

SUMMATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

Title: Exploring the influence of Instagram on the self: A qualitative study on first year female university students, using in-depth interviews.

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

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Abstract

Instagram, which is based primarily on sharing pictures and videos with the feature of being able to comment and 'like', can impact how the individual 'self' is understood and perceived. Being 'relevant' is a demanding trend that many female students feel necessary to achieve. This research aimed to determine the positive and negative effects that Instagram has on female students' 'self', to determine what motivates these young women to use the app, and to explore whether these students are consciously aware of the effects that it has on their psychological well-being. In-depth interviews were conducted with five participants. Responses were analysed using thematic analysis and five major themes emerged. It was found that young women are consciously aware of both the negative and positive features of Instagram. The overall perception of Instagram was more positive than negative. Participants identified the problem areas in regard to the general use of Instagram, however noted that this did not directly affect their presentation of their selves on Instagram. The general consensus amongst participants was that Instagram boosts their self-esteem through positive feedback on their posts from close friends and family. Findings indicate that Instagram positively influences the development and maintenance of the 'self'.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	6
1.1. Contextualisation	6
1.2. Rationale	6
1.3. Problem Statement	7
1.4. Purpose Statement	8
1.5. Research Question	8
1.6. Objectives/Hypotheses/Sub-questions	8
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	9
2.1. Theoretical foundation and how it links to the research problem	9
2.2. Review of previous literature	12
2.3. Conceptualisation	20
3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHDOLOGY	22
3.1. Outline of worldview/paradigm/tradition	22
3.2. Research approach and design	23
3.3. Population	23
3.3.1. Population	23
3.3.2. Unit of analysis	23
3.3.3. Target and accessible population	24
3.3.4. Population parameters (characteristics)	24
3.4. Sampling	24
3.4.1. Probability or non-probability sampling	24
3.4.2. Sampling method	25
3.4.3. Sample size	25
3.5. Data collection	25
3.5.1. Data collection method	25
3.5.2. Data collection application	26
3.6. Data analysis	27
3.6.1. Data analysis method	27
3.6.2. Data analysis application	28
4. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS	30
5. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF FINDINGS	36
6. CONCLUSION	37

6.1. Summary of findings as they relate to the research question, problem and objectives	37
6.2. Anticipated contribution of the study (Implications of findings)	37
6.3. Ethical considerations	38
6.4. Limitations of the study	39
7. REFERENCES	41
8. ANNEXURES	45
8.1. Annexure A – Consent Form	45
8.2. Annexure B – Interview Schedule/Questionnaire	49
8.3. Annexure C – Ethical Clearance Letter	51
8.4. Annexure D – Examples of Data Collected	53
8.5 Annexure E – Final Research Report Summary Document	60

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextualisation

The first year of university is characterised as a turbulent time in which the identities of students are being remoulded as they enter a new tertiary environment and have to adjust to the new social niches, all while being flooded with continuous messages and stimuli via social media sites like the Instagram application (app). As social media sites become increasingly integrated into one's daily life, the versions of oneself that is presented online might shape how others see us as well as how we perceive ourselves. The differences between one's 'self' and the presentation of others online creates a pressure to be more like the idealised versions of oneself. Studying how and why users interact on Instagram can determine how users present themselves in an online environment and if this effects the 'self'. Instagram is based on one's personal identity because it allows users to create a visual photo album of their lives. It's increasingly common for one to heavily edit what is posted to ensure that the most appealing form of 'self' is portrayed to our ever-present audience. Through the measurement of identity-expressive motives, this study helps the researcher better understand why young women use Instagram, how the use of Instagram influences development of the 'self' and the overall effect that Instagram has on their well-being.

1.2 Rationale

Personal rationale

This research is of relevance to me as I have experienced the negative effects that the active use of Instagram has had on my self-concept and self-esteem. Instagram has become a platform which has set a standard as to how a women ought to look, behave, etc. This encourages, whether consciously or unconsciously, women to compare themselves to those who they see online. Subsequently, this constant comparison leads to a negative self-perception and low self-esteem if one does not match this standard.

Academic rationale

The necessity for this problem to be addressed and solved concerns the general well-being of these students, as they encounter a pinnacle time in their lives which leaves them vulnerable and open to having their identities and self-concept influenced by continuous exposure to social media stimuli as argued by Dion (2016). This research could be used to encourage positive self-esteem for women and to expose the possible effects it has on these women and the development of their 'self', especially during their transitional phase into a new tertiary environment. In the 21st century, according to Caffrey (2017), its increasingly common for one to heavily edit what is posted to ensure that the most appealing form of 'self' is portrayed to our ever present audience. By measuring identity expressive motives, this study will help the researcher better understand why young women use Instagram, how the use of Instagram influences the development of the self and the overall affect that Instagram has on their well-being.

1.3 Problem Statement

Social sites like Instagram, which is based primarily on sharing pictures and videos with the feature of being able to comment and 'like', can impact how the individual 'self' is understood and perceived. Being 'relevant' is a current and demanding trend that many female students feel necessary to achieve. This, to some degree, negatively or positively impacts their self-concept and subsequently their self-esteem, self-image, ideal self, self-efficacy, and self-presentation, all of which fall under the umbrella term 'the self' according to Dion (2016). According to Zietel-Bank and Tat (2014) social media influences one's ability to think independently which has a profound effect on identity formation. They state that the effects of social media develops over time and in order to counteract it, one must raise one's self-awareness. They argue that one needs to be consciously aware of what the constant use of social media does to one's self perceptions and subsequently construction of the 'self'. People may be aware of social media sites like Instagram having an effect on female students but may not be aware of the extent to which it fully effects their construction and understanding of their 'self' and subsequently self-concept.

1.4 Purpose Statement

This research aims to determine the effects, both positive and negative, that Instagram has on female students' 'self' as well as to determine what motivates these young women to use the app. In addition, it aims to explore whether the female students are consciously aware of the negative effects that it has on their psychological well-being.

1.5 Research Question

What is the impact of Instagram on the 'self'?

1.6 Objectives

To describe the concept of 'the self'.

To establish the relationship between the active use of social media and the impact on the self and self-development.

To determine the motivations that drive young women to engage with social networking sites like Instagram.

To explore the negative effect that social media has on the self and its components.

To discover the positive effect that social media has on the self and its components.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical foundation and how it links to the research problem

This research will critically evaluate the Uses and Gratifications Theory by Katz and Blumler in 1974 as well as the Self-discrepancy Theory by Higgins in 1987 in order to determine what motivates young females to use Instagram and how their active usage on the site influences their individual 'self'.

Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratification Theory, according to Katz and Blumler (1974), asserts that people use media to gratify specific wants and needs. This theory sees users as active agents who have control over their media consumption (Katz & Blumler, 1974). This theory focuses on the free will of audience and is deterministic that media can be used in different ways and for different purposes. This theory assumes that there is no absolute truth. The audience is said to have full control over the effect that media has on them as this effect can be chosen by the audience themselves. The theory is closely related to human psychology of needs, motives and influence.

According to Vinney (2019), the theory relies on two principles about media users. First, it characterises media users as active in their selection of the media they consume. They are engaged and motivated in their media selections. Second, people are aware of their reasons for selecting different media options. Vinney (2019) argues that they rely on their knowledge of their motivations to make media choices that will help them meet their specific wants and needs

Vinney (2019) argues that the Uses and Gratifications Theory outlines five assumptions: (1) media use is goal-directed. People are motivated to consume media. (2) Media is selected based on the expectation that it will satisfy specific needs and desires. (3) Media influence on behaviour is filtered through social and psychological factors. Thus, according to Vinney (2019), personality and social context impact the media choices one makes and one's interpretation of media

messages. (4) Media are in competition with other forms of communication for an individual's attention. (5) Lastly, people are usually in control of the media and therefore are not particularly influenced by it.

According to Vinney (2019) the theory stresses power of the individual over power of the media. Individual differences mediate the relationship between media and their effects. This results in media effects being driven as much by the media user as by the media content itself. Vinney (2019) argues that even if people take in the same media message, each individual will not be impacted by the message in the same way.

New forms of media such as Instagram includes several user attributes that weren't part of older forms of media. For example, users have greater control over what they interact with, when they interact with it, and more content choices. This opens up the number of gratifications that new media use could satisfy. Bajracharya (2018) states that human needs and gratification can be divided into five broad categories; (1) affective needs, (2) cognitive needs, (3) social integrative needs, (4) personal integrative needs, and (5) tension free needs.

This theory is of relevance to this research as it asserts that young women actively select and consume Instagram content and stimuli to satisfy specific needs or desires, which to some degree could possibly impact the curation of the 'self'.

