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Lecturer: Dr. John Hunter

Supervisor: Steven Sawyer

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the research report submitted for the Bachelor of Arts Honours in Psychology degree to The Independent Institute of Higher Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institute for degree purposes.

Signature:

Date: 28th October 2020

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Abstract

Social media usage in the 21st century has become common for many individuals for different personal and business purposes. With this increase in the pervasiveness of social media, the effects of social media on how individual's view themselves is important to investigate. This research study is about exploring the ways in which users of social media interpret the social media content they are exposed to, how they are made to feel or think about themselves as a result of this and whether this effect is positive or negative. In depth interviews were conducted with five participants from tertiary institutions, who currently use social media platforms. The responses of participants were analysed thematically, resulting in the emergence of five major themes. It was found that social media exposure had a negative effect on how users were made to view themselves, including their abilities and worth. This effect, however, was buffered by a personal resilience that individuals demonstrated in response to the negative effects of social media. As a result of this, social media exposure does not negatively affect an individual's view of themselves as much as it may have once done.

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Introduction

Background

In the 21st century there has been a rise in the use of technology and innovations such as the development of smartphones, tablets and apps. Social media platforms are another such development that are now so ingrained in everyday life, it is hard to imagine a world without them. From the first social media platform being launched in 1997 and throughout the subsequent two decades, one has seen the development of several major platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram.

In the current 4th industrial revolution, social media now plays a crucial role in the everyday functioning and maintenance of one's business and personal life, but with social media having a crucial role in society, it does not mean that there are only benefits to using social media. Previous studies and literature have pointed to the negative effects of social media on user's self-esteem. This study will look at how social media exposes users to the views of others on their self and how other user's social media content, such as media posts and comments, can act as triggers that produce both positive and negative views of the self within a user.

This is because human beings tend to compare themselves with others, whom they believe are superior, this is known as upward comparison, and those they believe to be inferior, which is known as downward comparison (Festinger, 1954). Therefore, exposure to different forms of social media content can positively or negatively influence how a user comes to view themselves (i.e. their self).

This research study aims to explore the effects of social media on users' views of themselves and how exposure to social media can affect the development of a healthy self-concept.

Rationale

This study is a relevant exploration of exploring social media related causes of negativity and positivity on one's self-concept (that is, to say, how one views his/herself). This could allow for recommendations to be made to social media platforms that provide benefits towards the development of a healthy self-concept by keeping the positive contributions and removing or changing negative contributions to one's self-concept. In addition to this, the findings of this study may enable users to become more aware as to whether social media exposure presents a threat to their

self and help them become more knowledgeable about how to protect themselves. This research can also contribute to the academic body of knowledge regarding social media and its effects.

In this current age of the technological revolution (also known as the fourth industrial revolution), social media platforms are being used more frequently by children and the youth of this generation. It is therefore important that measures be put in place to protect such at risk members of the population from the potentially negative effects of exposure to social media on one's self, while at the same time promoting the positive effects of social media on one's self.

Especially bearing in mind the vulnerability of children and youth groups, the research results of this study can be used by parents, teachers in schools and other caretakers to help make children and the youth understand the effects of social media use on how they see themselves and the way's social media can affect the extent to which they believe in themselves to be able to make a future for themselves. Limitations on children and youth having access to social media while using school computer resources could be implemented.

Problem Statement

Social media interactions and usage play a crucial role in modern society, especially amongst individuals and social media usage has been attributed as a potential cause of harm to a user by producing negative views of the self within the user (Cramer, Song & Drent, 2016). These negative views of the self can produce harm within a user because they can act as contributing factors towards producing a negative and/or inaccurate view of oneself (Rogers, 1959). When individuals do not view their self positively and/or accurately, they will not believe in their intrinsic values or capabilities which are needed to help them be able to make the most of their gifts, talents and skills (Rogers, 1959). When individuals do not believe in their intrinsic value or capabilities, they will not be they be able to realise their full potential in this life. The relationship between these negative views of the self and of social media needs more exploration.

Research Goal

The purpose of this research is to understand users' experiences of social media and whether these experiences affect users' views of themselves, positively or negatively,

and in doing so, also aiming to understand how these experiences affect the development of users' concepts of self.

Research Question

What is the effect of social media usage on the self-concept of its users?

Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- To explore the relationship between engagement in social media and views of the self.
- To discover how engaging in social media causes users to regard their self.
- To explore the role that social media content, such as others users' posts, comments, likes and dislikes, has in affecting views of the self.
- To explore how engaging in social media causes users to view and/or value their current life experience.
- To explore how engaging in social media causes users to feel about and believe in their current abilities and skills.
- To discover sources of motivation for the use of social media and the type of social media content that causes fulfilment or satisfaction within a user.

Literature Review

Conceptualisation

Self-concept, self and self-structure

Rogers (1959, p.201) defines the self-concept, self and self-structure by stating, “the term self or self-concept is more likely to be used when we are talking of the person's view of himself” and “self-structure when we are looking at this gestalt from an external frame of reference”. In the context of this research, the self-concept is defined as a person’s view of oneself, that is able to be influenced by either, the perceptions of other individuals a person interacts with on social media, or other user’s social media content.

Congruence/Incongruence

Rogers (1959, p.203) defines incongruence as “a discrepancy [which] develops between the self as perceived and the actual experience of the organism”. In the context of this research, incongruence refers to how individuals may perceive themselves and their life experience as having positive characteristics, and how an individual’s experience on social media, can produce negative feelings within them which causes them to perceive themselves and their life experience differently, as a result. Congruence, for the context of this research, is when an individual’s perception of themselves and life experience is not made to become different, as a result of, social media experience.

Perception and awareness

Rogers (1959, p.199) defines perception as “a hypothesis or prognosis for action which comes into being in awareness when content impinge on the organism”. In the context of this research, perception refers to the awareness that either, the views of others from social media, or the way in which exposure to social media content, impinges upon a user and make the self the object of a user’s own consciousness.

Social media/social networking sites

The APA Dictionary of Psychology (2020) defines this as “the relatively organized set of relationships that an individual or group has with others, including types and methods of communication, patterns of liking and disliking, and the strength of interpersonal connections”. For the context of this research, this refers to the set of

relationships an individual has with others using online platforms of communication, that are characterised by a pattern of liking and disliking, providing comments, status updates and posts. The three primary platforms for the context of this research are Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Social media content

For the context of this research, this refers to a user's posts on social media that includes their media (videos and images), status updates, likes and dislikes as well as comments, that can potentially impact upon another user's self-concept.

Motivation or drive

The APA Dictionary of Psychology (2020) defines a motive as "the impetus that gives purpose or direction to behaviour and operates in humans". For the context of this research, this refers to the urge to satisfy one's needs by making use of social media.

Self-actualisation needs/Self-actualisation

Maslow (1943, p.388) states that this is the desire for a person to "become more and more [of] what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming". This can only be done if the physiological, safety, love and esteem needs are regularly satisfied (Maslow, 1943). Rogers (1959, p.197) defines this as "the inherent tendency of the organism to develop all its capacities in ways which serve to maintain or enhance the organism". This can only be done if the self and experience of a person are congruent (Rogers, 1959).

