

ABSTRACT

Technological advancements are frequent and have brought the population around the world closer together. However, this has a drastic effect on how people interact with, and are influenced by each other. This conformation to a social media identity thus puts the wellbeing of young adults at risk. Young adults are constantly being influenced by current trends in social media and to constructing and conforming to a social media identity that impacts their actual life in drastic ways. For example, their physical appearance, self-esteem, personal relationships, and economic status. A qualitative study, using in-depth interviews with three South African participants, was conducted and allowed through thematic analysis participants to provide a more detailed explanation and the ability to clarify the point/position they are trying to make. The study's findings indicated that social media does indeed have an influence on young adult's identity formation through various dimensions of their life in line with Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory. Moreover, results have indicated that early intervention and teaching is required and advised to be conducted from an early age. This research has added to the body of knowledge through the Indian perspective/lens in Durban, South Africa.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Contextualization

Technological advancements in contemporary times are frequent and have brought the population around the world closer together. However, this has a drastic effect on how people interact with and are influenced by each other (Martin, Nakayama, Oudtshoorn & Schutte, 2013). Despite this modern technologically advanced age, there is not enough research on the psychological effects of this technological interaction. According to Branscombe and Baron (2017), not only is there online competition and bullying, but also a need to construct an identity for social media that has a drastic effect on the users lives. Previous studies of social media have made groundbreaking connections with social media and depression, increased cyberbullying, and acts of violence committed in the physical world. Predominantly, research indicates a concern for individuals health and the impact social media may have on it (Hall, 2015). However, there has been minimal research done on social media and identity formation on young adults, especially from a South African perspective. This is a phenomenon that is relatively new and therefore lacks a wide public knowledge for young adults.

1.2. Rationale

This conformation to a social media identity then puts the wellbeing of young adults at risk as well as effects those around them. These effects may not be realized and may reach a state where intervention is not sufficient enough to aid young adults into a form of recovery. Since this study was conducted it allows the young adults, those around them, and healthcare professionals to gain insight in the many trials and consequences of conforming to a social media identity and what can be done to improve their well-being. This research explored why young adults conform to a social media identity, sought to describe the ways in which young adults conform to a social media identity, and thereafter the effects of this on their physical appearance, self-esteem, personal relationships, and economic status. In doing this, this research attempted to aid in the identification of techniques that can be used to help young adults manage their conformity to a social media identity. This study therefore provides further contribution to the growing field of knowledge on the ever-

advancing technological developments made and its effects on human behavior, as well as what can be done to manage young adults who struggle with conforming to a social media identity and how this effects their identity development (Ganda, 2014).

1.3. Problem Statement

Young adults are constantly being influenced by the current trends in social media and to constructing and conforming to a social media identity that impacts their actual life in drastic ways (Stewart & Zaaïman, 2016), such as their physical appearance, self-esteem, personal relationships, and economic status. Many young adults find difficulty in finding comfort and conforming to their societies needs and may thus seek out a lifestyle for which they feel they can better pursue and alter the perceptions of themselves in the process to make society and their peers perceive them better (Hall, 2015). This is something that can be done through the use of social media (Hall, 2015). However, the consequences of this lifestyle are drastic to the young adult and can have a negative impact on them through various dimensions of their life.

1.4. Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of social media on young adult's identity formation. Furthermore, it is through this in-depth understanding about social medias effect on young adult's identity formation that suitable recommendations will be suggested. Additionally, this study will aid in the growing body of knowledge of this new phenomenon from a South African perspective.

1.5. Research Questions

- What leads to young adults conforming to a social media identity?
- In what ways do young adults conform to a social media identity?
- What can be done to manage young adults conforming to a social media identity?

1.6. Research Objectives

- To determine why young adults conform to a social media identity
- To describe the ways in which young adults conform to a social media identity
- To identify what can be done to manage young adults conforming to a social media identity

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Foundation

The key theory used as a framework for this research will be the Social Identity Theory (SIT) developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1986, which examines how an individual perceives themselves and a sense of who they are is based on their group membership (Branscombe & Baron, 2017). This group membership is in turn an important source of self-esteem and pride (Branscombe & Baron, 2017). Those who perceive themselves as a member of the group emphasize what they share in common with other members of the group (Branscombe & Baron, 2017). These individuals describe themselves in terms of the attributes that differentiate their group from another group. In other words, descriptions of the self are intergroup comparisons as they involve the contrast between groups (Branscombe & Baron, 2017). There is an emphasis on an 'us' versus 'them' attitude as well as that attributes are similar to those with members in the group (Branscombe & Baron, 2017). Therefore, there is a major impact on their self-perceptions and crafting of a social identity (Branscombe & Baron, 2017). Trepte (2006) states how this theory also explains that young adults use certain social media and entertainment in concordance with their group membership. The idea behind this was that a group picks a media platform/form that would fit their identities and deliver an identity related gratification (Trepte, 2006). Additionally, even though the group may pick the media platform/form, the media trends still influences group attitudes, especially inter-group attitudes about out-groups (Trepte, 2006). This leads to a social comparison of the individual to the group members and the chosen media and can result in an attempted alignment of similarities of the individual to their chosen media (Trepte, 2006). This study will look through the field of psychology and examine the many ways in which young adults conform to a social media identity and the effects of this on their physical appearance, self-esteem, personal relationships, and economic status. The SIT is a key element in understanding the individual in a social context and setting as the very phenomenon that occurs is a social one that occurs through social media.

2.2. Review of The Literature

2.2.1. Social media

Social media has become one of the fastest and most rapid advancements made in the modern era of communication and contact (Hall, 2015). However, while there is a desire to connect and use social media for good, there are also unforeseen negative impacts made to its users (Hall, 2015). Raymer (2015) notes that 90% of college students use social media while Shava & Chinyamurindi (2018) states that this college population in South Africa is also addicted to social media. According to Shava & Chinyamurindi (2018), approximately 22% of the 12 million South Africans who engage in Facebook are between the ages of 13 to 18. Trepte (2006) states that the SIT developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979, has been overlooked as a contributor to social media usage. It is these many social categorizations that defines the individuals place in society (Trepte, 2006). According to Brown (2017) through their Colorado research, many individuals seek out and use social media as a form of social and emotional support, sometimes lacking in their physical world. This leads down a path of further self-criticism (Brown, 2017). It is here that Hall (2015) brings in a biological explanation of this phenomenon.

Hall (2015) through their research in Oregon, explains that when an individual receives gratification on social media, such as a 'like' on a post, this leads to their body releasing dopamine, a chemical associated with pleasure in the brain. Following this, the individual is unsure of how many 'likes' or forms of approval they will get, which leads them to watching and waiting for a new release of dopamine (Hall, 2015). This fosters an addiction to social media (Hall, 2015). Once an individual begins engaging in social media they then begin with social comparison in line with SIT (Trepte, 2006). Trepte (2006) describes how SIT was used as a model of explanation for media consumption in concordance with group membership in the late 1990's, but has unfortunately not been used sufficiently with modern age social media. In addition to the explanations provided by Hall (2015) and Brown (2017), Trepte (2006) through SIT further elaborates that once an individual has perceived themselves to belonging to a certain group on social media, they will then further identify, compare, consume, and attempt to further belong through conformity to their online community. This has been shown to enhance their social identity and self-

esteem (Trepte, 2006). South African surveys of youth whom use social media indicated that a majority of the population felt compelled to post on social media and conform due to their online peers (Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2018). In a South African study, only 45% of college students who are social media users reported an interference of social media with their academic studies (Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2018).