Self-discrepancy Theory

According to Higgins (1987) over time many different facets of the 'self' or self-images have been identified. This theory describes two "actual" selves; the kind of person an individual believes they actually are and the kind of person an individual believes others think they actually are. The 'others' can refer to significant others or the generalised other. In addition to these actual selves, a variety of different potential selves have been identified.

According to Higgins (1987) there are three basic domains of the 'self': (a) the actual self, which is your representation of the attributes someone (yourself or another) believes you actually possess. (b) The ideal self, which is your

representation of attributes someone (yourself or another) would like you, ideally, to possess (i.e., a representation of someone's hopes, aspirations, or wishes for you). (c) The ought self, which is your representation of attributes someone (yourself or another) believes you should or ought to possess (i.e., a representation of someone's sense of your duty, obligations, or responsibilities). Higgins (1987) argues that there are two basic standpoints on the self, where a standpoint on the self is defined as a "point of view from which you can be judged that reflects a set of attitudes or values" (Higgins, 1956, p.321). These two standpoints are: (a) your own personal standpoint, and (b) the standpoint of some significant other (mother, father, sibling, spouse, closest friend). A person can have self-state representations for each of a number of significant others.

According to Higgins (1987), combining each of the domains of the 'self' with each standpoint on the 'self', yields six basic types of self-state representations: actual/own, actual/other, ideal/own, ideal/other, ought/own, and ought/other. The first two self-state representations constitute what is typically meant by a person's self-concept. The four remaining self-state representations are self-directive standards or self-guides. Self-discrepancy theory proposes people differ as to which self-guide they are motivated to meet. Higgins (1987) states self-discrepancy theory postulates people are motivated to reach a condition where their self-concept matches their self-guides.

Festinger's (1957) states that the self-discrepancy theory assumes that each type of discrepancy reflects a particular type of negative psychological situation that is associated with specific emotional/motivational problems. Festinger (1957) mentions two basic kinds of negative psychological situations that are associated with different kinds of emotional states: (a) absence of positive outcomes (actual or expected), which is associated with dejection-related emotions (dissatisfaction, disappointment, sadness); and (b) presence of negative outcomes (actual or expected), which is associated with agitation-related emotions (fear, threat, edginess). Self-discrepancy theory proposes individual differences in types of self-discrepancies are associated with differences in specific types of negative psychological situations their possessors are likely to experience.

According to Higgins (1987), the Self-discrepancy Theory does not assume people are aware of either availability or accessibility of their self-discrepancies. Availability and accessibility of stored social constructs can influence social information processing automatically and without awareness. According to Higgins (1987), the greater the magnitude and accessibility of a particular type of self-discrepancy possessed by an individual, the more the individual will suffer the kind of discomfort associated with that type of self-discrepancy. This is particularly relevant to this research study as one might argue that first year female university students might not even be aware that the constant exposure to certain social stimuli might be having an effect on the curation of the 'self'. Higgins (1987) argues this theory proposes emotions associated with depression arise from a discrepancy between a person's perceived self and some standard.

This theory is highly relevant to this research topic as Instagram has become a platform in which young females are constantly exposed to edited versions of reality and have consequently created an overwhelming pressure for women to match the 'realities' they see online in order to be happy and well-liked by others.

2.2 Review of previous literature

This review will look at literature which addresses four main themes in this research study: the 'self', perception and presentation of the 'self' online, motives for posting online, and lastly how the above might impact young females' well-being.

According to Bagautdinova (2018), the creation of the social media, "a set of online tools open for public membership that supports idea sharing, creating and editing content, building relationships through interaction and collaboration," and social network sites (SNS) gives people the opportunity to show their personalities through customised online profiles while connecting and maintaining relationships with other individuals. With the social media's ability for users to personalise profiles and millennials' tendency to utilise the Internet for communication, people have become progressively devoted to creating an online self so that they could demonstrate their identities to other users of social media. According to Goffman's theory of impression management, the reason the owner of the SNS profile

deliberately depicting an idealised version of the self could be the desire of an individual to make other users respond in favour of that profile owner.

According to Bagautdinova (2018), in terms of practice and the use of imagery, Instagram differentiates itself from similar platforms as it is the place in which users communicate through images in order to showcase themselves in a way they want to be seen by others. The high social value and popularity of Instagram make it worth analysis because unlike other platform, the communication on this outlet occurs solely via images, which makes the aesthetic part of imagery extremely important, as it is part of an online image that every user carefully controls. Probably, due to the aesthetic nature of Instagram, it is especially popular among women, as the statistics show that “female Internet users are more likely to use Instagram than men.

Bagautdinova (2018) argues that the popularity of Instagram has often been connected to the phenomenon of a selfie, a self- portrait that the user takes on his/her camera. The fame of selfies might be due to its ability for one to demonstrate identity and gain self-affirmation, which could be explained by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Study (Wagner et al., 2016). Human’s need for acceptance is the third most important stage after the basic need for survival and security. Instagram and selfies are significant in a way that they can satisfy an individual’s dichotomous psychological need to feel linked to and accepted by a larger social group.

According to Bagautdinova (2018), selfies on Instagram are distinctive from other images because they emphasise appearance and body and demonstrate users in a body-centric manner. That exemplifies a narcissistic nature of selfies which might affect people who have various self-confidence levels. The ability to present perfect but unrealistic images can result in other users being exposed to idealistic photographs of their peers, which, according to Bagautdinova (2018) can lead to body image dissatisfaction and other negative outcomes. Because women are heavier users of Instagram, they are at a higher risk of developing body inadequacies caused by the exposure to selfies than men.

Apodaca (2017) argues that Instagram users aged 18 to 29 years represented the largest group of individuals actively engaging with the app, with the ratio of women to men being 10:7 minutes spent on the app per day. Apodaca (2017) argues that women drive content on Instagram and are predictably more affected by their experiences on social media networks than men.

According to Caffrey (2017), with the proliferation of technology and the fundamental changes that occur within the 'self', social conditions and interactions now play an even bigger role in shaping one's 'self'. Taylor (2011) posits that traditionally our main social influencers were restricted to family, friends, school, our community, extracurricular activities and, to a lesser extent, media, which all promoted a healthier, positive message about who we were and how we should perceive ourselves. Instead of reinforcing our self-identity, our online influencers show us a 'portrait' of who they want us to be, tapping into our most basic needs to feel good about ourselves, accepted, and attractive (Taylor, 2011). Individuals now have the freedom and opportunity to create their identities online in a variety of different ways. Goffman (1959) posits that identities are like masks that can be worn and taken off in different contexts of social interaction. Caffrey (2017) argues that presentational culture present throughout history has now emerged with greater intensity as individuals have the opportunity to pay much more attention to the 'self' than ever before through online profiles. Here the 'self' refers to particular aspects of identity that individuals choose to portray to the public.

The Self

According to Hu *et al.* (2015), the Self-discrepancy Theory posits that the 'self' consists of three different elements: the actual self, ideal self and the ought self. Individuals construct their identities to ensure the discrepancy between their actual self and their ideal or ought selves is minimised. Taylor (2011) proposes we create our identity using a combination of our self-awareness as we evaluate our thoughts, feelings, and behaviour based on past experiences, current needs and future goals, and also from external conditions and feedback which we internalise to shape our identity. He also posits the importance of our social interactions in the development of the self.

According to Apodaca (2017) in psychology, the notion of the self refers to a person's experience as a single, unitary, autonomous being that is separate from others, experienced with continuity through time and place. Experience of the self includes consciousness of one's physicality as well as one's inner character and emotional life. People experience themselves in two senses; (1) as an active agent who acts on the world as well as being influenced by that world. (2) As an object of reflection and evaluation. In this type of self, people turn their attention to their physical and psychological attributes to contemplate constellations of skills, traits, attitudes, opinions, and feelings they may have.

Goffman (1959) referred to life as a stage with actors who portray different characters, as do everyday people in varying social situations. Many factors influence how people determine how they will portray themselves to others. People are able to present themselves in a way that is favourable, engaging in impression management. Attrill (2015) interprets the 'self' as malleable, depending on the social situation and interaction with partners. She believes people have basic tools to adapt to situations in which they find themselves. The traditional view is that the 'self' is uniform, structured, consistent over time and composed from a number of psychological and physical features that abstract the essential traits from the individual's past behaviour. Burke (1980) suggested the notion that the 'self' is stable, understandably so when looking at the 'self' over time. There is stability, but there is also change, development and growth.

While most empirical work on the self-concept suggests the 'self' is a stable construct, researchers suggest the social self is malleable and can change quite dramatically depending on the nature of the social situation. According to Apodaca (2017), the belief is that the self-concept is a significant regulator of behaviour. Markus and Nurius (1986, p. 964) came to this definition of possible selves: "an individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet such selves derive from categories made salient by the individual's particular sociocultural and historical context and from models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences".

