

**A descriptive qualitative study on the impact of social media on self-esteem:
A gender comparison amongst South African young adults.**

Name: Megan Kruger

Student number: 17001688

Supervisor: Suhaila Ameer

Module: Research (RESE8419)

Qualification: BA Honours Psychology (HPSY414)

Word count: 11 267 words

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the BA Honours Psychology programme to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

Megan Kruger

Date

ABSTRACT

The present study explored whether social media has an impact on self-esteem with young adults; and thereafter if there are reported gender differences. Social media may be a threat to the development of self-esteem, especially in young adults who are experiencing the overwhelming transitional phase in life. A lack of research in the South African context, coupled with inadequate coverage of the impact of social media on males' self-esteem served as the impetus for the current research. The sample consisted of two males and two females, South African young adults, aged 20-25, who had access to social media, specifically Facebook and Instagram, and lived in KwaZulu-Natal. Given the exploratory and qualitative nature of the present study, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection; and data was analysed thematically. The most significant findings were the fact that young South African males and females have a low self-esteem, as well as a negative body image in their early twenties. Individuals in their mid-twenties had an awareness of social media as a negative tool, and seem to have a higher self-esteem. This study has contributed towards addressing and identifying the effects of social media on self-esteem, and the possible gender differences in South African young adults.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
1. INTRODUCTION	6
1.1.Contextualisation/ Background	6
2. RATIONALE	6
3. PROBLEM STATEMENT	7
4. PURPOSE STATEMENT	7
5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS	8
5.1. Primary Research Question	8
5.2. Secondary Research Question	8
6. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	8
7. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION	8
8. LITERATURE REVIEW	9
8.1. Motivation for social media use	9
8.2. Impact of social media on self-esteem	11
8.3. Social media and body image	12
8.4. Gender differences and social media use	13
8.5. Conclusion	15
9. CONCEPTUALISATION	15
8.1. Social media	15
8.2. Body image	16
8.3. Self-esteem	16
8.4. Social comparison	16

10. RESEARCH PARADIGM	17
11. RESEARCH DESIGN/ CONCEPTUAL APPROACH	18
12. POPULATION	19
12.1. Target and accessible population	19
12.2. Units of analysis	20
12.3. Sample size	20
13. SAMPLING	20
12.2. Sampling method	20
14. DATA-COLLECTION METHOD	21
14.1. Application of data collection method	22
15. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD	23
15.1. Application of data analysis method	24
16. VALIDITY/ RELIABILITY AND/ OR TRUSTWORTHINESS	27
17. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS	28
18. INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS	30
18.1. Findings in context	32
19. CONCLUSION	36
19.1. Research Questions, Research Problem, Objectives Addressed	36
20. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, LIMITATIONS, HEURISTIC VALUE	37
20.1. Ethical considerations	37
20.2. Limitations of the research	38
20.3. Heuristic value	38

21. CONCLUSION	39
REFERENCE LIST	40
ANNEXURES:	43
A- Final Research Report Summary Document Table	43
B- Informed consent form	44
C- Audio recording consent form	47
D- Semi-structured interview schedule	48
E- Ethics clearance letter	50
F- Ethics checklist	52
G- Originality report	53

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Contextualisation/ Background

Social media sites have their advantages and disadvantages. A major concern is their negative impact on individuals (Hawi & Samaha, 2017). Social media has become a platform for social comparison, which can lead to self-esteem issues (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014). Social media has gained popularity in the last ten years, but also leaves long-lasting psychological effects on individuals (Jan, Soomro & Ahmad, 2017). A high emotional investment in social media can result in a lower self-esteem and depressed mood (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014). This study will examine the impact of social media and its possible consequences on self-esteem; as well as identify gender differences amongst South African young adults. There are gaps in the literature that need to be addressed. These gaps include a lack of research in South Africa; as well as a lack of qualitative research. South African research is needed as each country may have a different experience of social media, i.e. is social media and low self-esteem a global issue? The researcher will use the interpretivist paradigm, as this study is interested in how individuals interpret how they feel when using social media; and its impact on their self-esteem. The researcher will be unpacking Festinger's (1954) Social comparison theory. The key concepts that this research will conceptualise are social media, self-esteem, body image, body dissatisfaction, and social comparison. This research will conceptualise these terms by integrating the literature with the relevance of my research. Thus, this research took a critical engagement with the literature in order to position my research.

2. RATIONALE

According to Wahyuni and Maksum (2020), social media has earned an important place amongst young adults, including students, and has become a part of their daily lives, as a result of the broad characteristics, functions, and ease of access of social media platforms. Social networking sites are widely used across the globe for young adults to make new friends, show their identity, as well as to check up on their friends. However, Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014) propose that in addition to communicating with friends, commenting on posts, and posting pictures on social

media, social media provide a platform for young individuals to receive feedback, interact with their friends, practice their social skills, and observe other individuals. Therefore, social media has become a platform for social comparison, which can lead to self-esteem issues. Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014) argue frequency of social media use is linked to higher social self-concept, however, investment in social media is associated with lower self-esteem. Wahyuni and Maksum (2020) state that individuals who have a low self-esteem spend more of their time on social media, and constantly promote their profiles. Social media may also be a threat to the development of self-esteem, especially in young adults who are facing instability as they are experiencing the overwhelming transitional phase in life (Stapleton, Luiz & Chatwin, 2017). This research is relevant as there are gaps in the literature that need to be addressed, such as the lack of qualitative research on social media and its impact on the self-esteem in young adults; as well as a lack of research in South Africa.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

High usage of social media is resulting in lower self-esteem amongst young adults. Social media has gained popularity in the last ten years and has left certain long-lasting effects on individuals (Jan et al., 2017). Social media's effects include upward comparisons on social media sites, which have caused individuals to have lower self-esteems (Jan et al., 2017). Wahyuni and Maksum (2020) state that individuals who have a low self-esteem spend more of their time on social media, and constantly promote their profiles. Social media may also be a threat to the development of self-esteem, especially in young adults who are facing instability as they are experiencing the overwhelming transitional phase in life (Stapleton et al., 2017). Therefore, social media has become a platform for social comparison, which could lead to self-esteem issues. This study will address this issue by examining the impact of social media, and its possible consequences on self-esteem.

4. PURPOSE STATEMENT

The main purpose of this research is to assess whether social media has an impact on self-esteem with young adults; and thereafter if there are reported gender differences.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

5.1. Primary Research Question

- What is the impact of social media on the self-esteem of young adults?

5.2. Secondary Research Question

- What are the effects of social media on young adults' self-esteem?

6. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To determine the impact of social media on the self-esteem of young adults.
- To determine the effects of social-media on self-esteem in young adults.

7. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This study's theoretical underpinnings is Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory. Social comparison occurs when an individual compares themselves with others based on personal characteristics, abilities, and physical traits (Festinger, 1954). Individuals who use social media constantly compare themselves to others on social media platforms, which often results in a low self-esteem. Festinger (1954) argued pressure is placed on individuals in society, to be better/achieve more than the group average.

Bergagna and Tartaglia (2018) state that individuals who already have a low self-esteem frequently use social media to compare themselves to others. Individuals use Facebook to compare themselves with others based on the number of likes and positive comments they receive, as well as the photos they share. This may trigger social comparisons, which can result in individuals feeling good or bad about themselves (Bergagna & Tartaglia, 2018).

Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014) state that young adults present their most positive selves or profiles on social media, and so are online friends. Frequent exposure to these positive profiles of individuals engaging in socially desirable activities, such as at parties and on holidays result in social comparison (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014). According to Ormsby, Owen and Bhogal (2019), there seems to be a link between social comparison and a negative body image in males and females, although this link is said to be stronger in females. The more individuals compare themselves to others on social media, the more they felt negatively about their body image, which can result in a low self-esteem (Ormsby et al., 2019). For these reasons, social comparison theory provides a fitting theoretical framework for how extended social media exposure can lead to decreases in users' self-esteem. This theory is being used as a high usage of social media is correlated with lower self-esteem amongst young adults.

