which they help each other and share effective methods that help them to succeed, with a focus on their studies. Moreover, this collaboration allows for *StudyGrammers* to be more together even when they are physically apart, through the affordances of platforms as well as the interactions that take place between them. The understanding of 'studying' therefore has been ontologically changed from being a solo endeavour to being a sociable and communicative one. When Sherry Turkle used the term "Alone Together" (Turkle, 2017, p.229), she used it rather cynically, to claim that young people were not talking to each other anymore and that everyone was lonely. She also contended that social media communications are shallow and quick which hinder the development of genuine bonds between users. However, the findings of this research suggest otherwise: thus, I would wish to reclaim this term "Alone Together" to reflect that the community is 'together' and that *StudyGrammers* have innovatively blurred the public and private. While it is true that participants record themselves studying alone, this becomes a reflective and communal way of building better study practices and fostering enthusiasm for lifelong educational learning.

To elucidate further, *StudyGramming* provides an opportunity to socialise around 'studying' via the practices and values that they enact and share. This is very clear especially through taking the example of SWM videos. During a live stream SWM video, *StudyGrammers* are seen with their setup studying, reading, writing, drinking water, eating, etc; the camera is depicting them and streaming their practices to other studiers who are also alone on their studying setups, studying and engaging in similar activities. Technically, both sides of the content creators and the audience might be alone but at the same time, they are together. This togetherness is further nurtured through the discussions they have during breaks, when they exchange tips and things that help with their studies via comments or DMs, when discussing issues regarding the educational system and even *StudyGramming* issues (e.g. toxic productivity and hustle culture). Therefore, *StudyGram* has cultivated a novel setting for togetherness and uses social media platforms to be 'together' even when being 'alone'.

A fifth dimension: Learning Through Studying!

The data shows that there is a spiralling relationship between *StudyGrammers* and their contributions in the OSC which can be further elucidated within the four dimensions suggested by Wenger (1998, p.5). He delineated components of social theory of learning through the following four types of learning: learning through doing (manifested in this research as the practice of creating *StudyGram* content); learning through communicating/ belonging and engaging (manifested here in community engagements); learning through experience (manifested here as a shared and ongoing practice of study); and learning through becoming (manifested here as developing an identity as *StudyGrammer/ StudyTuber/ influencer*).

Components of a social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998)
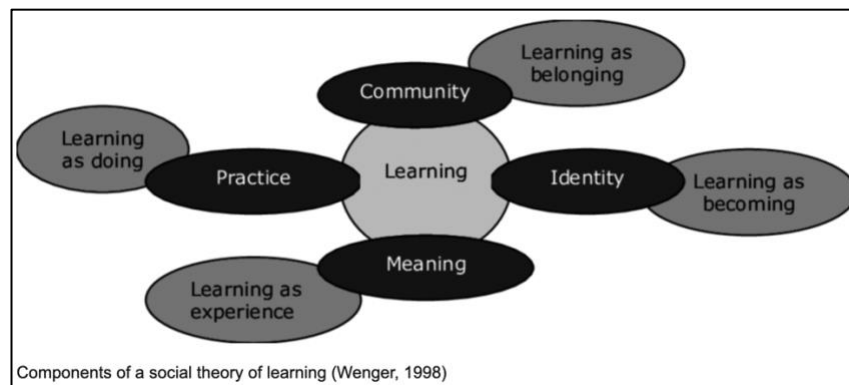
Figure 73. Components of a social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998, p5)

Pondering upon these elements suggested by Wenger (1998, p.5), another dimension arises in this research, which is: *learning through studying*. This core idea recurs in the analysis: *StudyGrammers* are learning through studying: it is more than learning, complementary but also unique in how it manifests. This can also be clarified through answering the question: *what does 'studying' mean when being a StudyGrammer?* In other words, *what is learning through StudyGramming?* What does it entail and what does it tell us about *StudyGram* as a whole?

Therefore, I argue that learning within the *StudyGram* CoP happens through studying in addition to the four previously mentioned dimensions suggested by Wenger (1998, p.5). As such, *practice* in the *StudyGram* community is 'studying' that does not only entail the actual process of seeking knowledge and grasping the content cognitively, but also involves the

practices of creating *StudyGram* content itself (learning through doing[58]) and dealing with the complexities that surround it (learning through belonging, becoming, and experience). Significantly, *learning through studying* in this CoP is characterised by distinct features that become known to its members through spending enough time in the community (Wenger et al., 2002). Considering this, Wenger (1998) further explicates that it is the amalgam between *domain*, *community*, and *practice* that forms a CoP. Moreover, participation in and within these three elements is what cultivates the community.

Linking the findings of the 4 RQs together, this section aimed to elucidate and highlight how the *StudyGram* community is enacted online as a CoP through *StudyGramming* practices. I have argued that *StudyGram's* learning aspects are congruent with Wenger's four dimensions and have proposed a fifth dimension that is reflected through *learning through studying*. This latter might further be taxonomized into three aspects: internal (knowledge based), external (visually represented) and affective (community aspects), which are all reflected in the findings.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In this chapter, I revisited the research questions of this research through providing answers to each. Moreover, I have linked the findings together and explained them within the theoretical concepts of CoP, Goffman's dramaturgical approach and informal learning.

In the final chapter (Chapter 9), I reflect on the research after I discuss its contributions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for further research.

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[58] For instance: finding ideas of what to post, buying props, organising elements in the pictures, lighting and colours editing, engaging with audience, managing emails form sponsors, posting pictures and many more.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

Introduction

This thesis analysed the voices of study-related content creators on OSC, *StudyGrammers*. Through deploying a netnographic approach combined with auto-netnography, this thesis has conceptualised 'studying' through the practices and the impact OSC has on them.

In this final chapter, I conclude the research by highlighting my contribution, suggesting implications, and discussing the limitations of this research project. Recommendations for future research will also be shared before I close the chapter with my reflections on the overall research.

Contribution and Originality

This study seeks to contribute to both the methodological literature and the substantive literature surrounding online communities by using netnography combined with auto-netnography to investigate online cultures. This study also addresses teachers/ lecturers, tutors, parents, and curriculum designers in terms of making practical suggestions regarding what students need and how they can be supported. The originality of this research can be categorised into three main aspects: methodological, theoretical, and substantive.

Methodological Contribution

This research deployed a netnography and auto-netnography as an assemblage that was carefully crafted to investigate the *StudyGram* phenomenon at a specific moment in time and with specific participants. The netnographic approach helped to obtain a fine-grained dataset which was used to analyse *StudyGramming* practices. This was particularly useful as an approach during the pandemic and allowed for a discussion to evolve not only about the surface level content of OSC but also of the practices and opinions that lie *beneath* this content. This allowed me to build the four data chapters around core themes that not only pertained to the content of *StudyGram* but also to *StudyGrammer* identities. The auto-netnography added an extra layer to the study and enabled me to experience first-hand what it might mean and feel

like to be a *StudyGrammer*, starting from buying a camera to communicating with followers and responding to their DMs.

