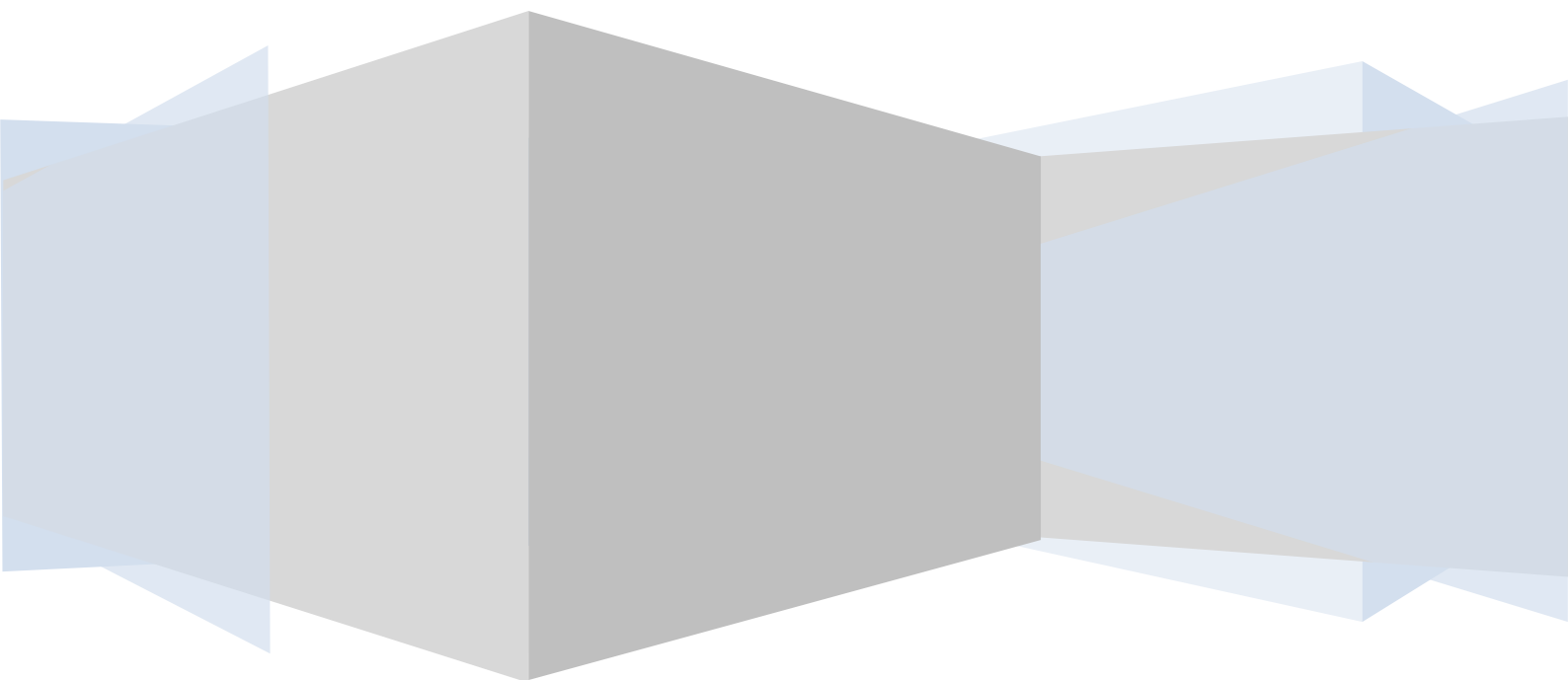


# **Teen Identity, Social Comparison and Voyeurism in Social Media: An investigation of UK Millennial Consumption Behaviours in Facebook**

**Leigh Doster**

**April 2018**



**Declaration of Authorship**

I Leigh Doster hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Doster', is written in a cursive style.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 6 April 2018

## Abstract

Social media interests marketers because of its influence on consumption behaviour. It has sparked much consumer research, most focusing on: motivations, identity, impression formation and online/offline interactions. Fewer studies have investigated social comparison, voyeurism or consumers under 18. This thesis addresses the gap, providing insights into teenage self-presentation, social comparison and voyeurism in Facebook and the resultant effect on teen identity consumption behaviour.

Millennial teens were the earliest and heaviest users of social media and have established practices for subsequent adopter groups. Furthermore many concerns around safety, privacy, addiction and risky behaviours have been expressed regarding social media use, so it is also important to understand the phenomena for societal reasons.

A phenomenological interpretivist approach was adopted using in-depth qualitative interviews, diaries and observational analysis to gain an understanding of UK millennial teen (16-18 years) behaviours in Facebook. The study produced a holistic model detailing the strategies and resources employed to present digital identities. Moreover it revealed how external influences, Facebook's incentive structures and 'unwritten rules' have combined to generate defensive and inhibited teen identity behaviours.

The study found that teens watched others in social media for identity, relationship development, entertainment and darker purposes e.g. criticism. It discovered increased and elaborated social comparison and voyeuristic behaviours, which were theorised, so extending the social comparison literature in the social media context. A new mediated voyeurism category was defined; social media voyeurism and five teen 'stalker' profiles with differing primary motives were conceptualised: Gossip Stalker, Relationship Stalker, Shy Aspirer, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) Stalker and Anti-Stalker.

This research makes several important theoretical contributions to the identity and social comparison literature in digital contexts and to mediated voyeurism theory (Calvert, 2004). In addition it makes several empirical contributions, increasing our understanding of the millennials and their consumption behaviours as they emerge as the next great generational cohort of consumers.

## Acknowledgements

Firstly I would like to thank my supervisor, Pauline Maclaran who has supported me patiently over several years, helping me develop my research skills and understanding of the research process. Pauline has frequently helped me see through the woods to the trees and has known when to push and when to let me get there in my own time.

Secondly I would like to thank my work colleagues, without whose help and support I would not have been able to complete this work. They have helped me in various ways, giving me blocks of time out to focus on my PhD, supporting me during challenging periods and believing in me that I was capable of it. Many people have contributed but specific thanks goes to Sarah Horton-Walsh, Eva Kipnis, Husni Kharouf and Jeff Clowes.

Last but by no means least, I would like to thank my family for their support, especially during the last 6 months, for looking after me, feeding me, reading and commenting on draft chapters and most of all allowing me time and space to get this thesis finished. Special thanks to Simon, who really has put up with an awful lot!

Finally I would like to thank my millennial participants, without whom this would not have been possible; their willingness to open up their world to me and talk me through their challenging transitional identity journeys via social media was generous, enjoyable and enlightening.

## Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
<b>1.0. Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1. Background	9
1.2. Rationale for Study	10
1.3. Research Aim	11
1.4. Research Design and Methodology	12
1.5. Outline of Thesis	13
<b>2.0. Chapter 2: Self and Identity</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1. Conceptualisations of Self	16
2.2. Social Comparison	22
2.3. Social Identity	27
2.4. Definitions of Self and Identity	29
2.5. Teen Identity	29
2.6. Self-Presentation and Impression Management	33
2.7. Symbolic Materials and Identity Making Tools	36
2.8. Chapter Summary	39
<b>3.0. Chapter 3: Computer Mediated Communications</b>	<b>40</b>
3.1. Evolution of Computer Mediated Communications	41
3.2. Key Facts and Statistics – Social Media	46
3.3. Motivations	48
3.4. Identity Related Practices	53
3.5. Social Comparison in Social Media	57
3.6. Impression Formation	60
3.7. Risks, Fears and Concerns	65
3.8. Chapter Summary	67
<b>4.0. Chapter 4: Millennials</b>	<b>68</b>
4.1. Overview of Generational Profiling	69
4.2. Economic and Political Background (1982-2012)	74
4.3. Technology/Media	78
4.4. Family Structures	81
4.5. Globalism	83
4.6. Education	85
4.7. Millennial Characteristics: Values, Attitudes and Behaviours	86
4.8. Chapter Summary	88

<b>5.0. Chapter 5: Methodology</b>	<b>89</b>
5.1. Philosophical Paradigms	90
5.2. Research Methodologies for Consumer Research	90
5.3. Ontology: The Nature of Reality	93
5.4. Epistemology: Acceptable Knowledge	96
5.5. Axiology: Research Values	101
5.6. Research Questions	103
5.7. Research Design	103
5.8. Trustworthiness	111
<b>6.0. Chapter 6: Data Analysis I – Self-Presentation</b>	<b>120</b>
6.1. Self-Presentation	121
6.2. External Influences	122
6.3. Symbolic Resources	125
6.4. Conceptual Model: Millennial Teen Self-Presentation in Social Media	126
6.5. The Embodied Self	129
6.6. Relationships	138
6.7. Interests, Activities and Opinions	143
6.8. Associations	148
6.9. Behaviour	151
6.10. Unwritten Rules	156
6.11. Emergent Themes	158
6.12. Revised Conceptual Model: Millennial Teen Self-Presentation in Social Media	160
6.13. Challenges to Maintaining Digital Identities	163
6.14. Strategies for Maintaining and Defending Digital Identities	166
6.15. Chapter Summary	173
<b>7.0. Chapter 7: Data Analysis II – Watching Others</b>	<b>175</b>
7.1. Social Comparison	176
7.2. Mediated Voyeurism	177
7.3. Social Environment and Situational Factors	179
7.4. Subjects	180
7.5. Reasons for Watching Others in Social Media	184
7.6. Observers	210
7.7. Chapter Summary	216

<b>8.0. Chapter 8: Discussion</b>	<b>219</b>
8.1. Discussion of Initial Research Questions	220
8.2. Discussion of Key Findings and Conceptual Models	223
8.3. Discussion Summary	240
<b>9.0. Chapter 9: Conclusion</b>	<b>243</b>
9.1. Key Findings	244
9.2. Key Theoretical Contributions	250
9.3. Methodological and Practitioner Implications	253
9.4. Limitations	255
9.5. Directions for Future Research	256
9.6. Final Words	257
<b>References</b>	<b>259</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>281</b>

## Figures

Figure 5.1.	Framework Analysis Path	110
Figure 6.1.	External Influences on Self-Presentation Strategies	127
Figure 6.2.	Strategies for Self-Presentation in Social Media	128
Figure 6.3.	Presenting self through the Embodied self	129
Figure 6.4.	Presenting self through Relationships	138
Figure 6.5.	Presenting self through Interests, Activities and Opinions	143
Figure 6.6.	Presenting self through Associations	148
Figure 6.7.	Presenting self through Behaviour	151
Figure 6.8.	Millennial Teen Self-Presentation in Social Media	162
Figure 6.9.	Challenges to Maintaining Digital Identity	164
Figure 6.10	Strategies for Maintaining and Defending Digital Identities	166
Figure 7.1.	Reasons for Watching Others in Social Media	186
Figure 7.2.	Profiles of Facebook Stalkers	218
Figure 8.1.	Holistic Model of Teen Self-Presentation in Social Media	226

## Appendices

Appendix 2.1	Self-Presentation Tactics	282
Appendix 5.1	Diary Guide	283
Appendix 5.2	Diary Participant Information and Informed Consent	284
Appendix 5.3	In-Depth Interview Questions	287
Appendix 5.4	Letter to Sixth Form College	289
Appendix 5.5	Poster to advertise study	290
Appendix 5.6	Participant Profiles	291
Appendix 5.7	Interview Participant Information and Informed Consent	297
Appendix 5.8	Participant Facebook Observational Data	299
Appendix 5.9	Researcher Reflexivity	304
Appendix 6.1	Description of Facebook Resources and Terminology	306
Appendix 6.2	Millennials Unwritten Rules for Facebook	307

## Table

Table 7.1.	Categorisation of Subjects	181
------------	----------------------------	-----



# Chapter 1

# Introduction

## 1.0. Introduction

This chapter introduces and outlines the thesis. It begins with the background of the research then continues, explicating the rationale for the study. Research questions are outlined and a summary of the research design and methodology is provided. Finally an overview of the chapters is presented.

## 1.1. Background

Social media (SM) consumption has rocketed over the last fifteen years, adoption of this innovation has been rapid and intense and usage has fast become part and parcel of everyday life. Millennial teenagers were the innovators and remain the most prolific users, thereby laying the foundations of consumption in the medium. Consumer researchers have demonstrated significant interest in the SM context. Studies thus far have focused on motivations (e.g. Bumgarner, 2007; Waters and Ackerman, 2011), identity (e.g. Zhao et al, 2008), impression formation (Hall et al, 2014; Tong et al, 2008; Utz, 2010) and interactions between online and offline identities (e.g. Back et al, 2010; Grasmuck et al, 2009; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007; Zhao et al, 2008). SM's effect on identity-related practices were identified at an early stage (boyd<sup>1</sup>, 2006, 2007) and continue to be of interest as researchers grapple to understand how people present and extend themselves in the digital world (Belk, 2013).

It has long been acknowledged that sense of self and consumption are inextricably linked and that people use possessions to manage and communicate their identities to others (Belk, 1988). People's identities change and develop over the course of their lifetime. Giddens (1991) argued that identity is not found in behaviour, nor in the response of others but in the capacity to sustain a consistent narrative of self over time. Digital environments have dramatically altered the scope and manner of self-presentation and impression management, for instance by providing a vast array of immaterial digital resources, by encouraging more sharing (PEW, 2013) and by facilitating co-construction of identities (Belk, 2013; boyd, 2007). It is critically important therefore that we have a better understanding of this ubiquitous social phenomenon that has become so central to many people's lives.

Whilst there has been significant interest in self-presentation in SM, many have adopted positivist approaches and the majority have focused on specific aspects or contexts of self-presentation, thus failing to capture an overall understanding of the holistic process of self-

---

<sup>1</sup> boyd: this researcher's name is always referred to in lower case

presentation in SM (e.g. Ellison et al, 2006; Tong et al, 2008; Utz, 2010). Furthermore until recently there have been limited studies of the 'consuming' side of SM consumption, watching others (Bolton et al, 2013). Only a handful of researchers have explored the effect of SM on social comparison behaviours (e.g. Fox and Moreland, 2015; Haferkamp and Kramer, 2011; Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014; Metzger et al, 2011) and how this in turn affects self-presentation. Moreover there has been limited attention paid to voyeuristic behaviours in SM and to the entertainment and relationship development benefits that users reap from this.

This study adopted a phenomenological approach, drawing on and extending social psychology theories, to explore teenage consumption behaviours in SM. The main reason for this research approach was that interaction with the subjects was required to check subjective meanings and interpretations and to understand teen consumption (Coser, 1971: p340). To gain an insider's perspective, the researcher immersed herself in the culture as far as was practicable to try to understand the subjects' behaviours and perspectives (Denzin, 1978 p99). The study aimed to provide deeper insights to these behaviours and thereby extract a richer more holistic understanding of postmodern teen identity development mediated through digital social environments. Furthermore by understanding early adopters' behaviours it also provided a valuable insight to SM consumption in general.