For the context of this research, self-actualisation refers to the drive for an individual to fulfil their full potential, by seeking to grow in knowledge, skills, stature, creative exploits and pursuing a life of excellence, order and morality. A negative effect on an individual's love and esteem needs as well as self-concept, from using social media, can hinder the ability for a person to self-actualise as it can cause their lower level needs of love and esteem to not be satisfied, as well as, cause an individual's self-concept to become incongruent.

Esteem needs

Maslow (1943, p.377) defines esteem needs as peoples "need or desire for a stable, firmly based (usually) high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others... based upon real capacity, achievement and respect from others". For the context of this research, esteem needs refer an individual's desire

for others to highly evaluate them, by positively acknowledging their accomplishments and content posted on social media or by giving the individual recognition, attention or appreciation.

Love needs

Maslow (1943, p.377) defines love needs as the desire for love, affection and belongingness and a “hunger for affectionate relations with people in general”.

For the context of this research, love needs refers to the desire to seek out fulfilling, affectionate and rewarding interactions and relationships by using social media.

Theoretical Foundation

Carl Rogers’ Theory of Personality

Outline

This theory states that human beings have a tendency or drive to act in accordance with their self-concept. This self-concept is when a person is aware of their experiential world and forms opinions about themselves. This theory also states that human beings have a tendency or drive to actualise, which is to realise their potential and become the best they can potentially be. This means that individuals can continue to grow despite adverse or difficult circumstances (UNISA, 2010; Rogers, 1959).

Relevance to this study

This theory is relevant to this study because there currently exists a body of literature that states that the use of social media has an effect on an individual’s self-esteem. By using the self-concept as a measure, this study will look at how viewing other people’s social media content, can potentially cause individuals to feel less satisfied about the life they are living or who they are, as they start to engage in social comparison on social media. Because a social media profile can act as a representation of an individual, one’s self-concept can be influenced by the perception of others, expressed through comments and posts, and this can affect the way they view themselves.

Effects on the self-concept can be discerned when social media content (i.e. the posts, comments, likes or dislikes of others) causes incongruence within an individual by producing “tension or internal confusion” (Rogers, 1959, p.204) about

the way they perceive themselves and their current life experience, to the extent that they begin to undervalue their current life experience or true potential in order to actualise.

This theory is aligned to the interpretivist paradigm of this study because it incorporates phenomenological psychology which states that what matters to an individual is the perceived reality of what one thinks and sees to be true and that one will act in accordance to this perceived reality as oppose to what is actually true (Morgan, 2011).

Social media can therefore act as a platform where the perceived reality of other people's lives can be favoured over an individual's current life experience and where the perceptions of other people can be included as part of one's view of themselves which in turn can negatively affect what they can become or do, in order to realise their full potential.

Abraham Maslow's Theory of Motivation

Outline

Maslow's theory of motivation looks at how human beings are motivated to fulfil certain needs and desires. These needs are fulfilled in a hierarchical manner, with the most basic needs having to first be fulfilled adequately or regularly enough before the desire or motivation to fulfil other higher needs comes into play. Once lower needs are fulfilled on a regular basis, only then do higher needs start to demand satisfaction. Satisfying lower needs is more urgent and vital because they ultimately serve the need for self-actualisation, which is the highest need in the hierarchy. If urgent lower level needs are satisfied, it makes it easier for a person to arrive at self-actualisation (UNISA, 2010; Maslow, 1943).

The first four levels of the need hierarchy are physiological, security, affiliation, love, and self-esteem needs. The fifth and highest level is the need for self-actualisation. The first four levels are referred to as deficiency motives because they fulfil basic survival needs such as hunger, thirst and the need for security, love, community feeling, freedom and respect. The need for self-actualisation is referred to as a growth motive because it is concerned with the realisation of potential, which include, needs for order, justice, harmony, excellence and effectiveness (UNISA, 2010; Maslow, 1943).

Relevance to this study

Maslow's Theory becomes relevant when looking at the motivating factors for social media use. Social media can be seen as a platform that provides individuals the opportunity to develop or maintain interpersonal relationships with one another, gain and share knowledge and information as well as develop stronger personalities and have better social lives (Boyd, 2007 as cited in Jan, Soomro & Ahmad, 2017). This means that the needs for love, relationship formation, respect and esteem can be fulfilled by social media.

However, in pursuit of fulfilling these needs, individuals may seek the validation or feedback of others. This may be triggered by the ability of social media to make it possible for individuals to focus attention on one's self (themselves) and make it possible for one's self to become an object of one's own's consciousness (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). When this happens and an individual is made to become aware of oneself, that individual may be influenced to become critical or analytical of his/her self, to the point that it becomes negative, and prevents the ability for a person to actualise.

For both Rogers' and Maslow's theories it is important for individuals to actualise because this way they become more adequate people, who learn to make great use of their intrinsic talents and abilities and become a greater help to themselves, those around them and to society.

Current Literature

The current literature on the effects of social media has been divided up into three sections pertaining to the three themes selected by the researcher that address the research problem. In the literature reviewed, the term self-esteem used was commonly used. This research brings a new perspective on the literature reviewed by using the notion of the self-concept.

Theme 1 – Developing a healthy self-concept

Explaining congruence and incongruence and how it relates to a healthy self-concept

According to Roger's theory of personality, human beings tend to experience a discrepancy between how they see themselves and how they experience life. Therefore, "tension or internal confusion" (Rogers, 1959, p.204) arises when an individual has a current experience that is different from what he wants to do and become, which is to actualise. When this happens, an individual may deny or distort real experiences, to align them with the way they view themselves, in order to protect their self-concept (how they view themselves). This is called psychological maladjustment (Rogers, 1959). In line with this, a malfunctioning person can be described as a person who undervalues their true potential, i.e. underestimates or underrates what they can do or become. Both these situations lead to incongruence and as long as there is incongruence, an individual cannot self-actualise (Rogers, 1959).

Defining a healthy self-concept

If an individual's view of themselves aligns with their current life experience, the individual can achieve their full potential. Therefore, if an individual can accept their current experiences, so as not to distort them or deny them, then this will lead to congruence. Congruence, which is where a person has a realistic view of him/herself, knows him/herself better and can therefore actualise their true potential (Rogers, 1959). A person with a healthy self-concept is seen as a congruent individual.

With an abundance of literature that exists which only looks at the effects of social media on self-esteem, the role of developing a congruent or healthy self-concept for the purposes of actualisation is missed. For the purposes of this study it is important to look at the effects of social media, using the concept of the self, in causing malfunction or incongruence in a user by making them undervalue their own current life experience or making them perceive themselves differently.

When an individual perceives themselves differently (or negatively), they will reduce their potential intrinsic value, as they favour external or perceived influences, from social media. By favouring the abilities, values, traits or life experience of another user on social media, above their own, an unhealthy/incongruent self-concept will have developed and when their own intrinsic value is favoured and their own perception of

themselves is not influenced by social media, a healthy/congruent self-concept will be developed.