The tools deployed in this research - participant observation, interviews, immersion journal and content creation- permitted me to focus both on the deep level as well as the surface, both on life behind the scenes and what was presented on OSC. I would recommend employing similar methodological aspects when researching online communities through combining an auto- netnographic approach within a netnography. I also recommend the use of an immersion journal to document the details of immersing oneself in the field and embrace creative ways of documenting observations. This allows for an in-depth exploration and reveals detailed auto-netnographic intricacies crafted and personalised by the researcher. Moreover, this research proposes the use of an engaging tool such as the iPad to get closer and to 'play with the data'. As discussed in the methodological section of this research, documenting, and analysing ethnographic data with an engaging tool such as notetaking applications on a tablet and scribbling, allows the ethnographer to decipher meanings each time they revisit the data sets, yielding more nuanced understandings. The decision to adopt such playful approaches was very conscious in this thesis, as it mimics some of the aesthetic choices made in the *StudyGrammer* community. Given the heavy reliance on visuals in many online communities, this playfulness with the form and function of data can prove particularly useful as a reflective process of analysis.

The lack/ absence of ethnographic methods for exploring study-related online communities was addressed through designing and employing a rich netnographic plan. Building on the existing research, this gap was addressed through designing and deploying a netnographic approach that was supported by my own auto-netnography. Therefore, my voice as a researcher, student and a *StudyGrammer* is also present in the data and adds more richness and depth. This approach has applications for many different fields of research. This specific project positions itself at the intersection of Educational Research, Cultural Studies and Digital Sociology but these sorts of deep data practices can be of use in many fields, especially as technology continues to impact how society broadly acts and interacts.

Theoretical Contribution

This research aimed to build an understanding of social media study communities and online behaviours through Wenger's CoP and Goffman's dramaturgical approach. The intricacies of OSC were explored and conceptualised through both these two lenses. Although these were originally developed to understand social phenomena that are not online, my research affirms the value of these theories (in addition to previous research such as Erdogdu (2022) and Gilmore (2014)), demonstrating their usefulness in deciphering meaning from online situations, in this case OSC. The OSC is evidently a complex community that continues to evolve in new ways, and as such, many theoretical frameworks could be applied to understand the minutia of the ways technology, study and community combine online. It is apparent that this rich community, like many growing communities online, is worthy of more academic attention. This thesis is an attempt to scratch the surface of the community and to expand existing theoretical frameworks to better understand what OSC means in wider debates about technology and education.

Moreover, in terms of theory, this research contributes to a conceptualisation of 'study' through exploring the different reasons why *StudyGrammers* join the community, their focus on content and proposes a model through which to understand 'study' in this context (see Chapter 5). 'Study' as a concept is often discussed in educational research alongside other issues such as learning, specific subject areas and student skills. Much like the OSC, this thesis is an attempt to focus on study as a singular concept that manifests in a unique way online. This singular focus on study separates from learning could be of importance to educational research more broadly.

Conceptualising 'studying' within the CoP framework helps in adding more depth to the data. Specifically, this thesis makes the case for adding a fifth dimension to learning to Wenger's (1998) model, namely *learning through studying*. Again, this centralisation and decoupling of study from broader learning could be particularly fruitful for educational researchers and theorists. Moreover, 'studying' has been evidenced in this thesis through the nuanced findings and analysis of this netnography, and is presented as being a complex ongoing practice, entailing all four aspects of learning within a CoP (doing, belonging, becoming and experience) as proposed by Wenger (1998).

Informational Contribution

Adding to the literature around internet cultures and online communities, especially study-related ones, this research is one of the first pieces of research that investigates the *StudyGram* phenomenon. It contributes to the literature on 'studying' and more broadly, to the growing research around online communities. It also adds to the literature through delineating the *StudyGram's* shared repertoire, *StudyGramming* practices, *StudyGrammers* and their experiences in OSC, and the impact it has on them. Very little has been written thus far about OSC academically. Therefore, one of the core contributions of my exploratory study is that it highlights the different aspects of *StudyGram.* As such, it is also an attempt to open what I hope will be a fruitful and ongoing academic conversation around OSC.

Among the gaps highlighted in this research was that the very few studies that have studied *StudyGram* have generally only focused on one platform. Izquierdo-Iranzo and Gallardo-Echenique (2020) focused on Instagram and Lee et al. (2021) focused only on YouTube. Therefore, I studied the phenomenon across platforms, more specifically, spaces where it started and is more dominant (Tumblr, YouTube, and Instagram). Moreover, I have explored the different affordances each platform offers and the relationship it has with their performance and engagements. This is depicted in Chapter 4, where this gap is further filled with descriptions of the main features of #studyblr, #studytube, and #studygram. As social media trends continue to evolve, further spaces continue to emerge, such as TikTok, presenting new avenues for further research.

Given the under-investigation of the *StudyGram* phenomenon, this thesis has also contributed to knowledge through exploring the rich intricacies behind *StudyGramming* content creation practices and enactments of 'study' in the community. By focusing on the practice of 'studying' that is the core element around which the community emerged, this study addresses a gap by proposing a fifth dimension to learning which is *learning through studying*. To address the gap in terms of knowledge about *StudyGram*, Chapter 4 provided a definition for OSC, Chapter 5 defined 'study', Chapter 6 defined *StudyGrammers* and the last chapter investigated the impact of OSC on *StudyGrammers* at three levels: academic, personal, and social.

It is also important to highlight that this research sits at the intersection of digital research and education and as such, makes contributions to both fields (and others). Some of these implications are discussed in the next sub-section.

Implications

If we look at the *StudyGram* phenomenon as an iceberg, the findings from the first research question (features of OSC) can be regarded as its tip. As such, implications that can be drawn from this, are related to platforms and content presented online. The implication drawn from RQ1 suggests that features of OSC might be useful in the digital field by serving as an entrance to the community, especially for the newcomers who want to become *StudyGrammers*. Through the experiences and analysis shared about *StudyGram* in this research, they will know what to expect, how the community works and if they want to do something similar. Platform designers can observe the community more closely and listen to *StudyGrammers'* concerns when developing new affordances.

The complexity of 'studying' as a practice and the deep impact it has on various individuals can also inform educators. In addition to considerations about content to be taught and methods to be used, it is also important to take into account the narratives and personal experiences of students and specifically, the impact of 'studying' on online platforms. *StudyGram* is an important locus where these experiences are narrated. It is also a doorway to 'lifelong' learning, and a way of encouraging education outside of traditional formal structures. As such, OSC may be a fruitful avenue to explore how to encourage a love of learning in students in a digital age.