## **1.2. Rationale for this Study**

This study addresses three under researched areas of social media consumption. Firstly it investigates participants between 16-18 years as the earliest adopters and heaviest users. This group are in a critical identity transition period and are therefore the ideal research subjects to provide an understanding of how and why this ubiquitous social phenomenon increasingly dominates people's lives. Whilst there have been a significant number of studies into SM, few have researched the under 18s and even less have adopted interpretivist approaches to understand these consumption behaviours from the teenage perspective.

Secondly, the majority of SM research has emerged from the computer mediated literature rather than consumer research and has been mostly positivist in nature. Furthermore studies have focused on individual cause and effect aspects (e.g. Ellison et al, 2006; Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). In order to understand consumption of this medium and the challenges that teens face in navigating their identity journey mediated

through SM, it is essential to consider all of the influences in this social environment and how they interplay with each other and with the users.

Thirdly, until recently the focus has been on ‘contributing’ activities in SM and limited attention has been paid to ‘consuming’ behaviour in SM (Bolton et al, 2013). It has become increasingly evident that watching others is at least as prevalent if not more so, than sharing content (Metzger et al, 2011), so it is critical that we gain an understanding of these ‘behind the scenes’ behaviours, what drives them and their role in teen identity development. Intuitively it seems likely that social comparison forms an important part of this behaviour; young people in particular have a strong need to compare themselves with others for self-evaluation and self-development purposes (Ahava and Palojoki, 2004). However the early explorations of teen consumption in this study suggested that other needs were also being satisfied such as: social, relationship building and entertainment. Until recently only a handful of studies have identified and explored voyeuristic practices in SM (e.g. Bumgarner, 2007; Stefanone et al, 2010; Wang, 2015). These gratifications deserve further investigations to understand their role in SM consumption.

In summary it is critically important that we have a better understanding of this medium that is both consumed by and consumes our young people and increasingly other consumer groups. It has been identified that there are several gaps in the literature warranting further investigation and by adopting an interpretivist approach to explore these research questions, richer insights will be provided into social media consumption from the millennial teens’ perspective.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

**RQ1.** What strategies do teens use for self-presentation in social media?

**RQ2.** How do teens maintain and defend their identities in social media?

**RQ3.** How does social media affect teenage social comparison behaviours?

**RQ4.** How is voyeurism characterised and enacted in social media?

The main purpose of this thesis was to explore teenage consumption behaviour in social media from their own perspectives in order to provide holistic insights to their evolving identity behaviours in a digital world and to gain an understanding of SM consumption per se.

## 1.4. Research Design and Methodology

Interpretative research aims to understand phenomena by discovering “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world” (Crotty, 2011: p67) rather than developing laws and generalisations. Interpretivist researchers try to understand the subjective meanings of their participants’ behaviours and perceptions in the studied context (Coser, 1971: p340) and take the viewpoint of their subjects as best they can (Denzin, 1978: p99). This study aimed to develop an understanding of social media consumption from the teenage perspective therefore a phenomenological interpretivist approach was adopted focusing on individual teen subjects, interacting with them, documenting their stories about their experiences and feelings whilst consuming social media and constantly probing to check their meanings and interpretations.

Substantive theory was developed from qualitative empirical data that was systematically and inductively collected, interpreted and analysed using the Framework analytical tool (Ritchie et al, 2013). Emergent themes were interpreted by comparison with relevant extant theories and comparative studies in digital and SM specific contexts (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The study was grounded in the social psychological literature, drawing on multiple theories to interpret the data, notably Belk’s (1988, 2013) concepts of the extended self, Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theories and Calvert’s (2004) concepts of mediated voyeurism.

UK millennial teens were selected as the subjects of interest as this was where the behaviour was first observed by the researcher. Teenage consumption of social media is extensive worldwide but took off particularly quickly in western developed countries. Teen consumption of SM in the UK is profuse and substantial Facebook: 31 billion; Instagram: 14 million; Twitter: 15 million (<http://avocadosocial.com>) and Snapchat (10 million: Financial Times, 2016a) with young people remaining the heaviest users and therefore subjects of significant interest for this study. Participating teens were well educated and originated from middle-class fairly affluent backgrounds where the prevailing parental attitudes were nurturing and protective thus their ‘outdoor freedom’ was restricted in their early teenage years (Bennett, 2006). Easy access to the Internet and mobile digital devices during this period resulted in SM becoming their key means of peer social interaction outside of school and continued to be so as they moved into their late teens.

In addition much of the consumer research into social media has emerged from the US (e.g. Lenhart, 2015; Madden et al, 2013; Pew, 2009; Pew, 2010) and whilst there are likely to be

similarities, this in-depth study enables comparative findings in an alternative geographical and cultural context.

Teens aged 16-18 years are at a critical identity transition point, poised on the precipice of adulthood, preparing to leave home and find their independence (Moschis, 1981; Nuttall, 2009). Belk (1988) described them as being in state of 'identity crises'. Millennial teens' intense need for frequent immersion in their peer groups to satisfy social comparison, experimental behaviours and feedback purposes, combined with their predilection for technology has resulted in SM becoming central to their everyday lives and a key channel for their self-expression. This study sought to understand their SM consumption behaviours and how they affect their self-presentation, social interactions and identity development processes. Millennials have been profoundly affected by their use of SM, their generational characteristics intrinsically influenced by digital social environments. Moreover they have led the pack in SM consumption, establishing and shaping consumption patterns for subsequent adopters and for the development of the medium itself. They are therefore the prime research subjects for gaining an understanding of the social media phenomenon.

### **1.5. Outline of the Thesis**

This thesis comprises nine chapters. This concludes chapter 1 which has outlined the research rationale, research design and methodology.

Chapters 2 to 4 encompass the literature reviews for the key theoretical areas; Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the self and identity from a range of different schools of thought. Chapter 3 reviews the concepts and theory emerging from the computer mediated communications body of literature, plotting its development from the early stages of the Internet to the current day and incorporating findings from SM specific studies. Chapter 4 reviews millennials, using generational cohorting to unpick their unique characteristics and analysing the key environmental influencing factors that have shaped their behaviours.

Chapter 5 outlines the philosophical and methodological approach of the study and the data analyses are presented in Chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 6 analyses the data relating to self-presentation strategies in SM, 'contributing' behaviour (Bolton et al, 2013) and Chapter 7 analyses the data relating to the observation of others in SM, 'consuming' behaviour (Bolton et al, 2013).

Chapter 8 brings the two data analysis chapters together into a robust discussion and presents the key models and theories emerging from the study. Finally Chapter 9

summarises and concludes the key findings for each of the research questions, highlights the key theoretical and management contributions of the study and acknowledges the limitations, thus identifying opportunities for future research.

# Chapter 2

## Self and Identity



## 2.0. Introduction

The concept of 'the self' as an entity has been around for over 100 years and has been examined and developed extensively through various streams of academic literature with particular intensity since the 1980s. James' early definition:

*"a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and his children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands, and yacht and bank account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down, not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all.*

(James, 1890 cited in Belk, 1988)

The self-concept has been developed from various different schools of thought; psychological, social psychological, interpretivist, postmodern and consumer culture theory. As a result several models and augmentations have been proposed, many adopting a multi-dimensional perspective (Sirgy, 1982).

*"Psychoanalytic theory views the self-concept as a self-system inflicted with conflict. Behavioral theory construes the self as a bundle of conditioned responses. Other views such as organismic theory treat the self in functional and developmental terms; phenomenology treats the self in a wholistic form and cognitive theory represents the self as a conceptual system processing information about the self. Symbolic interactionism, on the other hand, views the self as a function of personal interactions."*

(Sirgy, 1982 p287)

Regardless of the various epistemological viewpoints there is consensual agreement that the self has a direct relationship with consumption. This review aims to evaluate those arguments and synthesise these ameliorations with specific regard to teen identity related practices in Social Media (SM).

## 2.1. Conceptualizations of Self

### 2.1.1. Social Psychological Perspective

The self has been conceptualised as "the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings" (Rosenberg, 1979). Rosenberg (1979) identified nine dimensions of self; content, direction, intensity, salience, consistency, stability, clarity, verifiability and accuracy. Mittal (2006) extended these to encompass aspects of personality (e.g. extroversion, sociability, altruism). Furthermore it is argued that people's social roles (e.g. parent, teacher, wife) are

a key determinant of self (Kleine et al, 1993). Social identity is discussed more fully in section 2.3. Increasingly authors have conceptualised the self as a multi-dimensional variable incorporating one's own perception of self with other people's perceptions and recognising both individual and group levels of self (Sirgy, 1982).

Rosenberg (1979) postulated that individuals develop their own sense of self-concept in four ways; reflected appraisals, social comparisons, self-attributions and psychological centrality. Reflected appraisals concern the individual's own perceptions and judgements of self. Social Comparison Theory (SCT) stated that people compare themselves with others to evaluate their own qualities, opinions and abilities, using this information to gain insights into their own self-identity and identify their limitations (Festinger, 1954). SCT is discussed more fully in section 2.2. Self-attributions relate to judgments of one's own behaviour and psychological centrality relates to the hierarchical organisation of the self-concepts (Sirgy, 1982).

Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) combined psychological constructs with consumption forming a model incorporating internal self-perception, perception of self through interactions with others and utilisation of symbols to communicate self to others. Grubb and Hupp (1968) developed this construct, proposing that the perception of self develops from birth as attitudes, feelings and evaluations accumulate worth until it (the self) becomes the principal value that people build their life around. They maintained that the self-concept is developed and validated based on the reactions of referent others.

From these arguments, it can be surmised that individuals perceive their self as valuable and that they therefore endeavour to protect and improve it (Grubb and Hupp, 1968) thus the concepts of self-maintenance and self-enhancement emerged; individuals seek to proactively maintain their self by seeking affirmation from others to confirm their sense of self (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967; Grubb and Hupp, 1968). Leading on from this, Sirgy (1982) identified two key motives related to the development of self; self-esteem and self-consistency. Self-esteem relates to the drive to continually enhance one's self concept through experiences and consumption whilst self-consistency relates to the need to remain true to oneself and behave in a way that maintains the essence and integrity of their core self. Individuals are therefore driven to enhance their self through social experiences and interaction with others. Self-enhancement and boost to self-esteem is often achieved through the consumption of symbolic products, thus self-development relies upon two key external factors: the availability of symbolic materials and opportunities to interact socially.

Self-enhancement gave rise to the concepts of 'actual' and 'ideal self' (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). To improve themselves, individuals need a goal and a strategy to achieve enhancement. It is argued therefore that individuals develop an 'ideal self' with a set of attributes they can aspire to. The 'actual self' on the other hand is a realistic self-evaluation of the individual's present attributes. Self-enhancement is achieved by directing activity and often consumption towards the 'ideal self', using symbolic products as a tool box and feedback from others to gauge success. This becomes an iterative process as each ideal is reached another (higher) ideal is established and so the self-enhancement process goes on.

### **2.1.2. Interpretivist Perspective**

Belk's influential Possessions and the Extended Self paper conceptualised the self as a sense of self, an identity, a sense of who and what people subjectively perceive themselves to be (Belk, 1988). He viewed the self as a core to which objects are continually incorporated to extend the self. The 'core self' encompassed body, thoughts, ideas, beliefs and experiences and the 'extended self' incorporated possessions (e.g. persons, places, money and pets). So the self is extended via a process of adding and removing attributes over time, frequently by the acquisition and disposition of possessions. So, to some extent "we are what we have and possess" (Belk, 1988 p139) so possessions are not just tools that people use to express their selves to others, they are part of the individual's 'extended self'. Similarly to previous constructs, Belk argued that the self develops, as a result of life experiences, enabled by consumption and mediated by interactions with others.

Moreover Belk proposed that different levels of the self exist in relation to group affiliations; the individual, the family, the community and groups. The more personal and important relationships are, the closer they are to the 'core self' (Belk, 1988). Furthermore he recognised that individuals maintain different levels of self, depending on who they are with and the role they are playing. Some roles are more central to the 'core self' than others, depending on their salience for the individual (Hogg and Michell, 1996). People exist therefore as part of a collective as well as an individual self.

A number of authors claim that the 'body' is the central point of consumption (e.g. Belk, 1988; Saren, 2007). They argue that any enactment of a consumer's identity must be conducted through their body (Saren, 2007). Considerable self-development focuses on improving the body and in doing so, improving one's self-image (Saren, 2007). Supporting

this argument Belk (1988) argued that loss of a body part (e.g. mastectomy) tends to generate a feeling of loss of identity.

Whilst the body is considered central to the self in many western cultures, this perspective is not universal and in eastern cultures, influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism, the body is seen as little more than a temporary housing for the soul. For many individuals the key determinants of 'who they are' stem from their values and character as opposed to their bodies. Many people consider their values, desirable goals in life and their character (behaviour) as the aspects that truly define their self. For others, competence and success are the key criteria by which they judge their self-efficacy and thus act as drivers of their self-esteem. This component of self encompasses aspects such as money, status, power, reputation and fame (Mittal, 2006).

Subsequent authors have questioned the validity of Belk's (1988) 'core and extended self' conceptualisation for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is argued that individuals have a multitude of self identities enacted in different contexts and with varying company. Therefore, the one 'core self' concept does not hold. Secondly, self-evaluation assessments change over time, so individuals often reconstruct their identities at key points throughout their lives. The idea that the core self remains constant and that individuals extend it over time therefore does not account for 'transformed selves' (Ahuvia, 2005). Thirdly, it is argued that in the fragmented postmodern world it is difficult for individuals to reconcile all of their diverse identities into one unified single self (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Thus it is proposed that Belk's (1988) self-concept needs adaption to address these factors.

### **2.1.3. Postmodern Perspective**

Giddens highlighted the struggles that consumers face in late modernity: unification vs fragmentation, powerlessness vs appropriation, authority vs uncertainty and personalisation vs commodification (Giddens, 1991 p189). Similarly Firat and Schultz (1997) argued that the post-modern world exposes individuals to the dual forces of globalisation and fragmentation. Consumers have an infinite range of possibilities for constructing their self-narratives in various contexts, yet this unconstrained choice generates feelings of powerlessness. The lack of traditional authority structures (e.g. religion) becomes a burden and they seek that dominant authority elsewhere. Giddens (1991 p198) argued that the marketplace has moved into this void; that the commodification of goods and communication channels have reshaped self-projects into the desire for goods and the pursuit of artificial lifestyles. Furthermore he maintained that media's portrayal of

aspirational lifestyles are devised to resonate with consumers' self-concepts, thereby encouraging emulation. Moreover that commodification promotes appearance as the key marker of value, thus effective self-presentation to others substitutes for the genuine development of self.