Theme 2 – Motivation and benefits of using social media

The needs for love and esteem as motivators for social media use

In a study that looked at the motivation for using social networking sites (SNSs), they discovered that people use SNSs to overcome the shyness that can occur in face-face interactions and/or to develop or form relationships with others they may have never otherwise come across in everyday life (Barker, 2009).

According to Maslow (1943) the drive to form fulfilling interpersonal relationships with others is part of love needs of humans, and the drive to have others highly regard them is part of the esteem needs and both of these needs are intrinsically motivated as they urge one to satisfy them.

In line with this, social media can act as a trigger for this need to form and having fulfilling interpersonal relationships, because social media provides a platform for individuals to interact and form relationships with others from all over the world. Because social media provides this sort of a platform, both the love and esteem needs can be met through the use of social media. Therefore, fulfilling both the love and esteem needs can act as motivators for social media use.

Social comparison on social media that comes through fulfilling love and esteem needs

It has been argued that when seeking to fulfil both of these needs, there is a drive within each one of us that makes comparisons between others and ourselves (Schachter, 1959 as cited in Jan, Soomro & Ahmad, 2017). If these needs are pursued through social media, it can make the individual vulnerable to the perceptions of others. If this perceived reality is seen as true, then individuals may incorporate the perceptions of others into the view that they have of themselves. This can potentially have a negative impact on their self-concept (i.e. how they see themselves).

The trigger provided by social media to influence individuals to make comparisons of their lives with others, was seen in a Facebook study was done which involved looking at social comparison between users on Facebook. In the study it was found that, Facebook allows individuals to present an idealised version of themselves and this provides motivation for social media use (Seidman, 2013 as cited in Cramer, Song & Drent, 2016, p.1). This particular ability of social media to allow an idealised version of people to be portrayed, could trigger feelings of jealousy and make individuals more aware of their insecurities, which will overall provide motivation to compare one's life with the idealised version of someone else's life.

Social media helps present an ideal version of a person

In line with this, communicating through online platforms is more desirable because the user is able to communicate their social information in a controlled environment, in which they get to present an optimised version of their self, without the need for physical interaction (Cramer, Song & Drent, 2016). Users may fear judgement in face-to-face interactions because they are unable to optimise or 'edit out' things, they do not like about themselves. In these situations, the self is vulnerable to threat from the opinion and judgements of others. Therefore, an incentive to use social media is because it allows content created by a user, to be presented in an ideal way in order to optimally present the self.

Regarding Facebook, unfavourable posts can be edited or deleted and unflattering photos or media can be untagged on social media, and in this way "Facebook functions as a hyperpersonal social environment" (Cramer, Song & Drent, 2016, p.2), which provides a platform where everyone can present the best version of themselves for the world to see.

Theme 3 – Impact of social media on mental health and the self

The impact of social media on one's self-esteem has been studied over the years, with numerous studies revealing there have been both negative and positive effects found.

Earlier under theme 2 it was seen that social media allows for users to present an ideal version of themselves and that this can in turn act as a cause for social comparison. To fully explore this theme, there were two key seminal theories used in the literature reviewed that looked at social comparison on social media. The first of these is the *social comparison theory* by Leon Festinger (1954). According to this theory, people tend to assess their own abilities and opinions in comparison to others with similar abilities or traits, for the purposes of self-evaluation or similar comparison.

Negative Effects

Decreased satisfaction with life and lower self-esteem

Human beings compare themselves to others they believe are superior (upward comparison) (Festinger, 1954; Wood, 1989 as cited in Cramer, Song & Drent, 2016) and to those they believe to be inferior (downward comparison) (Wills, 1981 as cited in Cramer, Song & Drent, 2016). Upward comparison acts as a motivation for humans to learn how to act and what behaviour, from others, to imitate or incorporate into their own lives. Downward comparison helps a person figure out what not to do and what behaviour to avoid. Individuals with low self-esteem engage more in downward comparison and individuals with high self-esteem engage more in upward comparison (Wills 1981 as cited in Cramer, Song & Drent, 2016).

Therefore, people with lower self-esteem who tend to rely on using social media to boost their own and are at risk for not only lowering their self-esteem but also their satisfaction with life because social media acts as a trigger (or medium) for social comparison (Hawi & Samaha, 2017).

Reliance on the perceptions of others for contingent self-esteem

The second important theory used in the literature reviewed was the *sociometer theory* (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary & Downs, 1995 as cited in Burrow & Rainone, 2017). The sociometer theory “holds that self-esteem is calibrated to cues of inclusion or rejection within the social environment” (Burrow & Rainone, 2017, p.1). What this means is that self-esteem is important to individuals because it is able to enhance one’s relational value with others and increase acceptance by others (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2020).

In a study done that assessed the effect of positive social media feedback on self-esteem, it was found that when a greater number of likes was received by a user, it resulted in greater self-esteem (Burrow & Rainone, 2017). Therefore, “self-esteem was responsive to evidence of one’s value to others” (Burrow & Rainone, 2017, p.4).

While this effect may seem positive, the researcher regards this as a negative effect because this creates a reliance on contingent self-esteem found in the opinions of others on social media, which are fleeting, as oppose to developing self-esteem based on an individual’s intrinsic values, which in turn brings him/her closer to congruency.

Feelings of envy and decreased well-being

A summary of findings from numerous studied selected from the literature is given. According to a Facebook study done, it was discovered that, social media users who view others profiles tended to believe that other people were happier than they were and had better lives compared to their own, and believed, that because of this, life was unfair (Hawi & Samaha, 2017; Cramer, Song & Drent, 2016).

In 2012 and Sweden’s largest Facebook study done it was discovered that, “people use Facebook to convey the best of their lives, interesting events, and positive happenings, which makes others falsely believe they live a lesser life by social comparison which in turn negatively affects their self-esteem and well-being” (Denti et al., (2012) as cited in Hawi & Samaha, 2017). In a German study done it was shown that, “People who passively follow online users experience social comparison and feelings of envy, which decreases their satisfaction with life” (Krasnova, Wenninger, Widjaja, & Buxmann, 2013 as cited in Hawi & Samaha, 2017).

Associations with depression

In an Instagram study done, it was found that frequent use of Instagram and having a greater number of strangers followed was directly associated with symptoms of depression. Following strangers increased negative social comparison while following friends and acquaintances led to more positive feelings because the user had a better idea of what their friend’s lives were like as oppose to that of a stranger, where false

beliefs and assumptions about the lives of others contributed to symptoms of depression (Lup, Trub & Rosenthal, 2015).

Within a general social media study done, where participants limited their use of social media to ten minutes per platform per day for three weeks, it was found that symptoms of loneliness and depression both decreased (Hunt, Marx, Lipson & Young, 2018).

Links to body image problems

Increased use of Instagram has also been linked to body image issues (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013 as cited in Hunt, Marx, Lipson & Young, 2018).