Implications for practice also include the use of SWM videos to encourage productivity. The data shows the shift from liking and appreciating the beauty of content posted by others to acting and studying/ doing work as a student, using the process as a form of reflection on studying and learning more broadly. In this regard, schools and teachers might consider using *StudyGram* as a learning tool and a motivation booster. Perhaps students could be encouraged to 'study' and focus on practice. As such, teachers may install in them that it is important to know who they are as students and why it is important to know their preferred and most effective ways to study and therefore, learning effectively. As someone who hopes to teach in future, I too have thought about what might be taken from these practices that could help my future students.

Without the creation of the *StudyGramming* community within which certain practices are shared, *StudyGrammers'* minds and lives would go unnoticed. This investigation of practices (content and interactions), identities and the platforms that characterise the overall *StudyGram* phenomenon has generated insights into how students practise 'studying', what they think of it, how they spend their time and what they do. In this regard, listening to what these *StudyGrammers* have to say about being a student helps to leverage the understanding of the overall student experience in a digital age, something that has proven particularly useful and fruitful during the pandemic.

Educators should find these insights both useful and thought-provoking for their own practice in working with a new generation of learners (the effect of *StudyGramming* practices on teachers' practices and what they can learn from it to transcend the overall studying/ learning/ academic experience); put simply, an understanding of these practices can improve the overall experience of being a student, regardless of place or topic.

As Dyer highlighted: "There is a clear case to build an understanding of social media not from our assumptions but from the experiences of young people" (Dyer, 2020, p.36). *StudyGram* can therefore inform implementations across educational setting and in libraries and study spaces. This may involve designing study spaces according to students' preferences, based on *StudyGrammers* and their commentors. For instance, the creation of certain ambiances, crafting different study rooms, designing surveys according to what *StudyGrammers* post to get more data, could contribute to creating a good learning environment. Students can also learn to be life-long learners through building study routines and behaviours and learning from *StudyGrammers*. More research is needed to explore the impact of *StudyGramming* on educational attainment and student attitudes. Whilst this project was keen to decouple OSC from specific learning, there is also scope to develop research that explores OSC as a learning tool.

StudyGram can also be valuable for teachers as it could be used as a tool to transmit information to their students or to provide the skills that would encourage students to take ownership of their own learning. This could take the form of crafting accounts that curate all the important information about studying practices that can be of use to students according to disciplines, interests, and capacities. Or, by following the *StudyGram* culture, teachers can transmit what they see (mainly other students' experiences) to their students even without them having to join

StudyGram. Students who are studying and being trained to become teachers could benefit from *StudyGram* culture content to yield fresh ideas for learning more about the different ways students' study and might be helpful for them to understand the student experience as future teachers.

On a wider social and societal scope, the implication of this research could be particularly impactful to disseminate *StudyGram* culture among people. *StudyGram* encompasses a wide range of social skills and experiences which reveal the power of *StudyGrammers* and their world that they have created online around the act of 'studying'. Societies can benefit from experiences and move them to the workplace such as resilience, content creation, filming and editing skills, etc. Research suggests that watching online content and videos can help develop a range of skills and literacies (Majid et al., 2012) as a space of informal learning (Lange 2018). For example, Monkhouse and Forbes (2015) suggest that YouTube videos can help music students better understand and analyse their own performances. Similarly, *StudyGram* may offer students a space to better understand and analyse their studying. As discussed in chapter 5, demystifying studying can be very useful. As such, further research may wish to consider exploring how these online communities can improve study skills. Similarly, researchers such as Choi and Behm-Morawitz (2017) argue that online content can encourage viewers to develop digital literacy and produce their own content. As this thesis suggests, producing content can be a useful skill and tool to develop. It is hoped that this study might encourage readers to engage with online study communities and develop their own skills and uses for these diverse and complex communities, shining a light on the particularly critical and reflective nature of the *StudyGram* community.

With the pervasiveness of online study culture, society might be highly impacted especially in terms of spreading the act of studying and therefore the notion of lifelong learning. Parents can as well reach out to *StudyGrammers* and enquire about the educational system and the wider implications on their kids and students in general.

Another implication of this research is raising awareness about social media use and challenges. Despite the great impact of *StudyGram* as shown through this thesis, there is still another side to the phenomenon. As shown through data, challenges of toxic productivity, hustle culture, unhealthy relationships, jealousy, and content creation pressures are widely present within *StudyGram*. Therefore, this research could help parents, teachers, students, and

other community members to understand some of the struggles that *StudyGrammers* and other students face and help them to overcome them and have better experiences.

Limitations

Despite the contributions of this research to the understandings of *StudyGram*, its limitations also need to be acknowledged. Firstly, concerning the number of participants, qualitative research is often criticised for not being able to generalise the results. This is certainly true in this respect since there were only four participants. However, it is important to highlight that this research did not aim to generalise its results. As an exploratory study, the findings will be relevant to similar online communities and inferences can be made in terms of learning in a digital age.

Secondly, demographics were not taken into consideration in this research because the focus was more on *StudyGramming* practices. Exploring demographic differences when engaging with OSC may be a particularly fruitful area of future study. On Tumblr, the #studyblr analysis was not as deep as the other platforms mainly due to issues encountered with the navigation process. However, Tumblr provides a very rich platform for netnographic research that might be of use for researchers to explore other aspects of online communities in different fields.

Thirdly, it is beyond the scope of this research to study audiences; instead, this research has focused only on *StudyGrammers,* the creators of content. Another limitation lies in the fact that *StudyGram* is constantly changing as it is part of internet research that is usually characterised as 'fluid'. This may restrict these findings to a specific moment in time as affordances and trends will inevitably change. Even during the period of study, there were many significant events that impacted practices, notably, the move to online learning during the pandemic. At an early stage of this research, I intended to use a survey as a supporting tool; however, I didn't manage to use it mainly because I shifted the focus of this study entirely to *StudyGrammers* and not to audiences of the community. Thus, another avenue for further exploration would be to focus on audiences and their engagement with OSC.

Finally, data collection of this research happened in the middle of the COVID 19 pandemic. This influenced both my state as a researcher and *StudyGrammers'* practices. It would therefore be interesting to look at the *StudyGram* phenomenon post COVID19.

Paradoxically, the paucity in research around *StudyGram was* both a strength and a weakness for this study. A point of strength was that has pioneered research on this particular phenomenon and a limitation is that the richness of OSC makes it hard to capture in all its complexity.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a lot that could be explored beyond this research as there is very little literature around *StudyGram*. One aspect that was beyond the scope of this research is the 'monetisation' of the platforms and the economic dimension of the community. Although it has been referred to superficially in some of the analysis in this thesis, this topic could be explored further by researchers, especially in terms of how sponsorships work in the community and the business of selling items and *StudyGram* 'labour'. In other words, it would be useful to study the 'commodification of the practice of study'. Another area for further investigation is to explore how *StudyGrammers* engage in self-branding practices and giving a voice to their platforms to bring about products and start their own business (for instance, soap, books, planners, t-shirts, stationery, etc.). Moreover, this can be investigated within a consumerist lens of the community. The aesthetics and the visuals are signifiers of access to wealth, the prestige *StudyGrammers* get, increasing their status, but it also shows that they are weary of the importance of studying and the act of learning. This tendency could be investigated through the lens of social capital.

