A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF YOUNG ADULTS’ EXPERIENCES OF FACEBOOK

By

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DECLARATION:

In accordance with Rule G4.6.3,

4.6.3 A treatise/dissertation/thesis must be accompanied by a written declaration on the part of the candidate to the effect that it is his/her own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment to another University or for another qualification. However, material from publications by the candidate may be embodied in a treatise/dissertation/thesis.

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Completing a task like this is accompanied by a variety of feelings. The main one being the relief I feel finally being able to complete this treatise. Closely following the relief is the deep sense of gratitude I feel towards the people who were involved in helping me complete this task. I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to:

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SNS  Social Networking Sites
ARPA  Advanced Research Projects Agency
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Abstract

Social networking sites are a recent phenomenon and have experienced tremendous growth in popularity especially among young people. Social networking sites are changing the way individuals communicate with each other and the world. Social networking sites (SNS) provide users with a unique computer-mediated environment where individuals are able to disclose their thoughts, feelings, and experiences within their own social network. The present study aims to explore the experiences of young adults regarding Facebook. A transcendental phenomenological approach was used to elicit the essence of the experiences of the participants. Theoretical sampling ensured relevant participants were selected through haphazard sampling procedures. Data was collected through the use of biographical questionnaires and individual, semi-structured interviews. The data was processed according to the four phenomenological principles epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis using Tesch’s eight steps. Lincoln and Guba’s model was used to assess the trustworthiness of the data obtained. The participants described their experiences of Facebook by highlighting how they use Facebook as a communication tool which assists them in their relationship maintenance with others. Participants use self-presentation on Facebook to manage how they are perceived. The participants experience Facebook as having many privacy risks. They indicated that Facebook has addictive qualities and facilitates cyber stalking behaviour.

Key concepts: experiences, Facebook, social networking sites, transcendental phenomenology, young adults
Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

This chapter discusses the motivation for the present study. Through understanding the motivation to investigate this phenomenon, the aim of the study is clarified as a research objective. Social networking sites (SNS) constitute an important research area for scholars interested in online technologies and their social impacts. One of the largest social networking sites is Facebook, originally created in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. Social networking sites such as Facebook have attracted millions of users, many of whom use several of these sites in their daily lives (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Researchers from diverse fields have studied the application, implications and practices of SNS. There has been remarkable growth and increased popularity of social networking sites amongst individuals of all ages, thus highlighting the need for academic study of the phenomenon (Joinson, 2003).

We stumble toward a new technological era made possible by the emerging technologies of computer, video, telephone, and high-quality sound. Alas, the stumbling is not guided by any understanding of the nature of interaction. Instead, it is more like the tale describing the groping of those legendary blind men touching an elephant…. We need to view each of our activities in a larger framework. (Norman, 1993, p. xii-xiv)

Our understanding of social networking sites and their interaction with individuals is still very limited. Psychology lacks a theoretical framework from which to view all online behavior, therefore this study aims to contribute to what is currently known about this field.

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1 Please note that all references to boyd will be in lower case as the author has legally changed her name and surname to be written all in lower case.
Rationale

South Africa has experienced tremendous advancement in technology in the past years and thus the need for exploratory research in this context has arisen. The use of social networking sites is a very dynamic social phenomenon. There is a considerable body of research that has examined the experiences of adolescents’ use of online social networking. The current study will set out to build upon this body of knowledge by focusing on the experiences of young adult Facebook users, rather than adolescent users.

Little is known about the impact of these social networking sites on young adults in South Africa. A growing body of international literature has investigated different aspects of Facebook ranging from its capacity to assist in social capital formation, impression and identity management, privacy concerns, the expression of self and personality and online addiction (boyd & Ellison, 2008).

There seems to be a lack of reliable statistical data indicating how many individuals use SNS in general, but Facebook is one of the most popular networking sites and has become an integral part of individuals’ social interactions. The Facebook site has grown rapidly and currently has more than one billion users.

William Gibson (1984) coined the fictional term cyberspace. However, the nonfictional term relates to a socially perceived place where individuals can access information and communicate with each other through diverse technologies, and can be seen as both a context and a medium for social interaction. Social networking sites are often perceived as offering its users the ideal setting through which to present their ‘hoped-for possible selves’. Therefore it is of particular importance to seek to understand how the self is presented on social networking sites and how it contributes to interpersonal experiences.
Self-reflection

The Internet presents several conceptual and theoretical challenges for researchers from a variety of fields, including but not limited to psychology, sociology, communication studies and information technology. Each of these fields have attempted to study different aspects of the internet and its impact on individuals. These researchers often use diverging conceptual and theoretical frameworks, thus contributing to the immense expanse of different approaches to studying the interaction between individuals and new media, such as Facebook. While reading literature about SNS the present researcher soon became aware of the abundance of theories which could be applicable to a study of Facebook, which contributed to a sense of confusion as to which of these theories or approaches to apply to a study of young adults’ experiences of Facebook. It was with this feeling of confusion that the present researcher chose to not apply any one specific theory to this study, but to rather use a transcendental phenomenological approach. In doing so the researcher experienced greater freedom when reviewing relevant literature and collecting data from participants.

One of the main challenges the researcher encountered was the lack of a psychological over-arching framework from which to understand the interaction between social networking sites and individuals’ experiences of it. As mentioned above, much has been written about SNS within other scholarly fields, and the researcher found it very challenging to only focus on studies done from a psychological perspective, therefore this study does at times mention theories which stem from fields other than psychology, such as sociology. To guide the understanding of available literature about SNS the researcher chose to use the Self as a basis from which to examine the interaction between Facebook and young adults.
**Objective**

Against this background, this study will aim to explore and describe the experiences of young adults regarding Facebook. This will be done through semi-structured individual interviews with participants.

**Research Methodology Overview**

To reach the goals set out for the study, a qualitative approach will be utilised. Transcendental phenomenology was chosen as the appropriate methodology for this research as the researcher is searching for an understanding of the meaning of these participants’ experiences. Additionally, the procedures and detailed data analysis steps as outlined by Moustakas (1994) are ideal for this exploratory research. The researcher will apply the four phenomenological processes as discussed in the methodology chapter namely, epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis of meaning to provide a detailed description of the participants’ experiences of Facebook. The data obtained will be subjected to thematic content analysis using Tesch’s (1990) model. Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) model will be used to assess the trustworthiness of the data obtained.

**Conclusion**

Chapter One provided an overview of the focus of the study as well as the methodology used to actualise the researcher’s goals. Chapter Two provides a conceptual and scholarly context for the present study. Chapter Three reviews the methodology applied within the study. Chapter Four provides the findings and discussion of the study’s findings. Chapter Five summarizes the study and highlights important outcomes pertaining to the findings of the research. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations and recommendations for future study.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

Introduction

The Internet as a tool for communication has revolutionized the way individuals all over the world communicate with each other. The Internet allows for simultaneous communication between millions of individuals in a variety of ways (McCown, Fischer, Page & Homant, 2001). It is easier today to be connected to one another than ever before in history. Mobile phones, the Internet, email, instant messaging and various other forms of social media such as Facebook and blogs have become part of everyday life (Dodge & Kitchin, 2005). A need to study these new media communication tools from a psychological perspective has become evident. This chapter provides a conceptual and scholarly context for the present study.

Origins and Growth of the Internet

The Internet was created in the 1960s by the U.S. Defense Department’s Agency Research Projects Administration (ARPA) (Wharf, 2013). It allowed communication between computers in the case of a nuclear attack. Several young computer scientists were employed by the ARPA and developed a digitized network. The first nucleus of what would later become ARPANET linked universities such as UCLA, the University of California at Santa Barbara, Stanford and the University of Utah. Although this network was originally created with military goals in mind, Ray Tomlinson adapted computer messages for civilian use in 1972, thus inventing email (Murphy, 2002). The American National Science Foundation controlled the Internet from 1984 to 1995 in order to connect academic supercomputers. The Internet was privatized by an association of telecommunication corporations in the 1990s.
Tim Berners-Lee, often called the ‘father of the World Wide Web’ contributed greatly to the simplification of Internet use in the 1990s (Warf, 2013). This led to the development of private web browsers such as Internet Explorer, Firefox and Netscape. Websites developed rapidly with the numbers reaching the 4 billion mark in 2011 (Warf, 2013). The Internet’s ability to continually grow is one of its most prominent features, with millions of users around the planet adopting this new technology. Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East has experienced exponential growth in Internet usage, showing more than 10,000% growth rate between 2000 and 2011. The Internet used to be largely used by those in developed countries, but more recently it has penetrated into developing countries (Warf, 2013).

**The Digital Divide**

Howard, Busch and Sheets (2010, p.111) stated that “The cause and consequences of the digital divide have become a contested area of research. Understanding the digital divide is crucial to understanding the role of the Internet in contemporary social development.” Evidently Internet usage differs from country to country. Warf (2013) describes the digital divide as a phenomenon that is ever changing, complicated and has multiple dimensions, which in turn points to various ways in which social inequalities are manifested in cyberspace. The issue at hand revolves around the question of who has access and can use the Internet and who does not. An individual’s income and education as well as age is correlated with Internet access and use, with older adults being less likely to engage in online activities. Geographical location plays a huge role in the digital divide, with urban areas having more access to the Internet than rural areas (Mills & Whitacre, 2003). Owning a personal computer is beyond the reach of most individuals in developing countries, and Internet Service Provider (ISP) access charges are often high. Many users make use of privately-owned Internet cafés. However it is important to note that the Internet accentuates
the divide between the wealthy and the poor, as much as the expectation exists that the digital divide will become smaller as Internet growth rates improve access for many previously relegated users.

According to Warf (2013), it would appear as if the ‘information highway’ has generally evaded the African continent and as a consequence Africa is the least connected in the world. Warf (2013, p.37) states that “Hobbled by widespread poverty, economic stagnation, illiteracy, an inadequate telecommunication infrastructure, often unreliable electrical systems, lack of technical skills, and frequently indifferent governments, Africa was late to join the digital revolution…” Despite this, Internet penetration in Africa is growing rapidly. South Africa has always been the leader of the information revolution in Africa. The enormous growth rates in some African countries would indicate that Internet usage statistics will soon be outdated (Warf, 2013).

**Elements of Online Communication**

Interpersonal communication is vital for the survival of relationships (Littlejohn, 1999; Nelson-Jones, 1989). Communication is an important skill that facilitates connection with the outside world, without which social functioning would be impossible (Cherry, 1966; Huebsch, 1995). A fundamental aspect in the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships is regular communication (Argyle & Henderson, 1985). It is advantageous to have relationships, such as marriage, a supportive social network and many friends, as it encourages greater happiness, better physical and mental health, as well as longevity (Argyle & Henderson, 1985). Communication is an interactive and dynamic process. The different elements affect each other in a series of exchanges and each time an interaction occurs something new is produced or created (Hanneman & McEwen, 1975). Online communication is different from offline communication in that it allows real time
communication to take place, regardless of the geographical location of the sender or receiver.

Facebook offers a wide variety of communication channels to their users, including a chat application for instant messaging, an individual profile for blogging and the option to share their thoughts on the public newsfeed, gaming applications, and a private messages service between ‘friends’ similar to email. Online SNS communication can be seen as being asynchronous, with individuals replying to messages when they receive a notification from Facebook or whenever they next log onto their profiles. Even in the instances of individuals being involved in instant chat through Facebook, each individual has the time to reflect on and think about what to say. The Internet is very versatile as text messages, images, sound and video can be sent, thus relying on transmission of digitized information. Software is used to encode, send and decode the electronic data being sent (Suler, 2005). While offline communication includes non-verbal cues, online communication mostly relies on only verbal cues limited to text (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). However individuals have created ways to communicate non-verbal cues such as affect by using signs and symbols representing emotions. Suler (2005) warns that the expressive potential of text communication should not be underestimated.

Social Networking Sites

The introduction of social networking sites (SNS) such as MySpace, Friendster and Facebook have attracted millions of users, many of whom use one or more of these sites on a daily basis (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Social networking sites came into being during the Web 2.0 era, as did applications such as blogging, podcasting and wikis (Xu, Ouyang, & Chu, 2009). Although consensus does not exist regarding the definition of Web 2.0, it can broadly be defined as the second generation of web-based platforms which consist of applications that
specifically assist in online collaboration and content generation by the Internet user (boyd & Ellison, 2008). With the help of Web 2.0 applications individuals started to actively contribute to the internet by creating and uploading text, audio, photos and videos. Many scholars from a wide variety of different fields have studied SNS in an attempt to understand their application, implications and practices. boyd and Ellison (2008) define social networking sites as follows:

...web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site (p.211).

According to Lenhart, Lewis and Rainie (2001) social networking websites are sites where users can create a profile and connect that profile to others to form an explicit personal network. Typically, users register via email and in return for advertising display are provided free online space and web publishing tools. Social networking sites are distinctive in that they allow individuals to publicly display their social networks. Although exceptions exist, research indicates that individuals are not necessarily looking to meet new individuals through social networking sites but rather to connect and communicate with individuals they already know offline and who form part of their extended social network (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Facebook is therefore used to maintain and enhance existing offline relationships (Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe, 2007). It is for this reason that the use of SNS has become part of everyday life. Once users join a social networking site they are asked to identify other individuals with whom they have a connection. These connections are called different things on different sites for example, ‘Friends’, ‘Followers’, ‘Contacts’ and ‘Fans’. The expression ‘friends’ in a social networking site context does not necessarily indicate friendship in the
usual way, but rather indicates links or connections between individuals and offers the users an imagined audience which helps guide their online behaviour (boyd d., 2006a). Offline a friend is someone with whom you share a mutually affectionate relationship, usually exclusive of sexual or family relationships. However an individual’s ‘friends’ on social networking sites could possibly include friends, friend-of-friends, family, colleagues, employers and acquaintances.

According to boyd and Ellison (2008) the first social networking site was SixDegrees.com which launched in 1997 and was based on the idea that everybody is linked with everybody else via six degrees of separation. Over the past few years there has been a tremendous growth and rise in popularity of social networking sites across all age ranges (Joinson, 2003). There are hundreds of social networking sites each with differing capabilities, various interests and practices. Some attract individuals based on shared interest and others based on shared identities such as race, sexuality, religion or nationality (boyd & Ellison, 2008).

At present there is a lack of reliable statistics to indicate how many individuals use SNS. SNS have brought about a shift in how online communities are organised as they tend to focus more on individuals rather than shared interests (boyd & Ellison, 2008). This aligns more with offline unmediated social networks, as Wellman (1988) states, “the world is composed of networks, not groups” (p.37). boyd (2008) describes SNS as ‘networked publics’ which encourages individuals to socialize and gather with their friends, similar to unmediated public spaces. Researchers have employed a wide variety of methodologies when studying issues related to SNS, all of which contribute to the growing body of knowledge regarding computer-mediated communication (CMC). In the next section the researcher will review research that is directly concerned with SNS and more specifically Facebook, which in turn will set the stage for the present study.
Facebook Overview

The focus of this study is the social networking site Facebook which is one of the most popular networking sites among university students and has become part of individuals’ social interactions. Facebook was originally created in 2004 for Harvard university students only. In order to join Facebook users needed to have a Harvard.edu email address. It quickly grew to accommodate other universities and in September 2006 expanded to include high school students, professionals in corporate networks and then eventually became open to everyone (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Facebook's mission is to make the world more open and connected. Among a variety of elements, profile users of Facebook can create personalised profiles, post messages on ‘friends’ ‘walls’, post and tag pictures and video, music files and add links to their favourite websites. Additionally, users may simultaneously communicate via instant messaging or send email. Facebook users have the option of allowing anyone access to their profile or of limiting the number of virtual ‘friends’ to a close peer group.

The Facebook site expanded very quickly and currently has more than one billion users. Time spent on Facebook increased by 566% from 2007 to 2008 (Neilson, 2009). Research shows that individuals between18-24 make up 18% of MySpace users and 34% of Facebook while those between the ages of 35-54 account for approximately 41% of MySpace and 34% of Facebook users (Comscore, 2006). According to the website socialbakers.com (2013) there are 5 534 160 South African Facebook users. The website mybroadband.com (Mybroadband.com, 2011) suggests that South African Facebook users are typically aged between 18 and 44 with 49% male and 51% female users in September 2012. Although individuals of all ages use social networking sites, young individuals still comprise one of the largest Internet populations (Ellison et al., 2007). This has led to a sharp decrease in the more traditional media pursuits such as television viewing among this demographic (Lenhart et al., 2001).
The Self in Sociology and Psychology

The self and identity have been important concepts in the field of social psychology since the first part of the 19th century (Cook, Fine, & House, 1995). Scholars who examine human lives and experiences often view issues of the self and identity as significant when explaining human behaviour. The current mediated world challenges assumptions about the self. It is important to understand how mediated communication shapes the experience of self in an online setting (Miller, 2011). The potential for exploring the ever-changing dimensions of the self-social world relationship is immense. For the purpose of this study the self and its impact on online social networking behaviour will be explored.