Buffering some of these negative effects

Having a purpose in life

Current literature on buffering some of the negative effects of user's self-esteem being contingent on the value others ascribed to them, was having a purpose in life. Having a purpose in life presents a life aim that already has value and therefore relies less on the feedback of others or momentary affirmations such as likes. Having purpose reduces impulsive behaviour that seeks out rewards and allows individuals to recover faster from seeing social media content that has a negative effect on or presents a threat to their self-esteem (Burrow & Rainone, 2017).

The researcher argues that having a sense of purpose will improve a user's self-concept as they come to value, as oppose to undervalue, their current life experience.

Positive Effects

Reduced stress

For Facebook, a study revealed that having a greater number of Facebook friends was linked to more perceived social support, which ended up reducing the stress of those users and increased their psychological wellbeing. However, it should be noted that even in this study life satisfaction was not improved from Facebook usage (Nabi, Prestin & So, 2013).

Enhanced connection with others

Facebook helps users to connect with people from different places, keep old ties with previously acquainted people and develop new ones with strangers (Selwyn 2009, Wohn & LaRose, 2014 as cited in Moghavvemi, Sharabati, Paramanathan & Rahin).

Helps express creativity

Social media sites act as a platform for expressing creativity and posting creative content such as writing, music or other artistic means of expression. Users tend to rely on this feedback in order to help them develop their creative abilities and boost their esteem (Reid & Weigle, 2014).

Conclusion of review of current literature

Current literature has explored the effects of social media on self-esteem and on an individual's mental wellbeing. This research study will instead make use of the notion of the self-concept because this allows for understanding how users perceive themselves from a phenomenological psychology perspective. This perspective looks at the importance of perceived reality and how it influences how users perceive themselves, when it is favoured over what is actually true. For the purposes of this research, social media content presents a perceived reality because it is often idealised and optimally presented.

Research Design and Methodology

Paradigm

This research will use an interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm was chosen because the experiences of individuals using social media are approached from an understanding that they are subjective and can be interpreted differently by each user. Therefore, detailed and in-depth knowledge of users' perceptions and emotional experience when using social media, is seen as critical knowledge that is the focus of this research. Within this knowledge will be descriptions of what effects exposure to social media has on users' views of themselves, and whether those users regard themselves more highly or lowly as a result of this exposure.

The subjective information obtained from the research participants, will be accordingly applied to the three themes of this research, which are namely, the development of a healthy self-concept (Theme 1), the motivations behind and benefits of using social media (Theme 2) and the impact of social media on mental health and the self (Theme 3).

Research Design

This will be a qualitative cross-sectional exploratory study, using inductive reasoning. This research approach has been selected because this study will look to explore the value and meaning of particular experiences for different people, while appreciating that each experience is unique because it is shaped or defined by the individual's perspective. This is best done using qualitative data. This research will look to focus on the extent to which users perceive social media content as true and the effects of this on users' views of themselves. It will explore how users interpret social media content and how these interpretations influence how they come to regard themselves and their current life experiences.

This research is based upon theories used in previous literature such as the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), the sociometer theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation (Maslow, 1943) and Carl Roger's theory of personality (Rogers, 1959). These four theories act as the starting point for this research and will be narrowed down as follows.

Only the love and esteem needs of Maslow's theory will be used as they allow for the relevant sources of motivation for social media use to be explored, as social media provides a way of fulfilling both these needs.

Only the concept of the self from Roger's theory of personality, will be used because looking at the self allows for a more comprehensive understanding of individuals subjective experiences, that includes their current life experiences and the extent which they perceive their intrinsic value.

The concept of self-actualisation found in both Maslow's and Roger's theories, respectively, will be used as it allows for the study to anticipate and look at future or long-term effects to social media use, which will help to make the study more useful, than if it just focused on short term effects.

Both the social comparison theory and sociometer theory, explore social comparison, as well as the role of self-esteem in interpersonal relationships and this information will be used and applied to the study as well.

The above theories will be applied using inductive reasoning to the data gathered from participants, in order to generate and produce relevant themes and findings.

Population

The target population were tertiary education students, both in private and public institutions, within South Africa. The accessible population was tertiary education students, from The South African College of Applied Psychology (SACAP), the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University).

The population parameter for this research study were tertiary education students who use social media platforms. The unit of analysis for this research study were the five individuals that were interviewed. From these interviews' information about users' personal experiences of the effects of social media were obtained. Because most social media platforms are frequently used by groups between the ages of 18 to 29 (Hruska & Maresova, 2020), and the population selected were between these age gaps, the population chosen would therefore be more likely to provide significant and practical information.

Sampling

This research study made use of non-probability, convenience and purposive sampling. Given that the researcher has attended both Varsity College and the University of the Witwatersrand, using students that currently attend or formerly attended either of these tertiary institutions made for a sample that is conveniently available, because the researcher has access to individuals that currently attend or have previously attended both institutions. Non-probability sampling was used, because the students chosen that attend or had attended the above tertiary institutions were based on the researcher's subjective judgement. The unit of analysis for this research included three individual students from Wits University, one individual student from UJ and one individual student from SACAP. Therefore, the sample for this study included a total of five students from Wits University, UJ and SACAP.

The sample size therefore consisted of five individual students from three tertiary institutions. This sample size was regarded as adequate enough by the researcher to provide insightful information from subjective perspectives that would meet the research objectives without reaching the point of data saturation. The researcher acknowledges the limitations on the current sample size, in that it is not representative of all individuals living in South Africa and therefore the analysis that would have been ideal for this study will not be met. In line with this, a bigger sample would have been preferred by the researcher but for the purposes this particular research study, the sample size was sufficient.

The sample was purposive as only students who had experiences with using social media were interviewed, and students who did not use social media but attended the above tertiary institutions were excluded from the research study as they would not assist in addressing the research question.

Data-collection method

Data was collected using in depth interviews, which were recorded. The interviews included a preliminary session where the researcher greeted participants, asked each of them to verbally confirm that they agree to voluntarily participate in the research and that they have signed the informed consent form provided to them by the researcher. Afterwards an introductory set of question was asked to obtain basic information about the participants, such their age, their current year of study, what

tertiary institution they attend and whether that institution is public or private. In addition to this, questions pertaining to, how frequently participants use social media platforms per week and which current social media platforms they are currently active on/currently using.

This information was gathered in order to acquaint the participants with the researcher, which made the interview process easier and contributed to improving the quality of answers provided for the questions that were crucial for accomplishing the purpose of the study.

In depth interviews were a suitable data collection method because the purpose of the research was for participants to describe the effects of social media. The Interviews allowed participants to provide descriptions of their experiences using social media, while giving detail rich information that pertained to each users' personal experiences. Participants were also able to provide explanations and motives related to their social media usage. This is important because the nature of this study is qualitative and exploratory, therefore in-depth interviews were a good way to obtain information that would adequately satisfy or answer the objectives of this research study. The researcher was able to obtain information with enough detail and clarity to help the researcher fulfil the purpose of the study, which is to explore the effects of social media usage on its users. The information from interviews also allowed the researcher to develop relevant themes when analysing the data.

Some of the drawbacks to in depths interviews included the ability for participants to either over-explain, go off topic, not suitably answer the question asked and/or ramble in the answers that they gave. In addition to this, finding a suitable time and date to interview that worked for both the researcher and the participants was not easy.