More participants might allow the phenomenon to be explored further. For example, future research might consider exploring OSC on other famous platforms such as TikTok, Discord, Twitch, and Twitter where the community was attracting more attention at the time of writing. This kind of data would add more richness to current understanding about the community. It would be interesting to see what content creators who are mainly students are posting on other platforms and whether the features of *StudyGram* are the same or whether different practices are evolving.

While this research primarily focused on *StudyGrammers*, further research is needed to explore the audience of *StudyGram* beyond content creators and explore their perspectives about OSC and their different understandings/ uses of the community.

Reflection on the Overall Research

This research found that *StudyGrammers* contribute to building, shaping, and enriching the *StudyGram* culture through *StudyGramming* practices. This latter mirror *StudyGrammers'* experiences which give us insights into how studying is enacted and manifested online in OSC across platforms. Therefore, this study suggests a fifth dimension to learning which is *learning through studying*.

The significance of this research is in providing a rich account for OSC by shedding light on *StudyGrammers* and their practices. The CoP framing assisted in illuminating thoughts about how *StudyGram* is a community teeming with members interacting and networking together. It helped in conceptualising it as a community that is rewriting the norms and shifting the act of 'studying' from being a solo activity to a more social one where, despite still studying alone in their rooms, they have company and seek the closeness through live SWM videos, for instance.

At the time of writing this, my focal participants have moved on with their lives and each of them has moved on to other things over the two years since I interviewed them. One of them graduated while another has moved away from 'studying' to focus on her business. One is still a student but has deleted her *StudyGram* account and the last one is still producing content but with less frequency. This illustrates that the internet field is 'constantly changing' and so are its users. That is why it is important to highlight that this research captures *StudyGramming* practices at a certain point in time with specific individuals who had distinct personalities and experiences. Similarly, my auto-netnographic account is unique to myself in a specific moment in time and certain understandings.

From another perspective, many people ask what would happen to OSC when these pioneering *StudyGrammers* graduate, and they are not '*studying'* anymore. Future research might consider exploring the extent to which these learning practices fostered by *StudyGramming* remain once they are no longer engaged in that community. I have suggested that engaging in

StudyGramming might promote lifelong learning. Longitudinal data may be able to explore this hypothesis in more depth.

I engaged in auto-netnography based on the assumption that in order to understand the *StudyGrammers,* I needed to become one. This approach allowed me to understand the lived experiences of my focal participants and add more layers and depth to their experiences through reflecting on my own. It helped to hone my understanding of the *StudyGram* as a community and the practices that happen there, i.e., understanding *StudyGram* culture as a community of practice.

The exciting part of this research was becoming a *StudyGrammer* myself. Through buying the camera and engaging in all the practices, I gained an insider perspective. I too experienced the excitement of seeing notifications from people liking my content and the act of responding back to them. Making videos and producing content helped me to understand the research questions that led this project and assisted me in conducting netnographic observations and online interviews. Therefore, I believe that the deep connection between the two types of netnography deployed in this research generated a more nuanced, multi-layered account of the phenomenon.

The fact that I am also a PhD student was very helpful as a first identity, as all my participants were students at the time of fieldwork, under formal education and belonging to an educational institution. Studying this community as my core study gave me a whole perspective about studying and helped me to discover new things about myself as a student and as a *StudyGrammer*. For instance, it helped me to understand what it feels like to type in front of a camera as part of a study vlog video. I could note first- hand the decision-making process of keeping or removing certain details in the editing. Also experienced the hard work it takes to upload a five-minute video and the sleepless nights in the library that allowed me to see another dimension to studying.

As a PhD student, I was given the option of studying in an office with other PhD peers or in the library. I have always preferred the library, and this was tremendously helpful for my observation practices, as I observed the students around me and the different ways they behave, sit, eat, chat and 'study'. At the time of writing this thesis, I got to see a different realm of studying within sleepless nights in the library and early morning with hopeful sunrises. What I

witnessed in the library was like a real-life *StudyGram* where 'studiers' have different studying habits, they sit differently and choose different places in the library, I have also observed my inclination to change my study space when I become bored of a place or simply because I want to try somewhere new.

This study has explored *StudyGramming* practices as portrayed in and through OSC. My research narrates the *StudyGram* story and *StudyGramming* practices as seen and experienced by the four focal participants (Leila, Belle, Rstudies and Anna) and myself as an auto-netnographer so that my participation in the research through auto-netnography added another dimension to the experience.

What makes *StudyGramming* appealing to me and why it merits further investigation is that it adds another dimension to studying, a social dimension that relies for the most part on sharing aesthetically pleasing pictures and tips about studies. The 'studying' aspect is particularly important because it is a topic that, it is assumed, everyone knows about. But in fact, the 'everydayness' of students' lives involves far more than just studying: there are also emotions, ambitions, fears and anxieties. Students also seek help from each other and build communities around an activity that is seen as mundane and part of most people's lives since childhood.

Conclusion

In closing, this thesis has traced the story of the *StudyGram* phenomenon through deploying a designed netnographic research. Findings have showcased and discussed the experiences and narratives of *StudyGram,* a space where certain students (*StudyGrammers*) choose to create content that challenges the assumptions and practices usually associated with studying by changing the perspective towards studying practices and postulating different techniques and strategies, as discussed in this thesis.

While writing this thesis, I often tried to envision *StudyGrammers* themselves reading this piece of work around themselves and around something they are passionate about. I hope through this research that *StudyGrammers* themselves will gain insights about their community and can relate to the focal participants' stories. This might show them the value of the practices they participate in while at the same time help them improve their practice and perhaps inspire them to do more.

My thesis highlights the idea that there is much more to 'studying' then just the mundane acts of seeking knowledge (reading, writing, rehearsing, waking up, getting ready, etc.). It highlights and, in some ways, celebrates the rich practices that are embedded in the life of *StudyGrammers* as content creators which involve using a camera, arranging the scene to be filmed and photographed, photography, editing and social communication skills. Through this thesis as well, it has been shown that *StudyGramming* practices manifest the three characteristics of a community of practice (domain, community, and practice). Additionally, it has suggested a fifth dimension to learning as proposed by Wenger (1998) which is *learning through studying* that in turn encompasses all the other layers of learning (doing, becoming, communicating and experience).