Rosenberg (1986) simplified self-concept as the totality of a person's thoughts and feelings in reference to themselves. Those who use Instagram for photo sharing

do so to fulfil a need. Needs like self-expression, self-presentation, to communicate, nurture or maintain social relationships, are reasons why so many people spend time and effort contributing online as argued by Attrill (2015). While researchers vary in beliefs of the flexibility of the 'self', Attrill (2015) believed self-construct is determined by one's own perceptions and is shaped from the individual's experiences in the offline world. To reiterate, the true-self is the totality of a person's thoughts and feelings about oneself and is distinct from the ideal self and possible selves according to Rosenberg (1986).

Perception and Presentation of Self Online

Instagram and the overall internet environment create an area of control for one to decide what and how much, within the confines of the social media platform's architecture, they would like to reveal. According to Apodaca (2017), the internet has opened up a way for users to present versions of their online self, which are different and separate from their real life selves. Online and social media users are able to present themselves in a light that is favourable to them. It is relatively easy for individuals to manipulate their profile at will. Instagram, which is visually driven, allows the user to control aspects which they feel should be conveyed to their audience. Caffrey (2017) argues that users of these sites create their own self-promotional content and shape it to be analogous to their perspective.

The internalisation of the ideal 'self' is influenced by a multitude of media, symbolic social online forces, peers, and cultural norms. Apodaca (2017) highlights three categories of self-presentation which applied to behaviour online: (1) ingratiation, the act of presenting a likeable image, (2) supplication, which is used to gain support or sympathy from others by showing helplessness, and (3) enhancement, used for self-promotion and displaying a skill or knowledge in front of others.

Rogers (1959) claimed that people are cognisant of the fact they are one type of person in one social setting and another type in other situations. Due to the relative anonymity of the internet, communication settings and absence of physical gating features of face-to-face communication, the presentation of one's self has changed. Rogers' (1959) use of 'gating features' refers to cues in which a person uses to access a person's credibility of their identity.

Ting (2014) investigated the relationship between motives, usage, self-presentation and number of followers on Instagram by applying Uses and Gratification Theory and impression management approach. Results indicated most students used Instagram every day (58.6 percent) and tended to present themselves in a positive light rather than leaving a negative impression.

Motives for posting online

The Uses and Gratifications Theory, according to Katz *et al.* (1973), asserts that individual differences influence motivations for engaging in media. According to their research, the audience is perceived as active in choosing the media they consume. Needs gratification and media choice relies on the audience member. People are generally aware of these needs and self-report their interests and motives, or at least recognise them. Instagram requires users to take on an active role of participation, through commenting on pages, liking photos or following other users. This participation is driven by various motives for interacting on the site.

Coyne, Padilla-Walker and Howard (2013) conducted a study to determine how adults aged 18 to 29 spent their time using traditional and new forms of media. This study found that participants used media to gratify the following needs: autonomy, identity, and intimacy. Coyne *et al.* (2013) stated that autonomy referred to the increasing exercise emerging adults engage in to decide what types of media are consistent with their value system. Apodaca (2017) states that media can play a role in the many aspects of identity formation during the emergence of adulthood. This is relevant to the research as the target age group are females aged 18-21. Identity development is a lengthy process. What an individual posts on social media networks becomes a defining statement of who a person is. Posting various content related to whom a person may be is a means of trying on different possible selves.

Caffrey (2017) found in their research that a major motivation for social media use was the ability for individuals to manage the impression they make on others, and through social media sites users have the opportunity to create, modify, or maintain an impression of themselves in the minds of others. Caffrey (2017) highlights that self-presentation methods used to curate our online 'self' are highly linked to the

feedback process that is amplified within these social platforms. Particularly when individuals engage in self-derogating or self-enhancing practices (depending on their internal view of the 'self') there can be a self-perpetuating cycle of behaviour and subsequent identity change stimulated by the response which they receive from their online social network, evident through 'likes' or 'comments' on Instagram in response to a post, for example. Caffrey (2017) highlights that engaging in such activities can encourage the person who posted it to post more related statements and as shown earlier, repeatedly engaging in these types of interactions can result in the internalisation of these enhancing or derogating ideals into the individual's identity.

Caffrey (2017) argues that more images of perfect lives that are presented within our news feed endangers rational self-reflection, a vital component of our identity construction methods. As these curated selves cannot compare to offline realities, it diminishes the ability for individuals to evaluate themselves in accordance with traditional standards of 'self'. Caffrey (2017) identifies that the more a person feels a radical diminution of their 'self', they will try to compensate for this by engaging in activities where they ultimately feel instantly recognised, complemented or affirmed. Humanistic psychology asserts that psychological problems or cognitive dissonance emerges when there is a difference between the 'self' and the idealised 'self'. This can undoubtedly be witnessed in a social media environment.

According to Caffrey (2017) we have become accustomed to the constant editing of the 'self' online leading to a degradation of our offline communication skills. The comfort of being able to heavily construct and edit the 'self' will drive us away from real face-to-face communication and further into the safety of our online worlds. However, as we are driven to these sites in our need for recognition and connection, we are spending more time constructing the 'self' through the feedback driven by our narcissism and ego.

Well-being

According to Apodaca (2017) all humans have a vital need to maintain or raise their self-esteem as it leads to positive well-being and life satisfaction. Research conducted by Gordon, Juang and Syed (2007) suggests it is not how much time is

spent online that affects well-being, but rather what is being done online that creates the effect.

Apodaca (2017) states that Instagram is a unique application because it allows users to create an identity from scratch, contributing photo and video support to their preferred version of self. Identity construction is both a personal and public process. Individuals make claims about their identity and others (the audience) endorse those claims by “likes” or follower count.

According to Festinger (1954), individuals have a drive to gain accurate self-evaluations. He explains that individuals compare themselves to others to evaluate their own opinions and abilities in order to reduce any uncertainty in these areas and to learn how to define the ‘self’. Festinger (1954) argues that social comparison can be a way of self-enhancement by downward social comparisons, by means of looking to another individual or group that they consider to be worse off than them in order to feel better about themselves. It can also have a negative impact on an individual’s self-report by means of upward comparisons, when comparing themselves with others who are better off or superior. Festinger (1954) states that negative social comparisons are detrimental to the perceptions of the ‘self’. This is applicable to this research as young women possibly engage in negative and harmful comparisons against people they see online, consequently influencing their perceptions of themselves.

According to Dion (2016), a survey given to 231 participants, ages 18-25, showed Instagram use related to a greater degree of negative social comparison, which related to negative self-perceived social competence and physical attractiveness. The researchers found social networking site use was negatively related to self-perception through negative social comparison, especially among unhappy people. Dion (2016) found that a popular social comparison group on Instagram is to celebrities that are wealthy and have significant attributes valued by society than most who follow them. Following strangers such as celebrities and models may cause individuals to have a lower self-esteem and feel dissatisfied with their life by seeing pictures that celebrities post every day about their lavish lifestyles, “perfect” bodies, and pretty faces.

Coyne *et al.* (2013) argues that media can influence the perception of body image and self-esteem in emerging adulthood, especially amongst women. When it comes to body size and weight, the media often does not provide an accurate reflection of the world in which emerging adults live. Compared with the general population, below average weight individuals are over-represented, while average and obese individuals often receiving negative comments on their weight. Coyne *et al.* (2013) argues that given emerging adult exposure to such content, it is not surprising that body dissatisfaction and eating disorders are on the increase in young women.

The above review of literature suggests that we are increasingly becoming more dependent and intrinsically linked to our devices and social aspects of this new culture. As we increasingly become more hybrid beings, informed and influenced by our social networking platforms, it can be argued that we are becoming dependent on the social relationship with our devices and online connections, internalising these devices and environments to become extensions of the 'self'. Ultimately, through the above analysis it shows that our online environments facilitate the enhancement of individuals' narcissistic qualities and cultivation of a 'self' is intrinsically dictated by external 'others'. The research provided in this review suggests that the 'self', perception and presentation of 'self' online, uses and gratifications and motives, and social media's effect of self-esteem and well-being appear linked. These studies inform readers about learned behaviours of presentation of the 'self' online, some motivations for posting to social networking sites, behaviours which affect or enhance well-being, and prominence of women as participants in previous research.

2.3 Conceptualisation

According to Bagautdinova (2018), social media refers to a set of online tools open for public membership that supports idea sharing, creating and editing content, building relationships through interaction and collaboration.

According to Apodaca (2017), Instagram is a photo and video-sharing app which serves two-fold as a social networking service. Users express non-verbal captions using emoticons, add filters to alter photographs, add hashtags to group together categories, and frames to put together a digital storyline. Instagram users can like, comment on and bookmark other individuals' posts, as well as send private messages to their friends. Instagram (2020) provides a means for people to express themselves and to connect with people. This definition of Instagram will be used for the purpose of this research.