Application of data-collection method

Participants were interviewed via phone calls that were made by the researcher. These were traditional network calls and not calls that used data. The researcher called participants ten or fifteen minutes prior to the scheduled date and time, to remind participants of the interview they had arranged. The researcher began the phone calls by greeting the participants and obtaining verbal confirmation of participants voluntary participation in the study. This involved asking participants to confirm that they had read the nature and purpose of the study they had been provided with by the

researcher, as well as, to confirm that they had read, signed and agreed to the terms provided in the informed consent form that they had been provided with by the researcher. The researcher then thanked participants for willing to be a part of the researcher study. Afterwards, a set of introductory questions was asked by the researcher. The questions were as follows: how old are you, which tertiary institution do you attend, is your tertiary institutions private or public, what year of study are you, do you currently have any active social media accounts for either Twitter, Facebook and/or Instagram, how frequently do you use any social media platform per week and how frequently do you use either Twitter, Facebook and/or Instagram specifically per week?

Once these questions were asked, the researcher began asking the main series of questions that would help the researcher fulfil the purpose of the study. The first sets of questions dealt with asking users to describe their social media experiences of being exposed to the views of other on themselves (i.e. their 'self'). The second set of questions dealt with asking users how they would describe the effects of being exposed to other user's social media content and how it made them view themselves. The third set of questions dealt with exploring how, both interactions on social media as well as other user's social media content, act a potential cause for users to become aware of themselves, and how both of these factors also affect how users view themselves. The fourth set of questions focused on the effect or influence social media has on the way users regard, esteem and/or value themselves. The fifth set of questions focused on finding out the way exposure to social media content makes users view and/or value their own current life experience as well as how social media content effects how they view and/or value their own current abilities and skills. The sixth set of questions dealt with asking participants the extent to which they regard social media content to be an accurate reflection of other people's lives or experiences. The seventh set of questions, focused on addressing personal sources of motivation on why participants use social media as well as how well social media fulfils love and esteem needs for them.

To make answering the questions easier, the researcher requested that participants be online at the time of the interview and connected to the message service platform WhatsApp. The researcher would then send through the question asked only as the researcher was reading out loud to participants. In this regard, participants were not

privity to any of questions prior to them being asked by the researcher over the phone. This was done to avoid bias as well as the potential for participants to prepare their answers in advance which could contribute to error by negatively affecting the validity of the research.

Data-analysis method

A phenomenological data analysis method was used by the researcher. This data analysis method was seen as most appropriate by the researcher because it provided a reflection on users' experiences and used the data obtained from the interviews in a manner that made it socially valuable, so that it will benefit other users of social media who view the results of this research study. This data analysis method allowed for an understanding of the essence, as well detailed descriptions, of users' experiences on social media to be obtained. The researcher did not annotate or make notes during the interview, but rather listened to the recordings of the interviews and produced a transcript which captured the whole interview. A transcript all of all data collected was produced by the researcher using word processing software. Information from the transcript and audio recordings of the interview data was put into relevant themes related to users' experiences. These themes would help achieve the research objectives and ultimately satisfy the research question, and were further explored in the application of the data analysis method. Five major themes emerged from the data. The five relevant themes explored, (1) what users interpretations of social media content are, (2) how users interpretations of social media affects users views on their self, (3) the extent to which users regard or value social media content in favour of/over their own life experiences, (4) the sources of motivation for social media use and whether those motives are fulfilled through social media and (5) the extent to which users view social media content as true.

Application of data-analysis method

The researcher recorded the interviews using an application on the user's android smartphone. This recording was then uploaded to the researcher's personal laptop and using headphones the researcher listened to the audio recording while typing in the content of the audio recording using word processing software. The researcher edited out any identifying information, such as the participants names, in the transcript that was produced. After compiling all five interview transcripts the researcher analysed how the data from each interview could be used to help the researcher

achieve the research objectives and satisfy the research question. The researcher filtered out information that was not useful or irrelevant, especially in cases where participants rambled on or went off topic when answering questions. The researcher then analysed the data from each interview and assessed how it fit into the five relevant themes created by the researcher.

Themes that emerged from the research

For the *first theme* of what users' interpretations of social media content are, the researcher found that users often found social media content was interpretatively both positively and negatively by users. Some users placed emphasis on their own frame of mind or perspective that was crucial in defining how social media content was interpreted. Some users reported having had to adjust to initially negative interpretations of social media content by learning to spend less time on social media platforms as well as the making sure they used social media for the correct purpose.

For the *second theme* of how users' interpretations of social media affect's users' views on their self, the majority of participants reported negative effects on views on their self. This was largely contributed to social media reinforcing social comparison within users, where other user's social media content caused participants to compare their status in life with others. A number of participants acknowledged that social media content is filled with one's highlights and is often glamourised or enhanced in some way and that while some of the original intentions for social media may have been benign, across time, social media platforms have become a means for users to boast or show off what they have, where they have been and what they have experienced.

The *third theme* of the extent to which users regard or value social media content in favour of/over their own life experiences, had mixed responses from participants. Some participants reported feeling that their current life experience felt underwhelming and that social media exposure made them feel pressure to make the most of their lives. This pressure involved making achievements in ways that are similar to how other users of social media have made achievements. This involved, for example, pressure to become an entrepreneur and own a business or earn a five or six figure salary.

This sort of pressure was especially noted in cases of young people on social media who were of the same or similar age of participants proclaiming to accomplish being

millionaires or successful business owners on or even through using social media. This led to some participants feeling self-conscious and self-critical of themselves. In other responses, participants reported regarding the importance of social media in their lives as reduced and that the role they allowed it to play in their lives was minimal. Participants who reported this, spent less time on social media and remained, in this way, detached or not as affected by the negative effects of social media.

The *fourth theme* of exploring sources of motivation for social media use and whether those motives are fulfilled through social media produced a number of different responses. Sources of motivation for social media usage were mainly for accessing education content and content that helped participants enhance their careers. Participants also added a motive of keeping themselves entertained, and with this, experiencing a pressure to check in on what other users are doing or have posted, simply as a result of having access to the application, as a way to pass time.

The *fifth theme* explored the extent to which users view social media content as true. Majority of users reported social media content to be fairly untrue. Participants reported that while there is an element of truth to people's posts, they acknowledged that there is also some doctoring, editing, or manipulation of that content before it is posted to make it seem better than the actual experience. Therefore, while all participants stated that they don't believe outright lies of a person's actual experiences are common on social media, they don't believe the experiences portrayed on social media are exactly as they appear. One participant reported that gaining experience while using social media has taught him/her how to identify posts that seem exaggerated or more fake than real. One participant described the pressure of capturing a real-life moment and the effort it took to portray it as best as it could be on social media. This pressure was such that he/she did not end up enjoying or being fully present in the real-life moment they were experiencing.