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Research Information Sheets and Participant Consent Forms

Meriem Abed
PhD student
May 31st, 2020

Faculty of Social Sciences

School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Email: M.Abed@uea.ac.uk

Engagement with the 'Online Study Community' through YouTube, Tumblr and Instagram: A Netnographic Study #studygram, #studytube and #studyblr

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1)   What is this study about?
You are invited to take part in a research study about **the online study community (#studyblr, #studytube and #studygram).** The study community represents the online space on the three platforms (YouTube, Tumblr and Instagram), where users who are interested in documenting their academic experience share their common interest which is study-related content. It is found mainly under the hashtags of #studyblr, #studygram and #studytube. The research aims to explore this community, how students represent themselves in it, how they use it in their everyday life as well as the impact it has on their lives in general. Moreover, it aims to describe this community across the three identified platforms considering how members describe their participation and engagement.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are considered as an active participant of the community given the number of your followers and subscribers in addition to the content you share.

This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study.

Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:
- ✓   Understand what you have read.
- ✓   Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓   Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓   You have received a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2)   Who is running the study?
The study is being carried out by the following researcher:

Meriem Abed, a PhD student under the supervision of Dr. Harry T Dyer, Lecturer in Education at UEA.

(3)   What will the study involve for me?
I will ask you permission to interview you about your participation and being a member in the community across the platforms (whether you are a *StudyTuber*, a *StudyBlr* or a *StudyGrammer*). The interview will be online through Skype (or in-person if applicable) and the questions will be open questions about your overall experience being part of the study community. Because you are quiet known in the community sector, I would like to ask for your permission whether to mention your name or to stay completely anonymous (which will be ensured).

(4)   How much of my time will the study take?
I am planning to conduct interviews by the end of April/ May 2020. The interview will take no more than an hour in total.

(5)   Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?
Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by emailing me at: M.Abed@uea.ac.uk

You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. If you decide at a later time to withdraw from the study your information will be removed from our records and will not be included in any results, up to the point we have analysed and published the results.

(6)   Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study, we do not expect any harm or risks. The only issue is that because you might be known in the spectrum of the community, people may recognize you from the research; however, I will do my best to ensure that anonymity and confidentiality is granted unless you wanted to be mentioned in the research.

(7)   Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

This research aims to explore the online study community and reveal the voice of students who are members of it. Therefore, it will provide guidelines for other students, parents and teachers. Moreover, it will help to shape an understanding for this relatively new online phenomenon and provide a sense of its impact on all aspects of our society.

(8)   What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

The results from this study will be used for my PhD thesis, conferences and possible publications.

By providing your consent you are agreeing to take part in an interview that we will analyse for the purpose of exploring the online study communities. You are also agreeing to us collecting personal

information about your account (blog, page or channel) in the study community for the purposes of this research study. This involves what you preferred to present in this section which might include: your provided name, age, hobbies, place, websites, etc. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2015).

Your information will be stored securely, and your identity/information will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications unless you agree to this using the tick box on the consent form. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

(9) What if I would like further information about the study?
When you have read this information, Meriem Abed will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Meriem Abed, PhD student at UEA, M.Abed@uea.ac.uk.

(10) Will I be told the results of the study?
You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of one-page summary. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished.

(11) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?
The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.
If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:

Meriem Abed
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
M.Abed@uea.ac.uk

If you would like to speak to someone else, you can contact my supervisor:
Harry Dyer. Email: Harry.T.Dyer@uea.ac.uk

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Nalini Boodhoo - Professor of Language Education at: n.boodhoo@uea.ac.uk.

(12) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?
You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and email a copy to me at: M.Abed@uea.ac.uk. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

This information sheet is for you to keep

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (1ˢᵗ Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:
✓ I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
✓ I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
✓ The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
✓ I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
✓ I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.
✓ I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
✓ I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
✓ I understand that the results of this study may be published, but these publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me unless I consent to being identified using the "Yes" checkbox below.

☐   Yes, I am happy to be identified.

☐   No, I don't want to be identified. Please keep my identity anonymous.

I consent to:
• **Audio-recording**   YES ☐   NO ☐

• **Video-recording**   YES ☐   NO ☐

• **Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?**
                                                                              YES ☐   NO ☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____
Signature
....
PRINT name
....
Date
....

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (2ⁿᵈ Copy to Participant)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], agree to take part in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:
✔   I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
✔   I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
✔   The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
✔   I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
✔   I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.
✔   I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, and that unless I indicate otherwise any recordings will then be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study. I also understand that I may refuse to answer any questions I don't wish to answer.
✔   I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.
✔   I understand that the results of this study may be published, but these publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me unless I consent to being identified using the "Yes" checkbox below.

☐   Yes, I am happy to be identified.

☐   No, I don't want to be identified. Please keep my identity anonymous.

I consent to:
•   **Audio-recording**   YES   ☐   NO   ☐

•   **Video-recording**   YES   ☐   NO   ☐

•   **Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study?**
                                                                                      YES   ☐   NO   ☐
If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

☐ Email: _____

Signature
....
PRINT name
....
Date
....

Letter of Invite

My name is Meriem Abed, and I am a PhD student at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK. I am conducting research about the "online study community" that is known through the hashtags: #studytube, #studyblr and #studygram.
The aim of this research is to describe the features of this community over the 3 platforms (YouTube, Tumblr and Instagram) through unpacking the different practices and experiences of its members and how they portray the narrative of 'studying'. Moreover, it aims to determine how creating/ following content on this online community impacts upon students' lives academically, socially and personally.

My first ever encounter with the community was through #studyblr on Tumblr which sparked my interest. As a result, I decided to specify my PhD journey to explore it and delve deeply into its folds. I chose a netnographic approach to conduct this study. This means I am participating as an active member by immersing myself in it and documenting my experience along the way. For this reason, I created an account on each platform and I am trying to upload content and reflect upon the overall experience and engagement with members (find my accounts links below). But I would also love to gain deeper insight from the perspective of people who have weight and experience in the community, i.e. leading figures in the community. This is because they have been here longer and witnessed many aspects that wouldn't be apparent in the observations or through my experience.

Why You?

You have been chosen to undertake this interview because you meet my research participants criteria. Being an active member on at least two platforms with more than 1K followers and regarding your activity in the community of sharing content that is study related. I would love to gain an in-depth discovery of the community from your own perspective and unique lived experiences. Considering you as an active participant of the community, your description of the community and practices will be much appreciated for my research.

How it will run

The interview will take from **30 minutes** to **one-hour maximum** and it is **informal**. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, rather your **opinions**, **impressions** and **thoughts** are merely what I seek. You are free to skip any questions for any reason and you may choose to stop participating anytime. You'll be recorded and transcribed. Only my supervisor has the access to this data and it's completely up to you whether to mention your name or use a pseudonym. (Further details discussed in the consent form and the information sheet).