So identity construction has arguably become more challenging. Cornwell and Drennan (2004) argued that whilst the Internet enables individuals to connect globally it also encourages fragmentation. In this environment individuals construct an 'elective identity':

*"... the identity that people are able to self-fashion from the world around them, to pick up and discard at will".*

(Cornwell and Drennan, 2004)

An identity formed by bricolage; selecting desirable symbols from the available global milieu and combining them in diverse ways, liberally reassigning meanings to produce unique expressions of self (Thompson, 1995). The infinite permutations of identity formulated from symbolic materials are both a blessing and a burden, it is not sufficient to construct the right identity once, identity must be constantly updated and re-presented to audiences for their approval (Bauman, 2004 p7). Choice overload means that a consumer's identity is never complete as it is impossible to consume all available symbolic materials. Arguably this gap drives individuals to consume more in search of completeness (Saren, 2007) thus consumers adopt a reflexive approach to identity construction, experimenting with the available symbolic materials, drawing them together in different ways, evaluating the effect and then revising and refining in perpetuity (Giddens, 1991).

#### **2.1.4. Consumer Culture Theory Perspective**

Consumer culture theory (CCT) brings together consumer behaviour research from a range of theoretical perspectives (e.g. interpretivism, naturalistic, postmodern, humanistic) including concepts of the self. CCT focuses on the common research interests of understanding the relationships between consumer behaviour, the marketplace and cultural meanings rather than specific methodological paradigms (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Consumer identity projects (CIP) are one of the four dominant research themes of CCT.

CIP focus on how consumers interact with the market and its symbolic materials to construct narratives of self as opposed to lists of attributes (Escalas and Bettman, 2000; Fournier, 1998; Giddens, 1991; Thompson 1996; Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). The self

becomes a story, linking together self-attributes with the key events in one's life. The autobiographical approach also enables individuals to consider their self in terms of their past, present and possible future identities. In addition, relationships with others, positive or negative can be visualised and made meaningful within the self-narrative, like characters playing different roles in a cast. The self becomes a performance, a personal enactment of who the individual is, for both internal and external audiences (Ahuvia, 2005).

CCT views consumers as identity seekers and makers. The marketplace offers multiple positions that consumers can choose to occupy and abundant symbols which they can appropriate to construct their self-identity. For instance Schau and Gilly (2003) found that consumers integrated brands and hyperlinks in their personal websites to create multiple non-linear cyber self-presentations to their various audiences thus they contend that consumers increasingly construct their self-concept around consumption, placing the marketplace and symbols at the centre of their identities. Moreover consumer identity projects are goal driven and challenged by points of conflict, internal contradictions and ambivalence, often requiring consumers to develop coping strategies and compensatory mechanisms (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

### **2.1.5. Summary and Perspective for this Study**

To summarise, the self comprises of all the various elements which make up an individual's sense of who they are – these may be physical and tangible such as the body and face or less tangible such as personality traits, values, intellect and achievements. Furthermore the self may extend beyond the individual's actual realm into their possessions, associated people, places and roles enacted. There is debate as to whether individuals maintain one 'core self' or in the fragmented and complex postmodern world, multiple selves from which they judiciously select from or blend depending on context. Crucially, it is generally agreed that self-construction is closely related to symbolic consumption, mediated by social interaction and developed over time via an iterative process.

Furthermore there are various conceptualisations of the way in which the self is envisaged, largely divided by two key research paradigms, positivism and interpretivism. The former visualise the self as a set of attributes and traits that can be measured and evaluated quantitatively, the latter argue that the self should be conceptualised as a story or narrative and be considered holistically rather than be reduced to a simple list. Mittal (2006) reviewed these two discourses observing that in research terms, the 'trait-self' lent itself more to positivist (quantitative) research and the 'narrative-self' to interpretative

(qualitative) research. Whilst the 'trait-self' was functional for conducting research he considered it rather limiting and superficial, so developed an alternative model which aimed to combine the two.

Mittal offers a detailed whilst still structural view of 'self'. He considered the self as the combination of the self without possessions (*sans* possessions) and the 'extended self' (with possessions). Mittal's 'self' encompasses six components: our bodies, our values and character, our success and competence, our social roles, our traits and our possessions (Mittal, 2006).

In line with Belk's (1988) claims that "we are what we own" Mittal (2006) posits that possessions can be both functional and instrumental in identity expressions and constructions. Furthermore that different people will place different emphasis on the six components of self. One advantage of this construct is its ability to represent the different parts of self diagrammatically.

For the purpose of this study the researcher adopted a similar approach to Mittal (2006), seeking to bridge the social psychological perspective with interpretivist approaches thereby maintaining some structure within which to conceptualise emergent theories whilst retaining an interpretivist perspective of a 'core self' with multiple facets and layers constituting a personally constructed narrative for life. This approach is therefore consistent with Belk (1988, 2013).

## **2.2. Social Comparison**

Festinger (1954) introduced Social Comparison Theory (SCT) whereby people compare their opinions and abilities with others for self-evaluation purposes. In his seminal paper he asserted that people mostly compared themselves with similar and close others and whilst comparisons could be upwards or downwards, for abilities, they were predominantly upwards, with people whose abilities were marginally better than their own. Furthermore he found that people who were more uncertain about their own abilities and opinions were more likely to partake in social comparison more frequently.

Many researchers have extended and developed Festinger's SCT, notably Hakmiller (1966) who found that social comparison could be applied to any personal attribute, thus not limited to abilities and opinions. Wills (1981) focused on downward comparisons, positing that people with lower self-esteem were more likely to compare themselves with others

performing less well to improve their self-enhancement and thereby increase their self-esteem. Furthermore several studies found that people used downward comparison as a coping strategy when they felt under threat or had problems, for instance, cancer patients (Taylor and Lobel, 1989; Wills, 1983; Wood et al, 1985). Wheeler (1991) coined the phrase, neo-social comparison, emphasising that the focus was on self-enhancement rather than self-evaluation. Views remain divided on the effects of upward comparisons, some studies claim that they motivate and inspire people towards self-improvement (e.g. Lockwood and Kunda, 1997) others assert that they make people feel inadequate and over time negatively affect their well-being (Marsh and Parker, 1984).

Whilst Festinger's assertion that people focused their comparisons on similar and close others is still supported by many, Wheeler et al (1969) discovered that people often compared themselves with extremes on the performance dimension continuum, for instance the highest or lowest in the class, the most extrovert or the most introverted (Arrowood and Friend, 1969; Thornton and Arrowood, 1966). Furthermore Metlee and Smith (1977) found that people compared themselves with dissimilar subjects or 'weak ties' (loose acquaintances) if they provided valuable information.

In addition there have been several studies focusing on uniqueness and shared opinions, Ross et al (1977) identified the 'false consensus effect'; a tendency for people to assume that most people share their opinions and attributes, thereby placing themselves in the 'normal' position. In a similar vein the 'better than average effect' was observed whereby people believe that they possess more positive attributes and less negative attributes than other people (Alicke, 1985; Taylor and Brown, 1988). In addition Goethals et al (1991) identified the 'uniqueness bias'; whereby people view their good attributes as rare. In summary therefore people have a tendency to boost their own ego by believing that their abilities are unique and superior to others and that their opinions are commonly held by the majority (Marks, 1984).

These theories link to the concept of 'constructive social comparisons' whereby people imagine or make up information about others, fabricating or constructing social reality (Goethals, 1986). In addition people manipulate their evaluations of others to ensure their own self-enhancement and maintain their self-esteem (Goethals et al, 1991). So, when confronted with situations where other people appear to be performing better, people either: change their perception of their subject's abilities; change their perception of their own abilities or change their views about which abilities or attributes are important to their



self-concept (Gibbons et al, 1994). Further studies revealed that if people believe that others are inflating their abilities, they will inflate theirs too, to level the comparison field (Klein and Goethals, 2002). However there is a limit to how far people can stretch their own abilities and this was termed 'bounded irrationality'; when the individual could not compete with a subject, they tended to judge them as less similar to themselves (Kunda, 1990) thus linking back to Festinger's (1954) argument that people compare themselves with similar others. Finally another option when a subject out-performs an individual is for them to appropriate their subject's abilities into their own self-concept and 'bask' in the reflected glory (Lee et al, 1999; Tesser, 1988).

There is a body of work around the effects of social comparison on self-esteem, mood management and well-being. For the purposes of this study the following definition of social self-esteem was adopted. An individual's evaluation of their self-worth or satisfaction with three dimensions of selves: physical appearance and romantic attractiveness, ability to form/maintain close friendships and well-being (Valkenburg et al, 2006). Well-being is described as the judgement of one's satisfaction with life as a whole (Diener et al, 1995). It is assumed that self-esteem is the cause in this scenario and well-being is the effect (Baumeister et al, 2003). Some assert that social comparison, especially when predominantly upwards, can be damaging to self-evaluations, thereby decreasing self-esteem and causing a negative effect on well-being (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997; Marsh and Parker, 1984). Self esteem and social comparison are thought to have a reciprocal relationship; those with lower self-esteem have been found to conduct more social comparison and frequent social comparison is deleterious to one's self-esteem (Frison and Eggermont, 2016). Conversely other studies have found that people conduct downward comparisons to facilitate mood management; comparing themselves to others who are worse off to improve their mood and boost their self-esteem (Mares and Cantor 1992).

More recently but prior to social media becoming all pervasive, White et al (2006) identified a darker side of social comparison behaviour. They found that frequent social comparisons could, over time, lead to negative emotions and behaviours such as envy, guilt, lying, blaming others and addictive cravings, generally leading to unhappiness and decreased well-being. In addition they discovered that it led to increased 'in-group' bias, 'out-group' prejudice and reduced job satisfaction. In line with previous studies (e.g. Festinger, 1954; Gibbons and Buunk, 1999) they argued that those who were uncertain of their self-concept and low in self-esteem were more likely to compare themselves with

others more frequently and that ultimately this led to a perpetual (negative) social comparison cycle, where they increasingly felt that other people were better off. Young people are particularly vulnerable in this context as they constantly seek external information and affirmation from others to carve out their adult identity. Ultimately White et al (2006) asserted that whilst downward social comparison may boost self-esteem and increase feelings of well-being in the short term, in the long term it increases people's reliance on external standards by which to judge themselves and leads to destructive behaviours and emotions thereby diminishing well-being.

Mettlee and Smith (1977) identified social comparison behaviours used for interpersonal motives, this was supported by Taylor and Lobel (1989) who found that people conduct social comparisons with subjects that they desire or wish to affiliate with. In addition Wheeler et al (1997) found that people used social comparisons to reduce risk, developing the 'proxy ability comparison theory' which involves people comparing others' similar experiences prior to undertaking a new task to predict the result before taking risks themselves.

In addition to individual factors that influence social comparison behaviours, the social environment itself can affect the level of social comparison. Wood (1989) identified that the social environment can stimulate additional comparison goals and influence which attributes are deemed most important. Munar (2010) argued that social comparison practices are influenced by the embedded culture in the social environment. Garcia et al (2013) examined social comparison in relation to competitiveness, devising a framework for examining individual and situational influences on comparison practices and thereby competitive behaviours.

Garcia et al's (2013) model divides influences on social comparison into individual and situational factors. Individual factors vary from person to person depending on relevance of the performance attribute; similarity to rivals, relationship closeness and prospective outlook. Situational factors affect individuals similarly and are identified as: incentive structures, proximity to a standard, number of competitors, social category fault lines, audience and uncertainty. The model drew on previous studies for individual factors, proposing that people mostly compare themselves with similar others (Goethals and Darley 1977); with those whom they are close to (Zuckerman and Jost, 2001) and with long term rivals. Incentive structures such as the format and embedded culture in the social environment may encourage more comparison and/or competitiveness. They also found

that people were more likely to engage in social comparison if they were in close proximity to a meaningful standard, for instance, first or last place. The number of competitors was found to be inversely related to propensity for social comparison; so fewer competitors led to increased comparison and competitiveness and more competitors led to decreased comparison and lower competition. Social comparison and competitiveness tended to increase across social category lines (e.g. gender, age, social group) people were more motivated to compete with individuals outside of their social group than those within and in the presence of a 'common enemy', groups or teams worked more effectively towards a common purpose (Bornstein and Erev, 1994). The presence of an audience tended to increase comparisons and competitiveness, as did uncertainty (Festinger, 1954) and periods of stress and change (Gibbons and Buunk, 1999 p130) thus suggesting that teens would have a strong tendency to conduct social comparisons as they navigate the transition from child to adult; uncertain of their maturing opinions, abilities and place in the social hierarchy.

Garcia et al's (2013) model posits that situational factors influence comparison behaviours indirectly through individual factors. Moreover that individual factors are likely to change over time as people mature and develop, thus teen social comparison behaviours are likely to alter in response to changes in the social media environment and also as a result of their maturity and experience in that environment.

So in summary, social comparisons are used for self-evaluation purposes and may be upwards or downwards, the latter tending to increase self-enhancement and thereby self-esteem. People mostly make comparisons with those who are similar to themselves on the attribute being compared and are more concerned with comparing themselves with 'strong ties' than with 'weak ties'. The inherent drive to maintain one's self-esteem causes people to perform 'constructive social comparisons', adjusting perceptions of their own or others' attributes or the comparison dimension to ensure superiority. Social comparisons can enhance self-esteem and some people adopt downward comparisons to facilitate mood management. However over time it is argued that a perpetual cycle of frequent social comparison is detrimental to well-being, particularly for those with low self-esteem, leading to negative emotions such as envy, guilt, lying and prejudice. Finally it is asserted that social comparison behaviours are influenced by the social environment and that factors such as incentive structures, number of competitors and audiences affect the intensity of comparison activity and the level of competitiveness.

### 2.3. Social Identity

The concept of social identity developed from the psychology literature. Drawing on Sartre's (1943) notion of three states of existence: being, having and doing. Kleine et al (1993) proposed that the self comprised: the 'I' (the thinking, behaviour and influencing part); the 'me' (the body plus one's possessions) and the 'social' (all of an individual's role identities such as parent, friend and occupation). Social identities derive from roles and these identities partition a person thus the combination of all of an individual's identities comes together to form a 'global self' (Kleine et al, 1993).

Like Belk's extended self (1988), the social-self places high importance on symbolic possessions (having) and social interactions (doing) to derive meaning. Social connections include social interactions with others and with one-self. However, external social influences are perceived as more influential in self-evaluation than internal processes. Identity related possessions encompass resources that are perceived useful for enacting role-identity such as tools for builders, racquets for tennis players and prams for mothers.

Each individual identity has a set of schemas; stores of identity-related knowledge about how to behave, which activities to participate in and products required to enact the identity. Within each identity there is a 'role schema', an 'identity schema' and an 'identity-ideal' schema. The 'role schema' incorporates the norms and stereotypes of the role, the 'identity schema' represents the individual's understanding of themselves with respect to that role and is more realistic. The 'identity-ideal' role is how the individual would like to be perceived with respect to that role. There are clear parallels between this and concepts of 'actual' and 'ideal self' (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). The difference being that the individual has multiple 'actual' and 'ideal selves' for each of their enacted roles and thus individual identities (Kleine at al, 1993).