2.2.2. Identity formation

Ganda (2014) through their Portland research, states that the use of social media can influence the identity formation of their users. Due to the pressures of conformity to the online community, the individual may feel the need to project themselves in a certain manner as a guide to how they should be viewed by others (Ganda, 2014). Both Jukuri (2013) and Ganda (2014) also suggest that social media is an outlet that allows the user to make changes to their identity and online identity that they would not usually make due to confidence issues. Jukuri (2013) in their Finland research also states that this also allows for deviant behavior as the individual is separated by a screen that grants them anonymity. Hence, social media is thought of as a tool for identity practice (Ganda, 2014). According to Ganda (2014) this selective posting on social media allows the individual to test their various forms of online identity and based on the feedback they receive from their online community and peers, they then incorporate to create a new identity and understanding of who they have become (Ganda, 2014). *“By using social networking sites, the user has control over their own identity formation and self-understanding and can choose how to present themselves offline based on the feedback of their online-tested identity”* (Ganda, 2014, p.17). The individual reflects on whether their online identity is popular or beneficial to their social status and peers, and then works to transfer their online social media identity to their offline identity as a way to maintain their positive social status (Ganda, 2014). It can be noted that there is a lack of study and knowledge on this in a South African context.

2.2.3. Self-esteem

SIT plays a major role in self-esteem and how it is correlated and connected to the individuals online social media community (Trepte, 2006). Both Hall (2015) and Raymer (2015) agree that individuals with low self-esteem who engage in social

media are more likely to feel the negative effects of social media through a comparison of lifestyle and popularity, as well as gratification. This contributes to the individuals overall negative wellbeing (Hall, 2015). Hall (2015) further elaborates by saying that social media has created an environment where comparison to in-group members and amount of 'likes' on a post is correlated to the individual's self-esteem. However, it can be noted that Hall (2015) lacks a response and clarity when it comes to individuals with high self-esteem and their use of social media. Raymer (2015) supplements this shortfall by elaborating on research revealing that individuals with a high self-esteem use social media for different purposes than those with low self-esteem (Raymer, 2015). These individuals with a high self-esteem use social media as a tool for connecting with others and maintaining ties in relationships, and even to simply pass time (Raymer, 2015). Thus, people with a high self-esteem that use social media have a more positive experience than those with low self-esteem (Raymer, 2015). However, this notion of self-esteem by Hall (2015) and Raymer (2015) is seen differently by Trepte (2006). In contrast to Hall (2015) and Raymer (2015), Trepte (2006) states that in relation to the SIT self-esteem is the motivation for inter-group behavior and that a positive self-esteem is attained from the positive evaluation of the individual's own group. Additionally, Trepte (2006) also states that if group membership is important to the individual, a social comparison to in-group members should provide positive social distinctiveness and should enhance the individual's self-esteem. It can be noted that Raymer (2015) does state that social media can be possibly used to potentially increase self-esteem. This is done through online self-presentation, allowing the individual to present their optimal and ideal self to others, leading to positive feelings of self-esteem (Raymer, 2015). It can be noted that there is a lack of research and literature done on this phenomenon in a South African context.

2.2.4. Self-presentation

Raymer (2015) states that the more the individual exposes themselves to other individuals' positive self-presentations on social media, the more likely it is to produce feelings of deprivation and inadequacy, to which Brown (2017) indicates is a trigger for body image issues. Raymer (2015) further elaborates that the individuals with a low self-esteem then attempt to create an online conforming self-representation of themselves on their social media sites, allowing others to see what

only they want them to see. This then leads them to pursuing many different tasks in order to maintain this image, such as 'un-tagging' themselves from pictures and distancing themselves from lower status individuals online (Raymer, 2015). Raymer (2015) also discusses how the need for self-presentation is influenced by the individuals many personality traits, such as narcissism, shyness, neuroticism, self-worth and self-esteem. This is especially true for narcissists as social media allows for a control over self-presentation, appeasing attention craving behavior while promoting shallow relationships (Raymer, 2015). However, Brown (2017) takes a different approach to self-representation than Raymer (2015) does, and instead focuses on the body image aspect of social media influence, especially with regards to women.

Brown (2017) states that social media displays images and ideas of what an ideal body image is in society and proposes a baseline for what others must look like in society. This triggers a negative self-evaluation, leading individuals to become more upset and depressed about their body image (Brown, 2017). This is especially higher for women than men, as social media focuses more attention and imagery to women (Brown (2017)). Thereafter, this leads to many individuals seeking out harmful websites that are pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia as they feel pressured to conform to societies expectations (Brown, 2017). Brown (2017) concludes by saying that although these many social media sites are created with harmful content, some individuals who engage in these sites appear to attain a form of support. This is due to the many individuals experiencing similar feelings of shame and low self-esteem and results in a bonding and support structure (Brown, 2017). However, Brown (2017) fails to give an estimate or indication of the percentage of users that this occurs with, as well as the long-term effects of this phenomenon. Brown (2017) ultimately indicates that future research could focus on lesbian women, gay men, bisexual women and men, and/ or transgendered women and men, in terms of what pressures and ideas they have to what the perfect body is. It can be noted that there is also a limitation of this knowledge within the South African context.

2.2.5. Personal relationships

In terms of personal relationships, Ganda (2014) states that as the individual spends an increasingly longer amount of time on social media sites, their offline relationships

with those around them begin to decrease in meaning as their socialization continues to take place on an online platform. However, Chambers (2013) states that social media merely changes the meanings and practices of friendship. In contrast to Ganda (2014), Chambers (2013) states that recent research has indicated that social media and other networking sites have actually become an important cultivator for personal relationships. Rapid developments in this technological field allow for a different form of connection and in turn a reconfiguration of ideas of what intimacy means (Chambers, 2013). Chambers (2013) further states that social media is mainly used for the maintenance of existing relationships while allowing for the accumulation of vast online friends with weak ties.

Vaterlaus, Barnett, Roche and Young (2016) further contribute to Chambers (2013) through their study of the social media app 'Snapchat' and its effects on interpersonal relationships. This app specifically allows for the sharing of pictures, videos, drawings, and text for a determined amount of time set by the sender (Vaterlaus et al., 2016). From the results obtained in the experiment conducted by Vaterlaus et al. (2016) in the United States of America, they have concluded that social media such as 'Snapchat' are useful for the maintaining of relational ties with family, friends, and romantic interests. However, this also acts as a double-edged sword as Vaterlaus et al. (2016) indicates that in each type of relationship there are also problems that rise due to social media. In terms of family relationships, content can be possibly misinterpreted or seen as something rude and can create issues within the family sender (Vaterlaus et al., 2016). Chambers (2013) argues that friendships and the norms that abide it change and friendship changes meaning to become something that varies from situation to situation. Additionally, the term has become something inclusive of the various online community peers as well (Chambers, 2013). Vaterlaus et al. (2016) points out that friendships can also become very competitive and toxic online in terms of followers and keeping up with online trends. In terms of romantic relationships, social media also allows for infidelity through online connections being made (Vaterlaus et al., 2016). Vaterlaus et al. (2016) notes that 'Snapchat' in general facilitates deviant behavior in all personal relationships as these individuals send inappropriate pictures, videos, and messages that are deleted after an amount of time. According to Mohlatlole, Sithole and Shirindi (2018), South African studies indicate that local couples who are

engaged in a marital relationship with each other and are between the ages of 18 and 35 find it difficult to stay married beyond 5 years. Mohlatlole et al. (2018) argue that one cause for this is the social disconnection experienced and perpetuated by social media identity formation that is difficult to repair.