According to Hu, Zhao and Huang (2015), the Self-discrepancy Theory posits that the 'self' consists of three different elements; the actual self, ideal self and the ought self. This definition of the self will be used in this research.

Rosenberg (1986) defines self-concept as the totality of a person's thoughts and feelings in reference to themselves. This definition of self-concept will be used for this research.

Bagautdinova (2018) defines a selfie as a self- portrait that the user takes on his/her camera.

Bagautdinova (2018) defines self-esteem as the degree of satisfaction with the self

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Outline of paradigm

Human beings change all the time and the environment in which they find themselves constantly influences them. According to du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014), interpretivists aim to study, understand, and describe meaningful social action and human behaviour. The goal is to see the world through the eyes of the person being studied. The goal of interpretivism is to gain an in-depth understanding of the realities of those being studied according to du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014). This paradigm suits the subjective nature of this research topic.

The epistemological position of interpretivism asserts that common sense guides people in daily living. Understanding human behaviour demands understanding what people view as being common sense. Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014) state that the interpretivism paradigm perceives facts as being fluid and embedded within a meaning system. Interpretivism takes into account the social context in which the behaviour occurs. This research topic is interested in understanding why young females use social media and how their active use with the site and its contents influences the development of the 'self' and subsequently their self-esteem, self-concept and general well-being. According to du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014), the ontological position of interpretivism states reality is a social construction and it is dependent on the meanings people ascribe to their own experiences and interactions with others. According to interpretivism, the social world is what people perceive it to be. It is fluid and fragile and changes as people's perceptions change. Instagram has become a platform in which people are able to construct their own identity. The axiological position of interpretivism, according to du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014), states uniqueness is valued. Realities are viewed as unique and are complex to understand.

This paradigm is appropriate for this topic as it seeks to understand the subjective experiences of young female university students who actively engage with Instagram. This study seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of these students'

realities and to explore the effects that the active use of social media has on the individual 'self' and its development.

3.2 Research approach and design

This research followed a qualitative methodology as the objective was to understand, explore and describe people's behaviours, attitudes and experiences. This research sought to understand the meaning and purpose that individuals attach to their personal actions and experiences. This research is exploratory in nature and was conducted cross-sectionally. Cross-sectional refers to observational research meaning that the researcher does not manipulate or interfere with the study environment. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, the exposure and time spent with the participants was relatively minimal and contact was mainly made during the interviews via Zoom as well as through Instagram messaging. Due to the research being cross-sectional, the variables were collected at only a single moment in time, through in-depth interviews via Zoom, across a small sample of 5 young women selected using purposive sampling. Cross-sectional research allowed multiple variables to be studied at once. Additionally, this research followed an inductive line of reasoning as it involved inferring theoretical concepts from the data collected and analysed.

3.3 Population

3.3.1 Population

The population for this study included female first year university students aged between 18-21 who had to actively engage with Instagram on a daily basis. These individuals needed to be enrolled in a first year degree at a tertiary institution in South Africa.

3.3.2 Units of analysis

The units of analysis for this study was people, specifically female first year university students.

3.3.3 Target and accessible population

The target population for this study encompassed all female first year university students who actively engage with social media sites, specifically Instagram.

The accessible population looked specifically at five first year female students at a tertiary institution who actively engage with Instagram on a daily basis that were contactable on the Instagram application.

3.3.4 Population parameters (characteristics)

The population parameters for this study included female first year university students aged between 18-21 who have to actively engage with Instagram on a daily basis and live in South Africa. As this research is qualitative in nature, the necessary size of the sample included only five of these females.

3.4 Sampling

3.4.1 Non-probability sampling

The type of sampling method in which this research followed was non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling. Non-probability sampling is used when it is difficult to gain access to the entire population (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). In this type of sampling researchers carefully select the sample from the accessible population and will therefore consist of participants with whom the researcher had the ability to make contact with and not a result of systematic selection. In this type of sampling, the elements in the population will not have equal opportunity to form part of the sample (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). As this research was qualitative in nature, the aim was not to generalise the results to the broader population due to the subjective nature of the study. Due to this, the focus was on how many students need to be interviewed which will allow the study to generate an in-depth understanding of the correlation between the active use of social media sites like Instagram and the construction of the 'self' of first year female university students.

3.4.2 Sampling method

Due to the target population being so widespread, and the nature of the study being qualitative, subjective, and requiring in-depth interviews, this study lacked a sample frame and benefitted from purposive sampling in order to intentionally find first year female students who met the population parameters and ensure that the sample assisted with the research. Purposive sampling was beneficial to this research as it ensured that each element of the sample supported the research and its findings because each element (the students) fits with the population parameters.

3.4.3 Sample size

Qualitative research does not require a large sample as it does not seek to generalise the findings to the larger population, and according to the IIE's requirements and guidelines, a sample size of 5-7 participants is adequate for this study. Therefore, 5 first year female university students were selected to be a part of the sample.

3.5 Data collection

3.5.1 Data collection method

This research made use of in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are a qualitative data collection method which allows the researcher to pose questions to participants with the intention of learning more about their views, opinions and beliefs about a specific phenomenon (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). As the nature of this qualitative data-collection method is to gain an in-depth understanding of the subjective interpretations of participants, this method allows the researcher to fully interpret and understand the meaning of the answers given by the participants by asking and allowing them to provide detailed explanations of their opinions, views or beliefs (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.*, 2014). Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014) state that in-depth interviews allow the researcher to interpret and understand the

meaning of participants' answers to specific questions. This method allows the researcher to ask the participant to clarify a point and to provide a detailed explanation for their view on a specific question, all of which aid in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

3.5.2 Data collection application

The data collection method for this study followed a standardised, unstructured, open-ended in-depth interview method, also referred to as qualitative interviews. This type of method focuses on asking the same set of open-ended questions to all of the participants. This type of interview consists of an interview guide which is a skeleton of the interview structure in the form of a list of topics or questions to be covered (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). This method is flexible and allowed the researcher to adapt to the interview and formulate and ask alternate questions or probe the participant to elaborate on certain answers which occurred during the interview. This type of method allowed the researcher to engage with the participants in a relatively relaxed approach which encouraged co-operation and honesty (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). The researcher typically does not take detailed notes during the interview, instead audio-recording is the main record. This allows the researcher to actively build an understanding of what is being told to them. This was applied during each interview. A conversational approach allowed room for the participant to relax and feel comfortable in order to answer honestly and in detail. This type of interview is concerned with the opinions of the participant. The open-ended approach allows insight into the individual's experiences which might be of value to the study. Annexure B provides a question template which was used for each participant during the in-depth interview.

Prior to the interview, a sample was identified for this study. Those students who met the population parameters of the study were contacted by the researcher, via the Instagram app, appropriate for the topic of the study. The researcher directly messaged approximately 8 females and asked them if they would kindly take part in the study by being interviewed for no more than 30 minutes. Once agreeing to partake in the study, the researcher organised to interview each participant on a day and time that best suited them. Due to the 2020 South African lockdown, it was

impossible to meet the participants in person so instead it was arranged to conduct the interviews via Zoom. This had the benefit of providing a private environment which allowed the participants to answer the questions openly and honestly without other people being present, which might have hindered their answers. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher requested for the participants' email addresses in order to send the necessary consent forms that needed to be filled out before conducting and recording the interviews. Consent was needed to record the interview in order to transcribe the interview at a later time, which was analysed and used further. Each participant was emailed the link to the Zoom meeting which they could click on and be sent directly to the interview room. During the interview, the researcher actively participated with the participant in order to gather as much necessary information as possible and to identify possible reoccurring themes which was used in the data analysis later.

3.6 Data analysis

3.6.1 Data analysis method

The data collected from the interviews were analysed through the use of thematic analysis, more specifically, the data-led approach. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, organising, and describing themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights. Thematic analysis is also useful for summarising key features of a large data set, as it forces the researcher to take a well-structured approach to handling data, helping to produce a clear and organised final report. This method organises and describes the data set in rich detail. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data-led approach or inductive approach means that the themes identified are strongly linked to the data itself. This is a process of coding the data without trying to fit into a pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By using this approach, the researcher could

analyse the interviews and identify common or reoccurring themes amongst the students' answers in relation to their use of social media and their social identity.

3.6.2 Data analysis application

Braun and Clarke (2006) identified six steps involved in the thematic analysis process which was applied to this study.

Step 1: Familiarisation with the data. The researcher must become actively involved with the data (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). This study made use of in-depth interviews, as a result, the researcher became familiar with the content during the interview itself, the transcription of the interview and lastly the revision over the transcribed data.