8. LITERATURE REVIEW

High usage of social media is resulting in lower self-esteem amongst young adults. Social media has gained popularity in the last ten years and has left certain long-lasting effects on individuals (Jan et al, 2017). Social media's effects include upward comparisons on social media sites, which have caused individuals to have lower self-esteem (Jan et al., 2017). A frequent use of social media could result in a lower self-esteem and depressed mood amongst young adults around the world (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014).

8.1. Motivation for social media use

According to Wahyuni and Maksum's (2020) research in Indonesia, social media has earned an important place amongst young adults, including students, and has become a part of their daily lives, as a result of the broad characteristics, functions, and ease of access of social media platforms. Instagram, is an online social media platform that provides individuals with an immediate way of sharing and capturing their daily experiences. Instagram has become one of the fastest growing social media platforms in the world, and has 400 million users, with fifty-five percent of the 400 million uses between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine years old (Stapleton et al., 2017).

According to Hawi and Samaha (2017), Facebook had more than one billion daily users, as of March 2016. Facebook seems to be achieving its mission, of giving individuals the power to share and make the world an open and connected place through its social media platform (Forest & Wood, 2012). Forest and Wood (2012) also state that well known media outlets have held on to the idea that the purpose of Facebook is to serve as a social lubricant, as it helps individuals who struggle with relationships, such as the shy, the lonely, and those with a low self-esteem to connect with other individuals in a warm environment (Forest & Wood, 2012).

In Norway, Andreassen, Pallesen and Griffiths. (2017) found that those who visit social media sites choose to engage in entertainment and social activities which include socialising, playing games, passing time, uploading pictures, and communicating with others. However, Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014) propose that in addition to communicating with friends, commenting on posts, and posting pictures on social media, social media provide a platform for young individuals to receive feedback, interact with their friends, practice their social skills, and observe other individuals. The youth are able to present a social resume that shows who they are, and what they care about, by stating their personal information such as likes and dislikes, as well as posting photos that represent features of themselves of which they are most proud of (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014).

Barker (2009) also states young individuals use social media to post pictures, maintain relationships, make new friends, observe in such a way that they create their own electronic profile of themselves. Hanna, Ward, Seabrook, Jerald, Reed, Giaccardi, and Lippman (2017) extend on Barker's (2009) thoughts as they highlight that Facebook exposes young individuals to information about the lives of others, and allows individuals to represent themselves in a socially desirable manner. However, this daily influx of information and pictures on Facebook, can result in social comparison amongst its users (Hanna et al., 2017).

These articles show that there are mixed findings. Although Facebook was created to help connect individuals, much of this research shows that regular use of Facebook results in both negative and positive associations with psychological well-being, including mental health, self-esteem, and body image (Hanna et al., 2017). There

needs to be more qualitative studies done on individuals' motivations for using social media.

8.2. Impact of social media on self-esteem

According to Stapleton et al. (2017), self-esteem is likely to be influenced by the use of social media. Wahyuni and Maksum (2020) state that studies have shown that individuals who have a low self-esteem spend more of their time on social media, and constantly promote their profiles. Social media may also be a threat to the development of self-esteem, especially in young adults who are facing instability as they are experiencing the overwhelming transitional phase in life (Stapleton et al., 2017). This shows that there are mixed findings of social media and its impact on self-esteem.

In a study done in America, Vogel, Rose, Roberts, and Eckles. (2014) found that the more individuals used Facebook, the more they engaged in social comparison by comparing themselves to other individuals. There is evidence to suggest that individuals consider other social media users to have happier, more successful lives than themselves (Vogel et al., 2014). This causes individuals to engage in social comparison, and can affect their self-esteem.

Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014) found similar findings with social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram providing a medium for young adults to engage in social comparison. While young adults are presenting their most positive self-presentations, so are other individuals on social media (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014). Exposure to pictures of their friends engaged in socially desirable activities such as holidays and parties, as well as reading their achievements in status updates can result in social comparison. These young adults believe that other young adults are living better lives than them, which could affect their self-esteem. Vogel et al.'s (2014) study in Ohio revealed that individuals who use Facebook resort to upward social comparison on social media which has an impact on self-esteem. Although upward comparison can be beneficial when it inspires people to become more like their comparison targets, it may also result in feelings of inadequacy and depression (Vogel et al., 2014).

In an Australian study (Stapleton et al., 2017), it was found that individuals who were shown physically attractive Facebook profiles reported having a low self-esteem compared to individuals who were shown unattractive profiles. These research findings consistently show that social media use results in low self-esteem, as a result of upward social comparison in countries such as America, East Asia, and Australia. However, there is no research available for South Africa.

Moreover, social media may also be used by young adults who already have a low self-esteem as a means to increase their self-esteem. In a longitudinal study in East Asia, Facebook users showed that self-esteem moderated the link between Facebook use and social capital, as individuals with low self-esteem, and few friends use social media, such as Facebook to make more friends (Hawi & Samaha, 2017). In individuals with low self-esteem, Facebook may also increase self-esteem, especially in individuals with social anxiety, who struggle with face to face communication (Chandiramani & Sharma, 2018). This is because it is easier for these individuals to send messages on Facebook, rather than face to face.

8.3. Social media and body image

According to Ormsby et al. (2019), body image can be seen as an individuals' personal perceptions, feelings, and thoughts towards their body. Whereas body dissatisfaction refers to individuals having strong negative thoughts as a result of their perception of the ideal body that has been shown in social media (Ormsby et al., 2019). This can lead to body dissatisfaction. Fernandez and Pritchard (2012), share similar findings in that the images of the ideal body shown on social media can have an extremely negative influence on individuals, but particularly both men and women. Furthermore, in a study in America, it has been suggested that social media images of the ideal body may also predict eating disorder behaviours in female and male university students (Fernandez & Pritchard, 2012).

Fernandez and Pritchard (2012) state that although males and females are affected by these images, women are more likely than men to be concerned with their body image, and may have a lower body esteem. However, research should not neglect

males. Fernandez and Pritchard (2012) state that it is important to look at body image esteem among men too, as men thrive for a low body mass with muscle, in contrast to women aiming for a slim body. Therefore, low body esteem could be evident in both males and females.

A study in the United Kingdom by Ormsby et al. (2019) found similar findings. Individuals who use Facebook report feeling more dissatisfied with their body image compared to individuals who are exposed to traditional media, such as magazines. Ormsby et al. (2019) state that women who frequently use social media report having dissatisfaction with their body image, and that while women have pressure by social media to be slim, men have pressure by social media to be lean and muscular. However, women seem to score lower on body esteem as a result of their frequent use of social media, as well as what they are exposed to on social media networking sites (Ormsby et al., 2019).

Fernandez and Pritchard's (2012) study in the United States concur that body esteem and the ideal body image projected on social media platforms are strong predictors of a low self-esteem. Ormsby et al.'s (2019) findings showed that individuals who use appearance related social media platforms felt pressure to lose weight. Appearance related social media platforms include Instagram and Facebook. This study has also highlighted body image esteem, in which their findings have found a strong link between social comparison and a negative body image among both men and women (Ormsby et al., 2019).

However, this link is stronger in women, which suggests that women have greater concerns with their bodies, compared to men (Ormsby et al., 2019). However, Fernandez and Pritchard (2012) state that there is little information on social media's impact on males. Males also have low body/self-esteem as a result of images of muscular men on social media (Fernandez & Pritchard, 2012). Therefore, there is a link between social media, self-esteem and body dissatisfaction in males, and there needs to be more research in this area. There also needs to be more research done in South Africa, as most of the research has a Eurocentric basis.