Conclusion of data analysis

Overall, the effect of social media on users was both positive and negative. A number of participants reported that since the inception of them using social media, they have learnt how to navigate the negative effects of social media which may cause them to become self-critical or self-conscious and in turn cause them to view themselves negatively or lower than others. A number of participants reported having had adapted

to now know what sort of negativity to expect from social media and because of this a number of participants reported the negative effects of social media to be reduced or less impactful in their lives.

An example of this, is one participant who reported having become intentionally inactive on both Twitter and Facebook, while also reducing the time spent, he/she on Instagram to just once a week or once every two weeks. Another participant also reported deleting their social media accounts, sometimes for several months, before going back online in an attempt to neutralise or diminish the negative effects of social media on how they view themselves. This reason for avoiding some of the negative effects of social media, is also the reason why the majority of the participants started using social media for education and career purposes.

In regards to, fulfilling love and esteem needs through social media, a number of participants reported the difficulty of getting to know a person and have a fulfilling relationship (platonic or romantic) through social media because they felt that there were a number of ways a person can misrepresent themselves online. For fulfilling love needs all participants reported feeling more satisfied with face to face interactions with another person(s) and in line with this, all the participants showed an affinity to real life interactions and experiences. Regarding social media fulfilling self-esteem needs, a number of participants reported learning to not rely on social media for affirmation or validation, but that there still exists the temptation to look at what comments other users got in response to their posts, which in turn can produce a desire for that participant to obtain the same affirmation or positive response for themselves.

Findings and interpretation of findings

This part of the research study presents the findings of the study. The findings are presented by focusing on certain themes that developed from the research. There are five relevant themes that the researcher has identified which will help achieve the research objectives and satisfy the research question. There were five research participants involved in this study, from the ages 21 to 23.

1) What users' interpretations of social media are

Participants interpretations of social media content were both positive and negative. All five participants (100%) said that although social media platforms were different from one another, the nature of the content from each of them was pretty much the same and that they were exposed to the social media content of other users the majority of the time they went on social media. This was seen by participants as something to be expected and was seen as the core way social media generally functions in order to get users and participants to use its platforms.

"I guess that's the whole modus operandi of social media, getting exposed to other people's content. I would say [I get exposed to it] every time" (Male, 21 years old).

An important emphasis was placed by participants on their own frame of mind or perspective that was crucial in defining how social media content was interpreted by them. One participant in particular reported having had to adjust to initially negative interpretations of social media content by learning to spend less time on social media platforms as well as making sure they used social media for the correct purpose.

"Social media does have a lot of power to do good or bad for a person and it's up to the person to decide, how they choose to experience it" (Female, 21 years old).

2) How users' interpretations of social media affect users' views on their self

In this regard, the majority of participants reported negative effects on how they viewed themselves as a result of interpreting social media content they were exposed to. This was largely contributed to social media reinforcing social comparison within participants, because other user's social media content caused participants to compare their status in life with others. All the participants acknowledged that social

media content is filled with a person's highpoints or best moments in life and that this triggers a drive within them to socially compare their lives with others. When this happens, the effect on a user's views of themselves is negative.

"It will always be this comparing of their best to my worst, almost. It's never a question of comparing oneself at their best with someone else at their best"
(Male, 21 years old).

"It can have... the experience can be detrimental in the sense that it brings about a comparison element to it, which [makes] oneself tend to want to subscribe to those social standards (Male, 22 years old).

Rogers (1959) theory of personality, states that human beings act in alignment with their self-concept. The most significant factor in producing a negative view of the self in a user was as a result of participant's merely being exposed to the social media content of other users. Merely being aware of the content of the content of other users, began to act a trigger for participants to become aware of themselves. All participants reported that this heightened awareness of one's self (one's experiential world) or another user's self, i.e. the world experienced by another user (based on that users social media content) was often enough to trigger social comparison.

3) The extent to which users regard or value social media content in favour of/over their own lives

All participants reported feeling that their current life experience felt underwhelming and that felt pressure to make the most of their lives in order to achieve what others are supposedly achieving or accomplishing. This sort of pressure was especially noted in cases of young people on social media who were of the same or similar age of participants, proclaiming to be highly accomplished financially, career-wise or academically. The led participants to feel self-conscious and self-critical of themselves, because at their young adult age they felt they had not accomplished much of anything yet. In this way, negative feelings produced within a user based on other people's perceived 'success' on social media served as a potential obstacle that got in the way of a participant realising their full potential. Participants reported starting to focus on how another individual on social media, who is often a stranger, got to a particular level of success which in turn made participants feel critical about themselves for not doing more to be at a level of success similar to that individual. By

not focusing on the building blocks that participants were currently developing and what they were currently doing in their own lives that was already successful, participants were at risk for reducing their intrinsic value.

*“In terms of my career, which is what I use social media for, the competition is very stiff and you end up focusing on competing rather than growing your craft”
(Female, 21 years old).*

But in response to the above potential obstacle, a number of participants have stated that social media now plays a reduced role in their lives because they have taken active steps to make sure they spend less time on social media. This awareness of how much time was spent on social media, was shared by all the participants. Therefore, social media content ended up being overall not favoured over an individual's current life experience, despite in select instances producing self-critical feeling (as stated above) or additionally feelings of envy within a participant. This is because these feelings were usually fleeting and therefore participants continued to value their current life the way they had prior to social media exposure, and the overall effect was neutral. This is because participants reported having adjusted to the nature of social media and becoming wiser about how to use social media in a manner that decreases the level of threat to their self-concept. Therefore, the ability for individuals who use social media to self-actualise was not taken away.

4) Exploring sources of motivation for social media use and whether these motives are fulfilled through social media

Primary sources of motivation from participants for social media usage were mainly for accessing educational content, that aligned to their current tertiary studies, and content that helped participants enhance their careers. Participants also added a motive of keeping themselves entertained, and with this, experiencing a drive to check in on what other users online are doing or what they have posted, simply as a result of having access to a social media platform that allows this to happen and additionally as a way to pass time or decrease boredom.

One participant reported not knowing why she used social media, but this was not to say that the participant did not find social media useful for them. It seems, in this 4th industrial revolution, with the global trend of social media platforms becoming the normal medium through which many businesses and individual's conduct their daily

activities, there is a pressure to follow the trend of using and engaging in social media, at least to some extent, simply because of how big a role social media plays in society today.

“I think it’s one of those that everyone did it [started using social media] and I would find myself getting left behind because I didn’t have that thing” (Female, 23 years old).

All participants (100%) reported Maslow’s (1943) love and esteem needs as important for them. When it came to fulfilling love needs through social media, four participants (80%) reported that social media is unfulfilling in meeting love needs, because the interactions and communication were seen as ingenuine and that there is a lack of desired transparency and level of emotional connection through social media. When it came to fulfilling esteem needs through social media, participants were not reliant on social media interactions or feedback to increase their self-esteem. For example, one participant stated that a positive comment would not make her feel any better if she were already feeling her esteem was low and likewise a negative comment would not make her feel much lower, if she were already feeling full of esteem. So, while esteem has previously been seen as being responsive to one’s value to others according to the sociometer theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Burrow & Rainone, 2017), participants in this study did not rely on contingent self-esteem from social media, because participants recognised the fleeting and perceived nature of reality on social media.