Step 2: Initial coding generation. The researcher systematically worked through and organised the data by highlighting similar answers and made physical notes on a separate piece of paper on emerging patterns through the data familiarisation process. This study made use of the data-led approach in this step as the interview provided themes on which a theory could potentially have been developed.

Step 3: Searching for themes based on the initial coding (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). The researcher searched and identified themes based on the initial coding which were joined together in separate subheadings. Answers that were highlighted as being similar were grouped into sections, forming initial themes.

Step 4: Review of themes. The set of themes identified in the previous stages were reviewed. At this stage the researcher began to identify which themes were supported by the data and which were not. The researcher may decide to create further subthemes if necessary.

Step 5: Theme definition and labelling. The researcher defined each theme in terms of its characteristics (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). From this, 5 themes emerged: (1) presentation of the 'self' online, (2) motives for engaging with Instagram, (3) comparison to others online, (4) impacts of Instagram on well-being, and (5) perceptions of Instagram.

Step 6: Report writing. The researcher writes a final report discussing the data and its themes. This step was conducted when completing assignment 6 which consisted of describing and interpreting the findings.

This study followed each of the six steps in order to identify themes which emerged from the interviews. These themes were then used to inform whether or not the active use of social media sites like Instagram positively or negatively influence the construction of the 'self' of first year female university students.

4. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The main research question for this research report was “what is the influence of Instagram of the self?”. From the data analysis, five broad themes emerged: (1) presentation of the ‘self’ online, (2) motives for engaging with Instagram, (3) comparison to others online, (4) impacts of Instagram on well-being, and (5) perceptions of Instagram. This section will describe these findings as well as apply them to the theories and literature previously stated and apply the findings to the research question.

Motives for engaging with Instagram

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was that of ‘motives for engaging with Instagram’. This theme coincides with the review of previous literature and the Uses and Gratifications Theory which states that individuals are active in choosing the media they consume and that needs gratification and media choice rely on the individual. This is particularly applicable to the Instagram application (app) which requires users to take on an active role of participation. The theory states that these people are typically aware of these needs. Through the data collection and analysis, it became apparent that 3/5 participants mainly engage with Instagram socially and with the intention of checking up on their friends and family. For example, Participant 1 expressed, “I also really enjoy just looking at people’s content and seeing how their families are doing and seeing what’s going on in their lives right now” (Participant 1, field notes, 2020). 3/5 participants expressed that their purpose of engaging with Instagram was for entertainment by looking at funny pictures and videos. For example, Participant 5 expressed, “I’d say it’s for entertainment really. When I’m bored, I just go and check Instagram and maybe if I’m looking for tips for certain things” (Participant 5, field notes, 2020). Only 1 participant, Participant 3, expressed that they also used Instagram for educational purposes. She stated that she uses the app “to connect to other people see what other people are doing also for me just it’s a platform that I can learn things” (Participant 3, field notes, 2020).

Presentation of the ‘self’ online

The second theme that emerged was that of 'presentation of the 'self' online'. Linking to the Self-discrepancy Theory, Higgins (1987) states that there are three basic domains of the 'self'; (1) the actual self, which is your representation of the attributes someone (yourself or another) believes you actually possess. (2) The ideal self, which is your representation of attributes someone (yourself or another) would like you, ideally, to possess (i.e., a representation of someone's hopes, aspirations, or wishes for you). (3) The ought self, which is your representation of attributes someone (yourself or another) believes you should or ought to possess. Instagram and the overall internet environment create an area of control for one to decide what and how much, within the confines of the social media platform's architecture, they would like to reveal. Online and social media users are able to present themselves in a light that is favourable to them and engage in impression management.

Through the data analysis of the interviews, all 5 participants stated that they edit their photos before posting them. 4/5 participants stated that they use filters over their photos to make them more presentable and 1 participant stated that instead of using filters, they would change the colour balance of the photos. For example, Participant 1 stated, "I sometimes use Snapchat filters but I don't really edit my posts.. You don't want to now look completely different. Because I know so many people on Instagram that post and then you see them in person and they are the complete opposite and I don't necessarily want that to be me. (Participant 1, field notes, 2020). Participant 3 stated, "the most I will do is change the colour balance and make it slightly warmer the image. That's the most I do, I very much don't want to edit my photos because I know lots of people do edit their photos and it makes a very unhealthy self-image and I don't want to do that I'm happy with myself" (Participant 3, field notes, 2020). Therefore, despite being aware of the negativity surrounding editing photos, all 5 participants engaged in self presentation tactics in order to portray their idealised versions of themselves on the Instagram app. This is consistent with literature pertaining to the self as well as the Uses and Gratifications Theory in which those who use Instagram for photo sharing do so to fulfil a need. Needs like self-expression, self-presentation, to communicate, nurture or maintain social relationships, are reasons why so many people spend time and effort contributing online.

When asked whether they portray their true selves on Instagram, 4/5 participants stated that they think they accurately portray themselves online, however, what is important to note is that of these individuals, 3 participants clearly stated that they wouldn't post photos that they deemed "ugly" online, implying that they do selectively choose which aspects of themselves they portray to others. For example, Participant 2 stated, "I won't post photos that are like really ugly so I'll post like the best photos of me, so I guess like it's a little bit different to real life" (Participant 2, field notes, 2020). Additionally, Participant 2 stated, "I think I mostly portray myself accurately I like to be a very positive person. I think the only thing is obviously no-one posts the hard moments in life, no one posts the things no one wants to see so I only post things that are happy and fun and enjoyable" (Participant 2, field notes, 2020).

Comparison to others online

The third major theme that emerged from the data was 'comparison to others online'. Linking to the previous literature, according to Festinger (1954), individuals have a drive to gain accurate self-evaluations. He explains that individuals compare themselves to others to evaluate their own opinions and abilities in order to reduce any uncertainty in these areas and to learn how to define the 'self'. Festinger (1954) argues that social comparison can be a way of self-enhancement by downward social comparisons, by means of looking to another individual or group that they consider to be worse off than them in order to feel better about themselves. It can also have a negative impact on an individual's self-report by means of upward comparisons, when comparing themselves with others who are better off or superior. Festinger (1954) states that negative social comparisons are detrimental to the perceptions of the 'self'. When asked whether they compare their lives to the lives of other online, 3/5 participants clearly stated that they do compare their lives to that of others. For example, Participant 2 stated that "I do because like they look like they have better experiences" (Participant 2, field notes, 2020).

Under the same theme of comparing to others online, when asked whether they compare their facial attractiveness to that of others, 4/5 participants stated that they do compare their face to that of others, however, what is important to note is

that the comparison is mainly made with close friends rather than that of celebrities. For example, Participant 4 answered, “friends yes because I feel like that’s closer to home, that’s much more of a realistic comparison” (Participant 4, filed notes, 2020). On the other hand, Participant 3, for example answered, “I guess sometimes I’m self-conscious I think my face isn’t like as small and petit and pretty as other girls and people online” (Participant 3, filed notes, 2020). This is a practical example of upward comparison. Additionally, when asked whether they compare their bodies to that of others, 3/5 participants stated that they do. For example, Participant 3 stated that she feels “self-conscious and things like that because I’m not tiny and petit like I said before but again overall like I don’t try to focus too much on it, I’m just like this is who I am and I’m happy with who I am”(Participant 3, filed notes, 2020). Participant 2 stated that they do compare their body to others but mainly for fitness reasons and stated that “sometimes it’s kind of motivating because it’s like cool I can do more exercises and I can do the same exercises they’re doing and then my body will be as nice as theirs” (Participant 2, filed notes, 2020). Again, the general consensus was that participants engaged in some form of upward comparison to others on Instagram.

Impact of Instagram on well-being

The forth theme that emerged from the data analysis was that of ‘impact of Instagram on well-being’. The previous literature argued that, according to Apodaca (2017), all humans have a vital need to maintain or raise their self-esteem as it leads to positive well-being and life satisfaction. Instagram is a unique application because it allows users to create an identity from scratch, contributing photo and video support to their preferred version of ‘self’. When asked whether they think Instagram negatively or positively impacts their self-esteem, the general feedback was that it is a combination of both depending on individual perceptions and motivations for using the app. For example, Participant 3 argued that the app positively influences her self-esteem through receiving compliments from her friends and family on her posts. Participant 4 and 5 stated that it boosts their self-esteem because they typically look at funny content and follow pages/people that focus on empowering one another. Additionally, when asked how it feels when they don’t get a lot of likes on a post, all five participants answered that they aren’t effected by the amount of likes or comments they receive on a post. The general

consensus amongst the participants was that Instagram is more of a positive platform than a negative one.