8.4. Gender differences and social media use

In a study in Australia, Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014) found gender differences in terms of social media use, with females using social media more than males. Hawi and Samaha's (2017) study done in East Asia also found that more females use social media in comparison to males, with the results showing that 68% of females use social media, and 62% of males use social media. Gender also predicts the use of Instagram, as Hawi and Samaha's (2017) large scale study using 23,592 Facebook and Instagram users in East Asia showed that females use social media platforms more frequently, and have lower self-esteem than males. Therefore, it is clear that gender may predict social media use.

Although more frequent use of social media could result in low self-esteem, social media may also be beneficial for males and females. A study in Australia found that females use the social media platform Facebook to maintain their relationships, be entertained, and pass time, whereas males use Facebook to make new friends and relationships (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014).

Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014) also found that in American data, male young adults also use social media to make new friends compared to female young adults. Chandiramani and Sharma's (2018) study in India showed similar findings in that females use Facebook as a means to maintain their friendships and relationships, but they also use this social media platform to post pictures, compared to males. Chandiramani and Sharma (2018) also adds that females use social media more frequently than males as they are interested in the activities and relationship statuses of other individuals. However, females seem to be more concerned with their appearance, especially on Facebook. This may lead to social comparison on social media, which is harmful as it can result in low self-esteem (Chandiramani & Sharma, 2018).

Blomfield Neira and Barber's (2014) Australian study found similar findings, as female young adults who had a social media profile had a lower self-esteem, as well as a high level of depression, than other females who do not have a social media profile. This could be a result of the type of feedback that females receive on social media. Female young adults use social media to seek feedback about themselves, and this feedback

may be perceived as being negative (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014). Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014) found that 78% of participants who received positive feedback had a high self-esteem, whereas 7% of participants who received negative feedback had a low self-esteem, in both females and males. There clearly needs to be more research done on males, as they are also affected by social media.

8.5. Conclusion

Despite social media serving as a possible social lubricant by helping individuals who struggle with relationships (shy, lonely, poor self-esteem types) to connect with other individuals in a warm environment, as well as using social media to engage in entertainment and social activities which include socialising, playing games, passing time, uploading pictures, and communicating with others, the daily influx of information and pictures on social media, can result in social comparison amongst its users. This results in both positive and negative (predominantly negative) associations with psychological well-being, mental health, self-esteem, and body image.

What this critical review of the literature has highlighted, is that although social media is a global phenomenon, there seems to be no research undertaken on this phenomena in South Africa. There needs to be more research done on young adults experiences in South Africa. There also needs to be a concerted focus on males, and how they are impacted by social media. Although the findings state that females are more affected by social media, social media does seem to have an impact on the self-esteem on males, and this needs to be explored further. There is also a lack of qualitative data on the subjective experiences of social media in young adults. Therefore, my research will address these issues, and contribute to the limited research available to the lack of research in South Africa.

9. CONCEPTUALISATION

Before continuing with this study, the key concepts need to be defined in order to maintain consistency throughout this research.

9.1. Social media

On a broad scale, social media can be seen as a platform for which communication between people can take place (Wahyuni & Maksum, 2020). Social media is a platform that can be used for entertainment, playing games, passing time, socialising, communication, and posting pictures (Andreassen., 2017). For the purpose of this research, social media will be referred to as two specific platforms that are widely used across the world: Facebook and Instagram.

9.2. Body image

Body image can be defined as an individuals' perceptions, feelings, and thoughts towards their own body. In this research, body image will refer to the fact that social media has had a negative impact on the way in which individuals perceive their body. Individuals seem to experience body dissatisfaction after frequent exposure to ideal body images on social media, which results in a low self-esteem. Body dissatisfaction can be defined as individuals having strong negative thoughts about the look of their bodies (Ormsby et al., 2019).

9.3. Self-esteem

Self-esteem can be defined as the positive or negative perception of oneself, and each individual has different perceptions or level of self-esteem (Wahyuni & Maksum, 2020). According to Forest and Wood (2012), individuals with a low liking for themselves or who have a low self-esteem seem to be those who are shy, introverted, or have social anxiety, compared to those with a high self-esteem. Individuals with a low self-esteem are often lonely, and have no relationships compared to those with high self-esteem (Forest & Wood, 2012). In this study, self-esteem refers to those who develop a low self-esteem from frequent social comparisons on social media, as well as those who already have a low self-esteem, and choose to use social media to promote themselves or make new friends.

9.4. Social comparison

In terms of social comparison, people are thought to possess a fundamental drive to compare themselves to other individuals (Vogel et al., 2014). Individuals compare themselves with other individuals in order to learn more about the self (Stapleton et al., 2017). However, when individuals compare themselves to other individuals, they believe that other individuals have happier, more successful lives than themselves, which can impact their self-esteem negatively (Stapleton et al., 2017). Within this research study, the researcher refers to this term as 'upward social comparison' on social media. Upward social comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves to those who are successful, superior and have positive characteristics (Vogel et al., 2014). This type of social comparison results in individuals feeling inadequate, and can affect their self-esteem negatively.

10. RESEARCH PARADIGM

This research has used an interpretivist approach, as the researcher is interested in how people interpret how they feel when using social media. The researcher has seen through the eyes of the participants, their feelings towards social media, and how they feel when using the platform. This paradigm is relevant to the research because the researcher is trying to interpret why negative self-esteem can be caused by the use of social media. Most importantly, how South African young adults' self-esteem could be influenced by social media. The aim of the interpretivist approach is to get a deep understanding of how individuals are influenced by their environment.

Interpretivism is the idea that individuals are fundamentally different from objects (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014). This is because people change constantly, and the environment influences people. Therefore, this study is interested in individual's subjective experiences of using social media, and its impact on their self-esteem. As a result, the paradigm's relevance is in interpreting why a low self-esteem can be caused by the use of social media? Interpretivism thus elicits a deep understanding of how individuals are influenced by their environment by offering the researcher insight through the eyes of the participants, their feelings towards social media, and how they feel when using social media.

The data that the researcher has collected comes from the participant's knowledge of the world around them. Specifically, their knowledge of social media and its impact on individuals/themselves. The researcher has gained a new understanding of social media issues that arise in individuals, from a subjective point of view. The researcher will value this insight from participants to gain an understanding of their interpretations or feelings towards social media, especially because reality is subjective. The researcher has identified and gained an understanding of individual realities of social media that the participants' experience, and these realities may differ for each person. Therefore, the researcher has conducted a study where great importance has been placed on data collected through interviews, where the researcher gained knowledge on the participants' personal experiences using social media.

11. RESEARCH DESIGN/ CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

The research has employed qualitative research as a means to seek answers to questions by examining different social settings, and individuals who live in these settings (Maree, 2019). The research has an interest in how individuals arrange themselves and their settings and how individuals in these settings make sense of their environment and the world around them, through symbols, social structures, social roles (Maree, 2019). A qualitative research design enabled the researcher to achieve the purpose of determining individuals' subjective experiences of social media, and how social media has affected them. Qualitative research uses open, exploratory research questions, as it places great importance on understanding phenomena (Maree, 2019). The researcher used an Exploratory research design for the research problem, as there is a lack of past data or only a few studies for reference on social media and self-esteem in terms of gender differences, and the impact of social media on the self-esteem of South African young adults. Therefore, the researcher used exploratory research to investigate a problem that has not been thoroughly investigated in the past research studies. The researcher used exploratory research to have a better understanding of social media and self-esteem, and its impact on males and females in South Africa. The researcher had used an inductive research design by identifying new themes that emerge from the data.

This is cross-sectional research where the participants that the researcher selected had particular variables that the researcher was studying (Levin, 2006). This study took place at a single point in time (Levin, 2006), and it did not involve manipulating the variables. Rather, it allowed the researcher to look at numerous characteristics, such as age and gender, at one point in time. The researcher selected participants who had different genders (male and female), and investigated them at one point in time. By doing this, the researcher was able to identify any differences between the genders in terms of how they are influenced by social media, as well as to make inferences about possible relationships between social media and self-esteem, and if there are any gender differences.