Self-maintenance and enhancement activities are still present but rather than developing and improving one self, individuals devote their energies to maintaining and developing all of their various self-identities. In addition whilst it is generally agreed that one true 'core' self does not exist, it is argued that individuals strive to reconcile their various identities in order to maintain internal consistency (Kleine at al, 1993). Inevitably individuals encounter identity conflicts at times and have to enact resolution strategies. As with individual self-identity, a key means by which social identities are developed and communicated is through the consumption of symbolic materials. Arguably consumption is yet more important for social identity as it acts as a bonding mechanism for groups often playing a

significant role in the social rituals of a group (e.g. music genres) and helps to establish social hierarchies both within and between groups (Saren, 2007).

Within the CCT literature many authors have discussed consumers' individual identity constructs through membership of subcultural groups (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Saren, 2007; Kozinets, 2001; Maffesoli, 1996). Consumers bond with others through the pursuit of common lifestyles, leisure activities, religious and intellectual interests and shared rituals e.g. star trekkers (Kozinets, 2001); bikers (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and goths (Goulding et al, 2004). Consumers create meaning through product constellations, places and events, forging bonds and determining social hierarchies with other members through shared beliefs, rituals and practices. Subcultures also provide useful platforms for individuals to present their identities and sometimes enable an escape from their everyday lives (Saren, 2007). Within any particular sub-culture though, individuals have differing levels of commitment to the group, this commitment reflects the 'valance' of the group identity within their individual identity.

As a consequence of social comparison, observation tends to be two-way and observers interpret others' traits from the possessions they display and vice versa, they infer the nature of possessions from the known traits of the person (Belk, 1988). The observer's perception of another's self is governed by their own template of self, so if for them the central component of self is success and accomplishment that would be the focus of their assessment of others (Mittal, 2006). This can result in mismatches in self-evaluation and tension between individuals in a group which tends to be resolved either by: switching reference groups, educating others or modifying consumption (Mittal, 2006). The third option here is particularly interesting as individuals choose products which are more congruent with their own self-concept in order to convey that impression to others and dissolve any tension.

In summary, the interpretative literature conceptualises self as a single 'core' self, extended over time by acquisition of products, relationships and roles. Whereas, the psychology literature sees the 'social self' as an amalgamation of the various individual identities associated with the roles that an individual enacts. However both schools of thought agree that individuals place high value on their self-identity and utilise self-maintenance and self-enhancement strategies to preserve and improve their sense of self. To achieve their goals two key resources are essential. Firstly, access to symbolic materials to convey meaning and secondly opportunities for social interaction with others to enact

identity and evaluate success. It can be concluded therefore that the self-concept is inextricably linked to consumption and social immersion and that it evolves over time until an understanding of 'true' self is eventually reached. In SM both symbolic materials and social interaction are readily available so social identity concepts are likely to be highly applicable to understanding consumers in this context.

## **2.4. Definitions of Self and Identity**

At this stage it seems appropriate to clarify two of the key terms used in the conceptualisation of self, that is self and identity, which are often used interchangeably. Crucially, self subsumes identity and is conceptualised as a process or organisation of self-reflection whereas identity is more of a tool or strategy used by the individual to categorise themselves and present themselves to others (Dittmar, 1992 cited in Hogg et al, 1996).

The self is an organised and interactive system of thoughts, feelings, identities and motives which are developed through experiences, inter-linked and often including personality traits, intelligence, values, achievements, social roles and identities (Delamater, 2006). Identities on the other hand are categories that individuals use to specify themselves, often in relation to other people, thus defining both their distinctiveness and their sameness to others (Delamater, 2006).

## **2.5. Teen Identity**

Teens are experiencing possibly the most significant life transition, child to adult, enduring major identity crises along the way (Moschis, 1981; Nuttall, 2009). They endeavour to develop a stronger sense of self by taking control of the objects in their environment rather than being controlled by them (Belk, 1988). Symbolic products such as branded clothing or mobile telephones are frequently used to support their attempts to construct their self-identity. Equally these items are discarded when they no longer fit the teen's 'ideal' self-concept. Thus teenagers use symbolic items to help them navigate through their various transitions, throwing layers on and off along the way (Rindfleisch et al 1997 cited in Nuttall, 2009). Material possessions in particular are often used by teenagers to leverage status and prestige amongst their peers.

Teenagers seek identification, empowerment and social inclusion within their peer groups, often drawing on cultural texts to escape, belong or transcend social and cultural boundaries. Teens create identity via material products and brands but also through the

leisure services that they consume, e.g. clubs, football and music (Hogg and Michell, 1996; Nuttall, 2009). Young people have been termed 'identity-shoppers', constantly updating their identities through consumption (Ahava and Palojoki, 2004). As with adults, teens have different levels of involvement or commitment to any particular consumption activity. Level of involvement, knowledge or skill in a particular field e.g. music, sport, fashion can become central to a teen's self-identity and can be a key means of accumulating increased social capital amongst peers (Nuttall, 2009).

Youth subcultures self-fashion their unique identities through exposure to worldwide media and the Internet, creating culturally hybrid and complex identities which are often recognisable amongst youth groups the world over (Cornwall and Drennan, 2004). Identity construction during youth is treated as a project where a range of symbolic materials from their social environment are weaved together to create a unique self-identity (Thompson, 1995). The pressure on young people to continually reinvent themselves is immense. Whilst on the one hand technology and the Internet have been empowering, enabling individuals to seek information widely and generate their own content, they have also placed an onus on users to constantly innovate their identity presentations.

The actual scope that young people have to fashion their self-identities from symbolic materials is limited by various constraints e.g. financial and also by the socially constructed meanings of the materials already in place, determined by previous generations and marketers (Nuttall, 2009; Saren, 2007). However each generation makes some kind of mark on the cultural landscape, carving out new meanings, developing new associations and often leading new innovations. Arguably for the millennials their mark will in some way relate to social media.

Teenagers tend to be experimental as they develop their true sense of self. Consequently they try on new behaviours and experiment with different forms of symbolic consumption, receive feedback from others and adjust accordingly depending on their desired objectives (Benn, 2004). The iterative identity process therefore is particularly evident and magnified amongst teen consumers. So gaining an understanding of how teen consumption relates to self-identity formation is important as they are developing the symbolic templates that will influence adult consumption for the next generation (Nuttall, 2009). Moreover examining their behaviours in SM will reveal how teen identity is being formulated in the digital era.

Most studies classify teenage consumers in terms of younger and older teens and observe various differences in their identity related behaviours. Older teens are more likely to categorise people and possessions as part of their self (Belk, 1988). As individuals age they are more likely to cite as special those objects that symbolise other people (Belk, 1988). Young people are likely to befriend others who will reflect favourably on their desired self-image, "You are the company that you keep" (Belk, 1988: 156). Like adults, teens tend to regard those people close to them as their possessions e.g. 'my boyfriend', 'my Mum' and in any relationship it is reasonable to assume that each participant's sense of self is extended by the bond with the other.

Younger teens are more likely to cite objects and possessions, name and location as part of who they are whereas older teens are more likely to cite their skills or talents (e.g. musical, artistic, athletic) and traits (moral character, beliefs, self-sufficiency). Linked to this, possessions which connect to their skills, talents or traits or which they can manipulate are more likely to have a stronger prominence in their definition of self and may provide an effective means of coping with their life transition (Belk, 1988; Chong-Bum et al, 1993 cited in Nuttall, 2009). So in contrast to the claims that teenagers engage in symbolic consumption to develop and communicate their emerging identities, it is possible that they may prefer to construct self-identity through actions and behaviours as opposed to possessions (Belk, 1988). This strategy also circumvents any constraints upon their consumption e.g. financial. Furthermore with the wealth of digital symbolic materials freely available in SM, its attraction to teenagers is understandable.

O'Connor's (2006) study of Irish teenagers supported this in that their lifestyle choices focused on 'doing', the performative element of self as opposed to 'having', the consumption element. Teens typically talked about activities they liked to participate in, such as listening to music, playing sports, watching TV, 'hanging out' with friends, going out at the weekends to pubs and clubs, part-time jobs, playing computer games, reading, playing a musical instrument, going to the cinema and swimming (O'Connor, 2006) thereby supporting Belk's (1988) assertion that young people construct their identity through activities and behaviours as opposed to possessions.

Young people tend to value places according to the activities they facilitate (Belk, 1988). Social media as a virtual space provides wide ranging activities e.g. social interaction, a platform for self-presentation, games, information, thus suggesting that the medium will be highly valued and may figure prominently within their overall sense of self. Belk (1988)



talks about possessions providing a convenient means of storing memories and feelings that attach us to our past and to others. SM provides memory storage with the added benefit of being able to share multi-media items with wide ranging audiences instantaneously. Furthermore in SM this sharing mechanism facilitates more than long term memories and reminiscences, it also provides short-term immediate gratification. Teens can share their feelings, emotions and experiences with others, so developing additional connections with their referent groups and thereby a stronger sense of social identity.

O'Connor (2006) found that gender identity differences were still evident among teens, girls were more likely to prioritise family, friends and relationships and to maintain a stronger network of 'same-sex' friends. Conversely boys were more likely to cite 'same-sex' friendships in connection with activities such as sports. Inter-gender relationships were scarcely mentioned by boys and were referred to as transient and fun by girls. Whilst these teens did not perceive themselves as having gender specific identities, there were clear differences. Girls expressed more emotion and reflectivity particularly in terms of their close relationships, whilst boys were less emotional and more concerned with reinforcing their respective positions in the collective male identity (O'Connor, 2006).

O'Connor (2006) found no significant gender differences in clothing interests but unsurprisingly boys expressed more interest in sport and sports clubs than girls. Boys were also more likely than girls to express expertise on a range of topics such as politics, technology, music, economics and sport. O'Connor termed this component of boy gender as 'authoritative interpretation'. Girls on the other hand mostly did not have the confidence to profess this type of expertise except in traditionally female-based topics such as fashion and appearance.

### **2.5.1. Teen Subcultures**

Young people use social groupings to define themselves and more importantly to distinguish themselves from others (Hebdige, 1979). Teens tend to position themselves within certain social groups, often adopting particular constellations of products and services in order to express their collective identity e.g. clothing, music, hair styles (Kleine and Kleine, 2000). Consequently they can also distinguish the identity of other teens by drawing on these cues with their shared coded meanings, which are best understood amongst their age cohort (Hebdige, 1979). By categorising consumption objects into "I would like that" or "I wouldn't like that" they can similarly categorise other teens into "like

me” or “not like me” and develop attraction and avoidance strategies thus developing a more refined sense of self.

Subcultures create social structures and boundaries between groups of teens which are difficult to transcend, particularly if groups and their associated portfolio of collective identity-making possessions are oppositional. Nuttall (2009) found that it was difficult for teens to move between groups or maintain relationships with individuals belonging to different subcultures once they move into late adolescence. Linked to this if teens alter their preferred portfolio of belongings, because they are inextricably linked with the group’s collective identity, they sometimes have no choice but to move groups also. This can lead to the teens that are not as involved or committed to the collective identity, adopting subversive identities to avoid alienating their fellow group members (Nuttall, 2009) thus multiple identities may be more prevalent amongst teens as their social groups have more definite boundaries and the risk of social exclusion are higher than for adults (Nuttall, 2009).

## **2.6. Self-Presentation and Impression Management**

Goffman (1959) defined self-presentation as “the intentional and tangible component of identity”, he further discussed how impressions are maintained by consistently performing coherent and complementary behaviours, terming this ‘impression management’. Successful self-presentation and impression management rely on individuals manipulating symbols, signs, brands and practices to communicate their desired impression to others. Moreover self-presentation is contextual; an individual must enact different behaviours and different identities in different settings to different audiences at different times (Schau and Gilly, 2003 p387).

The identities communicated are both individual and affiliate. Individual identity reflects a person’s achievements, skills, tastes and creativity, thus conveying ‘me’. Affiliative identity communicates the individual’s self in the related social world, thus establishing ‘we’. Signs and symbols are used to convey both individual and affiliate identities. In addition it is assumed that consumers generally endeavour to convey favourable impressions in their self-presentations, emphasising their positive attributes and downplaying less desirable qualities, thus attempting to convey ‘ideal’ as opposed to ‘actual’ self (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967).

Traditionally self-presentation has involved material items; objects, places or people to convey identity. For instance clothes, hairstyles, cars, music and brands have long been employed to communicate personal expressions to others (Strathern, 1994). Displays of self often call upon commercial goods to aid identity messages. People relate to each other through the mediation of things; symbolic goods providing a non-linguistic form of communication allowing individuals to convey their identities to others in their social world. As Belk (1988) noted, possessions reflect consumers' identities, so studying the possessions of others provides insights to their intangible selves. Moreover social groups share a common understanding of the symbols' meanings, enabling them to construct meaningful self-presentations and decode the presentations of others.

People develop their self-presentation and impression management skills through experience; accumulating knowledge by learning, which actions generate which reactions and adjusting behaviour accordingly. Social norms emerge from these situations and people gradually evolve an understanding of what constitutes 'appropriate' behaviour. Childhood and teenage years are critical for learning how to read the cues in the environment and for developing this understanding (boyd, 2007).

Individuals differ in their abilities to present themselves effectively and manage others' impressions of them. Rosenberg and Egbert (2011) identified three personality traits which affected an individual's self-presentation skills: self-monitoring, Machiavellian and affinity-seeking. Self-monitoring is the degree to which individuals regulate their own behaviour to showcase their personal traits (Synder, 1974). High self-monitorers engage in more social comparison than low self-monitorers, are better able to assess social situations, have a greater repertoire of social roles and scripts and are consequently more effective at self-presentation. Low self-monitorers are less sensitive to social cues and less skilled at adapting their behaviour and self-presentation in various situations (Synder, 1974). Machiavellian personalities are calculated and strategic, seeking to exploit situations and other people for their own personal benefit. They are often quite proficient at self-presentation but manipulate and fabricate their identity displays to attain their goals (Christie and Geis, 1970; Leary, 1996). Affinity seeking individuals yearn to be accepted and try to get others to like them through their communications (Daly and Kreiser, 1994; Leary, 1996). So they focus on their self-presentation, consciously trying to create desirable impressions with their referent audiences.

Effective impression management is often as much about what is not presented as what is. Degree of disclosure shapes the content and self-presentation strategies involve suppressing or de-emphasising less desirable qualities and enhancing details more congruent with one's desired self (Schau and Gilly, 2003). Furthermore individuals sometimes present themselves by defining what they are not. By identifying objects and symbols that they do not like, refrain from or are actively opposed to they convey their 'oppositional self' (Smith, 1992).