In recent years the self has gained prominence in research studies conducted by personality theorists, social theorists and psychotherapists. “This continuing fascination with the self-concept is easy to understand: what we think about ourselves is probably the central concept in our conscious lives” (Fleming & Watts, 1980, p. 921). A significant amount of disagreement exists around the definition of the self. The self is often used interchangeably with words such as body image, body concept, self-concept, self-esteem, self-image, ego and identity, therefore causing a considerable amount of confusion. William James (1890) was amongst the first to propose that the self comprises of not one but two parts. He proposed that the self consisted of the ‘I’ (private self) and the ‘Me’ (public self). Therefore the self can be seen as both a subject and an object, which can be reflected on. According to James the fundamental characteristic of the self the ‘I’ did not change, what changes is the ‘Me’, the part of the self that interacts with and is perceived by others. It can be said that interpersonal experiences impact upon what an individual knows about the self (Shaffer, 1994).

It is of great importance to acknowledge the interactions of the self with others especially in light of the present research study. Individuals often describe themselves in terms of their relationships or the social roles they fulfil. Individuals acquire self-knowledge through social
interactions with others and always have social identities as group members (Baumeister & Twenge, 2003). Individuals can construct personal identities through interaction with others in the on-line context. Therefore it is of great importance that one considers the self-social world interactions and the implications for one’s self when studying the Facebook experiences of individuals.

**Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem and self-concept may often be seen as synonymous and need to be clearly defined. Self-esteem is generally considered as the evaluative component of self-concept (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). Literature provides a range of definitions of self-esteem. According to Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem is a “favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the self” (p.15). Taylor, Peplau and Sears (2006) state that the level of attention, acceptance and respect that the person receives from others plays a role in self-esteem development. Mruk (1999) suggests that self-esteem is affected by how one is treated in various areas of life; being accepted and treated well could lead to a higher self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to an “individual’s evaluations of their own self-worth, that is, the extent to which they view themselves as good, competent and decent” (Aronson, Wilson, Akert & Fehr, 2001, p. 19). Self-esteem is a crucial aspect of the self-concept (Cast & Burke, 2002). Another extensively used definition of self-esteem states the following:

Self-esteem can be described as the evaluation that the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself [sic]; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself [sic] to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy (Coopersmith, 1967, p. 4).
Battle (1981) defines self-esteem as follows:

> Self-esteem refers to the perception the individual possesses of his [sic] own worth. An individual’s perception of self develops gradually and becomes more differentiated as he [sic] matures and interacts with significant others. Perception of self-worth, once established, tends to be fairly stable and resistant to change. (p. 14).

It can be hypothesized that individuals with high self-esteem aspire to enhance it and individuals with low self-esteem wish to compensate for it and be accepted (Tice, 1993). Joinson (2003) suggests that Internet users would like to look popular online, whether they have high or low self-esteem. Low self-esteem can be related to being more self-protective and guarded online (Joinson, 2003). Self-esteem also plays a role in choices between self-enhancement and self-protection. Therefore self-esteem can ultimately be linked to self-presentation patterns (Baumeister, Hutton & Tice, 1989). It is possible that the Internet allows some users to express parts of their identity which may be difficult for them to articulate offline (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002). The self-esteem of an individual plays a vital role in Facebook behaviour and the interpretation of online social interactions.

**The Development of the Self-Concept**

Sociologists Charles Cooley (1902) and George Herbert Mead (1934) proposed that an individual’s self-concept developed from social interactions and therefore will be subject to change. The ‘Looking-Glass Self’ created by Cooley in 1902 is a social psychological concept suggesting that an individual’s self grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others. The term refers to individuals shaping their self-concepts based on their understanding of how others perceive them. Cooley’s view was that subjectively interpreted feedback from social interactions plays a vital role in informing the individual about the self (Cooley, 1902).
According to Scheibe (1985) Cooley’s work may be less well known than that of Mead or James within the field of psychology due to the fact that it was assimilated into the symbolic interactionist tradition in sociology. Cooley used the metaphor of a person standing in front of a mirror and seeing his or her reflection, in explaining the development of the social self. “Each to each a looking glass, reflects the other that doth pass” (Cooley, 1902, p. 152).

According to Burns (1979) Cooley’s concept of the self basically refers to the process of self-awareness or reflexivity. He went on to propose that self-monitoring is only the first step of a dynamic three step social and psychological process. “A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification” (Cooley, 1902, p. 184). Firstly, Cooley claimed that the actors gain understanding about themselves through the use of their imagination to reflect on social interactions. They imagine themselves as others may see them, thus bringing in the metaphor of the mirror image reflected back to them. Secondly, he stated that the actors imagine how others evaluate their performances. Thirdly, the actor experiences an emotional reaction to how they imagine others evaluate them. William James had first highlighted the significance of feelings toward the self, but his ideas about how actors come to ‘feel’ the self were advanced by Cooley. If they imagine others to have positively evaluated them, they may experience a positive emotion such as pride, but if the others’ opinion of them is negative, the actors may experience a sense of shame or embarrassment.

Identity therefore refers to the several connotations attached to oneself by the self and others. In the ‘looking-glass self’ a person views himself or herself through others' perceptions in society and in turn gains identity. Identity, or the self, is the result of the process in which one learns to see one’s self as others do (Scheff, 1988). According to social comparison theory information about oneself is often only valuable in comparison to others.
The reflected appraisals model posits that individuals discover what others think of them through social interactions and then internalize these opinions and in turn incorporate them into their self-view (Baumeister & Twenge, 2003). Reflected appraisal theory is rooted in symbolic interactionism for example Mead (1934) and it suggests that most of what individuals know about themselves is as a result of social interactions. This process of self-appraisal is often closely linked to Cooley’s looking-glass self (Baumeister & Twenge, 2003). From the above discussion it is clear that the self emerges through the process of social interaction.

**Self-Presentation**

Psychologists are probably more acquainted with Goffman’s (1959) work than with Cooley’s, since the concept of impression management forms part of social psychology and much research exists in this area (Thoits, 1995). Cooley’s idea of the ‘looking-glass self ‘can be viewed as the foundation of all of Erving Goffman’s earlier writings. Goffman focused on what he called *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Goffman (1959, p.13) points out that:

> When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude towards them, his competence, his trustworthiness, etc. Although some of this information seems to be sought almost as an end in itself, there are usually quite practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him.
Goffman had a dramaturgical approach and viewed actors as being concerned about their impressions in the eyes of other individuals just as Cooley had, and his depictions of embarrassment could be aligned with Cooley’s views on shame. However Goffman transcended Cooley’s descriptions of how actors could control the impressions of others. To him all actions are social performances, aimed not only at achieving its specific inherent purpose, but to also give off and maintain desired impressions of the self to others. He conceptualized the presentation of self in everyday day life as an ongoing process of information management and an integral part of the socialisation process.

Goffman clearly distinguished between the expressions one gives and the expressions given off. The expressions one gives is intentional verbal communication, explicitly offering details about one’s self and the expressions given off are presumably unintentional and not concretely communicated, but does contribute toward communication information about the person expressing it. When there is congruence between these two expressions communication symmetry occurs, when these two expressions do not provide the same information asymmetry occurs.

According to Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation, individuals attempt to manage the impressions others have of them through impression motivation and impression construction. Individuals have the ability to manipulate the expressions they give to a greater extent than the expression they give off, which then allows for a daily ‘information game’ to take place. Goffman referred to this game as a ‘performance’. A SNS such as Facebook provides the perfect space for this kind of information game, as users have immense control over what information they disclose.

The need for maintaining the coherence of the self as a psychic process is so powerful that Goffman saw the interaction order itself as arising to meet this need. Every encounter is risky, in that disruptive signification [sic] can occur intentionally or
accidentally. The rules of the interaction order arise to minimize the risk of damage to
the coherence of the self, and thereby to minimize the risk of the bodily felt emotional
pain that such damage can induce. The interaction order thus protects the individual’s
sanity and, by extension, his or her utility as a safe and effective interactant. When
the interaction order is disrupted, both selves and society are at stake... (Schwalbe,

Goffman spoke about individuals as actors giving performances in an attempt to manage
impressions others had of them, by selecting their words, actions and even the physical
staging of their performances. They give these performances to convey an identity, which is
referred to as face (Goffman, 1967)

**Constructing the self through impression management on social networking sites**

The Internet has not created a new motivation for self-presentation, but provides new tools
to implement such motives. Social networking sites can be seen as providing a new way to
access the self as an object by providing multiple opportunities for selective self-presentation.
Gonzales and Hancock (2011) propose that psychology can benefit from theoretical
development in order to further develop previous ‘offline’ theories by integrating an
understanding how media may change social processes.

In general the self participates in social life through self-presentation and is defined as the
attempts an individual makes to carry over information about the self. Self-presentation is a
continuous concern for all individuals in all areas of their lives, including their on-line
interactions. SNS offer an interesting context for researchers to examine online presentation
of self and impression management. While Facebook encourages its users to provide truthful
information about themselves when creating their profiles, SNS offers the perfect setting for
an individual to participate in self-presentational behaviour such as impression management
as they are highly controlled environments (Mehdizadeh, 2010). It is clear that individuals want to present themselves in a favourable manner, but it is often a fine line between favourability and believability. Facebook offers a ‘nonymous’ (that’s the opposite of anonymous) online setting and relationships are often carried over from off-line interactions, therefore there are definite limitations to the identity claims an individual can make. However, Facebook still offers the ideal space for the ‘hoped-for possible self’ to be expressed. This indicates the realistic socially desirable self a person may try to establish (Mehdizadeh, 2010). A person’s Facebook profile consists of many self-generated identity markers which includes, but is not limited to, what they write about themselves on their profile, photographs, selected contributions to the social newsfeed and the interests they express by joining Facebook groups or posting links. What makes Facebook different to offline self-presentation is the possibility of friends-generated (information ‘friends’ post to an individual’s profile) and system-generated markers (for example, number of Facebook ‘friends’) contributing to the impression others form of the individual. The extent to which an individual is concerned with how others perceive them is very likely to determine what information they choose to share on their Facebook profile (Zwier, Araujo, Boukes & Willemsen, 2011).

Self-esteem can be directly linked to self-presentational patterns. Individuals who have high self-esteem are more likely to want approval from their social group and tend to use an acquisitive self-presentation style. The self-protective presentation style is linked to low self-esteem and attempting to minimize social disapproval. Impression management plays an important role in interpersonal behaviour. The degree to which an individual is motivated to control how others see them is called impression motivation. Impression construction involves the kinds of impressions individuals try to construct of themselves (Baumeister & Twenge, 2003).
While identity formation in anonymous, online environments has been the focus of research for the past decade, more recently, the focus has shifted to self-presentation on social networking Web sites (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Research suggests that users of SNS engage in self-presentation behaviours to influence the impressions others form of them both face-to-face and in computer-mediated environments (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). Friendship links, or ‘public displays of connection,’ are significant aspects of self-presentation on SNS (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Individuals may use the Internet as a means through which they express their true selves, possibly more than in face-to-face interactions (Bargh et al., 2002). For this reason one should consider that some individuals may not be engaging in impression management, but rather are able to express themselves to a greater extent on Facebook.

Young adults are the most enthusiastic online reputation managers. Forty four percent of young adults limit the quantity of personal information accessible about them, 47% of young adults have previously deleted unwanted comments others have posted on their profiles, and 41% have removed their names from photos posted by others (Madden & Smith, 2010).

**Online Interpersonal relationships**

There appears to be a lack of research into the experience of being Facebook ‘friends’ with family members and parents. West, Lewis and Currie (2009) found that there are a number of reasons why parents were rarely welcomed as Facebook friends. Embarrassment, social norms, worries about exposure, vulnerability and privacy all seemed related to why Facebook ‘friend’ invitations from older adults and particularly parents were not received well.

According to Lenhart, Madden and Hitlin (2005) SNS have changed the way students perceive themselves and others as well as how they communicate with each other, because SNS have become ingrained in their daily lives. Prior studies have claimed that social-
networking sites are used as a substitute for face-to-face interaction, which in turn results in decreased relationship quality and intimacy among its users (Carlyne & Kujath, 2011). However Carlyne and Kujath (2011) in their study of Facebook and MySpace found that they act as extensions of face-to-face interactions and that some individuals tend to depend more on SNS than on face-to-face interaction. Harwood (1997) suggests that individuals increase their sense of group belonging and social identity by seeking media content that features individuals who look and behave as they do and belong to the same social group. Studies have shown that individuals who do not feel secure or happy in face-to-face interactions sometimes turn to new media such as computer-mediated communication (Ma & Leung, 2005; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Papacharissi (2002) found that SNS were seen as functional alternatives for individuals who did not consider other forms of communication to be rewarding. She speculated that those who find "their offline life communication with friends and family less rewarding could perhaps feel more confident when communicating through their personal home page" (p.350).

Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter and Espinoza (2008) suggested that social reasons emerged as the most important function for using SNS. Furthermore, studies suggest that formation and maintenance of different forms of social capital are one of the main reasons for SNS use (Ellison et al., 2007). According to Bordieu and Wacquant (1992) social capital can be defined as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p.119). Putnam (2000) in his book *Bowling Alone* clearly differentiates between bridging and bonding social capital. Bridging social capital refers to weak associations between persons that are based on information-sharing rather than emotional support. These kinds of associations or ‘weak ties’ offer benefits such as access to the knowledge base of a wide range of heterogeneous individuals that make up the social
network (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). On the other hand, bonding social capital point towards ‘strong ties’ typically between family members and close friends (Putnam, 2000). Therefore it can be argued that SNS assist individuals in maintaining closer relationships with a larger number of individuals than was possible before (Donath & boyd, 2004).

Research on traditional social networks states that an individual can generally maintain close relationships with 10-20 individuals and around 150 social relationships (Parks, 2007). Therefore, SNS do not operate as communities in the conventional sense, because they do not include membership, shared influence, and an equal power allocation. They can however be understood as networked individualism (Reich, 2010). Research conducted by Ellison et al. (2007) on a sample of undergraduate students confirms that maintaining bridging social capital by means of participation in SNS showed to be advantageous for students with regards to potential employment prospects and it also assisted them in maintaining connections with old friends. The advantage of bridging social capital formed through participation in SNS seemed to be mostly advantageous for persons with low self-esteem (Steinfeld, Ellison & Lampe, 2008). Armstrong, Phillips and Saling (2000) have linked the effortlessness of using SNS for bridging social capital by individuals with low self-esteem to the possibility of Internet addiction occurring.

Ji et al. (2010) established that there was a difference in Facebook usage amongst individuals from different cultures. Their study included American, Korean and Chinese participants and the results showed a correlation between the usage of different Facebook functions with the construction and preservation of either bridging or bonding social capital.

Social enhancement and social compensation hypotheses research has produced varied results as to what motivates online communication (Ellison et al., 2007; Kraut et al., 2002; Valkenburg, Schouten & Peter, 2005; Walther, 1996). The Social Compensation hypothesis states that individuals who struggle to form adequate offline friendships and who may be
socially anxious substitute online contacts for an undesirable offline social network (Zywica & Danowski, 2008). The Social Enhancement hypothesis states that individuals who are more extroverted add online contacts to their already large offline network of friends (Valkenberg et al., 2005). Ellison et al. (2007) while studying social capital found that those with lower self-esteem and life satisfaction reported having more social capital on Facebook, thus supporting the Social Compensation hypothesis. Lee, Lee and Kwon (2011) found that the size of individuals’ online social networks shows a positive relationship with life satisfaction and well-being but does not have an impact on the person’s offline network or emotional intimacy with individuals in real life networks (Pollet, Roberts and Dunbar, 2011).

Facebook has greatly impacted on interpersonal relationships in both positive and negative ways. SNS such as Facebook act as an extension of personal face-to-face interactions and makes it possible for individuals to maintain more personal relationships online than is possible offline.

The Expression of Self Though Personality differences on SNS

The self is viewed as the dynamic core of personality (Burns, 1979). Personality factors, for example, may play a vital role in the way in which individuals experience certain phenomena. Personality includes distinctive behaviours, accounting for thoughts, emotions and values that are characteristic of the way in which people adapt to life situations (Louw & Louw, 2009). A number of personality traits appear to be associated with the extent of SNS use. Various features, such as gender and age, in conjunction with individual and personality differences, determine one’s pattern of Internet use and social researchers need to investigate individual differences (such as shyness) that might explain the use of online communication tools (McKenna & Bargh, 2000).
Technology may be a factor contributing to loneliness. Loneliness may be a result of social isolation and life transitions. There are several kinds of life transitions that young adults may face, such as moving to another part of the country, their first year of tertiary education, or the start of a new job. Excessive use of the Internet could serve to isolate individuals more from their family members and friends; however some individuals use the Internet to form potential relationships (Santrock, 2004). Intimacy versus isolation is the most important developmental issue for young adults to resolve. The young adult gains love as a virtue if this crisis is successfully resolved (Erikson, 1964). The inability to resolve this crisis in young adulthood may result in isolation and ultimately problems in forming intimate relationship with others (Santrock, 2004).