This qualitative study used phenomenology, which is focused on the reflection of lived experiences of individuals, that is free from prejudicial, theoretical and suppositional intoxications (Maree, 2019). The researcher placed a great focus on how the participants made sense of social media, and their experiences using it. Phenomenology was used throughout the interview process in order to focus on the participant's lived experiences with social media. This helped the researcher to understand how social media impacts the self-esteem of South African young adults from a South African perspective.

12. POPULATION

12.1. Target and accessible population

The target population consisted of young adult males and females, who were aged 20-25, had access to social media, specifically Facebook and Instagram, and live in South Africa.

My sample consisted of two males and two females, South African young adults, who were between the ages of 20-25, had access to social media, specifically Facebook and Instagram, and lived in KwaZulu-Natal. One female was 21 years old, lives in Ballito, and has access to Instagram and Facebook. The second female was 24 years old, lives in Durban, and has access to Facebook and Instagram. The third participant was a male who was 24 years old, lives in Ballito, and has access to Facebook and

Instagram. Lastly, the fourth participant was a 21 year old male, who lives in Durban, and had access to Facebook and Instagram.

12.2. Units of analysis

The unit of analysis for this research thus consisted of the four South African young adults.

12.3. Sample size

Due to the research being qualitative, a smaller sample was used. Smaller samples generate complete and accurate information in a particular cultural context, as long as the participants chosen have a certain degree of knowledge in the domain of enquiry (Maree, 2019). The researcher used a sample size of four participants as it can generate accurate information with a high confidence level (Maree, 2019). In fact, small sample sizes are used in qualitative research, as it is difficult to extract rich and thick data if there are too many participants (Maree, 2019). Therefore, the use of four participants to generate detailed, idiosyncratic information, as well as so that the researcher could compare the experiences of males and females, as gender is a key variable in this research.

13. SAMPLING

13.1. Sampling method

The present study utilised convenience sampling for the accessibility of individuals who display the characteristics that the researcher was looking for, which included participants who lived in the same community (KwaZulu-Natal) as the researcher; and those who the researcher knew had access to social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Convenience sampling is non-probability sampling as the individuals are sampled because they are accessible sources of data for the researcher (Maree, 2019). Therefore, by using convenience sampling, the researcher was able to get a deeper understanding of how the participants were influenced by their environment by giving me insight through the eyes of the participants, their

feelings towards social media, and how they felt when using social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. The researcher first emailed the four participants informed consent forms, as seen in Annexure B, as well as audio recording consent forms, as seen in Annexure C. The four participants had signed the informed consent forms and the audio recording forms, as they had agreed to participate in the research, which consisted of an interview on the researcher's mobile phone, and was recorded. The researcher had also emailed the participants to ask them which dates and times they had available to do the interview, so that the researcher could make an interview schedule in her notes.

14. DATA-COLLECTION METHOD

The researcher had used a semi-structured interview, as seen in Annexure D, where she formulated interview questions based on her line of inquiry. The semi-structured interview had consisted of asking open questions, and this allowed probing and clarification if needed, in order for the researcher to identify new emerging lines of inquiry that could be related to the phenomena being studied. This method had allowed the researcher to get more information by probing the participants; and gain a deeper understanding of the participant's lived experiences. The participants were recorded during the interview process using a mobile phone, and each participant had one interview. The interview was scheduled to be between 30 and 45 minutes, to ensure that the participants did not get bored or tired during the interview process, but still allowed the researcher to get the information required.

The researcher had used open and closed questions which included: How many friends or followers do you have on social media? What is your age? Can you describe a time you have felt self-conscious due to portrayals of body image on social media? Did it make you feel inclined to change yourself? In what way? If you could change the way women are portrayed in the media, how would you? Do you think because of the media there is a specific definition of 'perfection' that most people want to achieve? By asking these questions, the researcher was able to elicit/get an idea of how males and females differed in terms of how using social media could negatively affect them. The broad or open questions allowed the researcher to get in-depth responses from the four participants. Whereas the closed questions focusing on the participants

demographics allowed the researcher to gather definite answers including their age, gender, and which of the following social media networks they had used (Facebook or Instagram).

In addition, the open-ended questions also allowed the researcher to get more in-depth angles of the issue that the literature had not discovered yet. For example, the fact that maturity can influence social media's impact on self-esteem. The questions that the researcher had asked in the interview linked back to the present study's research questions: What is the impact of social media on the self-esteem of young adults? (Primary research question), and What are the effects of social media on young adults' self-esteem?

14.1. Application of data collection method

The semi-structured interview was compiled based on the themes that emerged from the critical literature review and with the present study's objectives in mind. For example, for the theme social media and body image, the researcher had developed a few questions that would fall under that specific heading. The question: *Can you describe a time you have felt self-conscious due to portrayals of body image on social media?* fell under the heading of social media and body image. By formulating the interview questions in that manner, the researcher was able to ask thorough questions that would contribute to the present research in an insightful way. When creating the semi-structured interview, the researcher was also careful in avoiding sensitive questions that could have caused ethical implications.

The participants were recorded during the interview process using a mobile phone, and each participant had one interview. The interview was scheduled to be between 30 and 45 minutes, to ensure that the participants did not get bored or tired during the interview process; and still allow the researcher to elicit the necessary information.

The interview was conducted via a mobile phone on loud speaker, and the researcher had recorded the interview with QuickTime Player on her computer. The researcher had begun each interview with asking how each participant was, and ending each interview with thanking the participants for their participation, as a means to build

rapport, and show that the researcher was thankful for their contribution to the present research. The researcher had also allowed the conversation to flow in the interview by allowing herself and each participant the opportunity for equal participation. By doing so, the researcher was able to hear and understand the thoughts and feelings of each participant, and how social media has influenced them. Once the interview was over, the researcher had thanked the participants for participating in the present research, and stopped the recording, and saved each recording in the files on her computer. This made it possible for the researcher to access the recording again so that she could transcribe the interviews on Microsoft Word.

15. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

The data was analysed using thematic analysis to identify common themes, ideas or patterns of meaning that occur repeatedly (Maree, 2019). This had served as a link to the data collection method highlighted above as it helped to identify new themes or patterns that had emerged from the semi-structured interview (Maree, 2019). According to Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017), thematic analysis generates insightful and trustworthy results. This type of analysis is also a highly flexible approach that can be adjusted to suit the needs of many studies, and thematic analysis provides a rich and detailed account of data (Nowell et al., 2017). Therefore, the researcher had used a thematic analysis as it was useful in getting a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the different individuals/ participants. Thematic analysis helped the researcher to identify any similarities or differences in the present study, which was beneficial as the present research had aimed to assess whether social media had an impact on self-esteem with young adults; and thereafter if there were any reported gender differences.

Thematic analysis has also been found to generate unanticipated findings, according to Nowell et al. (2017). Therefore, the researcher was able to identify variables or themes that she had not yet considered. Thematic analysis has also been seen as trustworthy as it can summarise key features in a data set, and will force the researcher to take a well-structured approach in handling the data, which will help the researcher to produce an organised and clear final research report (Nowell et al., 2017).

Axial coding had been used in the breaking down of core themes during the qualitative data analysis. The data had been placed together in order to identify connections between the categories and sub-categories of data (Maree, 2019).

The researcher familiarised herself with the data that was collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then the researcher read over the data a few times, and wrote down some ideas. Secondly, the researcher generated initial codes across the data set, and found data that had relevance to each code (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The next step was to search for themes. This was achieved through the collection of codes into themes, and the researcher collected data that had relevance to each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher was then able to identify the themes that emerged before, during, and after the analysis of the data by moving backwards and forwards between the data set, coded extracts, and the analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher then reviewed the themes to check if they related to the coded extracts, and data set. This generated a map of themes of the analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This helped the researcher to identify and highlight a possible relationship between social media and self-esteem, and identify if there were any gender differences. Finally, the researcher produced a report by analysing the selected extracts from the data, and relate the extracts to the research question, and the literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher transcribed the data, and put it into a word document.