Goffman (1959) described impression management in a dramaturgical way, focusing on the performance aspect of expressing self. He used drama analogies to describe the 'self as an actor', delineating behaviours where individuals plan and enact deliberately with people where impression management matters (front stage) compared to behaviours when they step out of character without serious negative consequences (back stage). Consumers often maintain multiple selves dependent on role and context but they are not all equally articulated, learned or complex and some are more central to their self-definition than others (Hogg and Michell, 1996). For instance the 'private self' often varies from the 'public self'. So that the self presented outside of the home is likely to be more carefully managed than the home self which may be more reflective of the 'true' or 'actual self' (Belk, 1988). In addition Goffman (1959) distinguished between deliberate and inadvertent communication: 'given' being that which is intentional, more controllable and aims to convey a particular message (e.g. speech) and 'given out', that which is unintentional and less controllable (e.g. body language).

Drawing on the psychological literature, Lee et al (1999) adopted Tedeschi and Melburg's (1984) approach developing a self-presentation tactics scale dividing tactics into defensive and assertive actions. Assertive actions are designed to develop or create identities, whereas defensive tactics aim to defend or restore identities that have been damaged. Assertive tactics included: ingratiation, intimidation, supplication, entitlement, enhancement, basking, blasting and exemplification and defensive tactics included: excuses, justifications, disclaimers, self-handicapping and apologies (see Appendix 2.1). They found that male subjects were more likely than females to adopt assertive self-presentation tactics which was consistent with other studies (e.g. Deaux and Farris, 1977). Rosenberg and Egbert (2011) found that people predominantly adopted one or more of four self-presentation tactics in their self-presentation in social media: manipulation,

damage control, self-promotion and role modelling. Self-presentation in SM is addressed in more depth in Chapter 3, section 3.4.1.

## **2.7. Symbolic Materials and Identity Making Tools**

An individual's sense of self is an on-going life project. The process of self-development tends to be iterative with new 'ideals' being set as soon as previous 'ideals' are attained. Individuals are therefore constantly involved in a process of evaluating who they are, who they would like to be and how best to achieve it. Frequently the achievement of these 'ideal' goals is enabled by means of consumption of 'meaningful' objects (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967).

The term symbolic materials encompasses any entity which conveys meaning to others. The meaning is coded so that observers understand, interpret and formulate associated perceptions about the owner, wearer or user (Grubb and Hupp, 1968). Symbolic materials can be objects, products and possessions or publicly owned artefacts such as landmarks, places, leaders, celebrities, inventions, institutions, monuments, teams. Activities and behaviour can also communicate symbolic meaning, for instance horse riding, church going, train spotting, speech patterns, terminology, body language and rituals (Goffman, 1959; Hogg and Michell, 1996). In order for the communication of self to be successful it is essential that both consumers and their referent others interpret the coded messages in the same way (Grubb and Stern, 1971). There therefore needs to be a common understanding of shared meanings and this is the marketers' task through their marketing communications and positioning of brands (Bhat and Reddy, 1998 cited in Nuttall 2009; Grubb and Stern, 1971).

The set of symbolic materials used by individuals or groups are referred to as 'consumption constellations'; a cluster of complementary products, specific brands and/or consumption activities associated with a social role (Solomon and Assael, 1987 p191 cited in Hogg and Michell, 1996). Teenage groups, in particular, often develop and use 'consumption constellations' to carve out distinctive collective identities for themselves and as a bonding mechanism within their group members. Typical product constellations for teens involve clothing styles, musical tastes, and sporting interests. Furthermore, since the self tends to be multi-dimensional, each self may have its' own constellation of congruent products, brands and services. So it follows that different symbolic objects will be selected depending

on the context, situation and self being articulated at that particular point in time (Hogg and Michell, 1996).

Consumption is also a common means of self-enhancement. Individuals seeking to bridge the gap between 'actual' and 'ideal selves' identify the symbolic meaning(s) associated with their 'ideal self' and proceed towards their goal by acquiring the relevant symbolic objects to communicate symbolic cues to others and to themselves (Mittal, 2006). In doing so, they achieve 'symbolic self-completion', the symbolic objects extending the self to attain the ideal (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1981). Some objects or practices produce greater social rewards than others, for instance increased social or personal capital, so consumers are more likely to choose to adopt those over alternatives (Bourdieu, 1984).

An individual's confidence in their performance of a role (especially new roles) is often bolstered by ownership of 'role appropriate possessions', for example high technology trainers for a runner or an executive car for a business executive. Symbolic consumption is often used to aid role transitions and help individuals gain confidence in their new roles (Hogg et al, 2003; McCracken, 1986). Teenage consumption is a good example of this, as young people navigate their rites of passage from children to teenagers and then into adulthood thus symbolic items are part of an essential toolkit for developing self and social identity.

The process of 'symbolic attribution' is via a transfer of meaning from the product to the consumer. Products or objects are charged with symbolic meaning by the cultural environment, the media, marketers or even consumers themselves. Through a range of communication methods, the items embody the desired symbolic meaning. Consumers purchase the item and that meaning is transferred to them as the owner as "we are what we own" (Belk, 1988) thus the symbolic transfer of meaning is complete (McCracken, 1986).

Belk (1988) suggested that there were three ways that an individual incorporated objects into their 'extended self'. Firstly by appropriating it; purchasing an item and taking ownership. Secondly, by controlling it, mastering it or gaining power over it; thereby allowing the concept of 'possessions' to extend beyond purchase or ownership of products into people, places and ideas (Belk, 1988, Saren 2007). Thirdly by creating it, so if you produce something, "you are what you make". Fourthly by knowing it, for instance, the more you 'know' someone the more they become part of you. Alternatively through

knowledge of objects or categories for instance the more you know about a football team, the more they become part of your identity. McCarthy went as far as to say that sometimes identities might reside more in the objects in the 'extended self' than in the individuals themselves (McCarthy, 1984 cited in Belk, 1988).

Belk (1988) also discussed 'vicarious consumption', consuming through others which could extend for instance to boasting to others about one's offspring's achievements, basking in the glory of your football team's success or getting a boost in self-esteem through your spouse's promotion. Conversely the opposite effect may be seen, that is experiencing a reduction in self-esteem as a result of a dependent or rival's achievements, as it highlights your own lack thereof.

Symbolic meanings can originate from a variety of cultural sources and objects can symbolise different meanings across different cultures. Culturally formed symbols can be 'emblematic' or 'role acquisition based' (Solomon, 1983). Emblematic symbols tend to be based on geography, social class, gender, age, ethnicity and reference groups. Group membership is often expressed by way of shared consumption symbols e.g. clothing, hairstyles, music preferences, sports teams, motorbikes, pubs and tattoos. As discussed earlier, group symbols can enable 'group identity' to be expressed.

Sometimes symbolic meaning can originate from consumers themselves, for instance demonstrating connectivity with others. This may be externally focused so as to demonstrate group membership, or it may be internally focused. For instance, a piece of jewellery that takes on special meaning because it was a gift from a loved one (Mittal, 2006). As these products have strong associations with the self they are subsumed in the 'extended self' and often used as props in the play of life (Mittal, 2006). One product category that has been consistently symbolic and important to self-definition is photographs. Photographs are capable of rekindling memories, enhancing connectedness with others through shared experiences and forming conversation points. In today's world of digital technology, photographs and associated media such as video continue to form effective bonding mechanisms for relationships and are much easier to use, store and share.

Equally whilst symbols are often used to draw people together they can also be used to set individuals apart. Consumers often seek out unusual symbols to convey their uniqueness, to set them apart from the crowd. Kleine and Kleine (1995) claimed that consumers use

possessions to express both uniqueness and affiliation with others. They may look for rare brands, use smaller independent stores or travel to far-flung resorts for instance to demonstrate that they are 'different'. Only the complete ensemble of consumption items and possessions can communicate the full, detailed and unique portrait of self (Belk, 1988).

## **2.8. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has critically reviewed the expansive body of research on the self. It has examined models of the self emanating from psychological, social psychological, interpretivist, postmodern and CCT schools of thought. It has positioned the perspective of this study as bridging social psychology with interpretivist approaches; maintaining some structure with the concept of a 'core self' with multiple facets and layers, thus consistent with Belk (1988, 2013) and Mittal (2006).

Several bodies of literature related to self evaluation, development and expression have also been reviewed; social comparison, social identity, self-presentation, impression management and the consumption of symbolic materials. In addition several key models, definitions and terminology pertinent to this study have been explicated such as: self-esteem, self-improvement and self-enhancement; actual vs ideal self; oppositional self; single vs multiple selves; upward and downward comparisons; strong and weak ties; individual and group selves; given vs given out communication and front stage vs back stage behaviours.

In addition the review distinguishes between the concepts of self and identity and explores specific factors relating to teenage identity. Finally contextual aspects such as the social environment and individual characteristics such as personality have been explored with regards to how they influence people's identity-related behaviours such as social comparison and self-presentation.

Several of these concepts are explored further in the specific context of Social Media through the Computer Mediated Communications literature in Chapter 3.



# Chapter 3

# Computer Mediated Comms

### **3.0. Introduction**

This chapter reviews the findings related to social media (SM) from the computer-mediated communications (CMC) literature. Earlier studies tended to adopt a psychological, quantitative approach, whilst later research is grounded in social psychology and therefore aligns with the ethos of the current study. However the early CMC studies underpin much of the subsequent research in SM, so the discussion begins by reviewing the important theories focused on human interaction via the Internet

CMC research has covered many aspects of human behaviour online: uses, motivations, benefits, dangers, identity construction, self-presentation, impression formation, effect on social capital and variations by user profile. Comparisons between online and offline behaviour have led to conclusions regarding the effects of online activities on individual's 'real lives', their behaviour and their consumption of other media.

The central focus of this study is identity. The majority of studies reviewed here discuss how users construct, express and interpret identity messages in CM environments.

### **3.1 Evolution of Computer-Mediated Communications Research**

CMC research began during the 1990s early investigations studied text-based online environs such as email or Internet chat rooms. Many of these studies have become redundant as the scope of digital communications has evolved and new and different environments have emerged.

Underpinning CMC research is synchronous versus asynchronous communications. Synchronous communications occur in real time, conversation is instant like face-to-face (F2F) interactions. Asynchronous communications incur delays in the conversations, users send messages but their recipients may not read them until later and there may be a further delay before they respond.

#### **3.1.1 Early CMC Research**

Early studies frequently compared online communications with F2F communications (Walther et al, 1994 in Hancock and Dunham, 2001), several studies investigated how communications differed without the influence of physical appearance, body language or voice (e.g. Hancock and Dunham, 2001). Models were developed to analyse these phenomena using the Brunswick Lens (1956), which states that an individual's personality is reflected in their behaviour and in the artefacts they produce, others then use these

environmental cues to form ideas about their personality and attributes. However instead people tend to be selective about which cues they use (cue utilisation) and some cues are better at predicting personality than others (cue validity). If they select the valid cues, functional achievement is attained and impression formation is accurate. Several models were developed such as social presence theory (Short et al, 1976 in Hancock); reduced social context cues (Siegel et al, 1986; Sproull and Kiesler, 1986 in Hancock) and these various concepts were unified by Culnan and Markus (1987) in their cues filtered-out (CFO) perspective. The resultant theme that emerged from these studies was that communications in digital environments take a less personalised form and inhibit the development of interpersonal relations (Walther, 1996).

Research suggested that users enjoyed the anonymity achieved through the lack of cues, leading to increased potential for misrepresentation. In the absence of visual or aural validation, it was difficult to confirm key personal criteria such as gender, age, personality, attractiveness and extroversion. It was possible therefore for users to present different selves to their 'blind' audiences. In addition, the lack of personal interaction resulted in the Internet forming a metaphorical buffer between users; it was easy for them to forget that their messages were being broadcast to an audience and who that audience comprised of. Some studies revealed uninhibited behaviour in CMCs (e.g. Dubrovsky et al, 1991). In addition some researchers suggested that the anonymity encouraged users to explore playful and fantastical personae online (Stone, 1996; Turkle, 1995). The CFO perspective concluded that reduced cues would result in nebulous impression formation of other users (Culnan and Markus, 1987).

Further studies however challenged this assertion and focused on people's use of heuristics to formulate their impressions of others in CMC environments (Hancock and Dunham, 2001). Firstly the Social Identification/Deindividuation (SIDE) model (Lea and Spears, 1991, 1995; Spears and Lea, 1992, 1994) argued that observers rely on other communication cues to formulate their impressions (e.g. role, status, word choice, paralinguistic style) (Lea and Spears, 1992 in Hancock). The SIDE model proposed that observers draw on social categorisations and groups thus developing more stereotypical and exaggerated impressions (positive or negative) in CMC environments as compared to F2F.

Another challenger to the CFO perspective was Social Information Processing (SIP) theory (Walther, 1993; Walther and Burgoon, 1992). The key point of contention between SIP and CFO regarded impression formation over time. SIP argues that whilst CMC slows down the

rate at which users formulate accurate impressions of others, impressions become more developed and comprehensive over time eventually approximating to the same as those formed F2F.

The hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996, 1997) attempted to incorporate factors from CFO, SIP and SIDE into a composite framework. In these studies, Walther (1996) highlighted the concept of selective self-presentation, whereby users select and present the positive cues to their identity online. Users have more time to reflect and can therefore edit their presentations to best effect. The hyperpersonal model proposes that, as impressions are based on a reduced number of cues, users will only be willing to judge others on a limited range of criteria after the first interaction and that judgements on those limited criteria will be more intense, exaggerated and will cluster at the extremes of the category (Walther, 1996, 1997). Over time users will utilise adaptive criteria to reduce uncertainty about their target's personal qualities and eventually impressions should converge towards F2F impressions (Hancock and Dunham, 2001).

Whilst technology has progressed, some of these themes are still relevant. Limited or restricted cues in online communications remain an issue and the anonymity offered by the Internet allows participants to manipulate their self-presentations, suppressing less desirable attributes and exemplifying those they consider more desirable (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007). The findings, however are seemingly dichotomous, some suggesting that users are more expressive, open and honest online, while others argue that users are more guarded, secretive and controlled and some purport that users exhibit deceptive identity practices (Turkle, 1996). From an observer's perspective, there is no doubt that accurate impressions of others are more challenging to ascertain in online environments, yet the frequency of these interactions means that users have developed skills of interpretation to combat the lack of cues.

Another aspect of CMC research is the differing contexts of digital environments, for instance; work versus leisure, public versus private and formal versus informal. In different environments participants have different goals, objectives and audiences and therefore exhibit different behaviours. Email tends to be predominantly formal and for business usage whereas Messenger tends to be used for leisure. Social practices offline would be different in these two contexts and the same follows online. The characteristics and demographic profile of the users also influences the type of communications, older users tend to use more formal communication styles than younger users for instance. In addition

the CMC environments themselves can affect behaviour through their templates, by providing structure and boundaries to the social spaces provided, thereby influencing different type of communications.