Perceptions of Instagram

The last theme that emerged from the data analysis was 'perceptions of Instagram'. When asked what they like about Instagram, Participant 1 stated that she enjoys being able to meet people online that she otherwise wouldn't meet offline and therefore enjoys the social aspect of the app. Similarly, Participant 3 stated that, "it's a good way to connect with people and it's a good way to learn new things and discover new ways of thinking especially I quite like that and it's also just a fun way to relax sometimes" (Participant 3, filed notes, 2020). Participant 2 stated that she enjoys how the app boosts her self-esteem and self-confidence. However, when asked what they do not like about Instagram, Participant 1 stated that she tends to find the app to be distracting and "it also creates unrealistic expectations of people and people show they're living their life and they're awesome and they're doing well and in the meantime, they actually are not doing well at all. So, it creates almost false views of people" (Participant 1, filed notes, 2020). Similarly, Participant 3 stated, "I don't like how people think they need to put filters on themselves and Facetune themselves and wear a ton of makeup or change their appearance and who they are to feel popular or to gain more followers. I think people are obsessed with followers and likes and things like that when they should rather, I don't know, they should rather stay true to themselves I think lots of people, put on a front that's harmful to themselves" (Participant 3, filed notes, 2020).

The research question for this study was "what is the influence of Instagram of the self?", with the above information in mind, it seems as if young women are highly aware of the negative features and aspects of Instagram, such as the ability to heavily edit posts and the ability to inaccurately portray ones true life which has a ripple effect. However, participants also expressed the positive features of the application such as it being a means to engage with others socially as well as engage with content suited to the participant's likes, wants and desires which positively influences their well-being and consequently their sense of 'self'. This is consistent with the Uses and Gratifications Theory. The overall perception of Instagram was more positive than negative. Participants identified the problem

areas in regard to the general use of Instagram, however noted that this did not directly affect their presentation of their selves on Instagram. The majority of participants expressed that they accurately portray their true selves on the social media site but did express that they find themselves comparing their posts to that of others, especially to that of their friends rather than models or celebrities. These findings link to the objectives of exploring the positive and negative aspect of Instagram on the 'self'. Additionally, this is consistent with the Self-discrepancy Theory. The general consensus amongst participants was that Instagram boosts their self-esteem through positive feedback on their posts from close friends and family. This finding relates to the objective of establishing the relationship between the use of Instagram and its impact on the 'self'. It is important to note that a major limitation of the study was the sample size which means that this study did not reach data saturation. In order to gain a more accurate reflection of the influence of Instagram on the 'self', a larger sample size and study would need to be made.

5. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF FINDINGS

According to Koonin (2014), the aim of qualitative research is to promote understanding of a particular phenomenon within a specific context, and not to generalise results to a broader population. Participants answers are not objectively measurable since they are unique to each individual's experience. The term that is used for validity and reliability in qualitative research is trustworthiness, which can be further divided into credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility, according to Koonin (2014), refers to the accuracy in which the researcher interpreted the data that was provided by the participants. Credibility is increased when the researcher spends long periods of time with the participants in order to understand them better and gain insight into their lives. Credibility is further increased by making use of triangulation as well as when the findings are believable from the participants' perspective as stated by Koonin (2014). Within the study, credibility was ensured by the researcher gaining insight into the lives of the participants through the Zoom interviews. Transferability, according to Koonin (2014), refers to the ability of the findings to be applied to a similar situation and delivering similar results. It is the degree to which the results and analysis can be applied beyond this specific research. Although the nature of the study was subjective and therefore unable to apply the findings to the general population, the findings provide useful insight into the topic which can be used for further research. Dependability, according to Koonin (2014), refers to the quality of the process of integration that takes place between the data collection method, data analysis and the theory generated from the data. This study arguably integrated the data collection and analysis well. Koonin (2014) states that confirmability refers to how well the data collected supports the findings and interpretation of the researcher. It indicates how well findings flow from the data. The study showed a clear correlation between the data collected, the findings which followed as well as the researcher's interpretation of such. With the above in mind, this research study is arguably trustworthy.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of findings as they relate to the research question, problem and objectives

The research question for this study was “what is the influence of Instagram on the self?”, with the above information in mind, it seems as if young women are highly aware of the negative features and aspects of Instagram, such as the ability to heavily edit posts and the ability to inaccurately portray one's true life which has a ripple effect. However, participants also expressed the positive features of the application such as it being a means to engage with others socially as well as engage with content suited to the participant's likes, wants and desires which positively influences their well-being and consequently their sense of ‘self’. This is consistent with the Uses and Gratifications Theory. The overall perception of Instagram was more positive than negative. Participants identified the problem areas in regard to the general use of Instagram, however noted that this did not directly affect their presentation of their selves on Instagram. The majority of participants expressed that they accurately portray their true selves on the social media site but did express that they find themselves comparing their posts to that of others, especially to that of their friends rather than models or celebrities. These findings link to the objectives of exploring the positive and negative aspect of Instagram on the ‘self’. Additionally, this is consistent with the Self-discrepancy Theory. The general consensus amongst participants was that Instagram boosts their self-esteem through positive feedback on their posts from close friends and family. This finding relates to the objective of establishing the relationship between the use of Instagram and its impact on the ‘self’. It is important to note that a major limitation of the study was the sample size which means that this study did not reach data saturation. In order to gain a more accurate reflection of the influence of Instagram on the ‘self’, a larger sample size and study would need to be made.

6.2 Anticipated contribution of the study (Implications of findings)

The primary reason for conducting research on Instagram opposed to other social network sites is twofold: the research in this area is sparse and because the site is

popular among millennials, the largest demographic of the site. As mentioned in the introduction, women aged 18 to 29 make up the majority of its users. Studying how and why users interact on Instagram can determine how users present themselves in an online environment and if this effects the 'self'. Instagram is based on one's personal identity because it allows users to create a visual photo album of their lives. It's increasingly common for one to heavily edit what is posted to ensure that the most appealing form of 'self' is portrayed to our ever present audience. By measuring identity expressive motives, this study helped the researcher better understand why young women use Instagram, how use of Instagram influences development of the 'self' and overall effect that Instagram has on their well-being. Additionally, according to DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, and Fiore (2012) social media sites like Instagram have the ability to guide students entering an unfamiliar social environment. They argue that Instagram has become an important site for the informal, cultural learning of being a student, with online interactions and experiences allowing roles to be learned, values understood and identities shaped. DeAndrea *et al.* (2012) suggest that social network sites offer a unique opportunity to promote socialisation to the college environment. They argue that social network sites can help students learn about their peers and college which, in turn, can create satisfaction and affiliation with the university. Students' sense of belonging, whether they feel included in their college community, has a documented relationship with college adjustment according to DeAndrea *et al.* (2012). For instance, student perceptions of belonging have been positively associated with feelings of social acceptance and academic competence. This is highly relevant to this research as the target population was first year female university students whose identities and the development of the 'self' are changing and adapting as these students transition into a new tertiary environment. This research could bring awareness to how social media influences the 'self' and further facilitate a smooth transition for these students.

6.3 Ethical considerations

Ethics are a necessity in research as they are considered the norms for conduct which distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Ethics ensure

the fair treatment of participants within the study and furthermore, promotes the integrity and validity of the research and its subsequent findings.

According to the APA Ethical Guidelines (APA, 2017), researchers must safeguard the welfare and rights of those whom they engage with professionally. Researchers must seek to avoid harm (APA, 2017). This research will seek to avoid harming the participants involved, the researcher as well as the academic institution involved. This research study ensured that participants were not be subjected to harm in any ways whatsoever. This was ensured through the interview process as participants were not asked questions which could have provoked negative, embarrassing or harmful feelings or answers. Participants were allowed to withdraw themselves from the study whenever they wanted or needed to without adverse consequences, with their data removed from the study. However, no one requested to be removed from this study. Researchers should respect individuals' rights to privacy, confidentiality and self-determination (APA, 2017). This study ensured the protection of the privacy of the participants as well as an adequate level of confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Researchers must seek to promote accuracy, honesty, and truthfulness (APA, 2017). Within this study informed consent was obtained from the participants. Before conduction, participants were informed on the nature and purpose of the study as well as how the findings and their answers will be used to inform the study. All communication in relation to the study was done with honesty and transparency. The findings of the study have been presented truthfully and honestly.

No incentives were used to encourage participation in this research. Harm was avoided by not falsifying any of the data or distorting the results. Removal of any form of bias which may influence the interpretation of the results was ensured.