Extraverted individuals who are open to new experiences use Facebook more regularly, have a larger online social network, participate more in groups and use Facebook more for socializing (Ross et al. 2009). Introverted individuals in contrast, tend to disclose more personal information on Facebook (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010). SNS may seem advantageous for those whose real-life networks are inadequate, due to the ease of communicating with their peers without having to physically spend time with others. High self-disclosure on SNS, in turn, was found to positively correlate with measures of subjective well-being (Lee et al., 2011). However Facebook users do expose themselves to the risk of negative feedback when disclosing personal information, which in turn can have a negative effect on well-being (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006).

Research scholars found that higher narcissistic personality traits in individuals indicated whether or not they tended to be more active on Facebook and other SNS in order to present themselves more positively (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Mehdizadeh, 2010). La Barbera, La Paglia and Valsavoia (2009) suggest that narcissistic personality traits can be correlated with addiction. One of the key components of the theoretical models of narcissism point to
social relationships being used to regulate the narcissistic esteem. Therefore SNS offer the perfect place for narcissists to self regulate as it allows them to develop numerous superficial relationships and consequently gives them ample opportunity to boast about their own positive traits (Zweir et al., 2011).

**Incentives for Facebook use**

It is important to identify the motivations that bring about SNS usage. While examining SNS usage patterns, Kuss and Griffiths (2011) found that SNS use has increased significantly over the past few years. Baltaretu and Balaban (2010) in their study found that the incentives that motivate SNS use is psychological in nature and related to interpersonal relationships and communication, socialization and group belonging. Other researchers have indicated Internet usage motivators to include interpersonal reasons, such as social interaction, relationships development and maintenance, professional networking, entertainment, passing of time and information seeking (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Sheldon, 2008). Kwon and Wen (2010) posit that individuals with a higher social identity, higher altruism and higher sense of telepresence are inclined to use SNS because they experience support for participation from their social network. The outcome of a survey consisting of 170 US university students revealed that social factors were more significant motivations for SNS usage than individual factors (Kim, Kim & Nam, 2010).

Kuss and Griffiths (2011) posit that research suggests gender differences impacting on SNS usage patterns. Raacke and Bond-Raacke (2008) argues that males tend to have more friends on SNS than females. However Pfeil, Arjan and Zaphiris (2009) have found the opposite to be true. Barker (2009) found that males are inclined to use SNS for social compensation, while females mostly use it to communicate with friends, pass time and for social identification gratification.
SNS Addiction

Internet addiction is a phenomenon that has gained increasing amounts of attention in the past couple of years. Internet addiction can be defined by either an irresistible preoccupations or excessive use of the Internet for longer periods at a time (Shapira, Lessig, Goldsmith, Szabo, Lazoritz and Gold, 2003). The first empirical investigation into excessive internet use was completed by Young (1996). The study addressed the question of whether or not the internet had the potential to be addictive, and the extent of the complications associated with its misuse. The findings indicated that the dependent individuals spent more time online (38.5 hours per week) compared to non dependents (4.9 hours per week). Based on research conducted by Young (1996) and Shapira, et. al (2003) Internet addiction was classified as an impulse control disorder (Ko, Yen, Yen, Chen & Chen, 2010). Further research into the area of problematic Internet use followed quickly and defined Internet addiction as a behavioural addiction (Ko, et.al, 2010). Disagreement still exists regarding the diagnostic criteria of Internet addiction, therefore making accurate research into the prevalence of problematic Internet use impossible (Aboujaoude, Koran, Gamel, Large & Serpe, 2006). The diagnosis can be understood as a compulsive-impulsive spectrum disorder. A link between loneliness and Internet addiction has been mentioned by some researchers (Caplan, 2003; Davis, 2001). Kubey, Lavin and Barrows (2001) proposed that lonely individuals feel more at ease online because they tend to feel incompetent in social situations, therefore supporting the link between loneliness and Internet addiction.

For the purpose of this study, the literature will primarily focus on SNS addiction. Griffiths (2000) proposed the idea that some individuals may become addicted to specific Internet functions, rather than to the Internet as a whole. Young (1999) maintains that there are five different types of internet addiction, namely computer addiction, information overload, net compulsions, cybersexual addiction and cyber-relationship addiction. It would
appear as though SNS addiction could fall under cyber-relationship addiction, because the primary goal of SNS is to help individuals build and maintain relationships.

Kuss and Griffiths (2011) found that current scientific research investigating the addictive qualities of SNS on the Internet is sparse. When looking at the increase of time spent on SNS every year, it raises concerns regarding the possibility of addiction (Nielson, 2010). Kuss and Griffiths (2011) state that when examining addiction to Facebook from a clinical psychologist’s perspective, it could be categorized as a ‘Facebook Addiction Disorder’ or more broadly ‘SNS Addiction Disorder’. Young (1999) asserts that some individuals who use SNS excessively may present with addiction symptoms which impacts on their personal and professional lives in the form of mental obsession, mood enhancing occurrences, tolerance, hiding of addictive behaviour and using SNS for escapism. Individuals are able to present themselves in a positive light on SNS which can be a satisfying experience, the possibility of behaviour reinforcement exists, which can ultimately lead to addiction. Zuckerman (1979) describes sensation seeking as the willingness to take risks in the pursuit of new and varied experiences that simulate sensations. Being a sensation-seeker may predispose an individual to addiction. Armstrong et al. (2000) found that high sensation-seekers showed more signs of addictive Internet behaviors than low sensation-seekers.

Griffiths (2005) views SNS addiction from a biopsychosocial standpoint and argues that SNS addiction, just like substance-related addictions, includes the experience of the ‘classic’ addiction symptoms. Taking the biopsychosocial model for the etiology of addictions and the syndrome model of addiction into account, scholars assert that individuals with SNS addiction will experience similar symptoms to individuals with substance addiction (Griffiths, 2005; Shaffer et al., 2004). This has important repercussions for clinical practice because the aim of treating SNS addiction will have to be on controlled use, rather than complete avoidance, due to the fact that SNS have become part of one’s daily life. There is
currently no accepted set of criteria for Internet addiction or SNS addiction, therefore making the diagnosis and treatment very difficult. Young (1996) views the diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling as the most analogous to that of internet addiction.

Kuss and Griffiths (2011) recommend that further research be conducted to determine specific SNS addiction symptoms. They suggest adapting the criteria for substance dependence from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) has been one widely used source for identifying indicators of addiction. The DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) has not yet recognized Internet addiction as a disorder, but have listed Internet gaming disorder under section III, Conditions for further study. The American Psychiatric Association’s commendation suggest the value of further research to determine whether Internet addiction can or should be classified as another type of addiction, as proposed by some researchers.

**Online Privacy**

Privacy has become a growing concern in everyday life. It has become increasingly easy to access information, store it and potentially share it through the use of computers and the internet. The term privacy has numerous meanings. In the media the focus has been largely on personal security; however the concept of privacy is much broader, with associations to personal secrets and intimacy. Research findings indicate that concepts such as public and private in the context of computer-mediated communication is neither simple nor straightforward. Gefter (2007) asserts that the distinction between real life and online life is no longer clear-cut as the individuals making up online and offline interactions are largely the same. Divisions between online and offline social activity are not necessarily evident in contexts such as Facebook.
Researchers have explored the potential privacy risks associated with SNS, many of whom have focused on the safety of younger users (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Relatively little research has been conducted into how young adults understand the concepts of public and privacy on Facebook. Concepts such as public and private have been changed by SNS as there appears to be no clear division between private and public (West et al., 2009). According to West et al. (2009) SNS users view Facebook as both public and private. Adolescents’ opinions of privacy appear to be connected to their ability to control what others know about them (Livingstone, 2008). According to Clarke (2006a) the concept of privacy is extremely broad and has various elements, including body privacy, behaviour privacy, communication privacy, decision privacy and information privacy. Information privacy or privacy of personal data refers to the ability of the owner to implement control over his/her data and how the data is used (Clarke, 2006a). It therefore implies that an individual’s information should not involuntarily become available to other individuals or organizations. Although SNS offer enhanced social interaction, they also carry the risk of distributing a user’s private information to third parties.

In Gross and Acquisti’s (2005) study of privacy and SNS they found that users are often completely unaware of the amount of personal information they disclose and even though they usually share personal information in small harmless portions, the potential exists that the information can be connected and used in a privacy attack. Information privacy directly aligns with the protection of human rights and human dignity, affording individuals the capability to think and disagree freely without the risk of being monitored (Clarke, 2006a). Information privacy has been studied from various different perspectives such as from a human rights standpoint (Cavoukian, 1999; Clarke, 2006b), an information systems view (Clarke 1999) and economic perspective (De Boni & Prigmore, 2001). It is clear that the concept of privacy is not easily defined and understood. The present study will focus on
information privacy as a human right. Cavoukian (1999) states that privacy is an essential human value in the attempt to uphold and protect human rights. Almost every country’s constitution recognizes the right to information privacy (Snyder & Henderson, 1999).

The South African constitution provides explicit rights regarding the access and control of personal information (Banisar & Davies, 1999). The South African Bill of Rights (1996) can be applied to the protection of information privacy. According to this Bill of Rights all individuals have the right to human dignity. It states that: “Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected” (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, p.7). Some individuals use SNS to embarrass, defame or threaten others and consequently subject them to great suffering while violating their right to human dignity. These kinds of attacks often include name calling, posting of embarrassing photos, hacking into others’ profile and posting false information, and posting controversial comments with the intention to cause harm or conflict.

On the 12th of April 2013 a declaration was published in the Government Gazette, whereby South African President Jacob Zuma set 27 April 2013 as the date on which the Protection from Harassment Act (Act no. 17 of 2011) came into operation. With the legal support of the Protection from Harassment Act anyone who feels harassed can now approach the court without legal representation and apply for a protection order. Harassment is not limited to physical and verbal abuse, but includes electronic harassment over the internet (Protection From Harassment Act no 17, 2011). However retrieving information from electronic communications service providers such as Facebook, whose servers fall outside of South Africa's jurisdiction, may pose a potential difficulty for the South African courts.

Human security is another human right that can potentially be violated by others through Facebook. Aggressors may use Facebook to plan or initiate an attack on someone. Individuals may face all kinds of attacks on Facebook, these include for example stalking,
harassment, and defamation of character. According to the South African Bill of Rights (1996, p. 7) every person has the right to security which includes, “to be free from all forms of violence from either public or private sources; not to be tortured in any way; and not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way”.

According to the South African Bill of Rights (1996, p.8) “everyone has the right to privacy, which includes the right not to have their person or home searched, their property searched, their possessions seized or the privacy of their communication infringed”.

Facebook users are at risk especially if they choose not to apply the privacy setting provided to them. The possibility also exists that an attacker may pretend to be a friend, only to gain access to the user’s profile, to obtain information through phishing attacks and even attempt to take over the profile completely in order to use it for spamming attacks (Gross & Acquisti, 2005).

According to Ellison and boyd (2008) there has been an increase in concern regarding the safety of children on SNS. The age limit for Facebook is 13 years, however when the South African Bill of Rights refers to minors it refers to children under the age of 18 years. Minors on Facebook could face an increased risk of abuse, bullying and exposure to explicit and harmful content. According to the Bill of Rights (1996) a child has the right to be “Protected from maltreatment, abuse or degradaton.” Therefore parents and guardian should apply strict control and supervision when allowing a minor to have a Facebook account.

According to Rainie, Lenhart and Smith (2012) adults reported more positive experiences on SNS than adolescents, suggesting that adult users are more inclined to ignore negative or offensive content and behaviour and that adults are slightly less likely to become involved in the harassment of other individuals on social networking sites than teens. Rainie et al. (2012) found that 45% of their adult survey participants had previously decided not to post something online owing to concerns about how it could reflect on them.
The most commonly used definition of privacy is that of Alan Westin (1967) who states that privacy is the facility for individuals to decide for themselves “when, how, and to what extent information about them is disclosed to others” (as cited in Kagal & Abelson, 2010, p.1). This definition makes it apparent that it is the responsibility of each person to use the privacy settings and tools available to them on SNS. On most social networking sites, including Facebook, the user’s profile is set to be viewed publicly by default and only a number of users ever change their default settings (Gross & Acquisti, 2005). Ribbens, McCarthy and Edwards (2001) proposed the idea of personal as opposed to private. Several potential employers see importance in making use of social networking sites and internet search engines as part of their screening and background search of candidates. In recent times, concerns regarding how individuals use SNS have started to attract attention. Individuals are increasingly using SNS for the surveillance of others (Tokunaga, 2011). The core purpose of the majority of social networking sites is to help individuals connect to others with whom they already have an offline relationship with (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfeld, 2006).

According to Lampe et al. (2006) ‘social searching’ is one of the major incentives for Facebook use. Facebook has been linked to increased romantic jealousy and surveillance of partners (Melander, 2010). The risk of information exploitation is increased through Facebook especially if an individual’s personal information can be accessed by a wider audience. According to Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke and Cratty (2011) young adults often participate in stalker-like behavior. These behaviours mostly do not meet the legally required standard of causing their victims fear. Facebook may facilitate stalking behaviours, which in turn has implications for individuals’ privacy and security. Facebook has led to the development of several new words such as ‘Facebook stalking’ and ‘Stalkbook’. While these words may not refer to the traditional idea of stalking they may form part of less severe
behaviours that are termed obsessive relational intrusion (ORI) (Lyndon et al., 2011). ORI overlaps with stalking and can be defined as “the repeated and unwanted pursuit of intimacy through violation of physical and/or symbolic privacy” (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000, p. 66). Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002) created the term cyber-obsessional pursuit (COP) for the online version of obsessive relational intrusion. These types of behaviour can be associated with interpersonal monitoring and surveillance which is consistent with lesser forms of obsessive relational intrusion, as well as cyber harassing and demanding intimacy from another individual (Spitzberg & Rhea, 1999). The ending of a romantic relationship may trigger ORI behaviours, with 99% of college students admitting to engaging in some form of ORI after breaking up with a romantic partner (Dutton & Winstead, 2006). The potential exists that COP may develop into cyberstalking if the behaviours are severe enough to cause a reasonable person fear. Facebook stalking has not yet been extensively reached. There are no studies examining the perpetrator’s motivations for ORI, COP or Facebook stalking (Lyndon et al., 2011). Cyber-obsessional pursuit (COP) may include covert behaviours such as passively browsing through profiles or overt behaviours such as posting negative comment or embarrassing photographs. Individuals’ private lives become public on Facebook, which is related to cyber harassment (Lyndon et al., 2011).

On Facebook a stalker can easily observe what information their victim publishes and use the information to determine the victim’s physical location. Specific applications on Facebook makes anonymous stalking of another person very easy, these functions include the Facebook ‘Chat’ feature and the ‘Check In’ feature all of which provide stalkers with information about their victim’s whereabouts.

There is a very real threat of cyber-obsessional pursuit on SNS such as Facebook, therefore there is a need for cyberstalking laws as well as cyber harassment laws specifically aimed at regulating these crimes. Increased Facebook popularity raises concerns about
personal privacy and safety as individuals become more exposed to potential privacy threats on SNS.

**Conclusion**

The chapter provided a conceptual and scholarly context for the present study. It explored the emergence of the Internet and the digital divide and provided a brief overview of SNS, specifically Facebook. The chapter continued with the exploration of the self and the impact of online social interactions on the self. The exploration of interpersonal relationships on SNS, the expression of personality on Facebook, SNS addiction and online privacy concerns were also discussed. The following chapter will report on the research design and methodology of this research study as well as the ethical considerations.
Chapter Three
Research Methodology

Chapter Overview

This chapter will include a discussion of qualitative research designs used to demonstrate complex social phenomena such as the experience of Facebook. The transcendental phenomenological approach that was used in this study will be reviewed. To provide insight into this specific approach, the chapter explores four major processes in phenomenological research, namely (1) epoche, (2) phenomenological reduction, (3) imaginative variation and (4) synthesis. Furthermore, the chapter explains how these processes were integrated into the present research design. The chapter continues with a review of data collection methods and outlines the research procedure. An account of the setting in which the research was conducted; sampling procedures that were implemented as well as observations made during the study will be discussed. This chapter provides a review of the important ethical issues related to the present study as well as how these considerations were implemented in the research design, as profession ethics form an essential part of the research methodology. A review of data processing and analysis is also provided with particular reference to Tesch’s (1990) eight step content analysis as well as Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) model of trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a description of how these models were integrated into the phenomenological research design.

Problem Statement and Aims of the Study

Research should aim to generate knowledge and enhance understanding (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport 2005). There is a considerable body of research that has examined the experiences of adolescents’ use of online social networking. The current study
set out to build upon this body of knowledge by focusing on the experiences of adult Facebook users rather than adolescent users. Against this background, this study aimed to explore and describe the experiences of young adults regarding Facebook. The broad goal of this study was to generate knowledge and enhance understanding about this field in a South African context. This study directly aligns with one of the approved N.M.M.U. Institutional Research Themes (IRTs), namely Cyber Citizenship and its subtheme, cyber socialization.