15.1. Application of data analysis method

The researcher had first transcribed the four interviews by listening to the interview recordings that she had saved to her files on her computer, and then typed out each interview conversation. The researcher had then listened to each recording again to ensure that she had not left anything out. The researcher then went through all of the data from the four interviews, and started taking notes, in order to mark preliminary ideas for codes that would describe the present study content. This helped the researcher to become more familiar with the data that she had collected. As the research design is exploratory, the researcher had transcribed everything that was said during the interview. The researcher had also transcribed the four interviews by herself so that she could make sense of the data that she had transcribed.

In the second step of the thematic analysis, the researcher had assigned codes to the data by providing a brief description of what had been said in the interviews. Therefore, each time the researcher had identified something interesting in the data, she wrote down a code next to it. By doing this, the researcher was able to organise the data into meaningful groups. For some sections, the researcher had given data chunks multiple codes. For example, because the research looked at two types of social media, the researcher had used the codes “Instagram” and “Facebook”, and because the researcher was interested in social media and its influence on self-esteem, the researcher used the code “social media’s influence”.

The researcher had coded the data by using a table in a Word document. This made it more manageable to match each code to a section of each interview that the code referred to. Once the researcher had coded the data, she then combined the sections that had fit into each code, by using copy-paste in the Microsoft Word document. For example, she had combined sections of the interviews with the code “Instagram”.

Once the researcher had coded the data by finding interesting information in the data, the researcher then began to search for themes. The themes were broader than the codes, and involved actively interpreting the codes and data. The researcher had taken the themes from my literature review, and then extracted similar themes from the interviews. The researcher had looked through her list of codes in the Microsoft Word document, and the extracts from the interview that matched each code, and then combined the codes into broad themes that showed interesting things about the data. For example, the researcher had combined the codes “Instagram” and “Facebook” into a single theme called “social media platforms”.

The researcher’s search for themes involved moving codes back and forth to form different themes. The researcher then did axial coding by drawing a thematic map of her codes and themes so that she could identify the relationships between the different themes and codes. The themes that came out of the literature review included: Social media platforms, motivation for social media-use, social media and body image, impact of social media on self-esteem, and gender differences and social media use. The themes that arose out of the data were: Social media platforms, motivation for social media-use, social media and body image, impact of social media on self-

esteem, gender differences and social media use, and social media and its influence amongst different ages.

Once the researcher had sorted the codes and themes, she then began to review and refine each theme. The researcher had achieved this by reading through all the extracts that related to the codes so that she could explore if they had supported a particular theme, or if some themes overlapped. The aim of this was to ensure that each theme was consistent with one another, created meaning, and that there were identifiable distinctions between each theme. The themes that were too broad or contradicted one another were split into a separate theme, or the researcher had moved the codes or extracts into another theme where they had a better fit. Then the researcher had gone through the data again to ensure that the themes adequately represented the interesting themes in the interviews, and to identify if there was any un-coded data that could be coded because it fits into a particular theme. The researcher had also identified new themes that she had missed from the first process of finding themes.

Therefore, the researcher had gone back and forth between the codes, themes, and extracts until she felt positive that she had coded the relevant data, and had enough themes to represent her data accurately.

Then the researcher described and named each theme that she had identified in the previous steps. she then began to describe each theme, to ensure that each theme had a qualifying description and content from the various concepts. Furthermore, the researcher then related the story of each theme to the other themes, the literature review, as well as the research questions/ objectives. By doing so, she was able to write a coherent analysis of each theme.

Lastly, the researcher produced the report. The researcher achieved this by typing out the results on Microsoft Word. The researcher typed out a clear account of the data collection process, as well as the thematic analysis. The researcher used the description of the themes as the bases of my final report, and presented the themes by using quotes from the interview transcripts, as a means to demonstrate her research findings.

16. VALIDITY/ RELIABILITY AND/ OR TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness of a qualitative study is represented by using terms such as credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Nowell et al., 2017).

The researcher enhanced the trustworthiness of this research study by using credibility (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher used tactics to ensure honesty in participants, who were contributing to the data. The researcher ensured that each person who was approached was given an opportunity to refuse to participate in the research. This ensured that the data collection sessions involve those who were genuinely willing to take part and offer honest answers (Shenton, 2004). The researcher had encouraged the participants to be honest from the beginning of the interview session about their experiences with social media, and the researcher had indicated that there were no right answers to the interview questions that were asked (Shenton, 2004). The researcher encouraged their participants to contribute ideas and talk of their personal experiences (Shenton, 2004).

The researcher had also emphasised their status, where appropriate to emphasise their credibility as a researcher (Shenton, 2004). The researcher had regular discussions with the supervisor to discuss other possible approaches, and the research supervisor had drawn attention to flaws in the researcher's proposed course of action for the research study (Shenton, 2004). These regular research meetings or discussions provided a sound board for the researcher to assess the developing ideas and interpretations, which helped the researcher to recognise her own biases and preferences of the study (Shenton, 2004). The researcher had also enhanced credibility by examining previous research findings to examine the degree to which the research results correlate with the research of past studies (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability refers to generalisability, or in qualitative research, transferability can be seen as case-to-case transfer (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure transferability, the researcher provided detailed descriptions of the research, so that those who wish to transfer the findings of the research to their own study can judge its transferability (Nowell et al., 2017). In a qualitative research study, the findings are specific to a small sample of specific individuals or environments, meaning that it is impossible to show

that the research findings and conclusions can be applicable to other individuals and situations (Shenton, 2004). Therefore, the researcher emphasised that the results of any qualitative study should be understood within that specific context, and characteristics of that population or geographical area in which the research was carried out (Shenton, 2004).

The researcher enhanced trustworthiness through confirmability. Confirmability is concerned with ensuring that the researcher's findings and interpretations are from the data that the researcher collects (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher demonstrated how their interpretations and conclusions were arrived at, by including reasons or explanations for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the research study (Nowell et al., 2017). This ensured that the reader can understand how and why certain decisions were made by the researcher (Nowell et al., 2017), and that the researches' findings are derived from the ideas and subjective experiences of the participants, rather than the researcher's preferences (Shenton, 2004). This reduced the effect of researcher bias, and was achieved by the researcher explaining their beliefs underpinning their decisions and reasons for adopting certain methods in the research report (Shenton, 2004).

17. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

There was a 100% response rate as four out of the total four participants were interviewed.

Data analysis resulted in a set of three robust themes with sub-themes for this study as depicted below.

- **Theme one: Impact of social media on self-esteem**

A common theme between the participants was social media as a negative impact on self-esteem, as a result of upward social comparison on social media. A negative evaluation of the self could be a result of upward social comparison.

Sub-theme one: Social media “perfection”

“You may feel like you are missing out or that someone else has a better life than you, and I can definitely see how that would cause someone to develop insecurities, and feel down on life pretty much” (Participant two).

“I am envious when people travel, especially seeing my friends who work on yachts overseas (France), and those are the places that I would want to go” (Participant three).

- **Theme two: Social media and body image**

A common theme between the participants was the negative influence of social media on body image in males and females, and its effect on self-esteem.

Sub-theme one: Gender and body image

“From what I have seen, a lot of guys will have self-esteem issues. Whereas I feel like women especially put a lot of pressure on themselves” (Participant two).

“I would look at that and think hmmm I definitely want to look like that, and I want to have ripped muscles” (Participant two).

“Yes, I don’t like my body image, and I tend to compare myself with fitness people” (Participant three).

“I think that it used to be just girls, but guys as well. A person’s image, and the way that we see them can make them feel good or bad towards themselves” (Participant three).

- **Theme three: Age as a determinant of social media’s influence on self-esteem**

A common theme between the participants is that younger individuals seem to have a lower self-esteem in comparison to older individuals. Older individuals have an

awareness of the negative impact of social media on self-esteem as a result of experience.