2.2.6. Cost of lifestyle

Jukuri (2013) states that social media has become an online digital marketplace that offers resources to help the individual enact their identity both online and offline. Social media makes it necessary for individuals to make their online identity consistent to strengthen their sense of online self and participate in the digital culture or marketplace they find themselves in (Jukuri, 2013). Nouri (2018) explains that new evidence indicates that users have been informed or discovered new brands of products through a social media celebrity or influencer and their channel, and as previously discussed by Trepte (2006) in line with the SIT, group membership will influence media consumption. According to Carter (2018), social media creates a tendency of individuals comparing themselves to their peers and then experiencing a feeling of inadequacy along with a fear of missing out on current trends. This leads to the individual spending a vast amount of money in order to impress and fit in to their online community (Carter, 2018). Hughes (2019) extends this by describing how the feeling of a dopamine rush and gratification when conforming to your online community or social media influencer will fade as fast as a next trend arrives and will result in a severe financial disaster. That is, placing a large number of young adults under financial debt (Hughes, 2019). Hughes (2019) states that there needs to be a delay in purchase and an increase in thought while Carter (2018) emphasizes the creation of a budget for specialized spending that these individuals need to adhere to. It can be noted that there is no literature of this phenomenon pertaining to the South African context.

While social media was initially designed as a platform to connect with others, it has since then had a number of uses and effects not expected or predicted. Although social media does allow for the maintenance of personal relationships, it also leads to the formation of very shallow relationships online reference. Additionally, social media also facilitates deviant behavior that effects personal relationships in a negative way. Hence, social media metaphorically transforms into a double-edged

sword the individual uses for their relationships. As the individual continues to use social media, they eventually develop an online social identity and becomes integrated into an online community. This then effects their self-esteem in either a positive or negative manner and leads to further conformity through identity alterations online and offline. Thus, this results in monetary expenditure for social status items and resources in an attempt to alter their self-presentation, leading to possible financial debt as illustrated by Hughes (2019).

However, social media does have redeeming aspects along with the aforementioned negatives. This is due to social media having some positive qualities not available in another form, such as providing connection to each other across space and time, having the ability to share experiences, finding support, and many more redeeming qualities. Therefore, it is for these many reasons that effective coping and social media management skills and information needs to be taught to individuals in order to help them manage the influence of social media on their identity instead of just eliminating and avoiding social media from life altogether (Ganda, 2014).

Additionally, these effects of social media are also not something of just a Western experience and is instead something experienced across the world, such as South Africa. However, there is also a major gap in knowledge available of this phenomenon in a South African context. This is something that the present research will aim to supplement through a South African perspective.

2.3. Conceptualization

There are many concepts that are relevant to this study and the understanding of the literature. These concepts as mentioned consistently above are social media, self-presentation, self-esteem, fear of missing out (FOMO), cost of lifestyle, and personal relationships.

To summarize, social media refers to the many different forms of electronic communication occurring through websites and applications in which social networking takes place through the creation of online communities (Hall, 2015). This allows for the sharing of ideas, personal information, electronic messages, pictures and videos (Hall, 2015). Some examples of well-known social media are Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat (Hall, 2015).

Social media has become especially popular and an integral part of everyday life with young adults (Raymer, 2015). Social media also has an impact on the individual's self-esteem (Raymer, 2015). Self-esteem refers to the individual's own perceived self-worth or value (Raymer, 2015). This leads to influences on other aspects of the individual's identity either in a positive or negative way, based on the feedback from social media (Raymer, 2015). For example, self-esteem effects the individual's self-presentation to the world (Ganda, 2014). Self-presentation refers to the individual's representation of themselves or the picking of best aspects of information about the self to present to others to create or maintain a certain status, i.e. the confirmation to a social media identity (Ganda, 2014). This leads to the fear of missing out (FOMO), which refers to the individuals constant fear of missing an important update in their social media and can result in them constantly checking their social media (Carter, 2018). This FOMO can lead to an increased need to conform and can result in an increased cost of lifestyle (Carter, 2018). Cost of lifestyle as illustrated in the literature review refers to the individuals monetary spending habits to maintain a social media identity similar to their peers (Carter, 2018). All of this in turn effects the individual's personal relationships in terms of maintaining and meaning (Chambers, 2013). To conclude, personal relationships refer to intimate relationships held by the individual and the ties between them, ranging from family, friends, and romantic partners (Chambers, 2013).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Paradigm

The research paradigm which best fits this study is interpretivism. Interpretivism was developed in response and as a critique to the many limitations and ever short reach of positivism, especially when it came to the matter of the social sciences (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014). This paradigm views people as being completely different from objects, and in conjunction the inability to study people as if they were objects (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This is due to the ever-changing nature of human beings, as well as their environment in which they find themselves which also influences them, unlike objects (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

Interpretivists main goals are to understand human behavior and meaningful social action (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This also links to phenomenology, which relates to how an individual makes sense of the world in which they currently perceive themselves to be in (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

The present study is aimed at understanding human identity as well as the environment which effects this, specifically social media. Identity and the study of it is not quantifiable. It is a deeper understanding of the human mind. Thus, in order to obtain this understanding, there needs to be a degree of subjectivity and relativist understanding, especially when it comes to analyzing data. It requires a deeper look at young adults' identity before or after using social media and coding the meaningful social action behind their behavior and attitude to understand their current phenomenology or ways in which they now make sense of the world around them. This interpretivism paradigm also allows the study of young adults outside of a laboratory setting, allowing for a more natural reaction and response since they are in familiar territory.

3.2. Conceptual Approach

Qualitative research will be used as it is primarily aimed at exploring and gaining an in-depth understanding of the data or phenomena (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

This type of research is commonly used in discovering patterns in thought, emotion, and behavior (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). There is also a small sample size

involved and participants are chosen to represent a specific quota (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Identity is a complex phenomenon and requires an in-depth analysis and exploration. Due to the nature of social media and its effect on young adults' identity, discovering patterns in thought, emotion, and behavior is a key element in discovering an explanation and management for any harm experienced. As identity is something that varies from individual to individual, culture to culture, and is not generalizable in understanding, a subjective understanding is paramount. Also, participants chosen will need to fit in the criteria of being a young adult who uses social media instead of a random sample.

3.3. Research Design

This study will be deductive. A deductive approach deals with reasoning from general assumptions to a narrowed field of more specific assumptions (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). The researcher using this approach explores the broad general aspects of a theory and then applies it to a specific study or topic under observation or investigation (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). In other words, it allows for the testing of an already existing theory through the conduction a research study (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Hence, the theory is constructed before any study begins. This study will be using SIT, an already existing theory, to examine the effects of social media on young adult's identity formation. The broad aspects of the theory will then be applied to the young adult participants in this study who use social media. This then allows for more specific assumptions and conclusions to be drawn about the effects of social media on young adult's identity formation, self-esteem, self-presentation, cost of lifestyle, and personal relationships through the theoretical lens.