**Research Design**

The study used a qualitative method in order to explore the experiences of young adults regarding Facebook. A literature review revealed limited information regarding this topic. Qualitative research seeks to construct knowledge and aims to enhance understanding. A qualitative approach was considered the best strategy to be used for this research as the intention of this study was to identify common themes amongst the various semi-structured interviews in order to gain knowledge and an in-depth understanding regarding the experiences of young adults utilising Facebook. Qualitative research offers the researcher the ability to explore the meaning within a range of social phenomena and requires the researcher to become immersed in the data in order to discover themes, generalizations and motifs (Neuman, 2003). Qualitative research designs do not require a set theoretical framework, such as in quantitative research. Using a predetermined theoretical framework may distort rather than shed light on human behaviour.

This study used a phenomenological research design that is descriptive yet analytical in nature (Miller & Salkind, 2002). The design focuses on the words, sentences and impressions provided by the participants (Neuman, 2003). The methodology of a phenomenological study does not include chronological techniques but includes an understanding of processes which are used to guide and plan the investigation of the
phenomenon. The application of prescribed techniques within such a study could reduce the integrity of the actual phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenology focuses on description and interpretation more than upon analysis and measurement of a phenomenon as it emphasises subjectivity above objectivity. The focal point includes individual’s feelings or meanings as well as their attitudes and beliefs. Therefore phenomenology aims to describe and interpret how individuals perceive things, understand situations and interpret various occurrences rather than to explain causality (Denscombe, 2003).

In phenomenology there exists two major approaches namely, hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology both representing philosophical assumptions about experience and ways to organize and analyse phenomenological data. These two approaches had different historical advocates (e.g., Heidegger or Husserl), they differ in methodological procedures and their contemporary proponents, Van Manen (1990), for hermeneutic phenomenology and Moustakas (1994) for transcendental phenomenology (Giogi & Giorgi, 2003). Meaning is seen as the fundamental focus of transcendental phenomenology of science, a design for acquiring and collecting data that illuminates the essences of human experience. Hermeneutics entails reflective interpretation of a text or a study in history to reach a meaningful understanding (Moustakas, 1994).

The benefits of a phenomenological study include its ability to provide authentic accounts of complex phenomena through a humanistic approach which emphasizes the respect for research participants. It is also suitable for small-scale studies due to its in-depth nature. Criticisms of the phenomenological approaches are that they lack scientific thoroughness and that it does not provide a detailed analysis of the phenomena. Phenomenological studies are usually comparatively small, bringing the ability to generalise findings from phenomenological research into question (Denscombe, 2003). Several approaches exist for organizing and analyzing data in a phenomenological qualitative study. Transcendental
phenomenology, based on principles identified by Husserl (1931) and translated into a qualitative method by Moustakas (1994), has previously been used as a research procedure for phenomenological research.

A transcendental approach was used in the present study to actualise the researcher’s goal of observing, understanding and reflecting the phenomenon as it is perceived by the participants (Miller & Salkind, 2002). Transcendental phenomenology founded by Moustakas (1994) provides an organized methodology for analysing participants’ lived experiences. This approach depends on the individual’s experiences and relates their stories in their own words, thus giving in-depth and textural descriptions which is well suited to human science research. Transcendental phenomenology provides a systematic approach with processes clearly identified by Moustakas (1994). The four phenomenological processes are epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis of meanings and will be discussed in detail later in this chapter (Moustakas, 1994).

The German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), “sought to develop a new philosophical method” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 54). Vandenberg (1997, p. 11) regards Husserl as “the fountainhead of phenomenology in the twentieth century”. Husserl named his philosophical method ‘phenomenology’, the science of pure ‘phenomena’ (Eagleton, 1983). Husserl was focused on the discovery of meanings and essences in knowledge. He believed that there is a clear definition between facts and essences, between the real and non-real. Husserl states that, “Essence provides on the one side a knowledge of the essential nature of the Real, on the other, in respect of the domain left over, knowledge of the essential nature of the non-real (irreal)” (1931, p.45). According to Moustakas (1994) Husserl does not claim that transcendental phenomenology is the only way to gain knowledge about the human experience, but that it is a science of possibilities carried out in a systematic way which in turn creates opportunities for empirical sciences to explore actualities.
Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology incorporates the concepts of intentionality and intuition. Intention refers to the orientation of the mind toward an object, thus the object exists in the person’s mind in an intentional way. The perceiving of the object is the intentional act and is a conscious experience. Husserl describes *noesis* and *noema* as two phases of intentionality. Every intentional experience has a noetic (real) phase and a noematic (non-real) phase. The noema refers to the phenomenon as it is perceived and the noesis refers to how the phenomenon is experienced. The integration of these two phases is how meaning is created (Moustakas, 1994). For Husserl intuition “is the presence to consciousness of an essence, with all that implies by way of necessity and universal validity” (Lauer, 1967). Husserl views the self as an intuitive-thinking being who can doubt, understand, affirm, deny, wish, sense and imagine. Accordingly, all things become clear through an intuitive-reflective process. Intuition plays a vital role in describing whatever presents itself, what enters the person’s consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). Understanding the concepts of intention and intuition facilitate the researcher’s ability to describe and interpret the experiences of young adults’ of Facebook. A phenomenological study does not stipulate specific methodology, but rather integrates key processes in order to successfully explore social phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Scholars such as Amedeo Giorgi developed explicit research methods based on the philosophy of phenomenology (Groenewald, 2004). Groenewald (2004) states that for Giorgi, the operative word in phenomenological research is ‘describe’. The aim of the researcher should be to describe as correctly as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any predetermined framework. According to Welman and Kruger (1999, p. 189) “the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of individuals involved”. The researcher used a transcendental approach to studying the phenomenon as it is understood and perceived by the participants.
Four Major Processes in Phenomenological Research

The phenomenological approach consists of four major processes rather than a set procedure. These four processes were integrated into the study and provide guidance in terms of research design. In a phenomenological study the focus should be on description and interpretation of the feelings, attitudes and beliefs of the participants (Denscombe, 2003). The four phenomenological processes include epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis of meanings (Moustakas, 1994). The following section will include a description of each process.

**Epoche.** Epoche is a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain. It refers to the suspension of the researcher’s own preconceived ideas, prejudgements and biases. This does not mean that the researcher denies or doubts the reality of the phenomenon, but rather that what is already known about the phenomenon is bracketed and set aside and the researcher focuses on the views of the participants. Thus, the process is called transcendental because the researcher sees the phenomenon “freshly, as for the first time” and is receptive to its entirety (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). It is the first step of the phenomenological reduction process. According to Moustakas (1994) “no position whatsoever is taken...nothing is determined in advance;” the researcher should be present and focus on what is consciously known “by returning to whatever is there in…memory, perception, judgment, feeling, whatever is actually there” (p. 84).

The process of epoche enables the researcher to experience new ideas, feelings and understandings of the phenomenon (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The researcher should actively make an effort to maintain openness to the experience so that the phenomena can be understood in its true form, this is what makes the process of epoche difficult (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche requires sustained concentration to maintain a position of
openness to new meaning. The benefit of epoche is that the phenomenon is perceived in its true form, as it prevents the researcher to contaminate the research participant’s communication. Epoche needs to be integrated into the research design through the approach and intention of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

**Phenomenological Reduction.** Even the application of epoche does not prevent the phenomena to be disclosed without research bias. Therefore phenomenological reduction is employed to guarantee that the phenomenon is as accurately and appropriately described as possible. The focus of phenomenological reduction is on the quality of the experiences. The researcher repeatedly views the experience from different perspectives to ensure richer and more accurate descriptions of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The process involves graded prereflextion, reflection and reduction with attention to and comprehension of the essential nature of the phenomenon. This may be attained through perceiving, thinking, remembering, imagining and judging (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). According to Moustakas (1994) phenomenological reduction is more than just a way of seeing, but also a way of listening with a conscious and deliberate intention of being open to the phenomena, as it is, with its own textures and meanings. The present researcher started the process of epoche by meditating on her own personal experiences with Facebook over the past couple of years. Most experiences had been positive and meaningful, but others had been negatively perceived. Though this process of bracketing she became increasingly aware of her own preconceived ideas, biases and prejudgments regarding Facebook. She reflected on these experiences and then made a conscious effort to put them aside and open herself up to the experiences the participants reported without super imposing her own expectations or presuppositions of what the Facebook experience involves.
**Imaginative Variation.** The goal of imaginative variation is to discover possible meanings from the themes by using imagination. Imagination involves shifting one’s frame of reference, viewing themes from different angles so that different perspectives, roles and functions can appear. Imaginative variation is dependent on intuition as the means of integrating structural factors into essences. It thus encourages the researcher to focus on pure possibilities to find potential meaning. The aim of the process is to reduce the phenomenon into its necessary essences, which then encourages the researcher to explore the different possibilities of meaning to achieve a detailed description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This process departs from conventional perspectives that encourage the development of facts or the use of measurement, by moving towards the meaning and essence of the phenomena. The steps of imaginative variation include systematically creating as many different structural meanings as possible so that essential themes or contexts that account for the phenomena can be recognised. Universal structures that precipitate the feelings and thoughts surrounding the phenomena must then be considered. Finally, the researcher must illustrate these structural themes to develop a structural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

**Synthesis.** The fourth process in phenomenological research is synthesis which involves the assimilation of the important textural and structural descriptions to form an integrated description of the experience of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher does not merely restate the experiences of the participants, but aims to offer a deeper and richer description of how the phenomenon manifests. The process of synthesis is used to reveal the conditions or qualities through which the experience exists (Moustakas, 1994).
According to Moerer-urdahl and Creswell (2004) the researcher using transcendental phenomenology as a research method has to learn specific research related terminology and understand Husserl’s philosophical background. This unique terminology includes, but is not limited to concepts such as epoche, imagination variation, phenomenological reduction, textural and structural descriptions, and intuitive integration. The researcher is also required to have an understanding of these concepts and how they could be applied to a research study.

**Application of the Phenomenological Processes**

The phenomenological processes were applied to the study using four steps. Firstly, the researcher read through all the transcripts to gain an understanding of each participant’s experience of Facebook. Secondly, ‘meaning units’ were identified by bracketing all information that pertains to the phenomenon. Thirdly the meaning units were reviewed to elicit the psychological insight within them. Finally, the meanings were synthesised to provide a significant description of the experience of young adults using Facebook. With an understanding of the phenomenological research process, a description of the methodology used in the present study will follow.

**Procedure**

The following procedure was followed in order to achieve the aims of this study. The research proposal was submitted to the Faculty Research, Technology and Innovation (FRTI) Committee and Human Ethics Committee at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). Once approval had been obtained from the respective committees, the necessary changes were made in order to proceed with the research study in an ethical manner. The
first participant was contacted and asked to suggest contact details of other potential participants. The following letters and forms were given to the potential participants:

- A cover letter from the researcher introducing the research (Appendix A).
- A consent form and biographical questionnaire for the participants to complete (Appendix B & C).

The researcher contacted the participants telephonically to arrange an appropriate time and venue for each of the individual interviews. Each interview was conducted in a private and confidential office at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. This setting was agreed upon prior to the interviews in order to minimise possible variables that could have negatively impacted on the interviews, such as noise levels and interruptions. The researcher arranged the chairs in the office to allow for good eye-contact and the easy observation of participants for non-verbal cues. Prior to each interview, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the interviews, the goals of the study as well as explained the role of the participants. The participants were given sufficient time to ask any questions. A voice recorder was used to record each interview. An interview schedule (Appendix D) was used to guide the interviews. Each participant was given the opportunity to request another meeting with the interviewer if they needed to ask any questions or discuss the interview process. The data gathered was then transcribed and analysed.

**Participants and Sampling**

The non-probability sampling strategy of purposive sampling was utilised to enable the researcher to find participants to be included in the sample in accordance with the exploratory nature of the research outlined. In qualitative research, participants are purposefully selected in order to make sure that the best answers to the research question will be given (Creswell, 1994). Non-probability sampling implies that the principle of randomization will not be
implemented when selecting the participants (De Vos et al., 2005). The two main disadvantages of the non-probability sampling technique are firstly, statistical theories of probability do not apply to non-random samples, making it impossible to know the degree of accuracy to which properties of the sample can be used to describe the population. Secondly, since the researcher plays an active role in deciding who should not be in the sample, bias can easily be introduced by the researcher. However, the fact that participation in the present study was voluntary minimized the level of bias in sample selection.

The sample consisted of seven young adults both male and female between the ages of 18-30 years who use Facebook. Participants were invited to participate on a voluntary basis and were included in the study irrespective of race, culture, gender and socio-economic status. Potential participants had to use Facebook at least once a week and be willing to answer questions honestly during the interview. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in English or Afrikaans depending on the participants’ preference. The researcher had personal acquaintance with the target group, therefore snowball sampling was utilised, as it was time saving and cost effective.

The first participant for the study was identified and approached and asked to suggest to the researcher other potential participants. The researcher continued with this process until a sufficient number of participants for the sample had been identified (Baker, 1988). The researcher interviewed participants until data saturation had been reached. The researcher knew that data saturation had been reached when the same information was repeatedly heard and the researcher no longer learnt anything new (De Vos et al., 2005).

**Data Collection**

The researcher used biographical data forms and semi-structured interviews with the participants as the data gathering technique. Interviewing is the most common data collection
technique in qualitative research; it is used to gather information from participants through conversation and questioning (De Vos et al., 2005). An interview schedule consisting of a semi-structured questionnaire was followed to ensure that all important topics were covered while maintaining the flexibility and exploratory nature of qualitative research. The interview was guided by the information provided by each individual participant; however the researcher had prepared some questions in advance to help direct the interview. The flexibility of each interview was advantageous as it allowed the participants to discuss any aspect of their Facebook experiences. The participants each have complex knowledge regarding the phenomenon and could express their experiences spontaneously during the semi-structured interview.

According to Flick (2006) these interviews can be used to reconstruct the subjective theory which each participant possesses. The researcher established rapport with each participant prior to commencing the interview through casual conversation and maintained an open level of communication throughout by ensuring that the role of the researcher did not become prominent during the discussion (Willig, 2003). Once the participants were comfortable the researcher activated the recording device. A voice recorder was used during the interviews as it allowed information to be collected verbatim from the participant, without any alteration. All the interviews were conducted in English as chosen by the participants. The total time of the interviews was 6 hours 43 minutes 38 seconds. The duration of the interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 24 minutes. The recorded data was then transcribed and later analysed. All documentation collected by the researcher that contains personal information regarding the participants was securely stored in such a manner as to ensure that only the researcher has access to such documents. Electronic documentation that could compromise the participants’ confidentiality was protected through the use of passwords.
Data Analysis

The data processing and analysis was conducted in accordance with the principles and guidelines of transcendental phenomenological research. In quantitative research the generalisations are statistical in nature, whereas qualitative research generalizations are analytical (Yin, 1999). According to De Vos et al. (2005) data analysis is the process of organising, structuring and making sense of a large volume of data collected. Data should be analysed without any explicit expectations, the researcher should look for patterns within the data. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995) analysis is stimulating as “you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews” (p. 226). It is important to be clear and systematic during data analysis (Elmes, Kantowitz & Roediger, 1999). Through the application of Tesch’s (1990) eight steps of qualitative data analysis the four phenomenological processes namely, epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis of meaning, was actualised. The data for the current study was analysed using thematic content analysis, which involves patterns and theme recognition within the data. The researcher had to read the texts several times for this to occur (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme may consist of patterned response that has significant importance in relation to the research question.

The researcher employed Tesch’s model of content analysis (Appendix E) (Tesch, 1990), which includes eight steps during the data analysis process. Firstly, the researcher read through all the transcripts carefully to gain a sense of the data collected and wrote some ideas down. Secondly, the researcher randomly chose one interview transcript and started to think about the underlying meanings. The researcher then chose another transcript and implemented the same process. Thirdly, a list of provisional themes was made. Similar themes were clustered together and possible major and minor themes outlined. Fourthly, with the list of major and minor themes as a guide, the researcher then returned to all the
transcripts and began to carefully highlight and code all appropriate segments of the text. Fifthly, to organise related themes, categories were created. The researcher linked categories that are related to each other. Sixthly, the categories were abbreviated and the codes alphabetised. Seventhly, each category was preliminarily analysed. Finally, the researcher reviewed the data and checked whether recoding was required. The researcher then asked an independent coder to analyse the data to ensure credibility and integrity of results.

Lincoln and Guba’s model of trustworthiness (Appendix F) provides four constructs against which all qualitative research is tested in order to determine its trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The four constructs, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005), were applied in this research study in order to test its trustworthiness.