Thank you so much for reading this through, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and findings could lead to greater public understanding of the unique ways students are present online through their study accounts in the community.
If you are willing to participate, please suggest a day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thanks!
Meriem

My Accounts:

- Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/marystudiessunshine/
- YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6Zc-YyxvYc4IFH2DMSafoQ
- Tumblr: https://marystudiessunshinee.tumblr.com/

Appendix C: Email to Interview Participant and her Reply

To: Meriem Abed (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)   Mon 01/06/2020 5:30 AM

Hi Meriem,

Sure, I'd be happy to participate. Let me know when you'd be available to conduct the interview.

...

MA Meriem Abed (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)   Sun 31/05/2020 8:12 PM
To:

Participant Information shee...   Letter of Invite for Interviews...
Saved to OneDrive   Saved to OneDrive

2 attachments (43 KB)   ↓ Download all

Dear

Hope this email finds you well. Let me first thank you for your amazing work on the study community, on YouTube, Tumblr and Instagram, I followed you a long time ago and your content is really helpful.

As you might guess from the email heading, I am doing my PhD about the online study community on the three platforms Youtube, Tumblr and instagram. My aim is to give an understanding for this new phenomenon online and shed the light on it.

I am emailing you because you would be a perfect participant in my interviews to share your experience that would enlighten my research. Please read through the participant information sheet and let me know if you want to participate in my research.

Many Thanks,
Meriem

Appendix D: Ethical Approval

EDU ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER 2018-2019	

APPLICANT DETAILS	
Name:	Meriem ABED
School:	Education and Lifelong Learning
Current Status:	PGR Student
UEA Email address:	dzq18cpu@uea.ac.uk
EDU REC IDENTIFIER:	2019/07/MA_HD

Approval details	
Approval start date:	3.9.19
Approval end date:	30.9.21
Specific requirements of approval:	- Please ensure an explicit and visible acknowledgment of your role as the researcher in this context and the notification of the possibility of excluding data if a community member wishes it. - To make an ongoing assessment of any potential dangers in comments or material broadcasted and ensure any ethical considerations are followed appropriately. **You must ensure that the PCF is checked for grammatical and spelling errors – there are still some within this.** - As the project will be undertaken now with an interim Head of School in place, you should change Prof Richard Andrews for Prof Nalini Boodhoo. **Your PCF consent section (two copies) do not match; the second copy still has video details included. As this material is going to be emailed, I would suggest that you just include the first copy (to the participant) as they will send this back to you and then keep a copy for themselves.**
Please note that your project is only given ethical approval for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethical approval by the EDU REC before continuing. Any amendments to your project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU REC Chair as soon as possible to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.	

Kate Russell EDU Chair, Research Ethics Committee

Umm, I think there is one particular example of one of my friends who was , I guess not saying like I didn't ... I don't ... know how to pin-point the feeling I was getting from it but , it's kinda saying: "you're so lucky. you are famous (or something) . like I wish I had that. like almost saying like "we all deserve it equally, so why you?" ? 💬

worst example she had

- Friend
  - weird feeling.
  - Lucky - famous
  - "I wish I had that"
→ Jealous expression from her friend.

Which sort of I understand to some extent that I was lucky that the thing I do became trendy when I was doing it. But like Ehh ! you know! It could go either way .. That's the worst example I had of it ..

- Understand
- Lucky - Studytube is trendy NOW

🌿

Most of my friends are very positive , like people see and they are just like "WOW! that's so COOL! like how does this happen?! how DO you do this?!"

- friends Positive
  - WOW
- Amazed
- so cool
- curiosity

Yeah! that's really amazing! _ So. do you have any story that you would like to mention as a highlight between you & your followers - something happened if you have something? (positive / negative it doesn't matter).

* Asking for an anecdote! between followers & her (+/-).

Umm, I've met one of my followers like in person . umm. actually a few times, mostly because I do cross-country in track which I meet , it's just like a gathering of thousands of people in the same place and a lot of the time, I've been like in the line of the bathroom or warming up in the field before my race, and someone is just like : "Are you studyqpill?" "Yes, I am! It's so cool that you recognise me in person" → Umm, those are pretty cool moments! 😄 "giggles"

- meeting followers in-person
- cross-country in track
- gathering of thousands of ppl in the same place
instances : meeting people in bathroom lines / field before race
- Pretty cool moments
- Happy - Pretty crazy
- so cool

Also, one person was vlogging and they asked me if I wanna be in their vlog _ that was pretty crazy. "giggles" 😄

I really like the comment like : "you really changed my mind about studying" "I don't hate it any more' & like "you helped me improve my grades because I felt like studying or something to be enjoyed".
★

some feedback

Positive change that people tell her about
↳ She's happy for that!
Connections/relationships between each other!

Yeah! that's amazing .. yeah! that's really cool ...
Okay .. so how do you feel about sharing your life /aspects of your personal life online?!

Umm. it's stressful sometimes .. So like YouTubers who vlog , their personal lives are under scrutiny, and that must be super stressful. I only vlog one week per year or so .. So, it's not that bad .. But it is stressful to just like have yourself on the internet as like almost a job, or like the performance of the videos or the posts

_ Sharing aspects of Personal life! _
Stressful sometimes
- famous YouTubers
- their life under scrutiny
- Super stressful
- Vlogs once a year, not that bad
- still stressful
- Yourself on the net
- as almost a job

Performance of posts & videos seen as a judgement on yourself

⑤

almost seem like a judgement on yourself... like `oh! this video had low views, oh I must've done a bad job, it must not be interesting enough or knowledgable enough` → when that's not really the case - logically think about it - all my videos are approximately the same quality.

It's hard to have yourself tied to the performance of your work rather than like if you work for a company, it's more like you do the work, then it just happens and it's not really your fault or up to your personality it's just hard to reconcile... like.. `I'm the content`

I see what you mean! yeah
One of the aspects that I want to shed the light on in my thesis is the impact of this community on the `content creator's themselves`! So! How do you think this `impacted your life Socially?`

Umm, I feel like, um, I've always been like "Nerdy" and at my school that's not necessarily a bad thing.. because it's fairly academically oriented high school.. I guess like once people started finding out that I had this YouTube channel, I was almost like overweighed in status, to like "ruler of the Nerd"! 😅 or something like that.. I don't know how to explain it.. but it wasn't exactly as dramatic as that.. but it made people to respect me more almost! as if like having certain number of followers attached to you, just like made you more interesting.. eventhough I was the same person (before & after people found out)..
    impact & reaction of people after her fame!

Do you think they changed the way they treat you?