The following research will be exploratory. This is research which has the overall purpose of exploring an unknown area (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Along with the progression of time is the progression of technological advancements being made and the changes and impact this has on many sectors of life ranging from social, economic, biological, and political (du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Thus, as these systems evolve, it leaves new areas of ambiguity and uncertainty allowing for future further opportunities for research to be conducted continuously. For example, 30 years ago from 2020, social media such as Facebook or Snapchat and the vast

complications and effects that came along with them did not exist for young adults at that time (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Social media is therefore a relatively new phenomenon with many new complications and effects that have not yet been adequately explored (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Thus, this study aims to supplement this shortage of knowledge through exploration of unknown areas.

This study uses a cross-sectional design. This design allows for the collection of data in one point and place in time from respondents in order to create an overall picture and understanding of a phenomenon (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Responses from respondents are only taken once and there are no repeats (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). An in-depth interview is a form of qualitative data collection method which allows the researcher to ask questions to participants that allow them to give a more detailed explanation and the ability to clarify the point/position they are trying to make (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). In addition to this, the researcher is also able to observe non-verbal reactions from the participants and a flexibility in the research process (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

3.4. Population

The target population were young South African adults who reside in Durban, and are between the age of 18 to 40, who engaged and used social media at a minimum of two sessions per week on at least one or more platforms.

3.5. Sampling

The unit of analysis for this study will be a young adult's perception of social media and their identity. The sample for the study were three South African participants who met the criteria and parameters mentioned above in the target population.

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014) that was used in this research. This involved the researcher taking a sample which consists of units who they are familiar with and can get easy access to and whom also meet the population parameters (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). In other words, the participants sampled are already individuals who meet the population

parameters and are known and were previously contacted by the researcher and were convenient to access to the researcher (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This was done as it was difficult to establish whether an individual/ strangers meets the population parameters of being a South African who lives in Durban aged between the age of 18 to 40, that engage and use social media at a minimum of two session per week on at least one or more platforms. In addition to this, the viral outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 causing a global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020) has also brought further complications of safety when engaging with strangers to participate in the research. Therefore, for ethical and safety reasons, this sampling method best fit the research and was conducted through the use of a communicative platform known as Skype in order to further ensure the safety of both the researcher and participant.

The representativeness of the sample to the population is not considered to be an essential requirement in qualitative methodology (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Rather, in line with the paradigm chosen for the present study (interpretivism), the focus was on successfully exploring and gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). The focus is on achieving data saturation is (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). The three units used in this research have provided this saturation of data on all the themes and categories of social media and identity through the in-depth interviews to the point where no new information or data could be generated. This occurred as the participants in the sample possessed a high degree of competence in the area of questioning (Maree, 2019), particularly about their awareness of their social media usage and their identity.

3.6. Data Collection Method

An in-depth interview was used and is a form of qualitative data collection method which allows the researcher to ask questions to participants that allow them to give a more detailed explanation and the ability to clarify the point/position they are trying to make (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). In addition to this, it also allowed the researcher to observe non-verbal reactions from the participants and a flexibility in the research process (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Since the research is exploring the complex

phenomenon of young adults' identity and social media, it was important to have human interaction take place in which the researcher is able to observe signs of distress, nervousness, and uncomfortableness that the participants may feel that the researcher can then address (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This took a more subjective approach in which the participants are treated different to mere objects under observation and is why quantitative and other qualitative data collection methods were not sufficient (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This proved to be effective as non-verbal body language and facial expressions displayed through the video communicative platform by the participant was noted as gestures and facial expressions made during certain responses.

Standardized open-ended interviews were used as a data collection method as this type of in-depth interview allowed the researcher to ask the same standardized open-ended questions to all participants (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This also allowed interviewees to speak freely about their social media identity and allow the researcher to have a more organized structure for post-interview review and analysis of all participants (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). In other words, this format allows for the creation of notes and the comparison of responses from participants in a more organized format. Since open-ended questions were used in the standardized open-ended interview, participants were comfortable to answer all questions and felt a human connection (as indicated by the participants personal communication to the researcher) and thus proved to be effective (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). These types of questions also allowed the participants to respond in their own words in the manner they would like to convey them (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014) which in turn made them more comfortable to speak about personal negative experiences during the interview. These types of questions asked also surfaced feelings, underlying thoughts, and connections in the participants own life experiences that the researcher may not have previously thought about asking and therefore provided opportunities for branching questions or further elaborations to be made that were not included in the interview schedule (Annexure E) (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). These include aspects such as geographical locations effect on social media and identity as well as how culture and social media effect identity. As participants were encouraged to discuss openly and freely, these and other points were discussed. In addition to this, confidentiality was also assured and helped comfort the participants

when they were speaking openly and freely. This made it important as well to explain the process of the interview, their privacy, and helping increase of confidentiality through precautions.

Furthermore, participants were contacted through a phone call by the researcher in order to arrange an appropriate time for the in-depth interview to take place in which they were not inconvenienced. The researcher then thanked the participants who agreed to proceed further and was then informed that they will be emailed the informed consent documents (Annexure C and D) needed to be signed by them and then scanned and sent to the researcher in order for the Skype call to be ethical. This procedure was followed due to the Covid-19 global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). The interview questions were formulated by the researcher with careful consideration of the issues and phenomena being faced. Once written informed consent for the interview and video recording was sent to the researcher, an appropriate video communicative platform known as Skype was used and the interview was recorded. The video was recorded for data analysis purposes, including non-verbal language and clarity over points discussed.

3.6.1. Application of data collection method

Firstly, written informed consent for the interview and video recording of the interview was obtained from participants. Once the video call began a brief introduction was made and the participants were told the title of the research report as well as a brief standardized summary of what they would endure and what was required of them. The standardized summary read states, *“[T]his in-depth interview will consist of open-ended questions that is concerned with social media and identity formation in young adults. There is no time limit for each response and all participants are encouraged to speak openly and freely as possible. No identifiable information will be recorded in the response transcript and a pseudo-name will be used, such as ‘Participant 1’. This is also a voluntary procedure in which participants are free to withdraw from at any point in time during the research process with no consequences or harm befalling them”*.

After this was read to participants, demographic information was obtained with the notion that they are free to not answer any questions that make them uncomfortable and were encouraged to make the researcher aware as well if needed. This

demographical information included the participants, legal age, gender, nationality, city of residence, how many social media platforms they used, and how often they used social media platforms.

Secondly, the interview continued with the standardized open-ended questions and the participants then responding freely and openly to each question in the interview schedule. However, when the participant produced an interesting or relevant piece of information that was not expected by the researcher, the researcher then encouraged the participant to further elaborate or clarify what was mentioned only if they were comfortable in doing so.

Thirdly, in questions where the participants responded vaguely or in a simple sentence, they were encouraged to further elaborate.

Fourthly, once the researcher ensured all questions were asked and answered, the researcher then asked the participant if they had wished to make any further comments or statements about the research and the questions they were asked.

Finally, once the in-depth interview had ended, the researcher then thanked the participants and asked once again if they are comfortable participating and if they would like to withdraw any statements made or withdraw from the research completely. The researcher then informed all participants to freely contact the researcher or supervisor if they had any further concerns or questions.