5) The extent to which users view social media content as true

Four participants (80%) said that they regarded social media content as “fairly untrue” or “untrue”. All the participants gave similar reasons as to why social media content was not regarded as outright “very true” or “very accurate”. This was because all participants agreed that there is often a certain degree of altering or changes that are made to social media content before it is uploaded, in order for the user to achieve his/her intended purpose for posting the content. This purpose in most cases was for the user to present a ‘better’ version of themselves or their lifestyle.

*“I think people [on social media] present a version of themselves but I think a lot of the time its glamourised, romanticised, made to look better than it is”
(Female, 21 years old).*

Participants showed keen awareness of the perceived reality that social media presents and did not take that perceived reality in the place of what is actually true. Understanding social media content this way, led to negligible negative effects of social media on the self and led to no lower life satisfaction amongst participants as might have been expected from the literature on social comparison (Hawi & Samaha, 2017; Cramer, Song & Drent, 2016).

Conclusion of findings

From this study, the self-concept of participants was negatively affected by social media exposure, but only for a period of time and the negative effects of this have decreased since users first started using social media. This is because participants take care to protect their self from threat and therefore, a user can maintain a healthy self-concept even though they are exposed to social media content.

Phenomenologically speaking, participants were able to differentiate perceived reality from what is true. Participants showed acute awareness that social media presents a perception of someone else's life or experience and that this perceived reality does not affect user's self-concept in the ways that a real-life experience may do so. While using social media users are aware of the virtual filter (or perspective) that the content they are exposed to comes through and that content is intentionally uploaded to achieve a particular purpose. This awareness, acted as a buffer to decreasing negative effects of social on the self.

In line with this awareness, users still preferred face to face interactions over social media to fulfil love needs, such as for feelings of belonging. Esteem needs, such as receiving compliments or being regarded by others, were also preferred to be through face to face interactions than through social media. This probably because social media can present a flux of opinions at once, in the form of posts and comments from others, which makes others opinions known at the same time, which can diminish the impact of content posted that boosts one's esteem. Whereas in face to face interactions, something that build's esteem is usually the only source for a person to focus on at a time, and therefore that source can be valued more by an individual.

Validity of the study

Trustworthiness

The small sample used for this research study, meant that data saturation was not reached. This did negatively impact upon trustworthiness, as data saturation would have enhanced trustworthiness.

Credibility

The credibility of this research was high as in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to spend more time with participants. However, because of the current virus pandemic, credibility was not able to be done to the extent that the researcher would have wanted to. Recording the interviews allowed the researcher to carefully re-listen to the interviews which was helpful for when the researcher began to analyse the data and interpret participants' experiences. This increased the chances of the researcher accurately interpreting the data.

Transferability

This research was low in transferability because the sample selected is not representative of the broader South African population, as participants were all tertiary students and around similar ages, from 21 to 23. Therefore, the research findings cannot be generalised to the South African population. The focus of this research is on participants' subjective experiences of social media and produced subjective results for each participant, that could be applicable only for the purposes of this research project. However, the data from this study can be used to help inform other researchers who wish to perform similar studies on the effects of social media on the self.

Dependability

The dependability of this research was high as the data collection method which made use of in-depth interviews provided a way for detailed and subjective data to be obtained from participants. These interviews, which were recorded, provided relevant information to help accomplish the research objectives and answer the research question. The researcher was able to integrate the data collection, data analysis and suitably apply the theoretical foundations of this research to produce relevant themes for the research. This helped to make the dependability of this research high.

Confirmability

The research used the interviews to produce an interpretation of the data that was rich in detail. The researcher's methodology and how the researcher made sense of the data collected was done in such a way that other researchers could perform this research in very much the same way as the researcher.

Conclusion

Research Question, Problem and Objectives Addressed

The purpose of this research was to understand how using social media affects the development of a user's self by assessing the extent to which social media produces negative views of the self within a user. From the above research findings, it was found that negative views of the self were produced by social media but that this effect was reduced and overcome because of a personal resilience to such effects from participants, thus producing an overall negligible effect on participants overall self-concept. This resilience has developed over time as users have become more accustomed to ways the ways social media works and the harm that social media exposure can produce on the self.

This resilience comes from the frame of mind or perspective of each user of social media to be aware of what using social media means for them and what some of the risks to their self are when using social media. This resilience comes from the users who are no longer oblivious to the negative effects of social media nor do they expect the social media environment to pose no threat to the self, but rather they are aware of particular threats to the self and take measures to protect themselves.

The effect of social media on the way users value their current life experience to be neutral and, in some cases, positive. Seeing someone else who potentially has a 'better life', did not make participants upset or lower their current satisfaction with life or believe life was unfair (Cramer, Song & Drent, 2016). While social media did trigger social comparison within participants, the effect of this comparison was not entirely negative. This in large part has to do with the, aforementioned, personal resilience found in most of the participants, but also because participants did not perceive social media content to be entirely true. Participants were aware that social media content is usually changed in some way to make it more flattering or favourable towards the user, and because of this, they did not see it as an entirely legitimate source that could be used to compare different people's life circumstances equally. That is, to say, participants were aware that comparing *perceived* social media content to their *actual* experiences, would be like comparing apples and grapes, thus the role that social media content played in users' lives was reduced and the effect on user's self-concept was neutralised.

Conclusion of research question, problem and objectives addressed

This research study fulfilled its purpose in exploring the effects of social media on users' views of themselves, by finding out that social media still has a negative impact on how users view themselves but this effect was overcome by a personal resilience and increased awareness found in participants about the potential threats of social media to one's self concept.

In addition to this, because participants accepted their current life experience and viewed it as positive, participants were able to maintain a realistic view of themselves, where they value who they are which then enables them to tap into their intrinsic talents and abilities that are needed to realise their full potential.

Anticipated Contribution

This study has looked at the effects of social media on the self and has therefore provided a deeper understanding of what particular aspects of social media exposure affect the self, as well as brought about an increased awareness of the effects of social media on the self. This data can be used to give users knowledge about how social media can influence the development of a healthy self-concept.

Ethical considerations, limitations

Participants gave informed consent and agreed to the goals and methods of the research, which was explained to them, by the researcher, in language that was easy to understand. The goals and methods of the research included informing participants that the interviews were to be recorded; that information provided by the participants was to remain confidential but that identity of the participants would not be able to remain anonymous from the researcher.

Information obtained from participants was only used for the purposes of the research, and participants did not have to share information they regarded as sensitive or private. The data obtained from the research was looked after responsibly and is currently stored in a safe place, that is access controlled. If the participants wanted to withdraw from or stop participating in the interviews at any time, they were able to do so, however none of them chose to withdraw. If the interviews were to become a source of anxiety for the participants, both the participants and the researcher reserved the right to stop the interviews. However, none of the interviews became a source of anxiety for the participants (Maree, 2020).