“A lot of young adults will use social media, and they will be in that vulnerable place where they see all these extravagant things being posted, and they feel that they are inadequate themselves” (Participant two).

Sub-theme one: Maturation

“When I was in my early teens to late teens, and even very early twenties, my self-esteem wasn’t fantastic, but at the age of 25, I feel like I am no longer trying to compete with the guy that has the best physique or outfit” (Participant two).

“When I was a lot younger, between sixteen and twenty, I used to worry about what people think of me, and what posts I should put up, and if a photo wasn’t nice, I would delete it. But now that I am twenty-five, it doesn’t really bother me” (Participant three).

18. INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

- **Theme one: Impact of social media on self-esteem**

The findings show that social media has a negative impact on the self-esteem of South African young adults, as a result of upward social comparison on social media. A negative evaluation of the self is a result of upward social comparison.

Sub-theme one: Social media “perfection”

The data shows that most of the participants have a low self-esteem as a result of comparing themselves to others on social media. Upward comparisons on social media sites, which have caused individuals to have lower self-esteems (Jan et al., 2017).

Participant three states: *“I am envious when people travel, especially seeing my friends who work on yachts overseas (France), and those are the places that I would want to go”.*

The findings highlight that young adults seem to compare themselves to others who have “perfect lives”, and this can result in a low self-esteem.

- **Theme two: Social media and body image**

The findings show that a common theme between the participants was the negative influence of social media on body image, and its effect on self-esteem. A high investment in social media can result in a lower self-esteem (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014). This highlights the fact that social media can be seen as a negative tool in young adults’ lives.

Sub-theme one: Gender and body image

The findings showed that males and females seem to be negatively affected by social media, which results in a negative body image and low self-esteem. Males and females engage in upward comparisons on social media.

Participant two states: *“From what I have seen, a lot of guys will have self-esteem issues. Whereas I feel like women especially put a lot of pressure on themselves”.*

Participant three added: *“I think that it used to be just girls, but guys as well. A person’s image, and the way that we see them can make them feel good or bad towards themselves.”*

Males and females have a negative body image as a result of social media, which results in a lower self-esteem and negative body image.

- **Theme three: Age as a determinant of social media’s influence on self-esteem**

The findings showed that younger individuals seem to have a lower self-esteem in comparison to older individuals. The older young adult individuals showed an awareness of the negative impact of social media on self-esteem, as a result of experience.

Sub-theme one: Maturation

The findings showed that participants two and three who are twenty-five years old had an awareness of social media as a negative tool, and seem to have a higher self-esteem in their mid-twenties.

Participant two stated: “When I was in my late teens, and even very early twenties, my self-esteem wasn’t fantastic, but at the age of 25, I feel like I am no longer trying to compete with the guy that has the best physique or outfit”.

Whereas participants one and four, who are twenty-one years old had a lower self-esteem. This highlights the fact that young adults in their early twenties seem to have a lower self-esteem than individuals who are in their mid-twenties. Young adults in their mid-twenties have an awareness of social media being a negative tool in peoples’ lives, as it leads to social comparison and a low self-esteem.

18.1. Findings in context

This research study has confirmed most of the studies in the literature including Stapleton et al. (2017), Vogel et al. (2014), Blomfield Neira and Barber (2014), Ormsby et al., (2019), and Fernandez and Pritchard (2012) studies. However, the research study has identified an additional theme that highlights age as a determinant of social media’s influence on self-esteem.

- **Theme one: Impact of social media on self-esteem**

The findings show that social media has a negative impact on the self-esteem of young adults, as a result of upward social comparison on social media. Social media is a threat to the development of self-esteem, particularly in young adults who are facing instability as they are experiencing the overwhelming transitional phase in life (Stapleton et al., 2017). This research confirms that social-media has an influence on young adults' self-esteem, especially those in their early twenties, as seen in participants one and four. Participants two and three, who are in their mid-twenties, have experienced self-esteem issues in their early twenties.

Sub-theme one: Social media “perfection”

The data shows that the participants have a low self-esteem as a result of comparing themselves to others on social media. Upward comparisons on social media sites have caused individuals to have lower self-esteems (Jan et al., 2017). There is evidence to suggest that individuals consider other social media users to have happier, more successful lives than themselves (Vogel et al., 2014).

Participant two stated: *“You feel like you are missing out or that someone else has a better life than you, and I can definitely see how that would cause someone to develop insecurities, and feel down on life pretty much”*.

Exposure to pictures of their friends engaged in socially desirable activities including holidays or parties, and reading their achievements in status updates can result in social comparison. The findings highlight that young adults seem to compare themselves to others who have “perfect lives”, and this can result in a low self-esteem.

- **Theme two: Social media and body image**

A common theme between the participants was the negative influence of social media on body image, and its influence on their self-esteem. Fernandez and Pritchard 's (2012) findings highlighted that the images of the ideal body shown on social media had an extremely negative influence on individuals, particularly both men and women.

This highlights the fact that social media can be seen as a negative tool in young adults' lives

Sub-theme one: Gender and body image

The findings showed that males and females seem to be negatively affected by social media, which results in a negative body image. Ormsby et al's. (2019) study showed the link between social comparison and a negative body image in males and females, although the link was stronger in females. The more individuals compare themselves to others on social media, the more they felt negatively about their body image, which can result in a low self-esteem (Ormsby et al., 2019). For these reasons, Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory provides a fitting theoretical framework for how social media exposure decreases young adults' self-esteem. The findings show that social media can be a negative tool in that it leads to young adult's comparing themselves to others on social media in terms of body image.

Most of the participants compare themselves to others on social media. Participant two stated: *"I would look at that and think hmmm I definitely want to look like that, and I want to have ripped muscles".*

Participant one compares herself when *"seeing models on social media"*. And Participant three stated: *"I don't like my body image, and I compare myself to fitness people"*.

The findings show how social media's effects include upward comparisons on social media, resulting in individuals having lower self-esteem. Frequently using social media seems to result in a lower self-esteem amongst young adults globally, and this research study indicates that this seems to occur in South African young adults too.

When referring to gender, participant two stated: *"From what I have seen, a lot of guys will have self-esteem issues. Whereas I feel like women especially put a lot of pressure on themselves"*. Reinforcing the information above, participant three stated: *"I think that it used to be just girls, but guys as well. Especially now because of the day and age in which we are living in. A person's image, and*

the way that we see them can make them feel good or bad towards themselves.”

Although the literature states that this is more prominent in females, the findings show that males seem to be equally affected too. Ormsby et al. (2019) study stated that females who use social media are dissatisfied with their body image. While women have pressure by social media to be slim, men have pressure by social media to be lean and muscular. However, the participants have stated that although males and females have a negative body image as a result of social media, they still believe that females have a higher negative body image compared to males.

- **Theme three: Age as a determinant of social media’s influence on self-esteem**

Although the research findings correlate with the findings in the literature, there is an additional link between age and self-esteem. Frequent social media use results in lower self-esteem amongst young adults. However, age seems to mitigate the effects of social media on self-esteem.

For example participant two who is 25 years old stated: *“A lot of young adults will use social media, and they will be in that vulnerable place where they see all these extravagant things being posted, and they feel that they are inadequate themselves”.*

The findings showed that the individuals in their early twenties seemed to have a lower self-esteem in comparison to the young adults in their mid-twenties in this study, who showed an awareness of the negative impact of social media on self-esteem.

Sub-theme one: Maturation

The findings showed that participants two and three who are twenty-five years old had an awareness of social media as a negative tool, and seem to have a higher self-esteem in their mid-twenties.

Participant three acknowledged: *“When I was a lot younger, between sixteen and twenty, I used to worry about what people think of me, and what posts I should put up, and if a photo wasn’t nice, I would delete it. But now that I am twenty-five, it doesn’t really bother me”*.