3.7. Data Analysis Method

The content of the qualitative data required an interpretation in order to produce meaning (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). Thematic analysis was used as a data analysis procedure in this research. This form of data analysis was used due to the qualitative research design (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). This form of analysis is data reduction through the use of themes (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Thematic analysis required a repetition of analyzing and interpreting data in an attempt to isolate and refine any imbedded meanings in the data that was collected (Braun & Clarke, 2009), something necessary when it deals with the complex and subject nature of identity. There is no correct or incorrect answer that could be attained, rather a theme that captures the data (Braun & Clarke, 2009). The process of data reduction using

identified themes was done using a list of identified themes that were first derived from the literature review and then known, anticipated, and found in the data retrieved (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This is where the benefit of flexibility of the process as stated by Braun and Clarke (2009) came into effect. Additionally, thematic analysis also helped in the minimizing, organizing, and describing of data in rich detail, another noteworthy advantage of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2009). Furthermore, since thematic analysis is not connected to any pre-existing theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2009), it was able to be used in line with the deductive approach taken using the social identity theory. This form of data coding then allowed the necessary breakdown of identity into the themes of social media, identity formation, self-esteem, self-presentation, cost of lifestyle, and personal relationships, allowing for a simpler form of understanding in the complex phenomenon of identity, especially in comparison to other forms of coding and qualitative data analysis.

3.7.1. Application of data analysis methods

Once the interview had concluded and the researcher and participant departed, the researcher saved the video of the interview and prepared for data analysis. Firstly, for the perpetration of the data, every step that was taken by the researcher has been recorded and was systematic and organized for each participant once the interview began (Maree, 2019). Since this was a qualitative data analysis, it had to be an interactive and layered process. Furthermore, each layer and step were documented and analyzed.

Secondly, when it came to transcribing the data (Maree, 2019), transcription of the interview took place by the researcher alone as confidentiality was assured between the researcher and participant. This transcription included all the non-verbal cues by the participant such as their laughter, pauses, body language, and other cues. This is done as these non-verbal cues provide additional support and meaning to their verbal responses. It can be noted that the interviews all proceeded with relative ease and only a few seconds of time taken in-between responses given to the questions asked along with many hand gestures with an open palm towards the researcher, demonstrating openness and a connection of relativist understanding. Another example is the laughter made by "Participant 1" when discussing their feelings of influence social media has on their physical appearance/ presentation. Additionally, it

can be noted that this was a constant process as the video was watched and transcribed and then re-watched for further analysis of details and in turn ensuring that everything that took place in the recording has been noted down. This will only help when it comes to analyzing the data.

Thirdly, in terms of describing who the participants were (Maree, 2019), it must also be noted that convenience sampling was used. The research consisted of three respondents who were known by the researcher through the use of social media. All three participants were South African adults who reside in Durban, and are between the age of 18 to 40 and engaged and use social media at a minimum of two sessions per week on at least one or more platforms. Furthermore, even though gender identification is not necessary, two of these participants willingly identified themselves as belonging to the female gender while the other willingly identified himself as belonging to the male gender. Furthermore, one female identifying participant proclaimed they were 24 years old, the other female participant proclaimed they were 20 years old, and the male participant proclaimed himself as 20 years old. In addition to this, all participants also willingly identified themselves as belonging to the Indian race. Thus, the researcher's data arose from the subjective experiences and perceptions and lived experience of these individuals with these demographical and geographical parameters.

Fourthly, in terms of organizing the data (Maree, 2019), each participant was given a pseudonym/identification label. The male participant at age 20 was labeled and known as "Participant 1". The female participant at age 24 was labeled and known as "Participant 2". The female participant at age 20 was labeled and known as "Participant 3". All interviews were conducted and saved individually with each participant to aid in the organization of data. Hence, they were saved and coded separately. All of the qualitative data came solely from the interviews with the participants. This data was then subject to intensive examination after transcribing. This required the researcher to look and read over the transcribed data multiple times for meaning and to make sense of the information as well as to begin a process of understanding.

Fifthly, the researcher then began to know their data by immersing themselves in the data and became part of the interactive and interpretivist process (Maree, 2019).

This involved the researcher reading the transcripts and watching the recording multiple times while noting their impressions of the data using various color pens and highlighting of data. Although some of these noted impressions did not find itself in the qualitative write-up, it is something that needs to be done for reflection. For example, even though a noteworthy impression was made by non-verbal cues, such as closed arms by “Participant 1” during parts of the interview, it did not translate to them being closed or preserved as their verbal response was open and honest.

The sixth step involved the coding of data (Maree, 2019). This process had the researcher carefully read through each line of their transcribed data, and then divide it into meaningful analytical units. These segments of data were then marked with a set of words and identifiers and categories that would later become the broad thematic areas. Hence, grouping data that is associated with the same thematic idea. Since this is a deductive research process, themes identified in the literature review prior to the data analysis will be listed and used as identifying categories. However, both themes derived from the literature review and the data itself will be used.

The seventh step involved the researcher summarizing and organizing the data (Maree, 2019). This involved the researcher continuing the sixth step repeatedly in which they analyzed each line repeatedly until the data got saturated and could no longer offer anymore themes. From this, identification of core categories and connections between them are also made which pertain to the research. Additionally, a thematic map was used to help with these demonstrations and connections.

The eighth and final step involved the researcher establishing the themes and sub-themes of the research report (Maree, 2019). At this point the researcher has listed and defined each theme. These themes were highlighted in one colour and subthemes in another colour. The subthemes were largely induced from the participants’ response’s in line with the questions asked that the researcher had not foreseen or expected.

3.8. Trustworthiness

The purpose of qualitative research is not about generalizing to a larger population or identifying a causal relationship, rather it is to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomena (Maree, 2019). This then leads to reliability and validity not being useful in this type of study. Instead, reliability and validity are replaced with trustworthiness, which is sub-divided into credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Credibility refers to the precision in which the researcher was able to interpret data provided by participants (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Credibility will be increased by the researcher spending a longer period of time with the young South African adults in order to get an even better understanding and insight into their lives (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Another way to increase credibility is if the findings of the study are believable from the young South African adults' point of view (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Hence, the young South African adults must acknowledge that they have been adequately described and transcribed in their transcripts given to them by the researcher that allows for the correction any errors and facts. Credibility can be further enhanced by the researcher getting familiar with the young South African adults from an early stage participating in the study (Shenton, 2004). There will also be a number of frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and their superiors (Shenton, 2004). In addition to this, during a later stage in the interview with a participant, the researcher will describe aloud to the participant an initial understanding of the participants previous response to verify whether the researcher had interpreted what was shared correctly.

Transferability refers to the ability of the researcher's findings to be applied in a situation similar to the previously researched one and then deliver similar results (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). In other words, transferability allows for connections between elements of both phenomena (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). However, this does not involve or lead to generalized claims, and is instead the extent to which the analysis and results can be applied beyond just the initial research project (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). In order to increase transferability of this research, a thick description will be used, in which the researcher provides the full account of the research design, context, and participants for future researchers and readers to make their own decision about the transferability of the data (Maree, 2019). A further attempt to increase transferability has been made through participants being chosen

by gender (two male and two female) with the inherent notion that they could somehow represent the entire population of males and females in which the phenomenon is being studied.

Dependability refers to the quality in which integration takes place between the data collection method, the data analysis and the theory generated from the data (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). A detailed journal containing all of the researcher's decisions during the entire research process will be created and attached in an appendix to the research in order to help others follow the researchers reasoning (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Furthermore, dependability will be increased through the documenting of any labels created, any revisions made to categories, and any observations the researcher notes that may concern the data (Maree, 2019). Finally, the analysis process of the researcher's interpretation and decisions made will also be documented in order to aid other researchers and readers on how the researcher arrived at their interpretations (Maree, 2019).