Credibility, also referred to as truth value, refers to an evaluation of whether the research findings represent a ‘credible’ conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participant’s original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The principle of credibility was achieved by providing an accurate and thorough description of the experience of young adults using Facebook. Transferability, also referred to as applicability, is the degree to which the findings can be applied beyond the study. Transferability addresses the issues surrounding generalisability, specifically within small-scale qualitative studies. The principle of transferability aims to ensure that research is conducted in accordance with suitable concepts and models that are obtained from previously reviewed theoretical frameworks (De Vos et al., 2005). Dependability, also referred to as consistency, concerns the quality of the integration between the processes of data collection, data analysis and theory generation. Dependability refers to efforts by the researcher to describe any changes that are observed in the phenomenon (De Vos et al., 2005). This principle is linked to the phenomenological understanding that all experiences occur as part of the individual’s social construction of
reality thus allowing the possibility of multiple realities. The principle of dependability is incorporated into qualitative studies to acknowledge changes in the social world that may make duplication of the study hard (Denscombe, 2003). Conformability, also referred to as neutrality, refers to whether the findings of the study can be confirmed by another researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This principle was incorporated into the study by adhering to the phenomenological principle of epoche. The researcher aimed to stay neutral and objective throughout the research procedure thus ensuring that data collection and analysis was not tainted.

**Ethical Considerations**

Research ethics formed an integral part of the methodology of this study. Ethical considerations must be adhered to when undertaking research. According to Neuman (1997) the development of new knowledge through research should not be at the expense of the ethical treatment of all involved in the research. Ethical factors such as anonymity, voluntary participation, beneficence and risk of harm must be considered when undertaking research (Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2006). When conducting research scientific honesty is crucial as it is considered an important ethical responsibility.

The researcher aimed to ensure honesty and to avoid manipulation of data by transcribing the interviews verbatim. The right to informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality was considered. Informed consent refers to the potential participant’s right to being appropriately informed about the study (Burns & Grove, 1993). The participants were informed about their right to voluntarily consent or decline to participate and to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher provided the participants with a formal letter from the department of psychology, a cover letter and a letter of consent informing them of the procedure of the interview and the study (Graziano & Raulin, 2000). The cover letter contained information
regarding the interview and the research study, such as the motive for the research, the intended aims of the research and the method of acquiring the necessary data and analysing it, as well as how the findings will be recorded and disseminated. The participants were also given information regarding the researcher and the institution under which the research was conducted. All participants remained anonymous throughout the research in order to protect their privacy and confidentiality (Burns & Grove, 1993). A recording device was used to record all interviews and it was later transcribed and analysed. Generalised feedback regarding the study’s outcomes was made available upon the request of the participants. The participants were given sufficient time to ask any questions that developed during the process. The participants were informed that should they wish to receive feedback the results of the study would be made available.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the aim of this research study as well as the research design and methodology that was utilised during the research. The use of a qualitative design, the participants and sampling procedure, the method of data gathering, as well as the research procedure and data analysis were discussed. It concluded with an outline of the ethical issues as well as information regarding the dissemination of the results. The findings of this study as well as a discussion of these findings and the relevant information from the literature reviews in chapter two is presented in the next chapter.
Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore young adults’ experiences of Facebook. The researcher used the transcendental phenomenological approach to observe, understand and reflect on the phenomena in order to form a clinical impression of young adults’ experience of Facebook. The researcher applied the four phenomenological processes as discussed in the previous chapter namely, epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis of meaning to reveal a detailed description of the participants’ experiences of Facebook (Moustakas, 1994).

To attain the goals set out for the study, a qualitative approach was utilised. Research interviews were conducted with the use of a semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix D). The researcher applied the principal of epoche to allow for flexibility during the interviews which created the opportunity for new themes to emerge. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The research sample consisted of young adults who volunteered their time to be interviewed. The data from the interviews was analysed and interpreted according to Tesch’s (1990) model of content analysis to achieve the process of phenomenological reduction. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis process an independent coder was used. In this chapter the results of the present study as well as a discussion of these findings are provided.

The Participants

The biographical description of the participants is based on the information gathered from the biographical questionnaire that each participant completed before their interview. The participants consisted of seven young adults living in the Nelson Mandela Metropole. Six of
the participants were female, and one was male. The participants of the study were between the ages of 22 and 28, attend university, and are all fluent in English.

The participants were selected using the non-probability snowball sampling method. The researcher interviewed one participant who then assisted the researcher by suggesting other possible participants. Thus the snowballing effect was created and the researcher continued interviewing participants until data saturation had been reached. No compensation was offered to the participants and they all gave their time and information freely. The participants were included in the study irrespective of gender, race, culture or socio-economic status. They had to meet the following criteria to be included in the present study:

Participants had to be between the age of 18 and 30 years, they had to use Facebook at least once a week, and be willing to answer questions honestly during the interview.

The table below displays some further biographical information about the participants. All of the participants struggled to quantify the amount of time they spend on Facebook weekly and therefore these figures are only their self-reported estimations.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Approximate time spent on Facebook weekly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant A</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant B</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3hours 30minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant D</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant E</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant G</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3hours 30minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Interview Conditions**

The interviews were all conducted over a two week period as the identified participants were available. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to encourage and initiate an open discussion of topics. These questions were not prescriptive in nature as it allowed each participant to control the flow of conversation. To establish rapport between the researcher and the participants, general conversation was engaged in before the interviews commenced. The duration of the interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 24 minutes. The total time of the interviews was 6 hours 43 minutes 38 seconds.

**Findings**

Through the process of imaginative variation the themes and subthemes were identified and categorised. The main themes that emerged through the research were Privacy, Communication, Interpersonal Relationships, Use, The Self Concept and Other. The subthemes that appeared fall under these main themes. The main themes and subthemes were placed in a summary table below. The discussion of the themes will follow on the summary table. Each subtheme will be discussed and will include direct quotes from the research participants, relevant information from the literature review and the researcher’s own reflections and opinions. This process of discussing the results will actualise the fourth process, synthesis of meaning. Every main theme will conclude with a summary of the subthemes previously discussed. The main themes and subthemes are included in the following table.
Table 2

*Main themes and subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>Public versus private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal surveillance behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploitation of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Advantages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal relationships</td>
<td>Nature of the relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development and maintenance of relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber harassment and confrontation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The self-concept</td>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation of the self and identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses</td>
<td>Different uses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Habitual behaviour and addiction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis of findings**

The content below will discuss the table above in order to enhance the understanding of the participants’ experience of Facebook. A description of the themes that have emerged throughout the present study will be analysed and discussed in association with current literature in each focus area.
**Privacy**

One of the main themes that emerged during the research study is Privacy. The following subthemes form part of the main theme and are included in the table below.

Table 3

*Privacy Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public versus private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal surveillance behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitation of information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Public versus private**

Social networking sites are changing the way society understands concepts such as public and private. There is no clear-cut public/private distinction as Facebook tends to blur the line between what is private and what is public (West et al., 2009). One of the themes that emerged from the present study is that there are differing opinions and practices on Facebook when it comes to deciding what information to keep private and what to make public. According to West et al. (2009) SNS users see Facebook as being both a public and private space. Relatively little research has been done into how young adults understand the concepts of public and private on Facebook, but Livingstone (2008) in her study of teenagers’ use of social networking sites found that their notions of privacy seemed to be related to their ability to control who knows what about them.

Privacy concerns in online SNS have become increasingly prominent. Facebook makes access and storage of personal information very easy. The concept of privacy is very broad with multiple meanings. One of the most widely used definitions of privacy is one by Alan
Westin in 1967 stating that privacy is the ability for individuals to decide for themselves “when, how, and to what extent information about them is disclosed to others” (as sited in Kagal & Abelson, 2010, p.1). Most participants commented on how they feel about other Facebook users sharing very personal information on Facebook. The participants often felt that it is inappropriate behaviour. One participant stated: “...most people have a few hundred friends and lots of those things should be more private, perhaps I suppose people can use Facebook for what they want to, I suppose they view it differently to how I view it and maybe the way I use it, they might not agree with. ...couple of times I have thought of saying to someone ‘Don’t you think you should keep that private’ or ‘That’s not necessarily for Facebook’.” According to another participant: “Everyone can see it. ...I mean honestly speaking how many of these people on Facebook are really your friends you know, and it is like, so you have people, like 1000 people that have access to your life, just at the touch of a button and I don’t know, maybe I am weird, but I just find that a bit disturbing. ...you just have all sorts of random people reading about your life. It is right there.”

The participants highlighted their concerns regarding how easily accessible their lives are to other individuals on Facebook and stressed the importance of their privacy settings to limit access to their profiles. All the participants mentioned their concerns about how their Facebook profile content will impact on how other individuals will perceive them now and in the future, and this plays an important role in deciding what to post on Facebook. Their privacy concerns can also be linked to their desire to control their self-presentational behaviour online. One participant remarked that: “…there are certain people out there that I am going to cross paths in my future or my near future and they are going to immediately link me with that half-naked picture they saw on Facebook, so maybe that could possibly be something that is really influencing my view of Facebook.”
On most social networking sites including Facebook the profiles of users are set to be viewed publicly by default. According to Gross and Acquisti (2005) only some users change their default privacy settings on social networking sites. Most of the participants in this study expressed the opinion that Facebook privacy settings were very important, but there seemed to be a contradiction in some of their behaviour on Facebook, such as accepting ‘friend’ invites from strangers. When asked whether or not they use the Facebook security settings one participant reported the following about her privacy settings: “...it was for all public to see, but then I’ve noticed that I’ve been getting weird requests from people and then I changed the privacy settings to just friends.”

The participants mentioned how they control access to their Facebook profile by setting strict Facebook security limits which only allow their ‘friends’ access, occasionally blocking individuals from seeing certain content or ‘unfriending’ others. One participant highlighted her concerns over how easily anyone can access her Facebook profile if they used her mobile phone. She stated that: “But the weird thing is...someone can just take my phone and go onto my Facebook and they are there...because I downloaded Facebook and it is part of my phone, I can just lend you my phone and then you can just go onto my Facebook account. So I guess in that way then there is no privacy.” Another participant explained how she has witnessed individuals hacking into others’ profiles and posting false information, she said that: “it’s a joke now that people do it...they take each other’s phones, because it is on Facebook, it is on your phone and you just open it, you don’t even log in, nothing, and they put a status, ‘just got engaged’ or ‘I am pregnant’ and that in itself is bullying you know, because I have seen it happen...and then later on the person is like ‘sorry guys, really not cool, my account just got hacked in, I am not pregnant or not getting engaged’ and then it causes friendship problems you know.”
To the present researcher’s knowledge information regarding young adult’s view of Facebook privacy is limited. The participants in the present study mostly understood Facebook as being a public sphere. However they do take some measures to control who has access to their profiles, therefore attempting to keep control over their own information. According to West et al. (2009) Facebook can be viewed as being both private and public at the same time.

All the participants seemed to be very aware of the permanence of online content, especially Facebook content and the impact it could have on their future. One participant noted that: “They said that once you post something on Facebook, especially pictures it stays there even after you deleted it, the fact that it’s on the Internet now means it’s out there forever.” Another participant raised her concerns about the permanence of her Facebook profile and the possible future impact it could have in the following way: “You forget what’s on Facebook, what happened five years ago on Facebook and if somebody stays on your page for long enough it will crop up and it causes unnecessary drama. I also find getting rid of certain things on Facebook is a tedious and horrible process. That has also stopped me from posting things, because I’m obviously going to forget about it and then later I have to go back and remember that it is going to cause problems for jobs and future relationships, so that’s how I have kind of learned to stop posting unnecessary things.”

All the participants mentioned that they carefully consider what to post on Facebook. They acknowledged that what they post on Facebook determines how others perceive them and interact with them, both online and offline. It is understood that many potential employers see value in utilizing social networking sites and internet search engines as part of their screening and background search of their candidates. When asked what she thought about potential employers looking at her Facebook profile, one participant said the following: “I don’t think it is right for an employer to actually, so if I am going to employ you, it is not
right for me to go and stalk you on Facebook, because that is almost like stalking. But you want to see what that person is like truly so, but you shouldn’t put stuff on Facebook that is going to contradict you in a way. Another participant mentioned that: “I am thinking I mean you must think like your employers are not stupid. Before they employ you, they are going to go and look on your Facebook. ...are they calling themselves you know ‘Sasha sexy doll’ you know or some stupid thing like that, you know what I mean? And is there a concurrence between who you are on Facebook and who you are in reality?”

The participants seemed to be of the opinion that employers should not access their Facebook profiles to gain information about them, they viewed this as a violation of their personal privacy. The participants highlighted the importance of portraying a degree of congruence between the self in offline and online interactions, as severe contradictions of identity claims could have negative effects on how they are perceived by others. Most of the participants were only concerned with their parents and future employers checking on their Facebook profiles. Ultimately the control and sharing of information is in the hands of the user, but it is the present researcher’s experience that many users do not use the privacy controls provided to them. In the present researcher’s opinion individuals on Facebook have an inherent trust that Facebook is harmless and safe, often not paying much attention to their profile privacy settings. In truth Facebook can be scattered with potential security threats such as malicious links that allow hackers to utilize individuals’ profiles for their own agenda, consequently exposing themselves to the threat of privacy attacks on Facebook.

The concept of privacy is being shaped by SNS. The distinction between public and private on Facebook has become unclear (West et al., 2009). Privacy concerns online, and specifically on Facebook, are increasing as it enables individuals to easily search for, access and store information about others. Research investigating young adults’ conceptualisations
of privacy is sparse. The participants in the present study reflected this general concern of privacy by highlighting concerns about how their Facebook profile content will impact on how other individuals will view them. Participants were acutely aware of the permanence of all online content and the possible detrimental effect that could have on their self-presentation. All participants viewed employers using Facebook to search for information about them as a violation of their right to privacy. Furthermore, they mentioned the importance of congruence between their offline and online selves in impression formation.

**Interpersonal surveillance behaviour**

Recently, concerns have arisen about how SNS are used. According to Tokunaga (2011) individuals are increasingly using SNS for the surveillance of others. According to Lampe et al. (2006), the chief objective of the majority of social networking sites is to help individuals connect who already have an offline relationship with one another. They also found that one of the biggest motivators for Facebook use was ‘social searching’. Consequently, the Facebook user’s information has become available to a wider audience, which in turn creates the risk of information exploitation taking place.

Most of the participants admitted to using Facebook as a tool to search for information about other individuals. They often reported that their friends behave in the same way and seemed to justify their behaviour by normalising and rationalising it. One participant mentioned: “*I don’t really know if people Facebook stalk me. As I say when I befriend someone for the first time I might check their info or I’ll see if they are in a relationship. I’m not sure if that’s a form of stalking or not, I might just go through their profile and check a few photographs, that sort of thing.*” It seems like the participants of the present study often use Facebook to search for information about individuals, sometimes in an attempt to gain some understanding of the individuals whom they recently met.
Another participant explained it in the following way: “you can look up anyone, if they haven’t blocked you, you can look up anyone and it could be exes, you want to see your boyfriend’s ex-girlfriends... ...but I mean I can’t help it either, I want to see, I am curious. .... And it is a joke in my work place... my manager is like, ‘who would I Facebook stalk today?’ ....I think there is a lot of Facebook stalking to be honest, and I don’t know of anyone who hasn’t looked up someone they are not friends with..... And people get a thrill out of it, I mean, stalking, I can see why stalking would be addictive..... Because I like looking at other people’s things you know, or checking up who of your exes got married you know, who has got a new girlfriend, what is going on. I don’t know why I want to do that, I don’t care about any of them, so it is a crazy phenomenon, it makes no sense.... It is like cheating, but not cheating, it is just wanting to look.... it is like those chocolates you shouldn’t be eating at like 10 o’clock at night. I feel kind of guilty and shameful. ...I am like ‘why am I doing this?’ I am like ‘I shouldn’t be doing this, but I want to you know. ...even when like, one of my friends starts dating a new guy, I am like ‘have you checked his Facebook’, I am like ‘have you checked everything?’”

It is the present researcher’s experience that Facebook has led to the development of its own jargon to such an extent that to hear words such as ‘Facebook cyber-stalking’ and ‘Stalkbook’ is not unusual. While these words may not refer to the traditional idea of stalking they may form part of behaviours that are termed obsessive relational intrusion. These are all terms for obsessively monitoring of the social information presented by Facebook ‘friends’. The term cyber-obsessional pursuit was conceptualized by Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002) for the online version of obsessive relational intrusion. According to Spitzberg and Rhea (1999) this sort of behaviour can be related to interpersonal monitoring and surveillance which is consistent with lower forms of
obsessive relational intrusion. The potential for obsessive relational intrusion and thus cyber-obsessional pursuit is very real on Facebook. It is the researcher’s opinion that almost all Facebook users associate watching other individuals and being watched as a fundamental part of the Facebook experience and users often adjust what they display on their profiles accordingly, by monitoring their online presence for content that they believed others could find offensive. This kind of self-monitoring usually employs tactics such as impression management, which will be further discussed later on in this chapter.

