

# **IMPERIAL**

**Exploring the role of digital in feedback  
using multi-modal diaries**

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## Presentation Outline

- 1. Study Background:** why study the role of digital in feedback?
- 2. Theoretical Perspective:** what theories offer a useful lens to this problem?
- 3. Methodology:** how did I go about my research?
- 4. Emerging Findings:** what have I found so far?
- 5. Discussion and Implications:** what does this mean for practice?

# Study Background

## Background to the Study

- **Feedback** – ‘the sense-making process by which students use evaluative information to improve subsequent academic work and learning strategies’ (Wood, 2021, p.1173) has become **increasingly digitalised** in Higher Education (HE)
- Examples include **typed versus handwritten comments** (Gabaudan, 2013), **screencast technology** (Orlando, 2016) and **AI-generated feedback** (Lee and Moore, 2024).
- Field has adopted terminology such as ‘**digital feedback**’ (Ryan, Henderson and Phillips, 2019) and ‘**e-feedback**’ (Chong, 2019)
- Research typically focusses on **increased efficiency, personalisation and increased satisfaction.**

# Background to the Study

- Despite this innovation, students' satisfaction with feedback remains **stubbornly low**. Why?

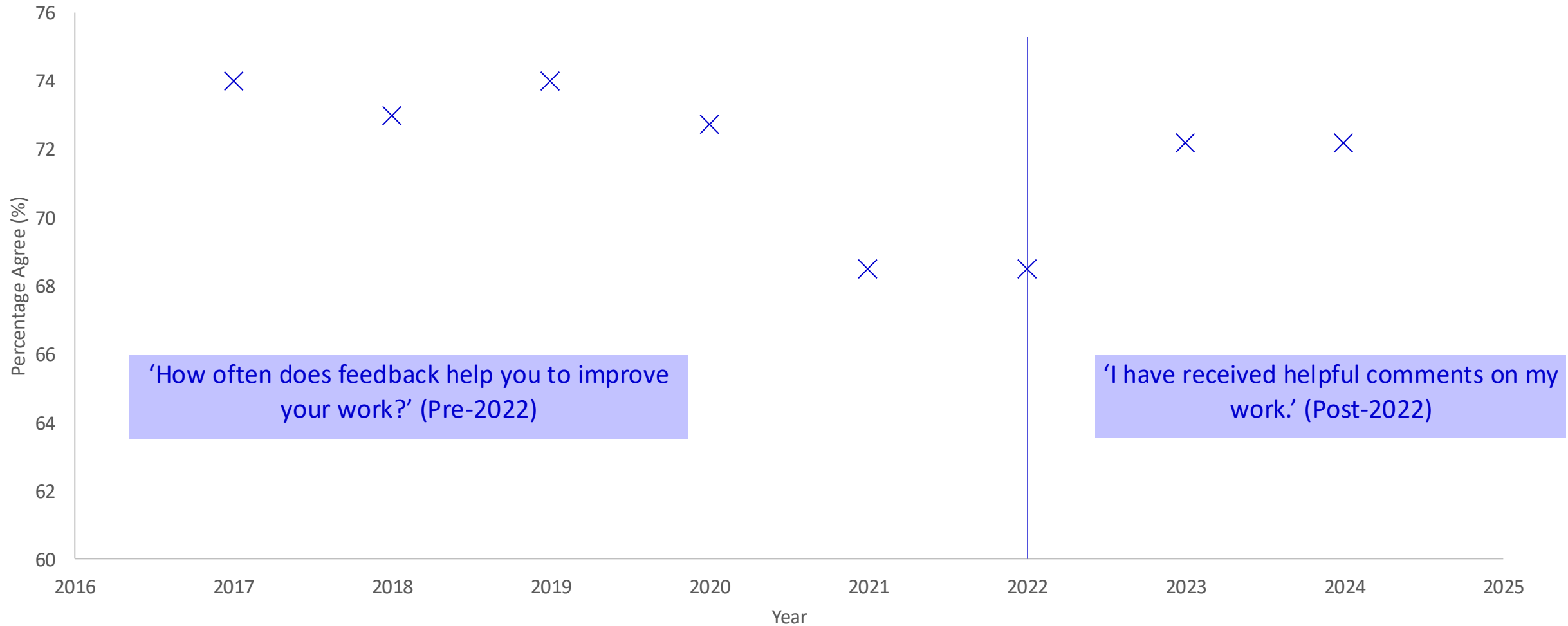


Figure produced from NSS Survey Data from 2016-2024.