Confirmability refers to how successful the data collected is supporting the findings and interpretations that the researcher had (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This shows how successfully the findings flow from the initially acquired data (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Another way of defining confirmability is the degree to which the findings of a study were shaped by the participants instead of the researchers own interest, motivation and bias (Maree, 2019). In order to increase confirmability, the researcher will admit their own predisposition as a way to reduce bias (Maree, 2019). This note of the researcher having a negative predisposition to how social media affects young South African adults in a negative way will be added to the limitations of this study as a way to reduce bias. In addition to this, the researcher will refrain from developing a relationship with any of the young South African adult participants as a method of reducing bias and eliminating any expectations the participants must confirm to (Maree, 2019).

3.9. Anticipated Contribution

This study contributes to the field of psychology by adding data to this particular topic of social media and the influence of social media on identity formation in young adults. As mentioned, this is a contemporary phenomenon that has not yet been fully

explored, especially in the South African context. It is through the exploration of the influence social media has on young adult's identity formation that a more detailed and deeper understanding about this specific phenomenon is provided. This has served as a groundwork or base for further future research and exploration of similar phenomenon, other related phenomenon of social media and identity formation, and a further exploration in which the limitations of this research are examined and supplemented. This research also contributes to the way we use social media by providing new information and insight about the influence of social media on young adult's identity formation, thus improving quality of life. Furthermore, this research can be used by academic journals and media articles to create further awareness of the influence social media has on identity formation on young adults. This could also lead to social media platforms using this research in developing of a stricter guidelines types of corporate advertisements displayed and the development of a support system similar to Facebook's "Bullying Prevention Hub" as an intervention resource for victims of cyberbullying as well as parents, educators, and teenagers, seeking support for issues on cyberbullying and other matters related to conflict on Facebook (Facebook, 2020).

4. FINDINGS AND INTERPERTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Presentation of Findings

Social media refers to the use of an online communicative platform to communicate and socially engage with others. Additionally, sub-themes of receiving social support arose along with the use of social media for the oppression of others, especially with cyberbullying. Participant 1 states, *"I like it because as I said, it keeps everyone close, but however I am against it for like small children using it as they should be outside playing and exploring, you know, outside, instead of them being inside"*.

Identity formation refers to the formation of a young adult's identity while under the influence of social media. Primary findings have indicated that their social media does have an influence on the young adult's identity formation. Sub-themes arose that dealt with the individuals gaining social norms from social media about identity. Participant 3 states, *"It did teach me about style, like about different style of clothing and you know how people dress and how people look, it gave me a sense of style like how I learn to dress and what looks good with what and the new trends like you know"*. Furthermore, all 3 participants agreed that it contributed to their knowledge about social identity and an increase in their growth/ sense of self.

Self-esteem refers to how the individual views their own self-worth and value. Primary findings have indicated that self-esteem is tied to social media and that positive feedback did improve self-esteem for all participants while negative feedback lowered participants self-esteem. In addition, subthemes indicate that receiving feedback is considered important, and that intragroup comparison is damaging to self-esteem and that negative feedback can result in behavioral change. Participant 1 states, *"At first, you may feel a bit bad, but personally, I feel bad as well. And then a bit motivated to prove these people wrong. And make them like, like as in click like"*.

Self-presentation refers to the individual's representation of themselves or the picking of best aspects of information about the self to present to others to create or maintain a certain status. Findings have indicated that social media has influenced how individuals would present themselves and their identity. All 3 participants admitted to only uploading pictures or content in which they would be seen in a positive light, such as being well dressed or in an exclusive or popular location.

Participant 1 states, *“Like yeah, I post pictures of myself whenever I feel I look nice and all dressed up”*.

Cost of lifestyle refers to the individuals monetary spending habits to maintain a social media identity similar to their peers. Primary findings indicate that individuals would be persuaded to purchase a social trending item if they first felt that it would suit them, if they wanted to feel unique, and if they would like to further fit into their online community using intragroup comparison. Participant 1 stated, *“Not clothing wise, but more technology wise, like I’m a tech freak, so I like like graphics stuff and stuff like that. So yeah, towards that aspect, yes. Clothes wise definitely not. I get notifications through like email and seeing companies posting or advert on my social media sometimes, like Facebook”*.

Cultural influence refers to the vast array of cultures that influence the individuals use and effect of social media. Primary findings from all 3 participants indicate that their culture does indeed influence how they use and are affected by social media and identified themselves as belonging to the Indian culture in Durban, South Africa. Participant 2 stated, *“I used to get a lot of scolding from my parents because they would be like you’re using it too long or you’re on your phone for too long, but that’s what Indian parents are like. And like I would post something and then like get comments from people in my family like saying oh that shirt is too short or something”*.

4.2. Interpretation of Findings

All participants stated that they were influenced by the current trends in social media and to constructing and conforming a social media identity that impacts their actual life in drastic ways, such as their physical appearance, self-esteem, personal relationships, and economic status. This can be gleaned as Participant 3 states, *“It did teach me about style, like about different style of clothing and you know how people dress and how people look, it gave me a sense of style like how I learn to dress and what looks good with what and the new trends like you know. Like if I see someone wearing something nice and I liked it then ya, I would wear it”*. All participants also state that they have altered their lifestyle in order to further accommodate the social media community, such as Participant 1 who explained that

he would perform helpful tasks for his online community for further conformity. However, it must be noted that all participants cited their Indian culture as being a mediating or influential factor in terms of how much they were exposed and affected by social media by insinuating that their parents and extended family were regulators who would determine how much of their identity conformed to social media's influence.

These research findings indicate that social media does indeed have an influence on young adult's identity formation. Furthermore, in relation to other themes such as self-presentation and cost of lifestyle, when intragroup comparison occurs, it can lead to a negative effect on self-esteem. This can be seen in Participant 3 when asked about how she felt different to her social media community, *"Sometimes I feel like everyone else is better than me and they have better things than me and they are more fortunate and stuff. Okay, like they have better lifestyles, they look better, they have better clothing, they are happy, they get whatever they want, they come from like er like er higher class, like for example their parents are more well off to do than mine so they are more fortunate in that sense and sometimes that makes me feel sad and down about it. And it lowers my self-esteem"*. Subthemes of body image arose as Participant 2 and 3 both indicated they felt pressure from seeing posts on social media about what body image they should have to fit it, and even went as far as to take measures to look that way.

Further analysis revealed that participants spoke about how they were more persuaded in face to face interactions than on social media. In addition to this, all participants first disclosed that they knew friends who were very susceptible to purchasing products to conform to their online community.

4.2.1. Findings in context

This research has confirmed what the literature review highlighted earlier. According to the SIT used in this research, an individual perceives themselves and a sense of who they are is based on their group membership (Branscombe & Baron, 2017). SIT states that group membership is in turn an important source of self-esteem and pride. This theme is affirmed and can be substantiated in Participant 3's statement about when asked how she feels when she receives negative feedback, *"Down, like it makes me question myself where I went wrong"*.