Most of the participants in the present study readily admitted that they use Facebook for ‘social searching’. Participants spoke about ‘stalking’ when describing their online interpersonal surveillance behaviour, however they did not seem to attach the same meaning to it as traditional stalking in an offline setting. They appeared to attribute their ‘Facebook stalking’ behaviour to curiosity about the lives of others. The participants described how they would search Facebook for information about individuals such as new individuals they might have met, ex-partners, and ex-partners of their current partners. They expressed a sense of shame in their behaviour and said that it would be embarrassing if others had to know exactly how often they ‘Facebook stalked’ others. Facebook is a fertile ground to engage in interpersonal surveillance behaviour, also known as cyber-obsessional pursuit. In the researcher’s own view, most Facebook users associate some degree of watching others and being watched as an aspect of the experience of Facebook, however, they would prefer others not to know to what extent they themselves engage in ‘Facebook stalking’.

**Exploitation of information**

Several of the participants alluded to the risks they perceive in sharing content on Facebook. One participant noted that: “I’ve heard of someone that posted a picture or series of pictures of themselves on Facebook in their underwear and they were actually found on
porn sites, so…” The South African Bill of Rights (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996) contains specific rights to access and control of personal information, these rights are related to the protection of human rights as discussed in the literature review chapter. Information privacy is an essential right of any individual using the Internet (Clarke, 2006a). In the present researcher’s opinion individuals should be able to use Facebook freely without the risk of being monitored or exploited by anyone else.

Only one participant said that her profile had been hacked previously, she said that: “It was someone who hacked it and sent spam about products or something. Facebook notified me, I changed my password and it hasn’t happened again.” However most of the other research participants could relate incidences of how other individuals’ Facebook profiles had been hacked. One participant explained what she has heard hackers do to their victims Facebook profiles: “Especially if it is a fairly attractive person, they’ll go through their pictures or remove the pictures from Facebook. So if you manage to get your profile back or you look at your profile from somebody else’s account, you’ll notice something they posted on their walls or the pictures they removed or friends they added that you don’t even know about.” Another participant commented that: “And there is this new thing, this advertising thing... you see things like that are happening a lot actually now and the thing is you find the other person that supposedly sent the message knows absolutely nothing about that and actually says ‘guys I don’t know what this is about’. ....I don’t know how they access or they hack into your Facebook, some hacking of some sort, but it is always advertising. Like ‘I bought a pair of shoes on this website, check it out’ you know or ‘I recently won an iPad, check this out’. It is things like that most of the time.”

When asked whether or not they had ever accepted friend invites from strangers on Facebook, most participants said that they had, this seemed contradictory because those same
participants had mentioned their concerns about privacy, yet they engaged in potentially risky online behaviour by exposing their profiles to strangers. One participant stated: “What I normally do is, I will first look at their timeline or their personal information if it is available... If I can’t, then I’ll just normally accept them and then when I have that access, I’ll read through them. If they do not pester me, then I don’t mind. But if they start pestering me, then I will just completely remove them and block them.”

Despite the fact that social networking sites offer greater social interaction, they also pose the risk of distributing the user’s private information to third parties and organisations. Even though individuals usually share personal information in small harmless portions, the information can be connected and potentially pose a privacy threat. Research shows that social networking sites users are often completely unaware of the amount of personal information they disclose (Gross & Acquisti, 2005).

Most of the research participants could relate incidences of how other individuals’ Facebook profiles had been hacked. Although the participants expressed their concerns regarding the exploitation of their personal information, they had previously accepted friend invites from complete strangers on Facebook, thus exposing themselves to unknown security threats.

**Communication**

One of the main themes that emerged during the research study is Communication. The following subthemes form part of the main theme and are included in the table below.
Table 4

Communication Subthemes

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<td>Advantages</td>
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<td>Disadvantages</td>
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Advantages

One of the themes that emerged throughout the research was that Facebook offered many advantages and disadvantages to communication. The participants in the current study reported that they generally used Facebook as a means to communicate and stay up to date with friends, keep in touch with family, organise events, share information, post on other individuals’ walls, message friends, read other’s profiles, and post pictures. All of the activities centred on connecting with individuals for the purpose of staying in touch. One participant said: “So that has changed communication in a sense that in the evenings I might be chatting to someone, in the past it could have been during the day more often. Like I say, aiding communication.... Some of the times that I’ve met up with people is through Facebook, for example through school friends that I haven’t seen for five years, I wouldn’t have had their cell numbers or have known where exactly they were, but I could contact them through Facebook...” A second participant had the following to say about the advantages of Facebook: “It makes communication easier and I can contact people who I wouldn’t normally contact even though I’m friends with them...” Another participant stated that: “Yes, I have friends overseas and if it wasn’t for Facebook and me checking up on Facebook I wouldn’t know what is going on in their lives, so that’s one of the reasons that I do use Facebook.”
Facebook offers its user numerous channels of communication which assist them in maintaining their relationships with their Facebook ‘friends’ and gives them direct access to the information available about their ‘friends’. Online SNS communication is asynchronous, with individuals replying to messages whenever they go on line. This is a major benefit to Facebook communication as each person has the opportunity to think about how to reply to any message. Facebook users have more control by being selective about what they include in messages and how they are phrased. This in turn can help individuals carefully selective what to information to share with who, in order to present themselves in the exact why in which they would want to be perceived by others. Frequent communication between individuals is essential in the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships (Argyle & Henderson, 1985). According to Lenhart et al. (2005) students’ patterns of communication and perceptions of themselves and others both online and offline have been changed by SNS. This is due to the fact that many university students’ lives have an online component. Carlyne and Kujath (2011) in their study of Facebook and MySpace confirmed that they both act as extensions of face-to-face interactions, but that some individuals tend to rely more on these social networking sites than on face-to-face interaction. All of the participants in the present study reported that Facebook was an inexpensive, convenient communication medium, which could connect them to anyone anywhere in the world.

Facebook offers many communications opportunities which assist individuals in maintaining their relationships. All of the activities centred on connecting with individuals for the purpose of staying in touch. Facebook users have more control over their online communication by being selective about what they include in messages and how they phrase their messages. This in turn is directly linked to their ability to manipulate and control their expression of self. The findings of this study indicate that online communication is changing students’ patterns of communication and perceptions of themselves.
Disadvantages

The participants reported that they found some disadvantages to communicating through Facebook. The participants expressed that they would censor themselves to an extent on Facebook, because they did not feel comfortable sharing very personal feelings and opinions in such an open way. One participant stated that: “it’s one of those where you try and fit in, so you won’t say how you truly feel unless that person is very close to you, but that will be more on a personal level, face-to-face or over a phone call, but not on Facebook.” Another participant said that: “I think face-to-face communication is way better than Facebook…” Another participant remarked that: “I’d say most of it is superficial especially the statuses…” Participants expressed that they experienced Facebook communication to be superficial and mentioned that they often preferred offline interpersonal communication above Facebook communication.

Another theme that emerged was that Facebook content such as statuses and inbox messages, for example, could easily be misinterpreted or misunderstood and consequently could lead to conflict. One participant described her experience in the following way: “A lot of misunderstandings, misconceptions, people will not understand what you’re trying to convey at that point... and then people will just rip you out of context. ...I think normally that if you can talk to someone, then they can get the sense of what you’re actually trying to say, but when it is Facebook or wherever you write something, that people can interpret in different ways. For me I like being sarcastic, so if I talk face-to-face with a person, then they can catch the sarcasm. But if you write something it is difficult for them to understand the sarcasm. ...I tend to think very hard about what is it that I am posting on Facebook because you might mean it in a certain light and someone sees it in another light and you know things like that.”
One participant reported how she felt about the way SNS has changed communication: “We don’t write letters to each other anymore. We don’t send proper messages to each other anymore, we use BBM language or Facebook language which sometimes you don’t even understand, but it has certainly changed the way we communicate with each other, definitely.”

Participants provided mixed reports regarding the nature of online communications. Most viewed Facebook as a very useful social tool, however some of the participants did allude to the limitations and drawbacks of online communications, stating that it contributed to misunderstandings. For the participants the disadvantages to Facebook communication included the lack of non-verbal cues, such as body language and voice tone which would normally assist them in interpreting the meanings of messages. Mckenna and Bargh (2000) highlighted that online communications are limited to verbal cues, but Suler (2005) states that the expressive potential of text communication should not be underestimated, as individuals have developed ways of communicating non-verbal cues such as emotions by using signs and symbols to denote affect.

From the participants’ responses it seemed that they preferred face-to-face communication and felt is easier to express their true opinions and feelings in a more private offline personal setting. Emotions can be carefully selected and displayed or withheld on Facebook, which in turn makes it easier for Facebook users to manage the impressions others have of them, thus presenting a desired image of themselves to their Facebook ‘friends’ (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

The present researcher observed that participants had a shared language when talking about and describing Facebook and Facebook related behaviours. Participants used terms such as ‘liking’, ‘posting’, ‘sharing’ and ‘stalking’. All these words form part of the mutually understood and shared vocabulary they used to describe Facebook behaviour.
Research into the social enhancement and social compensation hypotheses has generated mixed results as to what motivates online communication (Ellison et al., 2007; Kraut et al., 2002; Valkenburg et al., 2005; Walther, 1996). It could be argued that individuals with inadequate offline social connections attempt to compensate for it by having large numbers of online social connections, thus supporting the social compensation hypothesis (Zywica & Danowski, 2008). On the other hand, the social enhancement hypothesis posits that individuals online social network represent an extension of their large offline social network (Valkenburg et al., 2005).

In general the participants expressed that they found Facebook communication to be limiting due to the lack of non-verbal cues, such as body language and voice tone. They also expressed that they often censor what they say on Facebook as they do not always feel comfortable to share their personal thoughts and feelings, especially if they could be perceived as being negative by others. This suggested that they experienced Facebook communication to be superficial. Participants generally preferred offline interpersonal communication above Facebook communication when they wanted to share very personal content.

**Interpersonal relationships**

One of the main themes that emerged during the research study is Interpersonal relationships. The following subthemes form part of the main theme and are included in the table below.
Table 5

*Interpersonal relationships Subthemes*

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<td>Development and maintenance of relationships</td>
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<td>Cyber harassment and confrontation</td>
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**Nature of the relationships**

Research suggests that individuals don’t necessarily use Facebook to meet new individuals, rather it seems that their online relationships usually are anchored in real life connections (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Most of the participants in the study explained that even though they are Facebook ‘friends’ with many different individuals they prefer to communicate mostly with their close real life friends through Facebook. This is confirmed by Ellison et al.’s (2007) assertion that Facebook is used to maintain and enhance existing offline relationships. This contributes greatly to the reason why Facebook has become such a big part of daily life. boyd (2008) defines SNS as ‘networked publics’ which are similar to offline unmediated social settings and encourages individuals to socialise with friends.

All the participants reported that they have had the experience of being sent a Facebook invite or inbox message by a stranger, some had accepted such invites in the past, but most prefer to ignore friend invitations from individuals whom they do not know. When asked whom they communicate with mostly through Facebook one participant stated that: “I communicate with my friends, people that I actually really know, but then you obviously have those people that you don’t know that will message you or inbox you for example, but I don’t
reply.” A second participant commented that: “I suppose as I go along I would befriend people in the new situations that I come across... each time I get into a new place I would make new friends. Initially the first I’d say hundred were probably mostly school friends slowly but surely that’s changed.” All the participants reported that they had met almost all their Facebook ‘friends’ in person and none of them reported using Facebook to find and make new friends. Parks (2007) stated that research on conventional social networks indicates that a person usually maintains close relationships with 10-20 individuals and around 150 social relationships. It is the researcher’s opinion that ‘Friending’ large numbers of individuals on Facebook is something that mostly teenagers enjoy, and this notions was supported by some of the participants who explained how having a many Facebook ‘friends’ used to be one of their main goals on Facebook when they were in high school. Some of the participants alluded to the fact that they did not have real strong relationships with many of their Facebook ‘friends’ and that this has influenced them to start deleting some individuals from their ‘friend’ lists. They often referred to this as a ‘Facebook cleanup’. One participant explained this in the following way: “I also went through a phase where I started just cleaning up my Facebook because, yes I went to primary school with you but we never ever have ever had any conversation of any form on Facebook, so that will be my classification of the random people, like, or maybe a friend of a friend invites me on Facebook and you just accept, but you don’t say anything to each other, you don’t comment on each other’s statuses or anything like that...” Another participant commented that: “...the Facebook cleanup. ...I delete people that I have. I am like sometimes it is crazy because I went onto Facebook when I was 17, around there, and I am like ‘who is this?’.”

To the knowledge of the present researcher relatively little research has been done into the experience of having family members and parents as Facebook ‘friends’. According to West et al. (2009) parents were rarely welcomed as Facebook ‘friends’. They found that the main
reason for this was related to embarrassment, social norms, and fears about exposure, vulnerability and privacy concerns. Some of the participants in the present study reported that their Facebook friends included family members, siblings and parents. When the researcher asked how they felt about having their parents and family member as Facebook friends, she found mixed responses. A participant in the present study had the following to say about having her family members of Facebook: “It was fine when I just had my brother and my cousins. When my mom joined Facebook things changed a bit, I calmed down a bit, maybe limited what she could see on my profile for her own benefit, obviously I love my mother and I have a good relationship with my mother, but there are certain things that maybe I don’t want my mom to see.” One participant was positive about having his mother and family members on Facebook: “I enjoy it, because as I said the photographs are a big thing. My brother and sister-in-law very recently had a baby, just last week. So now I can just look at all the pictures every other day.” Another participant related the following experience: “It limits you to some extend because now you have to think carefully on what pictures you add and what you say on your statuses, so for me I find it is a bit limiting but not a big deal for me. ... I might post something and then after a while think okay no, let me just remove it just for in case...” One participant mentioned the following: “I don’t mind, because I don’t have like any bad stuff on my Facebook, so I don’t mind having my aunties and uncles and family member there.”

The findings in this study highlight that there are differing opinions towards having family and particularly parents as Facebook ‘friends’. Some of the participants enjoy having their family as Facebook contacts whereas others found it limited self-expression. From the participants’ responses it is clear that they maintain many different kinds of relationships on Facebook, some with very low levels of intimacy, such as acquaintances. These are usually Facebook ‘friends’ whom they have met briefly and seldom interact with. Most participants
reported that their close intimate relationships directly correlated with those they interacted with most on Facebook, these relationships where often with long term friends and close family members.

Individuals don’t necessarily use Facebook to meet new individuals, rather it seems that their online relationships usually are extensions of their offline social networks (boyd & Ellison, 2008). In the past few years Facebook has become an integral part of individuals’ social life and interactions with friend and family. Some of the participants felt that the presence of family and parents online restricted them in what they could post on Facebook. This suggests that participants consciously choose what aspects of their identity to share with others and what to keep hidden.

**Development and maintenance of relationships**

Donath and boyd (2004) argued that online social networking systems allow individuals to sustain a bigger number of close relationships. When asked how important Facebook is to her social life and friendships one participant responded that: “I would say it is quite important, because that’s probably another way of getting hold of family and friends that you haven’t spoken to in a while.” Another participant said that: “I’m a bit passive in forming relationships or communicating with people, I’m not very extroverted with that, so Facebook can sometimes aid that a bit. It could make it easier.” Previous studies such as Carlyne and Kujath (2011) stated that Facebook acts as an extensions of face-to-face interactions; however they also said that they found some individuals relying more on social networking sites than on face-to-face interaction.

All of the participants expressed how important Facebook is to their social lives. A participant explained the following: “Yes, I have friends overseas and if it wasn’t for Facebook and me checking up on Facebook I wouldn’t know what is going on in their lives.
so that’s one of the reasons that I do use Facebook. It’s very sad, because to them they might feel like I’m not aware of what’s going on in their lives, because I don’t phone them, but I am because I see what’s going on, on Facebook.”

As indicated by the participants Facebook can play a vital role in maintaining relationships over great distance, it assist users in seeing what is happening in the lives of family and friends who live far away from them. Although social capital is an adaptable term with a range of definitions in multiple fields, it can be said to refer to benefits individuals receive from social relationships. The ability to form and maintain relationships is a necessary requirement for the growth of social capital. Social capital theory is specifically applicable in that Facebook can allow the user to maintain bridging and bonding capital by assisting them to have closer relationships with a larger number of individuals than is possible offline (Donath & boyd, 2004). Ellison et al., (2007) found that social capital was beneficial in helping students with regard to employment opportunities and assists them to stay in touch with their friends.