Umm, it wasn't very drastic.. because I was never really made fan of for being academic.. umm.. it was just like, people seems like to view.. Um.. I don't know how to explain it.. a sort of more validated version.. people always like to (especially in high school) to gossip and talk about whose fun to be around or whatever..
And having like the validation of being popular on the internet almost like permits people to find me interesting without it being "controverical" to find me interesting.... (said something I didn't hear)
[drinks water 🫗]   which is a bit awk. "

— Anxiety / Stress about oneself's performance / doubt
→ reflections on one's performance

— Hard
— tie oneself to the performance of your work

→ hard to reconcile! سبب التوقف ...
🔥 🔥 🔥   بيسبب..

impact of the community on her as a content creator.

// Impact on social life.

—Nerdy at school
↳Not a bad thing.
— Academically oriented school
✱People knew about her YouTube channel →
    they overweighed her status!
! impact of fame!
✱more respect
✱Having nº of followers attached to you → made you more interesting
    (she's the same person).

— Change in the way they treat her
    — Never made fun of for being academic
    — more validated version
    — People in school like to gossip & talk about whose most fun

— Validation from fame on net
— Permits to make her interesting.
— without controversy.

⑥

How about academically?

> Emm, I think being forced to do a lot of research and to think about "studying" a lot for my videos, helped my academics, because you know, I had to research a certain topic about in order to make a video or for certain videos if I wanted to talk about my experiences, I had to actually go back & think about it and like reflect on it & figure out what worked & what didn't, and I found that really helpful.

Very helpful to her academics

→ had to do research
→ think about studying a lot
→ reflect upon experiences & figure out what worked & what not Really helpful
☑

Yeah, that's amazing!
- How about your grades? Did they increase/decrease! in relation to the community. academic impact

2/ Effect on grades

Umm, I think mostly, they stayed the same?! emm, I didn't have drastic increase/decrease in my grades throughout high school and I guess, it could've potentially made my academics slightly weaker, because I spent a lot more of my time working on videos, I could've been studying but at the same like that studying probably marginally lower rates of return ... (technical problem !!)
it turned to be safer for sure ...

> [it was freezing for a bit
    ...   ]

- Back -

* grades got a little bit weaker,
* she could've spent that time studying.
* spent time working on her videos!

(here I should've asked her to repeat the last bit because of tech issue, but I didn't ⌒)

Okay! The third aspect of impact - personally - How do you feel the community impacted you on the personal level?

3/ Personally

Umm, I feel like part of it might've just been like I kinda grew up with the internet, but I definitely feel like I got more confident .. from being involved .. there's always something validating about having people like pictures on the Internet .. (laugh) and that was probably part of it ..

→ growing up with the internet ↓ helped her in being.
→ more confident
→ involved
→ validation from people

like I noticed, some of my friends are less secure about their Internet presence, like their a little bit more worrying about how many likes are on their personal photos on Insta yet?! that I reached the point that I don't really care that much because I interact with social media that often → it's easier for me to see that the amounts of likes doesn't really determine anything, it's almost random .. so that really helped my emotional relationship with social media compared

her really

→ feeling about her Internet presence
→ worries about likes on personal photos
→ she doesn't care
→ less interaction with social media.
→ likes / determination of what.
→ ↓ Random

Appendix F: My Auto-Netnographic Fieldnotes

Tue 26 Nov. 19

Today, I met my supervisor, and it was really empowering as every time because he gives me positive energy and encourages me through. I am also trying to fulfil my 100 days of productivity challenge and I find it really motivational and inspiring as it makes me want to take pictures and think more of how can I do something productive today, even if it is not study related but at least something productive. I am also currently learning more about iMovie and how can I make the most of it, as I filmed some footage yesterday and I want to make something from it.

> **MA** Meriem Abed (EDU - ...   ⋯
>
> Meeting supervisor
> Positive energy, felt supported and encouraged
> Constant desire to keep up with the challenge
> Motivational and inspiring
> Pushes to be productive (even not study related)
> Learning more about iMovie **doing my best to improve my skills and share the best**
> Trying to be active, having footage
> 6 June 2021, 16:55
>
> @mention or reply

marystudiessunshine

marystudiessunshine 8/100 days of productivity 😊 ... Today I met my supervisor! I am so grateful and blessed to be his student. He always empower me with positive energy 🌟 Trying to learn more about iMovie editing so I can post more videos !A! Stay tuned 😊

Happy evening!
#studying #studygram #studybir #100daysofproductivity #emma100dop #phdlife #mary100dop
4m

Thu 29 Nov. 19

This is supposed to be the 10th day of productivity, but I didn't post anything.

> **MA** Meriem Abed (EDU - ...   ⋯
>
> Reality: didn't post anything even though I know I should do
>
> @mention or reply

Sun 01st Dec. 19

Yesterday, we got blessed by a very beautiful and warm sun that came along to Norwich. I took the chance to record one of my long-waited videos which is a plan with me video. It made me think how it takes time to organise behind the scenes, film and the whole process of editing. I am aiming to finish editing by today and upload it as soon as I am done.
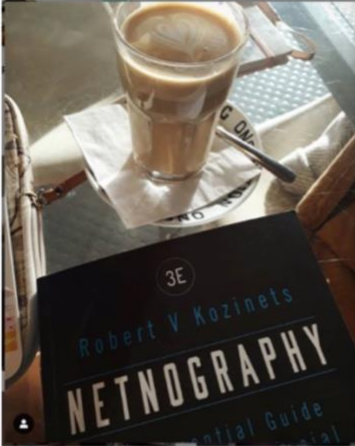
> **MA** Meriem Abed (EDU - ...   ⋯
>
> Enjoying nature
> Thinking of good environment for filming (sunny day, good lighting)

Sunday Feb 2nd, 2020

DISCLAIMER: I'm writing this on the 3rd :D because yesterday I just forgot to document that.

marystudiessunshine
Sainsbury Centre

marystudiessunshine A book and a Latte 😊 📍 Lots to go through, but 3E is the best so far!
Thanks @kozinets for this amazing guide!
1d

Liked by ▓▓▓ and 17 others
1 DAY AGO

And this makes my 20th post in my StudyGram account. Oh just remembered that I forgot to put hashtags on that post, and ohhh the 100 days of productivity challenge!! I completely forgot about that! I should write about it and reflect and also about filming videos and the culture of the study community... I tagged Kozinets on that post, and Kofra coffee shop because I was there, I got a like from Kofra Instagram page.

> **MA** Meriem Abed (EDU - ...   ⋯
>
> Struggles of posting things
> Use of the tag option, to let people aware of what I am posting and also to gain more followers
> 8 June 2021, 21:18
>
> @mention or reply

but knowing that there is somebody in the background doing studies at the same time of you is really inspiring and motivational. at least for me and at this time.

I guess what helped me as well is not going online on my phone before studies. I just decided to jump into my work first thing I do. I guess it worked ^^.

I'll have a break now, And hopefully continue ....

" I will also try to be active on my social media
*study spaces & see how everyone is doing!