SIT states that those who perceive themselves as a member of the group emphasize what they share in common with other members of the group (Branscombe & Baron, 2017). These individuals describe themselves in terms of the attributes that differentiate their group from another group as seen in Participant 2's statement, *"The people I interact with frequently on social media are people very similar to me in that we think on a similar level, so we sort of share the same sentiments on a lot of things, so, we are quite similar.. but, when it comes to people outside my circle, I think that I think very differently and outside of my circle there is a lot of negativity and I don't allow that in"*.

Raymer (2015) states that the more the individual exposes themselves to other individuals' positive self-presentations on social media, the more likely it is to produce feelings of deprivation and inadequacy, to which Brown (2017) indicates is a trigger for body image issues. This theme of self-presentation can be triggered through intra-group comparison and can be confirmed through Participant 3's statement when asked about social media and body image and self-presentation, *"It did affect me at one point. Like I remember seeing like pictures of other people and girls and was like, I don't look like that. I actually stopped eating and I wouldn't eat because I wanted to get thin and in shape. I used to ask my parents to buy me these fancy dresses and stuff but it's like they were on a whole new level and I remember spending all my birthday money that one year on a dress"*. Additionally, the cost of lifestyle theme is also derived and confirmed as stated by Carter (2018), social media creates a tendency of individuals comparing themselves to their peers and then experiencing a feeling of inadequacy along with a fear of missing out on current trends. This leads to the individual spending a vast amount of money in order to impress and fit in to their online community (Carter, 2018).

Furthermore, this research has added to the body of knowledge through the Indian perspective/lens in Durban, South Africa. This indicates that the influence of social media is something that needs to be understood through a localized and cultural lens, and is something not accounted for in the international literature. Participant 3 states, *"Especially since we grow up in an Indian household with strict parents, so we have to like watch what we say and do and post because they are watching and they can make it difficult with like how I post and what I say"*.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Research Question, Problem, Hypotheses/Objectives Addressed

The research questions of this study were acknowledged and the objectives met. There is a drastic effect of social media's influence over young adult's identity formation. It is perceived as negatively impacting the research participants and results in changes in their physical appearance, self-esteem, personal relationships, and economic status, which in turn affects their developmental course throughout the rest of their lifespan. The first objective of this research study was to determine why young adults conform to a social media identity. From the findings, all 3 participants uncovered and insinuated that they examined how an individual perceives themselves and a sense of who they are is based on their group membership on social media. Based on the researcher's findings, this objective was well met.

The second objective was to describe the ways in which young adults conform to a social media identity. It was clear from the findings that social media influenced young respondents' physical appearance, self-esteem, personal relationships, and economic status in a negative way. The second objective covered a sufficient number of findings pertaining to the phenomenon and was covered adequately.

The third objective of the research study was to identify what can be done to manage young adults conforming to a social media identity. This objective was discussed in depth as part of the literature review, and all 3 respondents gave the same suggestions on what can be done to help mitigate the influence of social media on young adult's identity. It was clear that all respondents wish to see an early intervention programme be taught in schools and placed in social media sites as an effective solution.

5.2. Ethical Considerations

When conducting research there are always moral and professional code of conduct to abide by (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). These are known as ethics (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Ethics set the standard for the researcher's behavior and attitude as well as affects the stakeholders and participants involved (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). The first of these ethical issues related to the participants deals

with informed consent (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). Participants were given a document that required them to write their name and sign stating they have read the document and consent to participate in the study under the guidelines stated. In this consent form, participants were aware that they are participating in a research study to which they have a clear and basic understanding of what the study pertains to and what is required of them (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). In addition to this, participants were also informed that they are under no forced obligation to participate, and are free to withdraw from participating during the interview if they wish to do so with no consequences or form of harm befalling them (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

An important concern from participants is that any information recorded from them that can lead to physical, emotional, occupational, and relational harm (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Participants were assured of confidentiality in the consent form. In that, participants were informed that their names recorded on the consent form only would only be available to the researcher and no one else (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). Additionally, participants names were recorded on a list in which each participant is assigned a pseudonym/label such as "Participant 1". From this, the participants would then be recorded only by this pseudonym in their in-depth interview and in the audio recording. This list of the participants name linking to their pseudonym was restricted to the researcher and no one else. This way, any other researcher or individual who looks at the transcript would not know the identity of the participant, while the researcher can consult their list and find out if necessary.

Participants were also informed on the consent form of the in-depth interview being recorded with an audio device, which they need to approve of through written consent, and that the purpose of this recording is to ensure correct transcribing by the researcher takes place afterwards and will not be used for any other purpose (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). Also, participants were also informed that this audio recording will only be accessible to the researcher and only be used by the researcher (Howitt & Cramer, 2017).

There are also ethical considerations in terms of the researcher, such as distorting results. When a researcher distorts results, they will emphasize specific factors over other factors of same relevance as well as quote facts and figures out of context (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). The researcher may quote and use the facts and figures

that only demonstrate the link between social media and young adult's identity formation. This may result in data indicating contradictory information not being used, even though it is of equal importance.

Bias is another important ethical principle of the researcher and involves a much more subtle approach in which the researcher is unaware that they have an expectation or even desire of achieving a specific outcome, and may not be aware of it (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This may lead to the researcher being influenced in terms of where and how the data is collected and interpreted (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

To compensate for the researcher's distorting of results and bias, the researcher will allow all the participants to speak freely with minimal interruption, avoid leading questions, speak to the participants about their interpretation of a response to see if it aligns, and allow the interview to flow naturally.

In relation to ethical considerations, individuals whom are members of a vulnerable group, such as cancer patients or other illnesses, disabilities, and disorders, will be excluded. Most importantly, ethical clearance from the ethics committee was also sought and obtained, and the researcher only commences with data collection when given this consent.

5.3. Limitations

There were limitations of this research report. As with qualitative research, the sample is not representative of the entire population as there are many different forms of gender identity and sexual identity not being represented. This research does not take different races and ethnicities into account. Culture and religion are also not considered as a factor. This limits the extent of generalizability and representation as each and every young adult's gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, and religion causes them to have a different experience with social media that has not been explored in this research. Another limitation is that participants may choose to purposely be dishonest in order to avoid dealing with the truth of seeming being easily persuaded.

5.4. Heuristic Value

The study has provided a successful insight into a Durban, South African perspective of social media's influence over a young adult's identity through their self-esteem, self-presentation, personal relationships, and financial status. Furthermore, it can be noted that this study has specific connotations to the Indian culture found in Durban, South Africa, as all participants willingly and voluntarily identified themselves as belonging to the culture. Hence, this adds a cultural lens to the South African perspective and helps unpack understanding. Impetus for further research into other cultures as well as gender comparisons and effects on minorities remains.