A low self-esteem is a result of social media comparison, as stated in Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory. This is evident in the findings where a lower self-esteem was more common in the participants who were 21 years of age, irrespective of gender, compared to the participants who were 25 years of age. The two participants who were aged 25, mentioned that they had a low self-esteem when they were younger. This shows that age can determine the influence of social media on self-esteem.

19. CONCLUSION

19.1. Research Questions, Research Problem, Objectives Addressed

From the research findings and the literature reviewed, the research objectives for this study were met, the research questions acknowledged, and the research problem has been addressed. The findings clearly stated that when determining the impact of social media on the self-esteem of young adults, social media seems to have an influence on the self-esteem of young adults. The findings showed that young adult males and females have a low self-esteem, as well as a negative body image. The effects of social-media on self-esteem in young adult males and females seems to include social comparison, low self-esteem, and negative body image.

The first objective of this research study was to determine the impact of social media on the self-esteem of young adults. From the findings, all the participants felt that social media had a negative impact on their self-esteem. This was discussed in detail throughout the research findings. It was also clear that social media had negatively impacted the body-esteem or body image of the participants as a result of social comparison from seeing images of models and muscular men. The participants felt

that there is a certain definition of “perfection” that they have to reach to meet those standards of beauty.

The second objective was to determine the effects of social-media on self-esteem in young adults. From the findings, it was clear that the effects of social media included a negative evaluation, the feeling of unworthiness, as well as a low self-esteem. The findings showed that male and female participants were negatively affected by social media in terms of body image. The participants were left with a negative body image and self-esteem.

The research problem has been addressed as this study has highlighted that social media results in a low self-esteem amongst young adults, as a result of social comparison.

20. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, LIMITATIONS, HEURISTIC VALUE

20.1. Ethical considerations

Firstly, as this research revolves around a sensitive topic: Social media and its impact on self-esteem, ethical clearance for this research project had been obtained from the Ethics committee in the Faculty of Psychology at the IIE Varsity College, Durban North, South Africa.

The researcher has addressed ethical issues, and protected the welfare of the participants by addressing informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, prior to the research, and collection of the data. Therefore, the participants had been fully informed of the exact nature of enquiry and their involvement in this research. The researcher had gained permission to carry out the research by providing informed consent. This was achieved by providing:

- Informed consent. Individuals who were over the age of eighteen were required to provide informed consent to participate in the research (Maree, 2019). The informed consent included the research goals, credentials of the researcher, and the nature of inquiry (Maree, 2019). The researcher provided informed consent to

the participants to participate in the study, as well as to record their interviews. Details were provided (goals of the research/nature of the research/credentials of the researcher) in writing, and participants had signed their consent, which is outlined in Appendix B and C.

- The researcher had ensured anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher ensured that the participants' identities remain anonymous, and that their responses remained confidential (Maree, 2019). Codes and descriptive assumed names were used, which ensured that the identity of the participants were unknown to unauthorised users (Maree, 2019). This is stipulated in Appendix B.

The researcher assured the participants that they have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research, which was included in the informed consent, in Appendix B.

20.2. Limitations of the research

There were a few limitations of this research study including the sample size, and a lack of diversity. This study was limited in the number of people it was able to reach, which consisted of four participants in KwaZulu-Natal. This research study also used a convenience sample that is not representative of a larger population due to its limited reach. Therefore, it is not representative of the entire population. A larger sample size with more diverse individuals would have been more ideal to receive more accurate results, and to increase generalisability. The lack of diversity of the population sample may also lead to a decreased accuracy of results. It is recommended that future research uses a larger, and more diverse sample in order to avoid generalisability.

20.3. Heuristic value

This research has significant value as it has highlighted the impact of social media on self-esteem in South African young adults. It is clear that social media has a negative influence on young adult males and females as it leads to social comparison, a low self-esteem, and a negative body image. This seems to be a global issue, which needs attention. Therefore, it is recommended that future research focuses on this issue, especially in male young adults in South Africa.

With this in mind, this research has contributed to the academic world by furthering the insight of health care professionals on the impact of social media on self-esteem in young adults. This research has also contributed towards addressing and identifying the effects of social media on self-esteem and highlighting the gender differences in the impact of social media. This research has thus contributed to the gap of research in South Africa, as well as the lack of research of the impact of social media on males. Ultimately, the findings have served as a means to provide a deeper understanding of this specific phenomenon.

21. CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the limitations of the study, the study has contributed insight into the academic world and furthered the insight of health care professionals on the impact of social media on self-esteem in young adults. This research has contributed to the lack of research in South Africa, as well as the lack of research of the impact of social media on males. Ultimately, the findings have provided a deeper understanding of social media and its influence on self-esteem in young adult males and females, in South Africa.

REFERENCE LIST

- Andreassen, C. S., Pallesen, S., & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). The relationship between addictive use of social media, narcissism, and self-esteem: Findings from a large national survey. *Addictive behaviours*, 64, 287-293.
- Barker, V. (2009). Older adolescents' motivations for social network site use: The influence of gender, group identity, and collective self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology & behaviour*, 12(2), 209-213.
- Bergagna, E., & Tartaglia, S. (2018). Self-esteem, social comparison, and Facebook use. *Europe's journal of psychology*, 14(4), 831.
- Blomfield Neira, C. J. & Barber, B. L. (2014). Social Networking Site Use: Linked to Adolescents' Social Self-Concept, Self-Esteem and Depressed Mood. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 66, 56-64.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2), 77 - 101.
- Chandiramani, K., & Sharma, D. (2018). Age and Gender Differences in Face book Intensity and Self Esteem. *Journal of Humanities And Social Science*, 23(3), 70-79.
- Fernandez, S., & Pritchard, M. (2012). Relationships between self-esteem, media influence and drive for thinness. *Eating Behaviours*, 13(4), 321-325.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2012.05.004>
- Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human relations*, 7(2), 117-140.
- Forest, A. L., & Wood, J. V. (2012). When social networking is not working: Individuals with low self-esteem recognize but do not reap the benefits of self-disclosure on Facebook. *Psychological Science*, 23(3), 295-302.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611429709>

Hanna, E., Ward, L. M., Seabrook, R. C., Jerald, M., Reed, L., Giaccardi, S., & Lippman, J. R. (2017). Contributions of social comparison and self-objectification in mediating associations between Facebook use and emergent adults' psychological well-being. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, and Social Networking*, 20(3), 172-179. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2016.0247>

Hawi, N. S., & Samaha, M. (2017). The relations among social media addiction, self-esteem, and life satisfaction in university students. *Social Science Computer Review*, 35(5), 576-586. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439316660340>

Jan, M., Soomro, S., & Ahmad, N. (2017). Impact of social media on self-esteem. *European Scientific Journal*, 13(23), 329-341.

Levin, K. A. (2006). Study design III: Cross-sectional studies. *Evidence-based dentistry*, 7(1), 24-25.

Maree, K (Ed.). (2019). *First Steps in Research*. 3rd Edition. Van Schaik: Pretoria.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1-13.

Ormsby, H., Owen, A. L., & Bhogal, M. S. (2019). A brief report on the associations amongst social media use, gender, and body esteem in a UK student sample. *Current Psychology*, 38(2), 303-307.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for information*, 22(2), 63-75.

Stapleton, P., Luiz, G., & Chatwin, H. (2017). Generation validation: The role of social comparison in use of Instagram among emerging adults. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, and Social Networking*, 20(3), 142-149.

Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Roberts, L. R., & Eckles, K. (2014). Social comparison, social media, and self-esteem. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 3(4), 206-222.

Wahyuni, E. N., & Maksum, A. (2020). Self-Esteem and Social Media Addiction among College Students: Contribution Gender as Moderator. *Proceeding of International Conference on Engineering, Technology, and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 34-38.

Yang, C. C. (2016). Instagram use, loneliness, and social comparison orientation: Interact and browse on social media, but don't compare. *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour, and Social Networking*, 19(12), 703-708.