## Theoretical Perspective

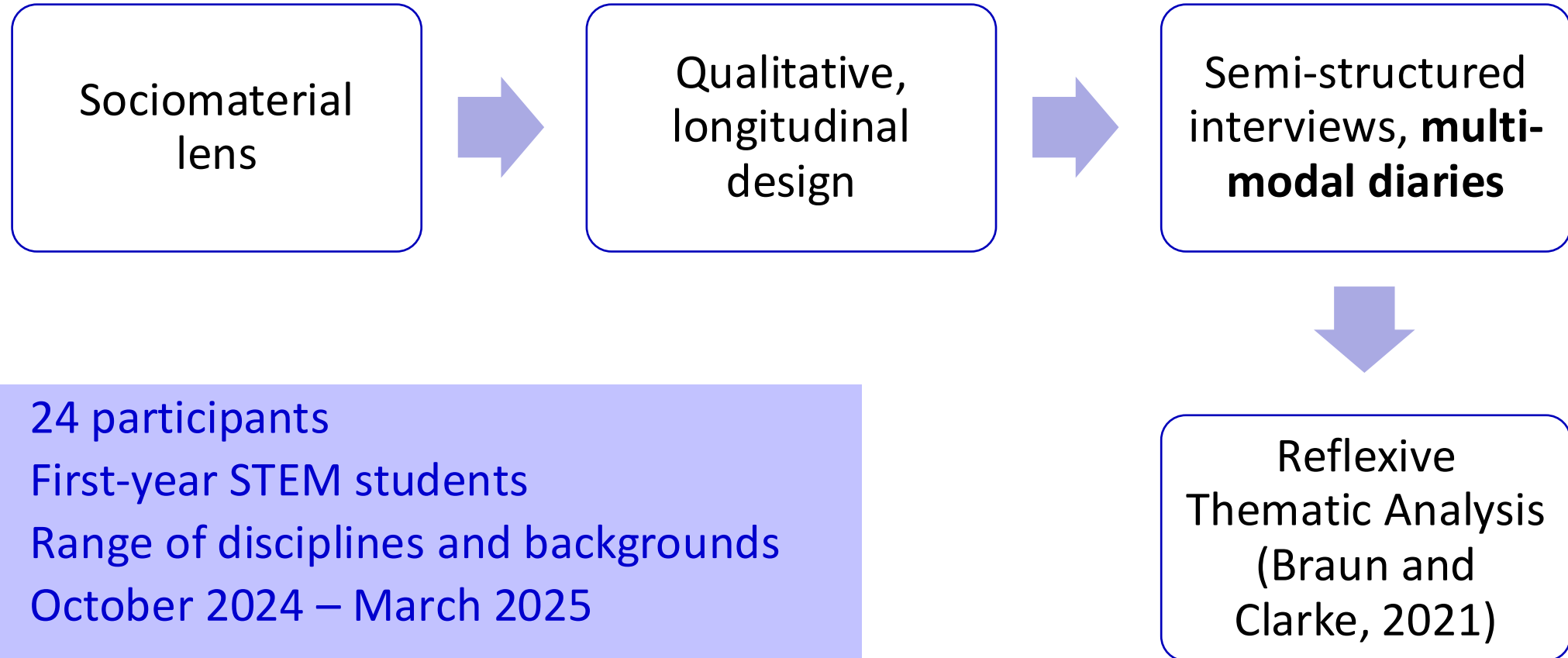
- Much literature implicitly positions digital as a **facilitator, vehicle, deliverer** of feedback
- Less work has focussed on how digital is involved in the **sense-making process** of feedback
- Emerging research has shown feedback to be **emotional, relational** and **social** (Ryan and Henderson, 2018)
- **Less explored is how technologies might interact with the emotional and relational elements of feedback, beyond just mediating conversations**