### **3.1.2. Later CMC Research**

Later studies have focused on alternative computer-mediated environments such as: personal websites (Schau and Gilly, 2003); dating websites (Ellison et al, 2006) and instant messaging facilities (Lancaster et al, 2007). These studies yielded some interesting findings relevant to SM. For instance Schau and Gilly (2003) drew on Goffman's (1959) theories of impression management to conceptualise the way that individuals presented themselves to others via their personal websites. This study advanced understanding of how users draw on digital resources such as symbols, signs and brands to create a digital presence. In personal websites individuals created a digital likeness of themselves, so the anonymity observed in less developed CM environs started to evaporate. However a degree of selective and somewhat idealised self-presentation was still in evidence; they found that users presented what they perceived to be their strongest, most beneficial characteristics in their website. In these contexts, individuals were often involved in mixed-mode relationships, on and offline. Personal websites were frequently used to maintain relationships with distant relations or friends, meaning that the audiences were known acquaintances therefore the presented identities were anchored in reality.

Ellison et al (2006) studied self-presentation strategies in dating websites, exploring the way that participants present themselves to find a romantic partner. Again participants were in mixed-mode relationships. Whilst there was a clear incentive to present the most positive aspect of self to maximise the potential to initiate new relationships, at some point there would inevitably be a physical meeting, so presented selves could not be too far removed from reality. Presenters struggled to maintain a balance between creating the best impression whilst still presenting an 'authentic sense of self'. This study incorporated some visual cues (e.g. photographs) so anonymity was somewhat reduced. Ellison et al (2006) found that observers drew on small cues online to develop their impressions of others and their findings supported Walther's SIP model (1993), that users adapt to the limited cues available online to form impressions of others (warranting) and look for other sources of validating information which are difficult for the users to control e.g. news group postings.

Ellison et al (2006) focused on the interaction between digital environments and real life in online dating and concluded that there was also a growing awareness that the changes being wrought in digital spaces were two-way, in other words whilst emerging technology was undoubtedly shaping social practices, social practices were equally shaping technological developments.

Ellison applied Goffman's (1959) model of 'given' (intentional communication) versus 'given out' (unintentional communication) and found that there was a stronger tendency towards 'given' behaviour online. Akin to earlier studies, Ellison et al (2006) found that online communications were subject to more self-censorship than F2F communications. This is not surprising in an online dating context, the technology and asynchronous communications provide ample opportunity for editing. However it does provide further support for the argument that participants engage in more selective self-presentation in digital environments than in F2F communications. The study also identified deception in dating websites particularly about age, marital status and appearance, examining the effect of 'perceived deception' on other users' behaviour. Most users believed that others were dishonest and therefore participated in similar deceptions themselves to maintain a level playing field.

Interestingly Ellison et al (2006) also discovered converse behaviour amongst some of their participants, where under certain conditions users were inclined to express themselves more honestly in CMCs than in real life (RL). This can be somewhat explained by 'the passing stranger effect' (Rubin, 1975), where individuals may disclose information to strangers in a way that they would not do to close friends or family for fear of judgement or enduring consequences. The Internet creates a perceived distance between communication partners for more open disclosures. Moreover Zhao et al (2008) found that introverted people found it easier to express themselves in asynchronous online environments, as the ability to take longer to compose their messages and to avoid witnessing the recipient's reaction made them braver.

Lancaster et al (2007) compared Instant Messenger (IM), a forerunner to SM, with email and found that users categorised online environs for different communication purposes. They considered IM as suitable for their leisure, personal and playful communications whereas email was more suitable for formal and work communications, these categorisations are a useful mechanism for comparing communication practices in social network sites for instance Facebook with Twitter or LinkedIn.

### 3.1.3. Social Network Site (SNS) Research

Research on SNS environs specifically began to emerge from 2004 onwards (e.g. Donath and boyd, 2004; boyd, 2006; boyd, 2007, Larsen, 2007; Jones et al, 2008). They were initially categorised as social network sites (SNS) and latterly referred to as social media (SM). Early studies were mostly exploratory and endeavoured to extract an understanding of these new digital social spaces and consumers' use thereof. It was difficult to forecast the enduring and widespread influence that SM would subsequently enforce on everyday life; Donath and boyd (2004) queried "are SNS a fashion fad or an enduring revolution?". boyd's (2006, 2007) subsequent studies examined specific characteristics of SM and identified four key properties that distinguished them from previous CM environs: *persistence*, communications in SM are recorded and stored enabling asynchronous communications; *searchability*, users can easily search and find like-minded others; *replicability*, content is easily copied and passed on and *invisible audiences*, in that users do not know the extent of their digital audiences nor the context in which their messages may be received.

boyd has been one of the key instigators of research into SM environments and in her 2007 paper she identified that the social hierarchies that regulate 'coolness' amongst teenagers offline are equally present in SM. boyd (2007) focused particularly on MySpace in this study and identified a range of social practices operated by teens in this context that were commonly understood and accepted amongst their peers. For instance, it is cool to have 'friends' but not too many otherwise you are perceived as a 'MySpace whore!'

## 3.2. Key Facts and Statistics - Social Media

With the advent of smart phones and ubiquitous Wi-Fi, teen usage of the Internet has increased to the point that 92% go online daily and 24% are online 'almost constantly' (Lenhart, 2015). Social media accounts for much of their online activities (81% of 15-17yrs: Lenhart, 2015); and the most popular SM in the UK currently are Facebook (31 billion: <http://avocadosocial.com>), Instagram (14 million: <http://avocadosocial.com>), Twitter (15 million: <http://avocadosocial.com>) and Snapchat (10 million: Financial Times, 2016a). FB still dominates the market with 20% of adults saying that they visit the site more than 10 times per day and 50% of teens using it two or more times a day (Ofcom, 2015). Although there is evidence among younger UK users that Instagram and Snapchat are becoming more preferred options (<http://www.thelasthurdle.co.uk>) and in addition that 71% teens

now use multiple SM platforms (Lenhart, 2015). The key reasons for FB's falling popularity with teenagers are: the increasing adult presence, other people's oversharing and the prevalence of stressful dramas (Madden et al, 2013). Teens feel that they can express themselves better in SM other than Facebook, due to its inherent social expectations and constraints. However despite their frustrations with FB, they continue to visit the site regularly as it remains a key focus of their peer social activity (Madden et al, 2013).

UK specific data about teen consumption of social media is not readily available however a series of studies on teens and technology by PEW Research in the US provide useful information which are likely to be applicable to UK teens also. Some key profile differences in digital consumption behaviour have been identified. Firstly girls are more inclined to use SM, whereas boys are more inclined to play online games (Lenhart, 2015). Secondly girls favour visually oriented SM and as such make greater use of Instagram than boys (23% girls vs 17% boys: Lenhart, 2015). Furthermore boys are more likely to choose FB as their predominant SM platform (45% boys vs 36% girls: Lenhart, 2015). There is also evidence that those from higher income backgrounds and younger teens (13-14s) favour Instagram and Snapchat over FB (Lenhart, 2015) thus there may be a product life cycle (fashion) effect rippling through SM consumption with the newer SM gaining ground on the established competitor (FB).

In their use of FB, the average teen maintains a network of 300-400 FB 'friends' (Madden et al, 2013; Manago et al, 2012) and 57% of teens have made new friends online; girls more via SM (78% vs 52%), boys more often via online gaming (57% vs 13%) (Lenhart et al, 2015). It is evident that users conduct proactive impression management of their online FB personas and teens report feeling pressure to present themselves as attractive and popular (Lenhart et al, 2015). As SM has become regular cultural practice, young people are sharing more personal information (2012 vs 2006) for instance: real name, photographs, school, town/city, email address, phone no., interests, birthday, relationships status and relatively few (9%) are very concerned about third parties accessing their data (PEW, 2013). Finally whilst teens report some negative outcomes of FB in terms of how it makes them feel (dramas, oversharing, feeling worse about their own life), overall they report more positive feelings as a result of their engagement with SM (PEW, 2013).



### 3.3. Motivations

Many studies have focused on trying to establish why users are drawn to SM environments, what motivates them to join network sites initially, what compels them to continue to frequent them regularly and what benefits they derive from this practice (e.g. Bumgarner, 2007; Donath and boyd, 2004; Ellison et al, 2007; Waters and Ackerman, 2011; Zhao et al, 2008). Several common themes have emerged: to connect with others and develop relationships (e.g. Donath and boyd, 2004; Grasmuck et al, 2009); for convenience and practical purposes (e.g. Waters and Ackerman, 2011); to support identity construction (e.g. Zhao et al, 2008) and as a form of entertainment or escapism (e.g. Waters and Ackerman, 2011). Whilst SM differ in their purpose, focus and positioning; the same underlying themes seem to prevail.

#### 3.3.1. Relationships

A predominant attraction to SM is the desire to connect with others. Human beings are social animals and key to their well-being is the ability to forge bonds with others, affirm relationships and understand their place in the social hierarchy (Tufekci, 2008). Targets can be family, friends or work associates and different SM cater for each type of interaction. The subjects in this study are young people so this discussion focuses on the key people they interact with via SM (other young people; close friends, friends of friends, known others from the wider social network and complete strangers).

Unlike previous computer mediated environments, SM are termed 'anonymous, meaning that users tend to use their real names and mostly interact with people that they know offline. Whilst the average size of teens' SM network tend to be larger than what is observed in F2F situations (SM friends: 300-400 vs Offline friends: ~150; Tong et al, 2008) so their networks are more diffused, Zhao et al (2008) maintained that the majority of young people were not developing relationships with strangers in SM, although PEW's more recent findings contradict this (PEW 2015b). Teens habitual and extensive use of SM, raised some concerns that SM reduces the quality of existing offline relationships. Valkenburg and Peter (2007) examined two competing models; the displacement hypothesis (time online displaces time spent with friends thus reducing relationship quality) versus the stimulation hypotheses, (online communications enhances time spent with existing friends thus improving relationship quality). Their study compared results in anonymous versus 'anonymous online environments and found that in the 'anonymous environment, where users predominantly interacted with existing friends, the stimulation

hypotheses was supported however this was not true for family relationships. They concluded that 'nonymous online environments can enhance existing peer relationships thereby improving feelings of well-being.

Several researchers have examined the different types of relationship building that goes on in SM, these are categorised under the areas of relationship formation, facilitation, maintenance and enhancement (Ellison et al, 2007; Grasmuck et al, 2009; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007). Relationship formation occurs when a new relationship is created between two people previously unknown to each other; relationship facilitation is where a relationship is brought about via a connection with mutual friends; relationship maintenance is keeping up with existing contacts and relationship enhancement is about deepening relationships with existing contacts. Extant studies have found all of these types of relationship developments to be present in SM environments (Ellison et al, 2007; Grasmuck et al, 2009; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007).

Young people's SM networks incorporate a significant number of 'friends' with whom they have only loose connections offline, Granovetter (1982) termed these more distant acquaintances as 'weak social ties'. Ellison et al (2007) found that SM could greatly increase the potential for forming and maintaining relationships with 'weak ties' and that these relationships could provide potential information, resources and perspectives that could develop an individual's 'bridging social capital'. Furthermore Ellison et al (2007) and others (e.g. Grasmuck et al, 2009; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007) identified that SM encouraged and enabled more frequent interactions with close contacts, termed 'strong social ties' (Granovetter, 1982) enhancing those relationships and developing 'bonding social capital'.

Similarly SM provides the means for keeping up to date with long distance family and friends, thus maintaining their relationships (Ellison et al, 2007; Waters and Ackerman, 2011). This seems to be especially pertinent when children are involved and SM enabling photo and video sharing are greatly appreciated by consumers with this need. Individuals are therefore able to maintain day-to-day relationships despite remote proximity so maintaining 'bridging' and 'bonding social capital' (Utz and Beukeboom, 2011).

Returning to teenagers, their predominant use of SM is maintaining hyper-regular contact with local friends ('strong ties'). Teens enjoy being immersed in their peer social groups and love to share their personal experiences (Waters and Ackerman, 2011) and SM enables this social interaction 24/7, thus today's teens have been coined the 'always on' generation

(Spero and Stone, 2004). Moreover teens are more inclined to 'open up' to their contacts in SM than F2F. This has potential benefits for relationship enhancement as relationships are strengthened by expression and reciprocity of information and trust (Waters and Ackerman, 2011) thus with heightened frequency of interaction with close friends and increased disclosure of private information, it can be assumed that SM is likely to increase the quality of existing peer relationships (increase 'bonding social capital').

In addition teens also value SM for exploring and initiating romantic relationships (Bumgarner, 2007; Ellison et al, 2006; Utz and Beukeboom, 2011). SM are akin to dating websites, allowing users to gather considerable amounts of personal data about potential mates which can then be used to make judgements to initiate early conversations that may lead to relationships. Furthermore, once a relationship is formed, SM provides a socially acceptable way to monitor partners and to publicly display relationships via *relationship status* and *photographs* (Utz and Beukeboom, 2011).

There are however, some negative side effects when romantic relationships are displayed in a public forum. It can engender jealousy, suspicion and embarrassment if the relationship breaks down (Fox and Moreland, 2015; Utz and Beukeboom, 2011). Public discovery of a partner's unfaithfulness for instance is considered far more severe than private disclosure. Facilities such as the 'newsfeed' and 'tagging' of photos encourage close monitoring (grooming) behaviour which can be problematic. Despite these issues, most teens still maintain that publicising their relationship in SM increases their relationship satisfaction, happiness and commitment (Utz and Beukeboom, 2011).

### **3.3.2. Instrumental**

Whilst SM are considered to be 'expressive' digital applications; used mostly for self-presentation, social comparison and relationship building, many of the stated motivations are quite instrumental in nature. For instance storing and sharing information (Waters and Ackerman, 2011); organising, publicising and finding events (Bumgarner, 2007; Tufekci, 2008; Waters and Ackerman, 2011); as a directory of contacts (Bumgarner, 2007) and to locate people (Tufekci, 2008). SM leaves a searchable digital trail that simplifies and expedites these operational tasks. Larsen (2007) found that teenagers often used SM to discuss homework with their peers. Moreover they provide easy mechanisms for organising social events, there is an established database of friends so it is easy and efficient to send messages to large groups of people and monitor their responses thus SM provides utilitarian value in addition to hedonic benefits.