The limitations of this study were that it was conducted on a small sample that was made up of only tertiary education students. This was due to access to limited resources and time constraints that resulted in the convenience sampling method being used to find participants. In addition, this sample was non-representative of the South African population, therefore the results obtained may not be suitably generalised to the larger population. There were no face to face interactions for the interviews and therefore the researcher could not read interviewee's facial expressions or extract as much information as possible from the interviews. There were also time constraints to complete interviews with participants by a given time, which meant that some valuable information that pertained to this research, may have been missed out on.

Heuristic value

Heuristic value for a qualitative study such as this refers to the way a body of research acquires knowledge and information that is valuable for society because it focuses on awareness of an individuals' current experiences in a way that seeks to enhance and enrich our understanding of everyday life experience (Van Manen & Adams, 2010). The heuristic value of this research was that it was able to add to the existing body of research on social media's effects on individuals, from a new perspective of using the concept of the self. The concept of the self not only looks at an individual's present but also an individual's ability to reach their full potential in the future. This meant the research was able assess both short term and long-term effects of social media as well as whether the effects of social media would have potential future or long-term implications on users.

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APPENDIX A

Final Research Report Summary Document Template

TITLE: Exploring the effects of social media usage on the development of a healthy self-concept, for its users: a qualitative, cross sectional analysis of public and private tertiary students using in depth interviews.

Research Purpose/Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/Sources	Literature Review – Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method (s)	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
The purpose of this research is to understand users' experiences of social media and whether these experiences affect users' views of themselves, positively or negatively, and in doing so, also aiming to understand how these experiences affect the development of users' concepts of self.	What is the effect of social media usage on the self-concept of its users?	This study is a relevant exploration of finding social media related causes of negativity and positivity on one's self-concept. The findings of this study may enable users to become more aware as to whether social media exposure presents a threat to their self.	Abraham Maslow (1943) Carl Rogers (1959) Leon Festinger (1954) Mark Leary & Roy Baumeister (2000)	Theme 1 The development of a healthy self-concept Theme 2 Motivation and benefit of using social media Theme 3 Impact of social media on mental health and the self	This research will use an interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm has been chosen because the experiences of individuals using social media are approached from an understanding that they are subjective and can be interpreted differently by each user. Detailed and in-depth knowledge of users' perceptions and emotional experience when using social media, is seen as critical knowledge that is the focus of this research.	This was a qualitative cross-sectional exploratory study, using inductive reasoning. Population The target population were tertiary education students, both in private and public institutions, within South Africa. The population parameter for this research study were tertiary education students who use social media platforms.	Data was collected using in depth interviews, which were recorded.	Participants gave informed consent and agreed to the goals and methods of the research, which was explained to them, by the researcher, in language that was easy to understand. The data obtained from the research was looked after responsibly and is currently stored in a safe place, that is access controlled.	From this study, the self-concept of participants was negatively affected by social media exposure, but only for a period of time and the negative effects of this have decreased since users first started using social media. Participants have learnt to protect their self from threat and therefore, a user can maintain a healthy self-concept even though they are exposed to social media content.	Negative effects of social media on an individual's self-do still exist. It is important that users take measures to protect their self from threat when using social media. Measures can include, spending less time on social media and developing a sense of purpose in life. Users of social media that can learn to focus on their intrinsic abilities and in doing so, create a buffer against negative effects of social media on the self and at the same time allowing individuals to be better able to achieve their full potential in life.
Research Problem	Hypotheses/Objectives	Key concepts	Key theories			Sampling	Data Analysis Method	Limitations	Key Contribution	
Negative views of the self can produce harm within a user because they can act as contributing factors towards producing a negative and/or inaccurate view of oneself. The relationship between these negative views of the self and of social media needs more exploration	To explore the relationship between engagement in social media and views of the self. To discover how engaging in social media causes users to regard their self.	Self-concept, and self, congruence, incongruence, perception, social media, motivation, self-actualisation.	Theory of Human Motivation (Maslow, 1943) Theory of Personality (Rogers, 1959)			Non-probability. Sampling method Convenience and purposive sampling. Size The sample size consisted of five students from three tertiary institutions.	Unit of analysis Five individuals from three tertiary institutions. Data analysis method A phenomenological data analysis method was used by the researcher.	This study was conducted on a small sample that was made up of only tertiary education students.	The study has provided a deeper understanding of what particular aspects of social media exposure affect the self, as well as brought about an increased awareness of the effects of social media on the self.	To help further protect the self from threat, social media platforms should be used for the primary purposes of communication.

APPENDIX B

Participant Consent Form

**Honours Psychology
Research Project
Course: RESE8419
Researcher: Oeratile
Moatshe**

*A research study describing the
effects of social media usage on
user's self-concept*

Consent to take part in research

- I [full name of participant]
.....voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind. I do not have to share any information if I do not feel comfortable in doing so, or if I regard any information as sensitive or private.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- The method of research will be using in depth interviews, which will be recorded, and whereby annotations will be made by the researcher.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves sitting down for an interview for the duration of 30 minutes to an hour and answering questions asked by the researcher on my experience using social media and the effects of exposure

to other users' posts, comments, likes and dislikes and other social media related content.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the transcriptions made of the interview and in the research project, which is the purpose for which this data is being collected.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in a secure storage space in the home of the researcher and in a place that only the researcher has access to until the exam board confirms the results of this research project. Electronic copies of signed consent forms and audio recordings will be stored in cloud storage, in a personal account of the researcher, which only the researcher has access to.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained until the exam board confirms the results of this research project.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Details of the researcher:

Name: Omeratile Moatshe

Degree/Qualification: Bachelor of the Arts Degree (University of the Witwatersrand)

Contact details:

Details of academic supervisor:

Name:

Contact details:

Details of academic lecturer:

Name: Dr. John Hunter

Degree/Qualification: PhD in Research Psychology

Contact Details:

Signature of research participant

Signature of participant

Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of the researcher

Date

APPENDIX C



29 July 2020

Student name: Oratile Tshepang Moatshe

Student number: 20122209

Campus: IIE's Varsity College Sandton

Re: Approval of Honours in Psychology 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.

There are some aspects that you still need to address in your proposal. You will need to address these aspects in consultation with your supervisor before you may proceed (see below):

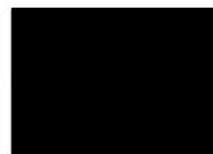
Please discuss with your supervisor/navigator/lecturer how you will address these issues listed below:

Please note: **Your fieldwork may only proceed once you address the following issues:**

- Please make all the changes suggested/recommended by your supervisor.

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

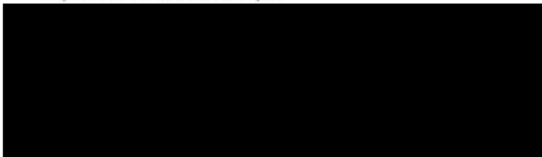
Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.

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.

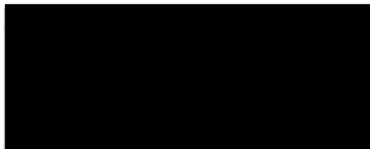
Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

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.

Supervisor: Steven Sawyer



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC):



JENNA-LEE RAMNARAIN