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ANNEXURE A

Final research report summary document table

A qualitative cross-sectional study exploring why young adults conform to a social media identity

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors /Sources	Lit Review Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data collection Method (s)	Ethics	Anticipated Findings	References
To determine why young adults conform to a social media identity.	What leads to young adults conforming to a social media identity?	This conformation to a social media identity then puts the wellbeing of young adults at risk and its effects may not be realized until it is too late for an intervention.	(Branscombe & Baron, 2017) (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014) (Hall, 2019)	Theme 1: Social media Theme 2: Identity formation Theme 3: Self-esteem Theme 4: Self-presentation Theme 5: Cost of lifestyle Theme 6: Personal relationships	Interpretivism Epistemology: Determine why young adults conform to social media. Ontology: Reality is a social construction that is influenced by others around them. Axiology: This research should be educational and used to help young adults whom conform to a social media identity.	Qualitative – aimed at getting an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon.	Standardized open-ended interviews will be used as a data collection method.	Written informed consent will be attained and participants will be informed that it is a voluntary procedure and they are free to drop out. Participants will be confidential.	Young adults conforming to a social media identity through their group membership. There will also be an agreement or correlation between the conclusion of the literature review and the responses given. Anticipated Contribution	Branscombe, N. R., & Baron, R. A. (2017). <i>Social psychology</i> (14 th ed.). Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited. du Plooy-Cilliers, F., Davis, C., & Bezuidenhout, R. (2014). <i>Research Matters</i> . Cape Town, South Africa: Juta and Company.
					Population 3 South African adults who are individuals between the age of 18 to 40, that engage and use social media at a minimum of two sessions per week on at least one or more platforms.					
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/ Hypotheses/ Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories			Sampling Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method. The units in the sample are familiar to the researcher can be accessed easily and whom meets the population parameters.	Data Analysis (s)	Limitations		du Plooy-Cilliers, F., Davis, C., & Bezuidenhout, R. (2014). <i>Research Matters</i> . Cape Town, South Africa: Juta and Company.
Young adults are constructing and to a conforming social media identity. This impacts their actual life in drastic ways, such as their physical appearance, self-esteem, personal relationships, and economic status.	In what ways do young adults conform to a social media identity? What can be done to manage young adults conforming to a social media identity? To describe the ways in which young adults conform to a social media identity. To identify what can be done to manage young adults conforming to a social media identity.	•Self-presentation •Self-esteem •Fear of missing out (FOMO) •Cost of lifestyle •Personal relationships •Social media	The Social Identity Theory (SIT), which examines how an individual perceives themselves and a sense of who they are is based on their group membership.				Thematic analysis: This process of data reduction using identified themes will be done using a list of identified themes usually known, anticipated, found in the data, or derived from the literature review.	- Participants truth when it comes to their own introspection. - Gender consideration, in terms of how other genders, such as non-binary, approach and are affected by social media.	Provide further contribution to the growing field of knowledge on the new ever-advancing technological developments made and its effects on the human being, as well as what can be done to manage young adults who struggle with conforming to a social media identity.	Hall, K. (2019). <i>The effects of social media on the human psyche</i> (Honours Thesis, Oregon State University, Oregon, United States of America)

ANNEXURE B
Ethics clearance letter



20 July 2020

Student name: Chivaan Brijlal

Student number: 16008784

Campus: Varsity College Durban North

Re: Approval of HPS1 Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS/PGDIP ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued.

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

Please note: The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

ANNEXURE C
Consent form to participate in interview

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants
To whom it may concern, My name is Chivaan Brijlal and I am a student at IIE Varsity College (Durban North). I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Suhaila Ameer about why young adults conform to a social media identity. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of how social media effects the identity formation of young adults and what can be done to help improve this if necessary. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.
What will I be doing if I participate in your study?
I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you are the ideal candidate with whom this research can be conducted that can be used to increase existing body of knowledge and quality of life. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to ask you a series of open-ended questions about your social media activity and identity. There is a total of 10 questions and you are allowed to speak freely/ unrestrained with no punishment or consequence. You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.
Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?
Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your identity and social media. If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.
Do I have to participate in the study?
• Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary; • If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so; • Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.
Will my identity be protected?
I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at IIE Varsity College, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.
What will happen to the information that participants provide?
Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my Psychology Honours Degree. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?
Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate. You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed. My contact details are as follows: Chivaan Brijlal The contact details of my supervisor are as follows: Suhaila Ameer (Clinical Psychologist)

Consent form for participants

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Chivaan Brijlal about why young adults conform to a social media identity. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of how social media effects the identity formation of young adults and what can be done to help improve this if necessary.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to be interviewed for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature	Date

ANNEXURE D
Consent form for audio or video recording

CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

Consent form for participants	
I, _____, agree to allow Chivaan Brijlal to audio record my interviews as part of the research about a study exploring why young adults conform to a social media identity. This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that: • My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private. • The recordings will be stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. • Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.	
Signature	Date

ANNEXURE E

Participant interview schedule

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Participant:

1 ☐

2 ☐

3 ☐

Age: _____

Gender:

Male ☐

Female ☐

Other ☐

This in-depth interview will consist of 26 open-ended questions that is concerned with social media and identity formation in young adults. There is no time limit for each response and all participants are encouraged to speak open and freely as possible. No identifiable information will be recorded in the response transcript and a pseudo-name will be used, such as "Participant 1". This is also a voluntary procedure in which participants are free to withdraw from at any point in time during the research process with no consequences or harm befalling them.

Questions

1. Why did you join social media?

2. Why do you believe you use social media?

3. What is your opinion of social media?

4. How often do you use social media per day or week and on how many platforms?

5. How do you feel when you make a post on a social media platform?

6. In what ways do you feel similar to members of your community on social media?

7. In what ways do you feel different to members of your community on social media?

8. If you saw the majority of your community in social media adopt a new trend, such as a certain brand of shoes, and you had the money to purchase this, what choice would you make?

9. What is your opinion on the purchasing of products to fit in or conform to a social media community?

10. How does support from social media differ from support in the physical world?

11. Elaborate on whether you would seek support either through social media or the physical world.

12. When you make a post on social media and receive positive feedback, how does it make you feel about yourself?

13. When you make a post on social media and receive negative feedback, how does it make you feel about yourself?

14. How does your physical presentation now compare to before you engaged in social media?

15. How does the cohesion of your personal relationships compare both before and after you started engaging in social media?

16. What do you feel has changed about you since you started using social media?

17. What would result if you did not have access to social media for a prolonged period of time, such as a year?

18. In what ways are your identity and social media identity different?

19. How does expressing yourself on social media differ from expressing yourself in the physical world?

20. Do you feel any pressure to conform to a social media identity?

21. Do you feel when a member of your online community receives negative feedback?

22. What would happen if you were seen on a someone else's social media post in a negative image?

23. How do you feel that social media has affected your personal relationships?

24. If you had been told from an early age what social media is, what it entails, and what its users are like, what would you have done?

25. What is your opinion of social medias influence over a young adult's identity?

26. What do you think can be done to improve any influence social media may have on a young adult's identity?

ANNEXURE F

SafeAssign originality report

10/27/2020

Originality Report

SafeAssign Originality Report

RESEB419_VCDN1 • Safe Assign Plagiarism Practice

[View Originality Report - Old Design](#)

Chivaan Brijlal

Submission UUID: 6593656f-76c7-86ac-fad9-8e532e4a1772

Total Score:  High risk 60 %

Total Number of Reports

1

Highest Match

60 %

Chivaan Brijlal (16008784) RESEB419 ASSI...

Average Match

60 %

Submitted on

27/10/20

15:00 GMT+2

Average Word Count

15,140

Highest: Chivaan Brijlal (16008784) RESEB...

 Attachment 1

60 %

Word Count: 15,140

Chivaan Brijlal (16008784) RESEB419 ASSIGNMENT 7 - RESEARCH REPORT.pdf

Institutional database (15)

58 %

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 Page 1 of 62

A Qualitative Cross-sectional Study Exploring Why Young Adults Conform To

A Social Media Identity In Durban, South Africa

Name: Chivaan Brijlal

Student Number: 16008784

Programme: HPS414

Module: RESEB419

Lecturer: Suhaila Ameer

Task: Research Report