Today I msged � on Instagram Dm's asking her if I can interview her & she agreed ٌ I was so happy. I approached her first through replying to one of her stories asking if she can do a post/stories/video suggesting paint supplies because I want to start painting. & she responded by yes & this gave me the push to ask her.

I should do the same with other users soon. especially in light of the current situation of COVID 19. where everyone shifted online and doing activities virtually.

the *with_me hashtag is spreading these days.

Reflect on the studdy buddy experience
what they are doing at these times.

youtube *with_me to all activities during the lock-Down..
also include. "screenshot"

finding myself taking pictures while studying &
thinking that it's instagram able.
→Reflect on dalgona coffee. & the new trends that happen daily.

19th, 2020
lots has

on finding
lifted
:ally

two weeks!
ry the
immitating
:nt vical

On the other hand, when I check my Instagram stories, I feel a bit uncomfortable when seeing people started their day early & productive while me just being lazy! This feeling is just because I wanna be better, not that I'm jealous or envy them! → but at the same time, these stories really motivate me other times to actually get up & get my work done!" → it's very complicated. human feelings 😶

Real study with my friend via WhatsApp!

I've been doing this for at least 8 times & they were very helpful for both of us! The idea is that we chat for 5 min at the beginning of the call for updates & to set an achievable goal, then We start studdying putting each other's phone on the side!

Sometimes we mute ourselves for less distractions. I am actually now writing this while having my friend on my screen. She's looking at her computer screen doing her work!
    THIS IS SO COOL!

This quarantine has blessings in desguise! I am learning lots about my participants behaviours through actually getting to apply what they do! I don't think I would get a perfect chance to experience studybudding than of this current situation!

    * instagramable   /* studyblr ?

Whenever I'm on my desk, I can't help it but take pictures (* studyblr style) especially when the sunlight ☀ is beautiful & I have coffee/tea/snacks near my desk!

when I post on Instagram, I found myself only picking one image out of the 4/5 pictures taken! This made me think: 💬 (what is really an 'instagramable' image? what make us decide?) and all the rest should be on Tumblr because that's what people post there ...

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265

- Content before attentive followers was just for the sake of posting something new.
→ after getting new "loving" followers, I starting putting more love in my content, sharing more stories, feeling connections with my followers, if they saw my stories / responded to it!
→ Now I have 18K followers ←── (med,) **#3**
Types of followers

in a day 26 new
→ because I shared
a story when I was
cooking ← watching a lifestyle YT
& tagged her, then she
re-posted that on her
story & tagged me.
(people followed me
after words).

fishing connection & new followers through posting stories mentioning famous people.

▷DM, asking for advice and it was a very personal Q sharing their dilemmas with me, then I shared a very deep response, that advice was genuinly from my♥ then she was happy & re-asked me again.

▷ Positivity of the community & seeking help

I will ask them about assumptions about me.

▶ **#3. I started caring more about them & my image in their eyes!**

A weekly activity done by some where they post favourite accounts on their stories it's like (follower exchange).
• they repost each other's account.
→ I contributed in that as well. ✗✗✗ it

also, that wa
Pinterest for in
a "studygran
then I foun
looking
• Numb
→ Expe
add later

DM about n
new foll

More engagemen
stories!
, Mentioning is
attention!
* low engag
weekend!
& I did
I'm v

▷ will try to

my activity is less
& less follow!

I'm just looking
on my accounts
following are not
time to time
Interviews request
the people I co
I will try to con

Even though the questions were prepared beforehand, the flow of the conversation depended on other aspects of the interview, especially the context and the personality of the participants.

With Belle's interview, I noticed that she expressed her ideas in more words and details which made the interview long and very rich with only 20 questions. Also, technical issues contributed to the flow of the conversation as well and this is in both positive (helping me rephrasing my questions) and negative side (interruption of her ideas).

On the other side, Anna was equally expressive, the internet connection worked well, and she was quite fast in her speech which resulted in an equally rich conversation answering 30 questions.

Both Rstudies and Leila expressed their honest emotions and gave all what they can say about the community. This is depicted in their enthusiasm in answering every question. Also, they were honest in revealing more depth about their perspectives of some of the issues in the community that not so many people open to speak about.

The following are the main questions of the interview, but it varied depending on the participant.

Introducing questions and broad questions about the community:

1. Tell me about yourself
2. How did you first encounter the study community (*StudyBlr*, *StudyGram*, *StudyTube*)?
3. How did you decide to be an active member of it?
4. Why?
5. When did you create your study accounts? And when did you start creating and posting data?
6. Which platform do you prefer and why?
7. Do you have any idea about the history of the community? Where has it started and when?
8. Could you please define/ introduce the community in your own words?

Specifying questions: in accordance with the core research questions

1. How do you find the study community? Elaborate.
2. How do you feel about it?
3. Do you consider yourself part of the community?
4. Can you name yourself a *StudyTuber*/ *StudyBlr* or a *StudyGrammer*? Why?

5. How do you feel about sharing your personal experience online? Aspects from your personal life and how do you decide which ones to include/ exclude?
6. Are there any values/ rules that govern this community? Do they vary across the platforms?
7. How do you balance between offline work and the online sharing of it?
8. How do you feel about the relationship between your actual studies and being an active part of the community?
9. How do you manage your time?
10. These platforms tend to be distractive in nature, how can you balance a healthy usage of the community?
11. Do you post genuine content of what you're truly going through or what you feel your followers would like to see?
12. What do you think about the aesthetics of the community?
13. How did your accounts change over time? Number of followers, content quality, and your overall thoughts about your progress as part of the community? How did it grow?
14. Do you know your followers? If so, who are those whom you know?
15. How do you represent yourself on the community? Which aspects of your personality you share the most?
16. What do you like/ hate/ prefer about the community?
17. Which platforms do you find useful and why?
18. How did you choose on which platform to be present?
19. About sponsoring posts and giveaways: how does this happen?
20. In the realm of the overwhelming posts shared daily, how do you manage your mental health and digital wellbeing online?
21. How do you decide what to post and on which platform?

Impact:

22. Academically: how your studies are going? Is it helping?
23. Socially: How would you describe your engagement and participation with others on the community?
24. How do you deal with comments and DMs?
25. Personally: what is the impact of the community on your personal development as a student, a content creator, and a person in general?

Wrapping up:

26. Do you understand the term 'online study community' as *StudyTube*, *StudyBlr* and *StudyGram*? If not, can you suggest a better term that will best refer to them.
27. What aspects would you like to add that were not present in our discussion and that you think are needed to be looked at through this study?

The Closing:

Thank you very much for your time and effort in answering all my questions. Do you have other things you would like to add, elaborate upon? Any questions or follow up comments? Feel free to drop me an email if you want to add anything else that you think is relevant to the research topic or if you have further queries. Much appreciated.