Annexure A: Final Research Report Summary Document Template

Title: A descriptive qualitative study on the impact of social media on self-esteem: A gender comparison amongst South African young adults.

Research Purpose/ Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors /Sources	Lit Review Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data collection Method (s)	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
Assess whether social media has an impact on self-esteem of young adults; and thereafter if there are any reported gender Differences	What is the impact of social media on the self-esteem of young adults?	Social media cites are widely used across the globe, and can result in low self-esteem. There is a lack of information on its long-term effects	Festinger, L. (1954).	<u>Theme 1:</u> Motivation for social media use <u>Theme 2:</u> Impact of social media on self-esteem <u>Theme 3:</u> Social media and body image	Interpretivism.	<u>Qualitative:</u> Phenomenology Population	Semi-structured Interviews. Recorded with a mobile phone.	Informed consent to participant in the research. Anonymity and confidentiality, as this research revolves around a sensitive topic.	Young South African males and females have a low self-esteem/ negative body image in their early twenties.	- Use a larger sample. - Use a more diverse sample
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/ Hypotheses/ Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories	<u>Theme 4:</u> Gender differences and social media use	<u>Epistemology</u> The data that the research collects will come from people's knowledge of the world around them. <u>Axiology</u> To conduct a study where great importance is placed on data collected through interviews.	Young adults (Age 20-25)	Data Analysis Method (s)	Limitations	Key Contribution	
High usage of social media is resulting in lower-self-esteem amongst young adults	Q- What are the effects of social media on young adults' self-esteem? O- To determine the effects of social media on self-esteem in young adults.	Social media Self-esteem Body image Social comparison	Social Comparison theory			<u>Sampling</u> Non-probability sampling Convenience sampling. Two males and two females, who have access to Facebook, and live in KwaZulu-Natal	<u>Units of Analysis</u> Four South African young adults. <u>Data Analysis Method</u> Thematic analysis. Axial coding to understand relationships between categories.	Sample size is too small. Not representative of entire population.	I hope to contribute to the academic world and health care professionals on the impact of social media on self-esteem.	

ANNEXURE B: CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE

Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants

To whom it may concern,

My name is Megan Kruger and I am a student at IIE Varsity College. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Suhaila Ameer to assess whether social media has an impact on self-esteem with young adults; and thereafter if there are reported gender differences. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of social media and its influence on self-esteem in South African young adults. I hope to contribute to the academic world and health care professionals on the impact of social media on self-esteem in young adults, and that other researchers can use my research as a basis for them to do the same research. This research will also contribute towards addressing my research problem, which is to identify the effects of social media on self-esteem, and if there are any possible gender differences in South African young adults. With this in mind, my research will contribute to the lack of research in South Africa, as well as the lack of research of the impact of social media on males. This research will also contribute to the lack of qualitative studies of social media and self-esteem, as a means to provide a deeper understanding of this specific phenomenon.

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 will be able to help me assess whether social media has an impact on self-esteem with young adults; and thereafter if there are reported gender differences. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to interview you. The interviewing process will be scheduled at the researcher's convenience, and will be conducted in a 30-45-minute phone interview.

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 experiences with social media, whether they are positive or negative. 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 BA Honours in Psychology. 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: Megan Kruger The contact details of my supervisor are as follows: Suhaila Ameer

Consent form for participants

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Megan Kruger about the impact of social media on self-esteem: A gender comparison amongst South African young adults.

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 C: CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING

Consent form for participants	
I, _____, agree to allow Megan Kruger to audio record my interviews as part of the research about: Title of study: A descriptive qualitative study on the impact of social media on self-esteem: A gender comparison amongst South African young adults Purpose: To assess whether social media has an impact on self-esteem with young adults; and thereafter if there are reported gender differences 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 D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The interview schedule consists of 5 sections.

All information gathered will be kept confidential.

SECTION 1. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

What is your age?

Which gender do you identify with?

Which of the following social networks do you use? Facebook? Instagram? Or both?

On average, how many hours do you spend on Facebook and Instagram per day?

How many friends or followers do you have on Facebook and Instagram?

Does the number of followers you have on Facebook and Instagram affect your use of the site?

SECTION 2. MOTIVATION FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

On average, how often do you change the content of your social media profiles? For example, update your status, upload or like an Instagram photo.

What is your main purpose of using social media?

Do you think that social media has benefits?

SECTION 3. BODY IMAGE

Have you ever felt self-conscious due to portrayals of body image in the media? If yes, describe how you felt.

Do you think because of the media there is a certain definition of 'perfection' that most young adults would like to achieve?

Do you think males or females have a negative body image?

Do you sometimes edit or photoshop parts of your body before posting pictures to social media?

Do you feel social media impacts on your perception of yours on others body image?

SECTION 4. GENDER DIFFERENCES

Do you think males or females have a negative body image?

Do you think men are equally objectified in the media?

Do you think social media impacts differently on males and females? Why?

Do you think social media creates a standard for a women's body, that is unattainable?

SECTION 5. SOCIAL MEDIA AND SELF ESTEEM

Would you remove a post from a social media site if it didn't receive the response you wanted? If yes, why?

Do you ever feel envious of what your friends/people you follow post on social media?

Do you ever compare yourself to the lives of your friends/people you follow based on what they post on social media?

How would you describe your level of self-esteem?

Do you feel social media impacts your self-esteem in any way?

ANNEXURE E: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



20 July 2020

Student name: Megan Kruger

Student number: 17001688

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 F: ETHICS CHECKLIST

Appendix A: Ethics checklist



HONOURS RESE, RESM and RMET ETHICS CHECKLIST

Dear student

Please complete this checklist and include this in your proposals as an appendix:

Student name: Megan Kruger

Title of the research: A descriptive qualitative study on the impact of social media on self-esteem: A gender comparison amongst South African young adults.

	Yes	No	Comment: supervisor/ navigator/lecturer
Are you using human subjects in your research?	✓		
I intend to use human subjects - I understand that I will not conduct research with human subjects under the age of 18 and other vulnerable groups. - I understand I can only proceed once I receive an ethical clearance letter.			
Interviews/ Focus groups An example of the <i>written consent form</i> I intend to use is attached.	✓		
I will record the interview/focus groups and the sample of the letter where I ask for permission to do so is attached.	✓		
I plan to use an interview schedule: The example of my research instrument is attached.	✓		
I plan to use a questionnaire: The example of my research instrument is attached.		✓	
I plan to use a gate-keepers letter: The example of my letter is attached.		✓	
I plan to do research on an IIE site/with IIE students/staff/artefacts and I filled in the application for permission to do so. The application is attached. I understand I can only proceed once I receive IIE Approval for this.		✓	

ANNEXURE G: ORIGINALITY REPORT



1 A descriptive qualitative study on the impact of social media on self-esteem: A gender comparison amongst South African young adults.

Name: Megan Kruger

Student number: 17001688

Supervisor: Suhaila Ameer

Module: Research (RESE8419)

Qualification: BA Honours Psychology (HPSY414)

Word count: 11 267 words

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the BA Honours Psychology programme to The Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for degree purposes.

28 October 2020

Megan Kruger

Date

ABSTRACT

1 The present study explored whether social media has an impact on self-esteem with young adults; and thereafter if there are reported gender differences. Social media may be a threat to the development of self-esteem, especially in young adults who are

RESE8419_2020_HPS1_VCDN1 - RESE8419_VCDN1

Step 2: Submit Assignment 7 - Research Report

Megan Kruger on Fri, Oct 23 2020, 9:53 AM

100% highest match
Submission ID: 9a50a8a6-425c-4a86-9944-bbf4cd158e9e

RESE SUMMATIVE R...

Word Count: 14,009
Attachment ID: 3594360812

100%

Citations (18/18)

1 Another student's paper

2 Another student's paper

3 Another student's paper

4 Another student's paper

5 Another student's paper

6 Another student's paper

7 Another student's paper

8 [https://www.science.gov/...](https://www.science.gov/)

9 Another student's paper