6.4 Limitations of the study

A qualitative study typically includes 5-7 participants in the research, this is a limitation in this research as, due to the small sample size and subjective nature of the study, the results cannot be generalised to the broader population. Another significant limitation concerns the 2020 South African national lockdown, stating on the 26th of March, has placed rigid restrictions on social interactions and

gatherings. This places a major limitation on this research as it makes finding, selecting and interviewing participants challenging as the researcher cannot simply walk around campus to find the sample and must therefore find participants an alternative way. Furthermore, this research made use of Zoom calls in order to interview the participants. This is a limitation as participants may not have data or laptops readily available for the interview. This is also a limitation for the researcher as it puts constraints on the money needed for airtime or data. Another limitation is that this research topic only focuses on young women and does not include men and therefore can again, not be generalised to a broader population. It is important to note that a major limitation of the study was the sample size which means that this study did not reach data saturation. In order to gain a more accurate reflection of the influence of Instagram on the 'self', a larger sample size and study would need to be made.

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8. ANNEXURES

8.1 Annexure A – Consent form

ANNEXURE A: EXPLANATORY INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

To whom it may concern,

My name is Kelly Shackleton and I am a student at Varsity College Sandton. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr John Hunter about the influence of Instagram on the self: a qualitative study on first year female university students, through in-depth interviews. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of the influence of social media sites like Instagram on the development of the self and subsequently the well-being of female students who actively engage with the application daily.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

What will I be doing if I participate in your study?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because you are a female first year university student who actively engages with Instagram daily. If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to interview you and ask you a set number of open-ended questions relating to the topic. The interview will be recorded and will be transcribed at a later time.

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 engagement with Instagram and its subsequent effects on your self and well-being. 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 Varsity College Sandton, 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 Bachelor of Arts 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:
Kelly Shackleton

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:
Dr John Hunter

Consent form for audio-recording/ video recording

I,  agree to allow Kelly Shackleton to audio record my interviews as part of the research about exploring the influence of Instagram on the self: a qualitative study on first year female university students, using in-depth interviews.

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

1. My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
2. The recordings will be stored in a password protected file on the researcher's computer.
3. Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.


Signature

10/08 / 2020
Date

Consent form for audio-recording/ video recording

I, , agree to allow Kelly Shackleton to audio record my interviews as part of the research about exploring the influence of Instagram on the self: a qualitative study on first year female university students, using in-depth interviews.

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

1. My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
2. The recordings will be stored in a password protected file on the researcher's computer.
3. Only the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and possibly a transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings.


Signature

10/08 / 2020

Date

8.2 Annexure B – Interview schedule

Good afternoon. How are you doing?

I'd like to start off by saying thank you for participating in my honours research. I appreciate you taking the time to answer some of my questions. My research is centred around exploring the influence of social media sites like Instagram on the 'self', specifically on first year female students. I would like to remind you that your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw yourself and your data at any point if you feel necessary. I would also like to remind you that this interview is being recorded so I can transcribe it later. You and your data will remain confidential and only myself and my supervisor will have access to your data. There are no right or wrong answers but I would like you to answer as truthfully and as fully as you can. If you have any questions or are unsure of something then please feel free to stop me and ask me to clarify for you. With that being said, are you ready for me to ask you some questions regarding your use of Instagram?

1. Do you use Instagram daily?
2. How much time per day would you estimate that you use Instagram?
3. Is your account private or public? Why?
4. What type of content do you typically look at or engage with on Instagram?
5. Which type of people do you mainly follow? (eg., friends, family, celebrities)
6. How often do you post content?
7. Does it matter how often you post?
8. How conscious are you of the number of followers you have?
9. Does it matter who you follow or who follows you?
10. Do you compare your number of followers to that of others?
11. How do you feel when you don't get a lot of likes on a post?
12. What is your main purpose for using Instagram?
13. How seriously do you take Instagram?
14. Do you feel a pressure to be active on Instagram?
15. Do you edit your posts or use filters to look more presentable? Why?
16. Do you accurately portray your true self on Instagram? If not, what do you manipulate?
17. What would you not post on Instagram?

18. Do you care what others on Instagram might think of you?
19. Do you find yourself often comparing yourself, your life and/or your posts to those you see online? Please explain.
20. Do you compare your facial attractiveness to facial attractiveness of your friends, celebrities, or models on their selfies? Please explain.
21. Do you compare your figure to the figure of your friends, celebrities, or models on their selfies? Please explain.
22. How does comparing yourself to others online make you feel?
23. Do you think that Instagram is competitive? Please explain.
24. Do you feel that Instagram affects your relationships? Please explain.
25. Have you ever had a bad experience because of Instagram?
26. Do you think Instagram negatively affects your self-esteem or does it boost it? Please explain your answer.
27. What don't you like about Instagram?
28. What are the positive aspects of Instagram for you?

That concludes the interview. Again, I'd like to thank you for your contribution to my honours research report. I hope the remainder of your day goes well. Goodbye.

8.3 Annexure C – Ethical clearance letter



29 July 2020

Student name: Kelly Ann Shackleton

Student number: 17430979

Campus: IIE's Varsity College Sandton

Re: Approval of Honours in Psychology Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS/PGDIP ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

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

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

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

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

- Please make all the changes suggested/recommended by your supervisor.
- Please wait for an IIE letter approval if you plan to conduct research on an IIE site/staff/students.
- Change "university" to "tertiary institution".

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

We wish you all the best with your research!

GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

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

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

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

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

Supervisor: Dr John Hunter



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC):



JENNA-LEE RAMNARAIN

8.4 Annexure D – Examples of Data Collected

Participant 1 (Tessa Diedrick)

Good afternoon. How are you doing?

I'd like to start off by saying thank you for participating in my honours research. I appreciate you taking the time to answer some of my questions. My research is centred around exploring the influence of social media sites like Instagram on the 'self', specifically on first year female students. I would like to remind you that your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw yourself and your data at any point if you feel necessary. I would also like to remind you that this interview is being recorded so I can transcribe it later. You and your data will remain confidential and only myself and my supervisor will have access to your data. There are no right or wrong answers but I would like you to answer as truthfully and as fully as you can. If you have any questions or are unsure of something then please feel free to stop me and ask me to clarify for you. With that being said, are you ready for me to ask you some questions regarding your use of Instagram?

Yes, I'm ready.

1. Do you use Instagram daily?

Yes I do. I try not to be on it too much, but I use it like twice a day.

2. How much time per day would you estimate that you use Instagram?

Probably about 2 to three hours a day. I try not to go over that.

3. Is your account private or public? Why?

It is definitely a private. I don't enjoy people necessarily looking through my stuff that I don't know. Because I think in the world there's many people that aren't who they are specially on social media because you can hide yourself very well and so I prefer to know who's looking through my stuff.

4. What type of content do you typically look at or engage with on Instagram?

I mainly look at personal content so anything that people post about themselves. I love learning about their families, about where they've gone on

holiday. I also love any sort of quote or inspirational quotes and things like that.

5. Which type of people do you mainly follow? (eg., friends, family, celebrities)

Um friends and family mostly and I don't mind friends of friends if that makes sense. Because then you get to know them the same.

6. How often do you post content?

Maybe once every two months. I don't post too often like now I've been posting a lot on my stories but in terms of actual posts I only do like once every two months. Not too often.

7. Does it matter how often you post?

To me it doesn't no. I feel if I want to post I will post. I don't feel pressurized at all to post and seeing when others post.

8. How conscious are you of the number of followers you have?

I keep an eye on it but I don't.. I'm not like overly obsessed with it so like I know my sister when I first joined, she was like "Tessa you only have ten followers how can you do that? And I was like "Hannah I know those people and as I get to know more people, I will get more followers. I'm not worried about having 1000 followers. If I know my 200 followers, I want to know them I don't want stranger following me either.

9. Does it matter who you follow or who follows you?

um not really to me. I don't mind who follows me as long as I know them or that they are friends of friends. I don't want complete strangers on my account.

10. Do you compare your number of followers to that of others?

I sometimes do just to see more or less where I am. But it's not something that I do often. It's only every now and then that I'll do it. More with friends and people my age.

11. How do you feel when you don't get a lot of likes on a post?

It's obviously very nice to always get likes and comments and something. It doesn't bug me hugely, but I do like to have a few likes and comments. I guess I try not to let it get to me because I feel like it's your picture, you posted it, you like it, it doesn't really matter what other people think but it is always nice to get likes and comments and I did actually pick up that Instagram you get a lot more likes and comments than on Facebook.

12. What is your main purpose for using Instagram?

I enjoy getting to know people so like I've strangely enough met a lot of new people on Instagram where they send me personal messages and through that you form friendships on Instagram which I don't think you would have if you don't have Instagram app. But I also really enjoy just looking at people's content and seeing how their families are doing and seeing what's going on in their lives right now because I think you drift away from people especially when you leave school so you don't necessarily have contact with a lot of the people you used to so it's nice to see how they are getting on with their lives

13. How seriously do you take Instagram?

I don't take Instagram extremely seriously. I think you've got to really be careful when looking through Instagram because I don't really think people post who they truly are on Instagram and obviously they're not going to post their bad days or when they are upset, they're only going to post when they are happy and when they're looking great so I don't take it too seriously but it's a nice thing to do to relax and just look through it.