Some participants highlighted how Facebook could potentially cause problems in relationships, especially in romantic relationships. One participant described her experience the following way: “...it could also bring problems into a relationship. A random girl can comment on [name omitted’s] wall and I don’t know who this girl is, but like saying things like ‘oh I missed you and hug kiss’ and I don’t like that, I don’t think that is right. And like ‘thinking of you’ and ‘we must meet up sometime’ and she can see he has a girlfriend, but because it is not face-to-face, she doesn’t respect it.” According to one of the participants: “It can cause problems in your relationship if a partner goes and seeks the past, it can bring up a lot of unnecessary issues...maybe things you haven’t told your partner that they find out via Facebook.” In the researcher’s opinion these ‘problems’ the participants refer to are connected to their desire to present themselves in a favourable light. This becomes more and
more challenging as time goes by, in the sense that Facebook stores all previous information posted about them. This archival information about the user is accessible to any of their Facebook ‘friends’, and can therefore contribute to how they are perceived by others. The self and identity are socially constructed and ever-changing, therefore one can speculate that the self-presentation the users employed previously and what they expressed about themselves, may possibly be contradictory to what they wish to portray about themselves currently or in the future.

Facebook enables it’s users to maintain large social networks with greater ease than is possible offline (boyd, 2004). The participants expressed that Facebook plays a very important role in helping them maintain relationships with individuals who live far from them, such as family overseas. Some participants highlighted how Facebook could potentially cause problems in relationships, especially in romantic relationships. This seemed to be linked to the possibility of romantic partners accessing archival Facebook information about them. Archival information about the user is accessible to any of their Facebook ‘friends’, and can therefore contribute to how they are perceived by others.

**Cyber harassment and confrontation**

While general interaction and communication takes place on SNS there are also occasions where individuals either embarrass, defame or threaten others and consequently subject the targeted persons to great suffering. Rainie et al. (2012) in their survey of American adults’ use of the Internet compared adult experiences on social networking sites to teenagers’ experiences. Their findings indicated that adults reported more positive experiences on SNS than teenagers. According to them adult users are more likely to ignore negative or offensive behaviour and they reported that adults are slightly less likely to become involved in the harassment of other individuals on social networking sites than teens. According to Rainie et
al. (2012) 45% of their adult survey participants reported that they had previously decided not
to post something online due to concerns about how it could reflect on them. This aligns with
the findings of the present study.

One participant reported the following experience regarding cyber harassment: “I have
experienced bullying. My ex-boyfriend...didn’t want me to be with my new boyfriend,
because he wasn’t over me and he took to Facebook saying, it is so childish, he took to
Facebook saying ‘[name omitted] has airborne HIV’ ” A second participant stated that:
“I’ve been in a situation where I was arguing with a girl on Facebook, at first it was just on
statuses and then it became personal and started to go into inboxes. I didn’t even know who
she was, so for me it was difficult to be fighting with someone who I didn’t know and I’m
posting comments at some girl that I don’t know.” Another participant reported that: “There
can be abusive things on statuses, like bullying maybe, it hasn’t happened to me per se, but I
have witnessed it.” One participant mentioned how he would attempt to avoid conflict on
Facebook by censoring what he posts. He explained it in the following manner: “Some
people might not like it and I just thought it’s not really positive, so I decided to take it off
after a few seconds. I wouldn’t like to put up things that start fights or something.” As
indicated by one of the participants of the present study, cyber harassment is a very real
concern as all the participants experienced harassment on Facebook, either having been
harassed themselves, or have witnessed it being done to someone else. In the present
researcher’s experience individuals often find it easier to convey intimidating messages and
to turn private arguments into public ones in an online environment such as Facebook.

The new South African Protection from Harassment Act came into operation on 27 April
2013 (Protection From Harassment Act no 17, 2011). The Protection from Harassment Act
makes it possible for anyone who feels harassed to approach the court without a legal
representative and apply for a protection order. Under the act, harassment is not limited to
physical and verbal abuse. The Act makes provision for individuals who are being harassed electronically over the internet. Individuals who receive threats or unwanted attention via social media and text messages may also apply for a protection order. The Act allows the court to request details of this person from the electronic communications service provider or may order an investigation by the police into the name and address of the person who is harassing the victim (Protection From Harassment Act no 17, 2011). Unfortunately, the court will most likely struggle to enforce some of these measures of retrieving information from electronic communications service providers such as Facebook, whose servers fall outside of South Africa's jurisdiction. The harassment of individuals online can also be understood as a violation of human dignity, which is stated as a human right in chapter two of the South African Bill of Rights (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). The challenge according to the present researcher is in the protection of human rights and the difficulty in pursuing legal action against the perpetrators of harassment. The fact that information posted on Facebook can be deleted by the person posting it makes it potentially difficult to obtain proof of harassment. The present researcher is of the opinion that much work still needs to be done to educate the public about online safety, the impact of cyber harassment on individuals and the avenues available to them to protect themselves against cyber harassment.

Participants in the present study indicated that cyber harassment is a very real concern and all the participants had experienced harassment on Facebook. The findings from this study suggest that the harassment of individuals online can also be understood as a violation of human dignity, which is stated as a human right in chapter two of the South African Bill of Rights (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). In South Africa the new Protection from Harassment Act makes it possible for individuals who feel harassed to obtain
and pursue legal action against their perpetrator. Facebook creates new challenges when it comes to the protection of human rights and the attempt at legal action.

**The Self-Concept**

One of the main themes that emerged during the research study is the self-concept. The following subthemes form part of the main theme and are included in the table below.

Table 6  
*The Self-Concept Subthemes*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation of the self and identity</td>
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**Self-esteem**

Exploring the ever-changing relationship between the self and the social world is integral to any study of online interactions. As mentioned earlier, interpersonal experiences directly impacts of the individual’s sense of self (Shaffer, 1994). Cast and Burke (2002) conceptualise self-esteem to be a key element of self-concept. The level of attention, acceptance and respect that an individual receives from others plays a part in self-esteem development (Taylor et al., 2006). Individuals gain insight into themselves through interactions with others, in looking-glass fashion, the individual’s self-view is based upon their conceptualization of how others see them (Cooley, 1902). Tice (1993) posits that individuals with high self-esteem aim to enhance it and individuals with low self-esteem want to compensate for it and be accepted. Therefore, Facebook users may want to look popular
online, whether they have high or low self-esteem. Being more self-protective and cautious online has been correlated to low self-esteem (Joinson, 2003). The Internet provides users an opportunity to convey characteristics of their identity that may be difficult to express offline (Bargh et al., 2002).

Some of the participants mentioned how they felt that Facebook encouraged individuals to compare themselves with others on Facebook and how it had the possibility to affect self-esteem. One participant stated the following: “...you start feeling inadequate or your self-esteem starts getting... you know what I mean? You start treading on your own self-esteem which is, I am guilty of that, but I mean I can’t help it either, I want to see, I am curious.” The same participant also later said: “I think Facebook can be a huge threat to your self-esteem. ...I didn’t think it would affect me and it does and I am like ‘ag this is silly’ you know what I mean? I am still able to rationalise with those thoughts though, but someone who has a low self-esteem, it could really do damage, so... Another participant stated that: “...if you put a picture on there and everyone like says ‘oh yes you look so pretty’ and you know that obviously is going to you know, increase your self-esteem.” Another participant said the following: “Luckily, all of the comments on the pictures I have had on Facebook were really good ones, so at least, and it just makes me feel ‘Oh actually yes’, you know it makes me feel good actually it does make me feel good.” One of the participants commented on what she saw as attention-seeking behaviour by some girls on her Facebook. She said the following: “From my perspective, if a girl should do that it is obviously to get a guy’s attention. The more ‘likes’ you get you start feeling good about yourself. I’m just guessing its people who have low self-esteem...”

This suggests that participants engage in social comparison through Facebook which in turn has an effect on their own self-esteem. A person’s self-esteem is affected by how they are treated in different areas of life. Being accepted and treated well is very important for the
development of high self-esteem (Mruk, 1999). The findings from the present study align with Cooley’s (1902) view that subjectively interpreted feedback impacts the individual’s sense of self. Facebook interactions such as ‘liking’ and commenting on each other’s profile offers feedback for individuals to use to develop an understanding of how they are perceived by others. This is also supported by the reflected appraisal model which is embedded in Mead’s (1934) symbolic interactionism, which states that what individuals know about themselves is mainly as a result of their social interactions. This is closely linked to Cooley’s view of how the self-concept is developed.

The relationship between the self and the social world is a dynamic one, which has implications for all aspects of the self (Shaffer, 1994). According to Joinson (2003) Facebook users may attempt to look popular online regardless of their level of self-esteem. The present study’s findings indicate that individuals engage in social comparison on Facebook and interpretation of their social interactions. Therefore the social interactions individuals engage in on Facebook can have a major impact on their self-esteem.

**Presentation of the self and identity**

SNS such as Facebook offers users a new way to display the self. Research suggests that users of social networking sites engage in self-presentation behaviours to influence the impressions others form of them (Papacharissi, 2002). According to Goffman’s (1959) theory of self-presentation, individuals all attempt to manage the impressions others form of them through impression motivation and impression construction. Goffman expanded upon the work of theorists such as Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902), by elaborating on how individuals attempt to control the impressions others hold of them. He explained that social interactions always involves a process of information management. He made a distinction between the intentional verbal communications and unintentional communication, and
proposed that both play an important role in communicating information about the person expressing it. Individuals are able to manipulate their intentional verbal communication more than non-verbal unintentional communication. Goffman referred to this type of information manipulation as an ‘information game’. Thus, as he put it, actors put on a daily performance in order to manage and convey identity, or as he calls it ‘face’ (Goffman, 1959). Research by Rosenberg and Egbert (2011) suggests that SNS users try to influence how others perceive them by employing self-presentation behaviours in both face-to-face and in computer-mediated environments. Persons may be motivated to monitor their behaviour and in turn their impressions more, because of the possibility of real life interactions with their friends (Hanneman & McEwen, 1975).

Most of the participants in the present study reported that they do monitor the content that they post about themselves and the contents posted by their friends about them. They seemed to realize that their friends shaped their online reputation just as much as they do themselves in an online setting such as Facebook. One participant related the following: “...people put their best pictures on, they always write like happy statuses, so maybe they are trying to create like a better person or like a more positive person than what they are.” Another participant spoke about how she saw individuals using Facebook to get attention: “The one guy is a body builder and his girlfriend is this ‘bimbo’ with huge boobs and they just do the most ridiculous things. The photos that they post are horrific and I just can’t believe that people behave like that, but it is entertaining.” Another participant mentioned the following: “...lately girls find the need to upload pictures of themselves half naked.”

Another participant explained her experience of self-monitoring and impression management in the following way: “I think that Facebook is more of a mask for everyone else; well I think it’s a mask for me as well, because it’s always only happy things that happen on there, never the bad.” Another participant stated: “...always being aware of what
you are putting out there and what people will perceive and what they will judge and how they will judge you.” Another participant mentioned the following about her Facebook profile: “It’s sort of is the real me, but only part of me, it could be a more positive side because in a sense I am more conscious of what I put on Facebook... I am concerned about what people think about me, so I want to give some sort of positive picture.”

From the above responses it is clear that the participants actively engage in impression management as they seem to realise that the expression they give and the expressions they give off will not only influence their online identity, but will most likely spill over into real life, making the control of information about themselves more complicated than first anticipated. Another important aspect of Facebook is the ability of friend-generated and system-generated information about a person to influence how that person is perceived by others (Mehdizadeh, 2010). In the researcher’s opinion this has implications for information control, as users are able to restrict what is said about them on their own profile by tightening up on their security settings available to them. Facebook gives their users the choice to approve or disapprove of anything before it appears on their profile, thus assisting the user to have easier control over their online identity.

One participant related the experience she had when she once decided to temporarily deactivate her Facebook account: “I deactivated it and for those six months I felt like so isolated. I know that is weird. Even though I saw my friends everyday there was a, there was almost like a community isolation, it was a weird feeling, but it was nice, it was actually very nice because no one knew what you were up to, you know and I liked the privacy, but I did feel that sort of like an isolation...”

SNS offer the perfect setting for an individual to participate in self-presentational behaviour such as impression management as they are highly controlled environments. The kinds of information that individuals choose to post on their profile is likely to be influenced
by the level of concern that they have for what others think of them. Individuals have the opportunity on Facebook to present others with their ‘hoped-for possible selves’ (Mehdizadeh, 2010). boyd and Ellison (2007) suggested that friendship links, or ‘public displays of connection’, are another significant feature of self-presentation. Bargh et al. (2002) found that individuals may be using the Internet as a medium through which they could express their true selves, more than in face-to-face interactions. Therefore one should consider that some individuals may not be engaging in impression management, but in fact are expressing themselves more fully on Facebook.

Some participants in the present study reported that they intentionally manage their online impressions by carefully and selectively posting information about themselves. Others described their impression management as less of a concern to them.

Most of the participants said that they are very selective when deciding what to post on their Facebook profiles. One participant explained it as follows: “I think I am a very private person and there are just certain things that I want to keep to myself or I want to keep amongst my close friends or my group of friends and things like that. I don’t want people just reading about my life on Facebook...”

There are possibilities for presentation of the self online which do not exist offline. In the present study the participants generally expressed that they preferred to create positive impressions about themselves and aimed at maintaining congruence between their offline and online self. This aligns with research that indicated that individuals aim to present themselves in a favourable manner online (Zweir et al., 2011). Self-esteem can be directly correlated to self-presentational patterns, individuals with already high self-esteem seek social approval, and individuals with low self-esteem attempt to avoid social disapproval (Joinson, 2003). Madden and Smith (2010) found that young adults are the most vigorous online reputation managers. Their survey results showed that 44% of young adults limited
the amount of personal information available about them, 47% of young adults have deleted comments other individuals posted on their profiles, and 41% have removed their name from photos.

SNS such as Facebook offers users a new way to display the self and offers the ideal setting from which to manage one’s presentation of self and identity. Facebook users engage in self-presentation behaviours to influence the impressions others form of them (Papacharissi, 2002). The participants in the present study reported that they are vigilant regarding what others post about them and they carefully select what to post about themselves. The research findings indicate that participants engage in impression management. Participants indicated that they preferred to convey mostly the positive side of their personality on Facebook and this is confirmed by research that indicates that individuals aim to present themselves in a more positive light online (Zweir et al., 2011).

Uses

One of the main themes that emerged during the research study is Uses. The following subtheme forms part of the main theme and is included in the table below.

Table 7

Uses Subthemes

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<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Different uses</td>
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Different uses

Baltaretu and Balaban (2010) in their study attempted to determine what incentives motivate individuals’ use of SNS. They found these incentives to be psychological in nature and related to interpersonal relationships and communication, socialization and group belonging. A participant in the present study reported the following about what she used Facebook for: “I only upload pictures and status updates, but other than that you have apps that you can play games on and things like that, but I don’t really do that.” One participant described Facebook as being a communication tool: “I think Facebook is a very useful tool if you have maybe family or friends in another country or in another place like Pretoria or Cape Town and I like to keep in contact with them.” Another participant reported the following: “I play online games on Facebook. ... there is Tetris, and that is like my favourite game.” She also said the following: “…mostly I like go on like if it is between classes and there is nothing to do I will just scroll down, you know, look at people’s profiles, their pictures.”

Another participant mentioned that she uses it in the following manner: “To keep up to date with people’s lives, to hear what is happening, it’s an easy way to do that, what is happening in other people’s lives. I use it more to check up on other people than posting my own actual stuff.” Another participant said: “it gives you information, keeps you connected and it gives you some kind of network to access for whatever it might be that you are interested in. From the present study it is clear that the participants use Facebook for several different purposes such as keeping in touch with others, networking, sharing information, accessing information, entertainment, passing time and interpersonal surveillance.

The findings from the present study align with what other researchers have found to be motives for internet use namely; interpersonal connection, passing of time, information
gathering, professional networking and entertainment (Baltaretu & Balaban, 2010; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Sheldon, 2008).

**Other**

One of the sub-themes that emerged during the study that did not fit into any other theme was that of Habitual behaviour and addiction.

Table 8

*Other Subthemes*

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<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Habitual behaviour and addiction</td>
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**Habitual behaviour and addiction**

Little is understood about the habit-forming nature of the Internet and its potential for abuse (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Griffiths (2000) suggests that some individuals may become addicted to specific Internet functions, rather than to the Internet as a whole. Young (1999) has proposed that there exist five different types of Internet addiction. Based on her classification, SNS addiction will fall under cyber-relationship addiction. These include computer addiction, information overload, net compulsion, cyber sexual addiction and cyber-relational addiction. Alternatively, Kuss and Griffiths (2011) expressed that when investigating addiction specifically related to Facebook it can be regarded as a ‘Facebook Addiction Disorder’ or more broadly a ‘SNS Addiction Disorder’. Young (1999) stresses that excessive use of SNS could have a detrimental effect on personal and professional lives. Since Facebook allows individuals to express their ideal self which can be very satisfying and personally rewarding, behaviour reinforcement is a real possibility. The challenge for the
field of clinical psychology lies in the treatment of SNS addiction, as SNS have become such an integral part of everyday life.

High sensation-seekers show signs of more addictive Internet use behaviours than low sensation-seekers (Armstrong et al., 2000). The exciting nature of ‘stalking’ someone on Facebook could potentially be linked to sensation-seeking behaviour. However, to the current researcher’s knowledge there is a lack of research studies examining the relationship between online interpersonal monitoring and surveillance, often called ‘Facebook stalking’ and problematic habitual Facebook use.