Similarly millennial teens have grown up with digital technology and are accustomed to being able to multi-task. It is not uncommon for them to complete homework, message with friends and listen to music or watch television simultaneously (Spero and Stone, 2004). SM facilitates this behaviour; they can cram more media time into fewer hours, making their lives more efficient (Jacobsen and Forste, 2011; Waters and Ackerman, 2011). This type of multi-tasking provides further support to the stimulation hypotheses; digital technology facilitates more connections, more activities and more enjoyment.

### **3.3.3. Identity**

Identity related behaviours are often emphasised during transition periods. Teenagers are arguably encountering life's most significant transition; from childhood to adulthood (Hill, 1992). Zhao et al (2008) found that teens used SM to create desirable identities in order to become popular among their friends, boyd (2006) argued that teens use SM in the "construction of cool", carefully crafting self-images with words, imagery and media to generate peer validation. SM provides the perfect arena for identity related activities as teens are immersed in their peer group for extended periods, have limitless access to their peers' identity displays; a profusion of digital resources with which to present their own identity projects and immediate feedback from a perpetual audience. Doster (2013) found that teens spent considerable time and energy designing and redesigning their 'aesthetic selves' in SM. Teens therefore indulge in the key activities related to identity development; social comparison, (digital) symbolic consumption, self-presentation, experimentation and self-evaluation.

Social interaction and affirmation from peers is critical for teenage identity development and self-esteem. Central to this is establishing a sense of belonging in a social group. SM platforms often provide facilities which quantify and visualise friend networks (boyd, 2007), most displaying number of friends on the user's profile, thus providing a proxy indication of popularity (see further discussion in section 3.6.1) (boyd, 2007; Tong et al, 2008). Therefore teens can proclaim their extended selves through their attachments to other important people.

### **3.3.4. Entertainment**

The final motivational theme is entertainment, fun and escapism. Several studies have identified these as key motivators for using SM (e.g. Nyland et al, 2007; Valenzuela et al, 2009). SM enables socialising; teens enjoy exchanging short messages and humorous

banter and it helps them to feel connected, valued and happy as well as providing a welcome relief from other less desirable and more challenging tasks such as homework.

Further entertainment is enabled through various self-expressive activities: creating interesting profiles, adding interests and hobbies; locating and sharing interesting links to music, jokes, games, fashions, movies and news items; uploading and editing photographs and linking their profiles with friends (boyd, 2007; Bumgarner, 2007; Nyland et al, 2007). In addition teens are further rewarded by the self-affirming feedback they receive from their peers on the results of their creative efforts (boyd, 2007; Larsen, 2007).

SM also generates a constant stream of narratives about other people's lives thereby facilitating gossip which stimulates discussions with other friends (Bumgarner, 2007). So SM content provides instant gratification whilst complementing offline social relationships by providing common conversational topics.

SM can provide perpetual entertainment and some studies report teens getting lost in the flow of this activity (e.g. Tufekci, 2008). Constantly checking profile after profile, leaving message after message, tweaking their profile and responding to messages. Understandably concerns have been raised about teen SM addiction and that SM distracts them from their studies (see section 3.7) (Nyland et al, 2007). Alternatively SM may be seen as a form of 'play' for teenagers, allowing them downtime from their 'work' oriented tasks, which is considered essential for human well-being (Ibarra et al, 2010). Early SM studies argued that SM improved teens' self-esteem (Baker, 2009; boyd, 2007); increased social interaction and complemented their existing relationships (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007), thereby providing a positive influence on teen lives.

### **3.3.5. Social Monitoring**

Fewer studies have focused on social monitoring, sometimes termed 'grooming' or voyeurism (e.g. Bumgarner, 2007; Tufekci, 2008; Utz and Beukeboom, 2011). Bumgarner (2007) argued that gathering information about others at a distance is central to all activities in SM. Users engage in voyeurism to find people that they can relate to; compare themselves with and to identify their place in the social hierarchy often boosting their self-esteem by deriding others (see section 3.5) (Calvert, 2000). Tufekci (2008) purports that the boundaries between the public and private have shifted in these 'anonymous online environments and that the natural curiosity that people have about the lives of others has been encouraged by SM. Habitual social monitoring of friends, partners and associates has

become commonplace and socially acceptable (Fox and Moreland, 2015; Utz and Beukeboom, 2011).

### **3.4. Identity Related Behaviours**

Identity related activities are common in SM and have been much explored (e.g. boyd, 2006, 2007; Grasmuck et al, 2009; Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011; Zhao et al, 2008). Online environments have progressively moved from anonymous to 'nonymous social spaces. In FB for instance, users' 'friends' are mostly 'anchored' in their offline relationships thus significantly altering the nature of identity construction and impression management in SM compared with earlier online environments (Zhao et al, 2008).

As discussed the internet provides a 'buffer' in social interactions (Dubrovsky et al, 1991). The perceived distance often resulted in online interactions being less inhibited resulting in higher levels of personal disclosure than F2F (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007). Several researchers have argued that online identities are idealised (e.g. Ellison et al, 2006; Utz and Beukeboom, 2011), selective (Schau and Gilly, 2003) or even plain deceptive (Walther et al, 2009) and many studies compare the online (virtual) self with the offline (real) self, implying two distinct constructs. As SM environs have become less anonymous, self-presentations have become more realistic and honest (Back et al, 2010; Grasmuck et al, 2009) and users are more inclined to conform to social conventions, hence these claims hold less weight, however some aspects of selective self-presentation online persist (Zhao et al, 2008).

#### **3.4.1. Self-Presentation**

Asynchronous SM interactions allow users to be more planned and reflective about their self-presentations. boyd (2007) found that SM users exhibited more self-monitoring behaviour; editing content, reflecting on meanings, and polishing their displays of self, prior to posting thus even in 'nonymous environments, selective identity appears to feature. boyd (2006) claimed that, teenagers engage in 'the construction of cool' supporting the argument that individuals seek to present, if not an idealised self certainly a 'hoped-for-self' (Zhao et al, 2008). Utz (2010) identified that physical attractiveness was particularly desirable and thus prone to enhancement in the digital context. In SM therefore, users are able to construct digital selves that they are not able to achieve or sustain in the offline environment (Zhao et al, 2008).

In addition some studies have observed aspects of role play and playfulness in SM (Donath and boyd, 2004; Grasmuck et al, 2009; Larsen, 2007; Zhao et al, 2008). Users often creating multiple versions of digital self (boyd, 2007). For teens, SM enables identity experimentation as well as entertainment.

Self-presentation in the digital realm diverges from RL because the body is no longer the central locus of consumption (Schau and Gilly, 2003). In digital media, social presence does not necessarily have to equate to physical presence, this has been termed as telepresence (Minsky, 1980 cited in Schau and Gilly). Whilst there are fewer behavioural cues online, digital users have discovered ways to construct complex expressions of self (boyd, 2007; Doster, 2013). boyd (2007) claimed that teens create their own stories and narratives in SM literally “writing themselves into being”. Similarly Zhao et al (2008) observed a profusion of autobiographical self-statements in their study of young FB users. Individuals are able to create more personalised and relevant stories (Rettberg, 2009), drawing from an infinite range of symbolic digital resources and present themselves using photographs, personal interests, activities, hobbies and opinions and friend networks (Zhao et al, 2008). Furthermore associations with objects, brands and celebrities were utilised to position teen identities in SM (Doster, 2013). Impression management in SM requires new skills and some teens are more proficient than others. Amongst young consumers, the digital environment has enabled and encouraged stylistic displays of self, coined the ‘aesthetic self’ (Doster, 2013).

Moreover, sex identities seem to be more pronounced online; girls emphasising friendly, emotional, accommodating and sexually available characteristics, whilst boys project assertiveness, dominance and distance. Kapidzic et al (2011) found that teens expressed stereotypical gender qualities through their language, style and visual imagery heightening gender signalling and leading led to increased mutual attraction on both sides. Girls’ photographs were more sexualised and physical attractiveness was more important for girls (Kapidzic et al, 2011). However advertising role models and the availability of symbolic tools and resources have increasingly encouraged young men to also present themselves as sexual objects. Siibak (2010) analysed ~600 images of young men from an Estonian SM community called ‘Damn I’m beautiful’ posing decoratively, accentuating their athletic bodies and muscles and emphasising their power and domination.

Rosenberg and Egbert (2011) identified that individuals pursue both primary and secondary goals in their impression management. Primary goals relate to their desire to change the

behaviour of another (e.g. initiating a relationship) and secondary relate to actions that support their primary goals (e.g. interaction and self-oriented goals). FB users employed a range of self-presentation tactics including: self-promotion, damage limitation, role-modelling and manipulation and the balance of these tactics varied according to their personality type (Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011). Different personality types adopted different strategies for self-presentation and evolved differing levels of proficiency. High self-monitorers and affinity-seeking individuals tended to be more skilled at impression management than low self-monitorers and Machiavellian individuals tended to be more manipulative and self-oriented than high self-monitorers (Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011). Zywicki and Danowski (2008) found that introverted users with low self-esteem and popularity manipulated their profiles and photographs to make themselves look more popular.

Whilst many explicit displays of self are observed in SM, some researchers argue that individuals present themselves more implicitly through their behaviour, affiliations and usage, thus employing 'showing rather than telling' strategies (Doster, 2013; Zhao et al, 2008). Teens place greater emphasis on presenting group identities than individual identities perhaps due to their awareness that observers consider 'given off' cues, to be less contrived than 'given out' cues (Goffman, 1959) when formulating judgements of others (Antheunis and Schouten, 2011; Zhao et al, 2008). In addition individuals often utilise oppositional approaches to presenting themselves, disassociating themselves with individuals that are not like, to clarify their self image (Schau and Gilly, 2003).

### **3.4.2. Co-construction and Multiple Audiences**

Social interactions have always had a somewhat public aspect, however SM has increased this dramatically, interactions between friends and family are publicised more frequently and to wider audiences via 'statuses' and 'news feeds'. Donath and boyd (2004) coined this concept as "public displays of connection". There are several implications of this: projected identities in SM are co-constructed by the individual and their social network (Larsen, 2007; Walther, 2007); feedback on identity presentations is seen by others; individuals have to manage multiple audiences simultaneously; exhibitionism and self-disclosure have become more commonplace and acceptable (boyd, 2007, Valkenburg and Peter, 2007). Conversely knowing that others are watching has made individuals more reflective about their identity displays (Larsen, 2007).



Donath and boyd (2004) argue that the public and shared nature of identity displays results in individuals having less control over their self-presentation. The meaning of one's postings can be altered, negated or enhanced through comments or postings added by others. For instance Walther et al (2008) found that individuals often experienced unwanted photographs of themselves posted on FB by friends. Identities in SM therefore are a product of co-construction between the presenters and their various audiences.

Linked to this, individuals have the added challenge of managing multiple audiences simultaneously (boyd, 2007; Donath and boyd, 2004). In RL people adopt different roles and behaviours in different social contexts and with different groups (Zhao et al, 2008), so it can be assumed that they would seek to replicate this in SM. Walther's (2007) study of text-based online communications revealed that individuals used different language, formality and tone to communicate with different audiences. In SM however several audiences are present concurrently: strong and weak ties, peers, parents and romantic partners and it is difficult for individuals to compartmentalise their different roles and separate their identity messages. For teenagers the separation between their peer and parent roles is particularly critical and there is evidence that they sometimes resort to deceptive behaviour, such as setting up mirror or fake profiles to maintain the divide (boyd, 2007).

### **3.4.3. Feedback, Validation and Affirmation**

As discussed in Chapter 2, feedback is a critical part of identity development and the self-enhancement process for teenagers (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). SM use is constant thereby generating numerous opportunities to stimulate peer validation. Teenagers can experiment with different identities, behaviours and possessions, receive instantaneous feedback then adjust accordingly in an iterative process of self-discovery.

Feedback is critical and early SM studies found it to be predominantly positive (e.g. boyd, 2006; Jones et al, 2008; Larsen, 2007). Larsen (2007) argued that there was a "strong love discourse" both inter and intra gender. In these new digital environs, teens seemed keen to help each other feel valued. As a result feedback generally had a positive effect on their self-esteem (Valkenburg et al, 2006). However as consumption of SM has progressed, practices may have changed, Valenzuela et al (2009) for instance found that FB could affect young people's self-esteem positively or negatively. This is discussed further in Section 3.5.

### **3.5. Social Comparison in Social Media**

As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.2), social comparison is central to self-evaluation, self-enhancement and self-development (Festinger, 1954). This is particularly pertinent for teenagers as they navigate the transition from child to adult, striving to construct their emerging adult self. SM provides abundant opportunities for social comparison, more than in RL. Teens spend the majority of their time in SM watching others (Metzger et al, 2011) and it is reasonable to assume that much of this activity will involve comparison with others.

In section 2.2 it was established that social comparisons (SC) could be upwards (against those performing better) or downwards (against those performing worse) with downwards having a mostly positive effect on self-enhancement, self-esteem and well-being (Wills, 1981) and upward comparisons sometimes causing a negative effect on self-esteem but other times providing inspiration for upward affiliation and self-improvement (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997; Marsh and Parker, 1984). These factors continue to be of interest in the social media context. The discussion of the social comparison literature in the SM context is structured into five sections: the subjects people compare themselves with, the attributes they compare, user variances, how SC makes people feel and other observed outcomes.

#### **3.5.1. Subjects**

Some studies have found that people mostly compare themselves with close friends, partners and family in SM (e.g. Wilcox and Stephen, 2012), strong as opposed to weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). In keeping with Festinger's (1954) original assertions, they focus on subjects that are similar to themselves, so the same age and gender for instance (Knobloch-Westerwick and Hastall, 2006). Most comparisons are upwards, against those performing better on their selected comparison attribute, although they also partake in downward comparisons, particularly when they are in a negative mood (Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). The pool of subjects is larger and more accessible than in RL and people spread their net wider, comparing themselves with work colleagues, old friends, ex partners and so on (Fox and Moreland, 2015). However people strategically choose subjects and comparison attributes to best advantage the comparison with themselves (Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). Importantly social comparisons in SM are predominantly with real people that they know as opposed to celebrities or strangers.

### 3.5.2. Comparison Attributes

People particularly favour attributes of physical attractiveness, popularity, extroversion, achievements and career success (Haferkamp and Kramer, 2011). Comparisons are drawn from 'system generated', 'self-generated' and 'other-generated' content but more credence is given to 'system' or 'other generated' as it is seen as being more independent (Antheunis and Schouten, 2011). Physical attractiveness dominates for young people. They evaluate this based on photographs posted by the subject and their friends (Utz, 2010). Popularity is partly judged by number of friends, although having too many friends is perceived negatively (see section 3.6.1) (Tong et al, 2008). In addition people compare the number of comments, 'likes' and photos with friends to evaluate popularity. A subject's extroversion is judged by how often they go out for instance, judged by photographs and statuses (Tong et al, 2008). Achievements and success are evaluated from cues such as statuses, job titles and photographs (e.g. graduation) but also indirectly through displays of possessions (e.g. car, house, holidays).