14. Do you feel a pressure to be active on Instagram?

No. Not at all.

15. Do you edit your posts or use filters to look more presentable? Why?

I sometimes use Snapchat filters, but I don't really edit my posts. I think the Snapchat filters I just like how they make my pictures look lighter or they bring a bit of fun into them like if say you use the dog filter, I think it just brings a bit of fun into it. Um I don't always use filters though because I really.. you must

look the way you are. You don't want to now look completely different. Because I know so many people on Instagram that post and then you see them in person, and they are the complete opposite and I don't necessarily want that to be me.

16. Do you accurately portray your true self on Instagram? If not, what do you manipulate?

I think I do mostly because I'm usually, especially now during lockdown, I've posted a lot of my family and I generally am very close to my family, so I post a lot of pictures of them which does portray me accurately. I guess people can't see if you're an introvert or extrovert based off Instagram. So, I've had it a lot of times where people will see my posts and they're like 'you're extroverted' and I'm like "no I'm actually introverted" but you won't necessarily get that from a picture. And also, your age. I've had a lot of people that have contacted me because they thought I was older than what I was.

17. What would you not post on Instagram?

I think. I don't know what actually I wouldn't post. I think I would post anything I feel comfortable with posting and I obviously wouldn't post anything... I don't know I wouldn't post too much information about myself on Instagram if that makes sense. So like I wouldn't post "I live at this address..." because I don't necessarily want all my Instagram followers knowing exactly where I live and I don't really post my day to day whereabouts and exactly what I do each day because I don't think that's necessary. People don't need to know that but obviously if you're talking to someone on like whatsapp then there you can talk about it but I don't post that socially.

18. Do you care what others on Instagram might think of you?

Not really. I don't enjoy people um.. like I had a guy recently and he told me that he wants to talk to me because he thinks I'm really cute and I was like you don't know me, you've looked at my Instagram profile and you think I'm really cute. You don't know me so that sort of thing I don't really enjoy but otherwise I'm not too worried about what other people might think of me. I mean that's their own opinions and they can think what they want.

19. Do you find yourself often comparing yourself, your life and/or your posts to those you see online? Please explain.

I think everybody compares themselves at one point in time, but I try not to because I've got a big thing about comparing yourselves because I don't believe you should be comparing yourselves to other people. You all are individuals you all are so different you can't go "of because they did that why can't I do that" so I don't compare myself no.

20. Do you compare your facial attractiveness to facial attractiveness of your friends, celebrities, or models on their selfies? Please explain.

Not really no. no I don't at all actually. You know what, we're all unique and same point as before, we all look different, we're all meant to look different and if we all looked the same we would be clones so what would be the point. We're all meant to look different. So No.

21. Do you compare your figure to the figure of your friends, celebrities, or models on their selfies? Please explain.

I do sometimes wish I was taller so from that perspective I do think I'm short even though I'm not really short but I think I'm short but other than that no.

22. How does comparing yourself to others online make you feel?

I think it would give you an unrealistic expectation of who you're wanting to be because it's not possible for you to look that way necessarily and I think it would almost put you down if I did do it because you're wanting to change yourself but that is who you are and you shouldn't want to change yourself. You should accept who you are and so ya.

23. Do you think that Instagram is competitive? Please explain.

I think it can become very competitive because like you can see that that person has that follower or whatever and you don't have them. Personally for me its not competitive um but I definitely think it can be become very competitive because like if you see.. I've seen so many girls where one girl in

the group takes a picture in a costume and now the rest all want to take a photo in their costume so yes I think it can become very competitive.

24. Do you feel that Instagram affects your relationships? Please explain.

I think it definitely can um.. I think for family no because most of my family isn't really on Instagram except for my sister and I think friends it can create jealousy. I have seen that being done before especially with my older friends I've found that if you post this they become jealous of that because they weren't included or something like that and I think that can create jealousy. I also think in terms of a romantic perspective I think like I was dating someone in lockdown but they got very cross if I posted a thing about like my other friend who is a male and that becomes an issue even though it shouldn't be and I shared my friend's art page and my boyfriend became very jealous and he was like "why are you doing that" so from that perspective yes I think it can hurt your relationships.

25. Have you ever had a bad experience because of Instagram?

Besides that one not really no. I haven't really been on Instagram for very long.

26. Do you think Instagram negatively affects your self-esteem or does it boost it? Please explain your answer.

I think it can be both personally. I think it can boost your self-esteem when you're getting likes and comments and people are like "wow" You're looking stunning etc. But I think it can negatively affect your self-esteem if you obviously are not getting likes and stuff because I think it's become the norm that you need to get likes which it shouldn't be.

27. What don't you like about Instagram?

I think Instagram can become very distracting. So, like I've gotten so caught up on Instagram quite a few times where you're so busy looking at other people's stuff you don't realise you're supposed to be doing your work because you've gotten distracted by it. I think it also creates unrealistic

expectations of people and people show they're living their life and they're awesome and they're doing well and, in the meantime, they actually are not doing well at all. So, it creates almost false views of people.

28. What are the positive aspects of Instagram for you?

I've loved meeting new people. So, I generally I'm very cautious of people because there are a lot of creeps out there but like I've recently met like ten new people and we're actually starting to form friendships which is really nice and its just a way to meet them. I also really enjoy seeing my friends' families and I find it enjoyable seeing them happy and living their lives.

That concludes the interview. Again, I'd like to thank you for your contribution to my honours research report. I hope the remainder of your day goes well. Goodbye.

Annexure E: Final Research Report Summary Document

TITLE: Exploring the influence of Instagram on the self: A qualitative study on first year female university students, using in-depth interviews.

Research Purpose/Objective	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/Sources	Literature Review-Conceptual Framework	Paradigm	Approach	Data Collection Method	Ethics	Key Findings	Recommendations
This research aims to determine the effects, both positive and negative, of Instagram on female students' 'self' as well as to determine what motivates these young women to use the app and whether they are consciously aware of the negative effects that it has on their psychological well-being.	What is the impact of Instagram on the self?	Relevance to me involves me being a female student who has experienced the negative effects of social media on my self-esteem. Academic relevance concerns the well-being of these students are effected by the effects of Instagram	Apodaca (2017) Caffrey (2017) Dion (2016) Festinger (1954) Taylor (2011)	Theme 1 The 'self'. Theme 2 Perception and presentation of the self online. Theme 3 Motives for posting online Theme 4 Well-being	Paradigm Interpretivism Epistemology Something is seen as knowledge when it feels right to those being studied. Ontology This paradigm posits that reality is fluid and subjective and is created by human interaction Axiology	This research is qualitative in nature as it seeks to examine the subjective experiences of these female students and their use with Instagram and its effect on the self. Qualitative research is interested in describing these realities in detail from the perspective of the participants.	In-depth interviews	This research will seek to avoid harming the participants involved, the researcher as well as the academic institution involved. This will be done through receiving informed consent, data will remain confidential and anonymous, no incentives will be used, data will not be fabricated or falsified, bias will be completely removed from	Female students view Instagram more positively than negatively. These individuals are able to distinguish the positive and negative aspects of the app. Instagram boosts self-esteem through positive feedback. These students felt as if they accurately portray their true selves on Instagram.	A major limitation of the study was the sample size which means that this study did not reach data saturation. In order to gain a more accurate reflection of the influence of Instagram on the 'self', a larger sample size and study would need to be made.
Research Problem	Secondary Questions/Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories			Population	Data Analysis Methods			

Instagram is consciously or unconsciously impacting how the individual 'self' is understood and developed.	To describe the concept of 'the self'. To describe the relationship between the active use of social media and the impact on the self and self-development. To explore the motivations that drive young women to engage with social networking sites like Instagram. To explore the negative effect of social media on the self and its components. To explore the positive effect of social media on the self and its components.	Instagram The self Self-concept	Uses and gratification Theory by Elihu (1970) Self-discrepancy theory by Higgins (1987)		Within this paradigm, value is placed on the complex understanding of unique realities.	The population parameters and units of analysis for this study include approximately five female first year university students aged between 18-21 who actively engage with Instagram.	Thematic analysis	the entire process.		
						Sampling		Limitations	Key Contribution	
						Non-probability. Purposive sampling. 5 participants.		Sample size only consists of 5 participants from a single university and therefore cannot be generalised to the broader population. COVID-19 pandemic forcing research to be done telephonically.	Measuring identity expressive motives helps better understand why young women use Instagram, how use of Instagram influences development of the 'self' and overall effect that Instagram has on their well-being.	