Some individuals may find online social interactions easier than face-to-face social interaction due to their lack of good social skills (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). Some researchers have suggested a link between loneliness and Internet addiction (Caplan, 2003; Davis, 2001). Kubey et al. (2001) proposed that lonely individuals feel more comfortable online because they tend to feel incompetent in offline social situations, thus supporting the link between loneliness and Internet addiction. When exploring the etiology of SNS addiction, researchers have suggested incorporating biological, psychological and social factors as contributory forces to addictions (Griffiths, 2005; Shaffer et al., 2004).

The researcher asked participants what they thought contributed to their habitual Facebook usage. One participant said the following: “And people get a thrill out of, I mean, stalking, I can see why stalking would be addictive. Because I like looking at other people’s things you know, or checking up who of your exes got married you know, who has got a new girlfriend, what is going on. I don’t know why I want to do that, I don’t care about any of them, so it is a crazy phenomenon it makes no sense. And it is a joke in my work place, when I waitress they like, my manager is like, who would I Facebook stalk today? She is a perfect candidate for Facebook addiction that is for sure. I mean she sits on Facebook the whole day and she Facebook stalks whoever.
It can be even your boyfriend’s ex.” Young adults often participate in stalking behaviour and Facebook offers them the perfect way to do this anonymously (Lyndon, Bonds-Raacke, & Cratty, 2011). The participants reported being curious about other individuals’ lives and not wanting to miss out on information. This is often referred to as F.O.M.O. (Fear of missing out) in popular culture. The kind ‘stalking’ behaviour the participants said they engage in usually included looking up the profiles of individuals and looking at what information they post on their profile as well as looking at their photographs. These behaviours seem to be linked to lesser forms of cyber-obsessional pursuit (Spitzberg & Rhea, 1999). In the researcher’s opinion, Facebook has popularised stalker-like behaviour amongst its user and made it exceptionally easy to monitor anyone without them knowing.

When asked whether or not she thought Facebook was addictive one participant said: “Oh yes, I think I’m a victim of Facebook addiction. When I am bored I go onto Facebook, at night before I go to bed I kind of just scroll through, it’s a habit. I wouldn’t say that I’m addicted; I can go away without my phone for... If I go overseas or something I’m not... But yes, I do think it has become a habit, part of my daily life, but I wouldn’t say that it has gone as far as addiction.” Another participant mentioned: “I do spend a lot of time on Facebook. But I’m not... how can I say this, I’m one of those Facebook addicts, but not too addicted that I can’t live without it.”

Internet addiction has been the focus of research studies for several years, more recently researchers have started studying addiction to specific Internet functions, such as online gaming, cybersex addiction and SNS addiction. There still is no set diagnostic criteria for Internet addiction, making the identification and treatment considerably difficult. Kuss and Griffiths (2011) recommends that further research be conducted to determine specific SNS addiction symptoms. They suggest adapting the criteria for substance dependence from the
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Although Internet addiction, specifically, has not been recognized as a disorder by the American Psychiatric Association, the latest major revision of the DSM, the DSM-5, did however list Internet gaming disorder under section III, Conditions for further study. The American Psychiatric Association’s recommendation suggests the value of further research to determine whether Internet addiction can or should be classified as another type of addiction, as proposed by some researchers (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011).

It is the researcher’s opinion that the topic of Internet addiction and more specifically SNS addiction is a relevant and topical research field. In the researcher’s own experience Facebook use can easily become habitual and definitely has the potential to be addictive. It is clear that there is a great need for further research into the phenomenon of habitual and addictive Internet and specifically, SNS behaviour.

Research into the addictive potential of Facebook is relatively new and under developed (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). The participants in the study all mentioned that their Facebook use has become a habit and some even classified themselves as ‘Facebook addicts’. The impact of their habitual Facebook use and the extent to which it has an impact on their personal and social lives was not clear. The treatment of online addiction is very challenging as absolute abstinence is virtually impossible due to the fact that individuals’ lives have such a big online component.

Conclusion

The findings of this qualitative analysis were discussed in this chapter. The main themes that emerged from the research were Privacy, Communication, Interpersonal relationships, The Self-Concept, Uses and Other.
The subthemes that emerged and fall under the first theme were Public versus private, Interpersonal surveillance behaviour and Exploitation of information. The participant responses reflected on the changing meaning of privacy on Facebook and they expressed differing opinions with regards to self-disclosure. Concerns about the impact of Facebook content on their future, specifically how it would change the way individuals perceive them was also highlighted.

The advantages and disadvantages emerged under the theme of Communication. The participants reported that the use of Facebook was a convenient and inexpensive tool for communication, however, they also pointed out disadvantages such as the lack of non-verbal cues, which contribute to messages often being misinterpreted.

The nature of the relationships, development and maintenance of relationships and cyber harassment and confrontation are subthemes that emerged under the theme of Interpersonal Relationships. Participants expressed that they use Facebook mainly to maintain their relationships, rather than to gain new ones. They also indicated the limiting effect of having older family members and parents as Facebook friends. All the participants reported that they have had an experience of cyber harassment on Facebook, either directly or indirectly.

Self-esteem and presentation of the self and identity are the subthemes that emerged under the theme Self-Concept. The participants reported engaging in selective self-presentation in order to express a more positive identity on Facebook. They acknowledged the role that social interactions and feedback plays in their own self-esteem and that of others.

Different uses was the subtheme that fell under the theme Uses. The motivations for Facebook use reported by the participants included staying connected, networking, sharing information, accessing information, entertainment, passing time and interpersonal surveillance.
Habitual behaviour and addiction was the subtheme that emerged that did not fit into any other theme. The participant responses indicated that they acknowledged the risk of Facebook addiction behaviour and appeared to understand their own Facebook behaviour as a very time consuming habit. How much of an impact their habitual Facebook use has on their personal and academic lives is not clear.

The researcher utilised a transcendental phenomenological approach to present the findings of the present study. The findings of this research provided a structural description of young adults’ experience of Facebook. Textural qualities of their experiences were collected in the six themes that emerged. An impression of the participants’ experiences of Facebook has been obtained by integrating the structural and textural aspects of the phenomenon. The literature from the previous chapters was linked to the themes where applicable. In the chapter to follow the conclusion and limitations of the study and recommendations for further research will be discussed.
Chapter 5
Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the main findings of the present study and presents a discussion of the conclusions reached. A discussion of some of the limitations of the present study follows and the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research. The aim of this research study was to explore young adults’ experience of Facebook. The current study included a sample of seven young adults who regularly use Facebook. The study was grounded in transcendental phenomenology. The findings of each main theme along with its subthemes was discussed and integrated with relevant literature.

Summary of findings

The results of this study have been presented according to the key areas that have emerged through the conversations with participants. The results illustrate the participants’ experiences of Facebook. Social networking sites such as Facebook is a very dynamic social phenomenon. Participants experience that Facebook contributes greatly to the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, however they also highlighted perceived disadvantages and limitations to Facebook communication. Participants’ motives for Facebook usage were many and diverse, including relationships maintenance, professional networking, information gathering, social searching and ‘Facebook stalking’ of others, entertainment and passing of time. Most participants admitted to engaging in stalker-like behaviour on Facebook, often spending their time on Facebook browsing through the profiles of other individuals to gain information or simply for entertainment purposes. Some participants were self-proclaimed Facebook addicts, spending much of their free time on
Facebook. Whether or not their Facebook usage has detrimental effects on their personal lives was not clear.

The mediated world of Facebook shapes the experience of the self online. The self-social world interaction on Facebook has implications for the participants’ expression of self and self-presentational behaviour. Participants disclosed that they carefully consider what they post on Facebook, suggesting a strong link with their need to control the expression of their identity on Facebook. The participants experienced Facebook as impacting on their identity and self-esteem and told of how they compare themselves to their Facebook ‘friends’. Participants attempt to display themselves in as favourable a manner as possible, always aware of how others may perceive them.

The participants highlighted their concerns with regards to the limitations to privacy and potential threats they have encountered on Facebook. They had all had experiences on Facebook of cyber harassment, either personally or having witnessed it. They experience that individuals sometimes use Facebook to stalk or harass others, but none of the participant knew whether or not they have been stalked on Facebook themselves.

**Limitations**

The limitations of the current research study will be discussed in order to suggest improvements for future research. The present study aimed to broadly explore the Facebook experiences of young adults.

The first limitation of this study is that it is an exploration of the experiences of young adults on Facebook. A narrower research focus on one or two themes relating to this research may produce a clearer and more in-depth description.

Secondly, the sample size of this study was small and consisted of a total of seven participants. While being able to portray the experiences of the participants and identify
common themes, the findings are not representative of young South African adults as a whole.

Thirdly, the research findings of the present study cannot be generalised to the larger population, as the sample isn’t representative of the larger population. Non-probability sampling was employed which meant that the participants were purposefully selected, therefore the possibility of researcher bias exists.

Fourthly, limited research and available literature were also considered a limitation to this study. Literature involving the Facebook experiences of young South African adults was severely lacking.

**Recommendations for Future Research Studies**

With the scarcity of academic literature on young South African adults’ experiences of Facebook, the present study provides some valuable findings while at the same time highlighting possibilities for future research. It is recommended by the researcher that more research be conducted with regards to this topic and related issues in this field specifically on South African young adults. One of the themes that emerged from this study may stimulate other researchers to pursue further research in this field. There are numerous areas of an individual’s life that is impacted upon by Facebook and which could benefit from further in-depth investigation.

One of the themes that emerged throughout the research was the habitual nature of Facebook. It was not discussed in depth but merely mentioned in the findings and discussion of the present study. There is a great need for further studies in this area of SNS addiction, future studies can aim to contribute to the development of and the understanding of cyber addiction.
Another potential topic for research is the impact of cyber harassment, specifically on the self-esteem of the victims, as all of the participants reported that they had witnessed or experienced harassment on Facebook. A more comprehensive examination of the motivations behind Facebook harassment, along with interpersonal surveillance and stalking is also recommended.

It is suggested that future research explore the actual differences in gender with regards to Facebook usage, as this study included only one male participant.

Research on attention-seeking behaviour on Facebook is another recommended topic for further study. Some of the participants had mentioned that they have observed individuals seeking the attention of others through Facebook.

Future research should investigate how individuals utilise the information they gain online when making social judgments of others.

As researchers move forward in understanding the ways individuals interact with one another in online social networking environments, these are some of the research areas that will benefit from further investigation.

**Conclusion**

The final chapter of the present study began by reviewing the overall findings and conclusions of the study. It included the main themes and the subthemes that emerged during the course of research as well as relevant information from the literature review chapters. This was followed by a discussion of the limitations experienced and finally, recommendations for future research. Despite some of the limitations to the study, the findings were thought to contribute in a valuable way to furthering knowledge regarding young adults’ experiences of Facebook.
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Appendix A:

Cover Letter to Participants

Dear Potential Participant

I am at present a Psychology Masters student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. I am undertaking research into young adults using social networking sites.

The aim of the research is to explore the experiences of young adults regarding Facebook. I require adult participants between the ages of 18 to 30 years who meet the specific criteria for participating in the research.

The information for the study will be obtained by interviewing each participant for about one hour. The interview questions will relate to their experience of Facebook as a social networking site specifically.

The interview will be audio recorded, transcribed and analysed by the researcher. All information obtained will remain confidential and no personal feedback will be provided as the participants’ identity will not be revealed. A treatise will be made available for study in the NMMU library once the research is completed.

Participants will remain anonymous throughout the research. Each participant will be respected and no harm is intended toward them.
Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

........................................... ...........................................
Inge Prince Prof. G. Howcroft
RESEARCHER SUPERVISOR

........................................... ...........................................
Ms. T. Lambert Prof. D. Elkonin
CO-SUPERVISOR HEAD OF DEPARTMENT
Appendix B:

Consent Form

SOUTH CAMPUS
HEALTH SCIENCES/ DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
Tel. +27 (0)41 504-2354 Fax. +27 (0)41 504 2101
psychology@nmmu.ac.za

INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCHER’S DETAILS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of the research project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal investigator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Address | NMMU  
Department of Psychology  
PO Box 77000  
Port Elizabeth |
| Postal Code | 6031 |
| Contact telephone number (private numbers not advisable) | 041 504 2354 |

A. DECLARATION BY OR ON BEHALF OF PARTICIPANT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I, the participant and the undersigned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(full names)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**A.1 HEREBY CONFIRM AS FOLLOWS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID number</th>
<th></th>
<th>Initial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address (of participant)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I, the participant, was invited to participate in the above-mentioned research project that is being undertaken by Inge Prince from the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Health Sciences of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

---

**THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS HAVE BEEN EXPLAINED TO ME, THE PARTICIPANT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.1 Aim:</th>
<th>The researcher is studying the experiences of young adults regarding Facebook.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The information will be used to gain an understanding of the experiences of young adults using social networking sites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 2.2 Procedures: | I understand that the interview process will take place for approximately an hour. I may decline to answer any question and may withdraw at any point I wish. The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. The transcription will be included in the appendix of the final work with all identifying remarks and my name absent. Once the transcription is complete the recordings will be deleted. Generalised feedback regarding the study’s outcomes will be made available should I be interested. |

| 2.3 Risks: | I will not remain anonymous to the researcher and supervisor. |

| 2.4 Possible benefits: | As a result of my participation in this study the research findings are intended to contribute to the knowledge of young adults’ experiences of online social networking sites and cyber socialization. |

| 2.5 Confidentiality: | My identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publications by the researcher and supervisor. |

| 2.6 Access to findings: | A copy of the research will be placed in the library of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. An article may be published in a journal aligned to the profession of psychology. Generalised feedback regarding the findings of the study will be provided to me and other interested participants. |
2.6 Voluntary participation / refusal / discontinuation: My participation is voluntary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2.6 Voluntary participation / refusal / discontinuation: My decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect my present or future employment / lifestyle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TRUE</th>
<th>FALSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3. THE INFORMATION ABOVE WAS EXPLAINED TO ME/THE PARTICIPANT BY:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inge Prince</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Afrikaans</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and I am in command of this language.

I was given the opportunity to ask questions and all these questions were answered satisfactorily.

4. No pressure was exerted on me to consent to participation and I understand that I may withdraw at any stage without penalisation.

5. Participation in this study will not result in any additional cost to myself.

A.2 I HEREBY VOLUNTARILY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ABOVE-MENTIONED PROJECT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signed/confirmed at</th>
<th>on</th>
<th>20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Signature of participant

Signature of witness:

Full name of witness:

Full name of participant
## B. STATEMENT BY OR ON BEHALF OF INVESTIGATOR

I, Inge Prince declare that:

1. I have explained the information given in this document to (name of participant)
2. He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions;
3. This conversation was conducted in Afrikaans English And no translator was used.
4. I have detached Section C and handed it to the participant YES NO

Signed/confirmed at on 20

Signature of interviewer Signature of witness:

Full name of witness:

## C. IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO PATIENT/REPRESENTATIVE OF PARTICIPANT

Dear participant

Thank you for your participation in this study. Should, at any time during the study:

- an emergency arise as a result of the research, or
- you require any further information with regard to the study

Kindly contact Inge Prince at telephone number 041 504 2354
Appendix C:  

Biographical Questionnaire

Please fill in the form with your personal details as accurately as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code name</th>
<th>(A code name will be allocated to you by the researcher to ensure anonymity.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of birth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been using Facebook for a minimum of 6 months?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you use Facebook weekly?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much time per week on average do you spend on Facebook?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D:

Interview Questionnaire

Possible questions to guide the interview:

1. Tell me why you use Facebook.
2. What is your experience of Facebook?
3. How important is Facebook to your social life and friendships?
4. Who do you communicate with through Facebook?
5. Why do you update or change your profile?
6. What are the advantages to you of using Facebook?
7. What do you enjoy most about Facebook?
Appendix E:

Tesch’s Eight Steps to Data Analysis

(Tesch, 1990, p. 142-145)

1. Get a sense of the whole. Read through all of the transcripts carefully. Perhaps jot some ideas as they come to mind.

2. Pick one document (one interview) – the most interesting, the shortest, the one at the top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself: what is this about? Do not think about the “substance” of the information, but rather its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.

3. When you have completed this task for several informants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns that might be arrayed as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers.

4. Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try out this preliminary alphabetize scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.

5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.

6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.

7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary, recode your existing data.

In the present study the researcher will use an independent coder who has expertise in data analysis.
Appendix F

Lincoln and Guba’s Model of Trustworthiness (1985) asks the following questions:

1. How credible are the particular findings of the study? By what criteria can we judge them?

2. How transferable and applicable are these findings to another setting or group of people?

3. How can we be reasonably sure that the findings would be replicated of the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context?

4. How can we be sure that the findings are reflective of the subjects and the inquiry itself, rather than a creation of the researcher’s biases or prejudices?