## Theoretical Perspective

- A sociomaterial perspective can allow us a lens to explore these ideas
- Sociomaterialism could position feedback not as a task undertaken by students who receive information from teachers, but instead as a **coming together** of people, technologies, spaces, emotions, power dynamics, **all of which have multiple, agentic roles** (Gravett, 2022)
- Allows us to explore the different roles digital might take, and how it entangles in the social world
- **In what ways does digital entangle with feedback meaning-making at university?**

# Methodology

# Methodological Approach



## Methodological Approach

- Multi-modal diaries can access **material aspects** of experiences, those that might be **taken-for-granted** or **in the background** (Gourlay, 2021)
- Can capture phenomena that take place **across times and locations** (Gourlay and Oliver, 2018)

S

Setting

C

Context

O

Objects

P

People

E

Emotions

‘I’d like you to visually capture **‘feedback moments’** involving a **digital device** and provide a short **written or audio accompaniment** to the photo(s).’

# Emerging Findings

## Emerging Findings

In the following slides I share two examples from my data that explore two contradictory roles of digital in feedback:

- Digital as '**social isolator**'
- Digital as '**social connector**'

## Digital as 'social isolator'

Digital can **present** performance information to a student in a private and (potentially) isolating way. This can simultaneously **protect** students from perceived identity threats but can also **intensify self-judgement**.



'I am using my own laptop, which I like...**it's smaller than the big computer screens** in the lab, which means it's **harder for others to see my bad mark**. It's crushing.' (Lydia, Diary Entry)

'**Technology is dead**, it's a piece of metal. If you're **struggling emotionally, it won't help you**. If you have a person, they can tell that OK, it's not because you're not capable. If all you have is a piece of metal, **you will just tell yourself you're not good enough**.' (Lian, Interview 1)

## Digital as 'social connector'

Connection is **actively produced** through the interplay of grades, platforms and students. This configures immediacy, co-presence and responsiveness, enabling emotional reassurance.

'I was in **disbelief** when I saw my mark of 23. [...] After the initial shock, I joked about the situation to my boyfriend and **his presence on the phone eased me. I didn't feel alone** facing the fact I'd just received a really low mark.' (Tanya, Diary Entry)

'I am in my room right now, **feeling a bit helpless** as I cannot seek help from people around me unlike on campus. I am currently writing my third lab report of year 1. **I have my phone with me, so I decided to ask my friend some questions.** He answered my questions pretty quickly. Because I have my laptop with me, I can immediately try out the feedback he gave me in my code.' (Ryan, Diary)

## Discussion

- Participants experienced digital technologies as simultaneously **protecting** them from social judgement and **isolating** them to make meaning of feedback information alone.
- At the same time, digital technologies allowed for **connections to be made** between students to support meaning-making and emotional regulation.
- We see the **active, multiple and contradictory roles** that digital technologies play in feedback, **beyond just delivering feedback information.**

## Implications

- The role of digital in feedback is **wider** than we may have considered and **should not be taken for granted**.
- Digital is **entangled** with **social complexities**, **high-achiever identities** (Chiu, Wong and Charalambous (2021)) and **spatial concerns** (Gravett and Carless, 2023).
- We must go beyond viewing digital technologies as **inherently efficient** or as **vehicles** for feedback and further understand **how they are experienced by students**.

What does this mean for defining 'digital feedback'? How helpful is this term?

How can we support students to make meaning of feedback in this complex digital environment?

What pedagogical recommendations could come from these findings?

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Thank you!

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