### 3.5.3. User Variances

Key differences at the individual level have been identified; for instance those with low self-esteem conduct more social comparisons in SM and experience more negative emotions from upward comparisons than those with high self-esteem (Frison and Eggermont, 2016). Adolescents conduct more comparisons due to lower confidence about their self-concept and they focus on appearance and extroversion (Valkenburg et al, 2006). Haferkamp and Kramer (2011) discovered that women focused more on comparisons relating to physical attractiveness and men focused more on career success. Further to this Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick (2014) identified that high self-esteem women preferred to make downward comparisons, whereas high self-esteem men preferred upward comparisons. Social comparison practices are therefore mediated by individual user characteristics in addition to the social environment itself.

### 3.5.4. Outcomes

The most substantial body of research on social comparisons in SM concerns the affective reactions of these behaviours on people. Studies have focused on self-esteem (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011; Wilcox and Stephen, 2012), well-being and life satisfaction (Chou and Edge, 2012; Feinstein et al, 2013), mood management (Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014) and self-control (Wilcox and Stephen, 2012). Early studies claimed that SM improved self-esteem and well-being amongst young people (Ellison et al, 2007; Valkenburg et al,

2006). However later studies identified an increased proclivity for upward comparisons (Chou and Edge, 2012); which combined with 'selective self-presentations' (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011) has resulted in people often feeling that everyone else's life is more exciting than their own, thus leading to diminished self-esteem, lower well-being and decreased life satisfaction (Chou and Edge, 2012). The lives portrayed in FB represent idealised and unattainable targets and may be exacerbated by the fact that their subjects are known real people not celebrities. People report 'hiding' subjects from their newsfeed to avoid making constant comparisons. Moreover dissonant feelings were expressed; on the one hand claiming that they hate FB whilst feeling obliged to continue participating to stay in touch, this has been termed 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) (Fox and Moreland, 2015).

Wilcox and Stephen (2012) support earlier studies that argued that SM increases self-esteem with the proviso that they focus on close friends (strong ties). However they found that increasing self-esteem led to reduced self-control which was in turn detrimental. They identified that people who used SM more often had a higher body mass index and higher credit card debt and posited that this was due to lower self-control caused by the boost in self-esteem, thereby increasing binge eating and reckless spending.

Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick (2014) also found that people used SM to facilitate mood management; selecting 'worse off' subjects for downward comparison to bolster their self-esteem and improve or regulate their mood (Wills, 1981). They found that people tailored their comparisons to suit their personal needs, when they were in a negative mood they chose downward comparisons for a boost, when in a positive or neutral mood they preferred upward comparisons.

Finally social comparison in SM led to various undesirable behaviours. Unsurprisingly, people exhibited more jealousy of their friends. Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick (2014) found that people were more concerned about being out-performed by a close friend than a distant one and avoided looking at in-group depictions. In addition and in line with White et al's (2006) findings, rivalry between groups had increased, people expressed dislike of people from out-groups (Fox and Moreland, 2015). Furthermore romantic relationships had become more complicated and fraught; the public displays generating higher mistrust, leading to increased social comparison and surveillance activity. People exhibited increased jealousy (Utz and Beukeboom, 2011) often pursuing unhealthy social comparisons of ex partners or current partner's previous beaux, generating a higher incidence of relationship conflict (Fox et al, 2014).

To summarise, SM enable and encourage easy and prolific social comparison activity and these behaviours have become embedded in the culture of the social environment. People make both upward and downward comparisons and these have the power to increase or decrease their self-esteem and well-being. Similar to RL, those who have lower self-esteem conduct more social comparisons than those with high self-esteem and are more profoundly affected by them. Some people use downward comparisons to regulate or improve their moods. Social comparison in SM can negatively impact relationships generating feelings such as mistrust, inadequacy, jealousy and dislike of out-groups. Moreover some people feel that their use of SM is out of control, which may be caused by the perpetual cycle of social comparison using external standards that White et al (2006) described (Section 2.2) and the features in SM, which positively encourage social comparison. The most prolific consumers of these digital social spaces are identity-seeking teenagers. If White et al's (2006) theories hold true, the long term effect of SM on the millennial teen generation may be significantly detrimental to their self-esteem, well-being and general life satisfaction.

### **3.6. Impression Formation**

There has also been much interest in how people perceive others in digital social spaces. This body of literature has been largely framed under the subject of impression formation. Early CMC studies focused extensively on this topic, particularly with regards to the lack of physical cues in digital environs. The key theoretical models utilised and developed have been discussed earlier (section 3.1.1.), namely the Brunswick Lens (1956), the cues filtered-out model (CFO) (Culnan and Markus, 1987); the Social Identification/Deindividuation model (SIDE) (Lea and Spears, 1991, 1995; Spears and Lea, 1992, 1994); the Social Information Processing (SIP) theory (Walther, 1993; Walther and Burgoon, 1992), the Hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996, 1997) and the Warranting Principle (Walther and Parks, 2002) which attempts to incorporate the previous models into one composite framework.

There has been considerable debate as to whether self-presentation in SM is idealised or selective (Ellison et al, 2006; Zhao et al, 2008). Many argue that people mostly associate with people they know therefore their digitally presented self must be congruent with their RL self (boyd, 2007). Furthermore digital identities are co-constructed with network friends (Zhao et al, 2008). Back et al (2010) investigated these propositions with regards to FB and supported the argument that FB is an extended social context where people express their

actual personality, thus concluding that user profiles are broadly representative of RL selves. However whilst people mostly conduct mixed mode relationships and should be able to combine cues and put together an accurate picture, 'friend' networks comprise of a large number of 'weak ties' and new or potential 'friendships' for whom F2F contact may be limited. Indeed evidence suggests that initial impression formation is often conducted through some form of digital mediation (Utz, 2010) thus understanding how people form impressions from online cues remains an important concept in SM.

### 3.6.1. Cues

Impression formation research investigates how people utilise cues (e.g. profile photos, statuses, no of friends) to formulate impressions of other people's RL attributes, such as attractiveness and personality. Tong et al (2008) categorised cues according to their originator: 'system-generated', 'self-generated' and 'other-generated' to determine the 'warranting values' (predictive accuracy) (Walther and Parks, 2002). The focus has mostly been on physical and social attractiveness, perhaps reflecting that the primary motivation for forming impressions of others is to assess their viability for friendship or romantic partnering (Wang et al, 2010). In addition several studies (e.g. Hall et al, 2014; Utz, 2010) have investigated how people form impressions of others' personalities, predominantly utilising the Big 5 personality dimensions (extroversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness and neuroticism) (McCrae and Costa, 1999) plus popularity, which has been associated with social attractiveness and extroversion (Utz, 2010). Finally some authors have researched the influence of individual variables, such gender or age of the profile owner or the observer (e.g. Kramer et al, 2017; Walther et al, 2008; Wang et al, 2010).

The hyperpersonal model (Walther, 1996) argues that people begin to form impressions with limited cues and infer personal attributes by exaggerating their acquired information and adopting stereotypes. Impressions are developed gradually over time and communication partners often idealise until the impression is contradicted. Whilst in SM there are considerably more visual cues available than in the early text-based digital environs which this model was based on, there is still evidence that this principle applies (Wang et al, 2010). The warranting value of a cue was seen to be determined by its ability to be manipulated, thus 'self-generated' cues (e.g. profile photos, statuses) were not considered as reliable as 'other-generated' (e.g. tagged photos, friends comments) or 'system-generated' cues (e.g. no of friends) (Walther and Parks, 2002). Antheunis and

Schouten (2011) found that people used other-generated cues to validate self-claims, sometimes termed as 'behavioural residue' (Walther et al, 2008) generated by the subject's friends. Walther et al (2008) found that friends' 'comments' were used to determine attractiveness, social attractiveness, extroversion and popularity. Conversely Utz (2010) found that whilst 'other-generated' cues were more important for interpreting traits such as communal orientation and social attractiveness, 'self-generated' cues were considered more important for popularity and extroversion.

The most researched 'system-generated' cue is 'number of friends', used to evaluate social attractiveness, extroversion and popularity. Tong et al (2008) found that there was an inverted U shaped relationship between 'no. of friends' and perceived popularity with the optimum being around 300. Those with larger friend networks lacked credibility, observers suspected gratuitous 'friending' with people they do not know as opposed to authentic popularity, thus corroborating Donath and boyd (2004) and boyd's (2007) findings. However having too many friends was still perceived as more beneficial than having too few (Tong et al, 2008).

### **3.6.2. Judging Attractiveness and Personality Type**

Physical attractiveness remains the most desirable quality particularly with regards to willingness to initiate new relationships (Wang et al, 2010). Attractive people are believed to possess numerous other positive characteristics such as intelligence, healthiness, popularity and social skills (Langois et al, 2000) fulfilling the stereotype 'what is beautiful is good' and have been found to reap greater social rewards than less attractive people (Feingold, 1992). As people prefer to associate with attractive individuals, physical attractiveness and social attractiveness share a reciprocal relationship (Tong et al, 2008). Walther et al (2008) found that people were perceived as more physically attractive when they associated with attractive friends (radiation effect) and that positive comments left by friends led to higher perceptions of credibility and social attractiveness. Furthermore Walther et al (2008) found that 'other-generated' cues were more influential for predicting physical attractiveness but that self-generated cues were stronger for extroversion. However Rosenthal et al (2015) disputed this, arguing that 'self-generated' cues were more influential for physical attractiveness and 'other-generated' cues were stronger determinants of social attractiveness. Moreover Walker and Vul (2014) found that faces were perceived as more physically attractive when photographed in a group as opposed to alone; group photos provide multiple cues (social attractiveness, popularity and physical

attractiveness) and mediate against the perceived narcissism of solo photographs. Finally the warranting principle suggests that photographs posted by others will be perceived as more influential in inferring physical attributes than the profile owner's as they are less likely to be manipulated. Essentially people are likely to be perceived as more attractive if they are photographed in a group of attractive friends and the photograph is posted by someone else.

Visual cues are hugely important in impression formation, often furnishing first impressions and significantly influencing willingness to initiate new relationships (Wang et al, 2010). Ellison et al (2006) posited that profile photographs are the most important aspect of self-presentation in SM and studies have shown that both males and females preferred to initiate friendships with opposite sex subjects with attractive photographs, they also found that people would prefer to 'friend' an opposite sex subject with no photo than one with an unattractive photo (Wang et al, 2010). This supports the hyperpersonal theory that, in the absence of evidence, people draw on stereotypes and idealise their communication partners and that negative cues carry more weight than positive (Utz, 2010; Walther, 1996). In earlier CMC contexts when photographic visual cues were absent, users became adept at using and interpreting textual signs and paralinguistic codes (Lea and Spears, 1995), drawing inferences about other people's personalities from their language, style, timing, punctuation and emoticons (Mantovani, 2001). Whilst the presence of photographic cues in SM undoubtedly makes a powerful impression and can provide 'shortcuts' for impression formation of new acquaintances; analysis of text and language still has a place for deeper evaluation of a subject's relationship potential.

Utz (2010) developed these findings to identify the influence of visual cues on impressions of personality. Her study found that people combined information additively from the owner's profile photo, their friend's profile photo and 'no. of friends' to form impressions of extroversion; however the owner's profile ('self-generated') had the strongest effect. People expect individuals to mix with friends that are similar to themselves (Donath, 2007), so if their friends created an outgoing impression, by being photographed in social situations for instance, then the subject would also be perceived as extroverted and popular, leading to more positive evaluations than if their friends appeared introverted (Utz, 2010). In addition Utz (2010) found that friend ('other') generated information had a stronger influence on perceptions of communal orientation than 'self-generated' information and that to predict social attractiveness people ignored self-generated cues



and combined 'no. of friends' ('system-generated') with type of friends (extroverted/introverted) preferring those with relatively few introverted friends.

As discussed Utz (2010) found that people select and combine different cues to evaluate different attributes and form their overall judgements. Hall et al (2014) investigated which FB cues were used to form impressions of other people's personality traits and found that people judged: extroversion from photographs and 'no. of FB friends'; openness from information pages (interests, hobbies); conscientiousness from friend's comments; agreeableness from friendly photos and judicious sharing of news/media items and neuroticism from a combination of cues. They supported earlier research that photographs were important in impression formation but found 'self-generated' cues to be generally more valued than 'other-generated' except for evaluating conscientiousness, thus refuting the warranting theory (Walther and Parks, 2002). In addition they highlighted the need for participants to have a shared understanding of how impressions are managed and formed (communal common ground) and found that most people were inaccurate about which factors generate which impressions.

### **3.6.3. Third Party Effect**

One of the negative behaviours increasingly bemoaned about in Facebook is bragging. Scott and Ravenscroft (2017) investigated this phenomenon studying the effect of message source (self/other) and content focus (general/personal) on perceptions of social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, confidence, modesty and popularity. They found that people were perceived more positively (less bragger-like) when their 'self-generated' content was general and 'other-generated' content was personal. In addition they found that 'self-generated' content more positively affected physical attractiveness and confidence, whereas 'other-generated' content exerted a stronger influence on modesty, popularity and social attractiveness again suggesting that communication of personal qualities and achievements is more effective via a third party.

### **3.6.4. Stereotyping**

Finally some key differences in impression formation have been identified with respect to gender. Walther et al (2008) discovered that young men evidencing involvement in risky behaviours, such as heavy drinking or sexual innuendo in SM were perceived as more physically attractive and desirable, whereas young women similarly partaking were perceived as physically unattractive and undesirable. This implies that sexual stereotypes and 'sexual double standards' are perpetuated in the digital world. In addition males were

found to be more inclined to initiate friendships with the opposite sex based on sexual or romantic motives than females (Wang et al, 2010). Furthermore Kramer et al (2017) found that men who posted selfies were seen as less trustworthy than women. This may be another form of stereotyping, as women are traditionally more concerned about impression management than men (McAndrew and Jeong, 2012), and men who replicate similar behaviours may be judged according to different (gender) expectations.

### **3.7. Risks, Fears and Concerns**

Parents, the media and other authorities have long expressed concern about the use of SM, particularly with regards to the earliest adopters, children and teenagers. Their worries have been exacerbated by the digital generational divide in that parents do not understand new media as well as their children, so are unable to oversee and regulate their use effectively (boyd, 2007). Risks, fears and concerns regarding addiction, privacy, safety, relationship difficulties, jealousy and negative future implications are discussed.

Firstly the extensive time and seeming immersion in these digital environs that young people have exhibited has led to concerns about addiction. Internet addiction is defined as “an individual’s inability to control his or her use of the Internet, which eventually causes psychological, social, school and/or work difficulties in a person’s life” (Davis, 2001). There is evidence that users feel tethered to their social networks, compelled to check their newsfeeds regularly for fear of missing out (FOMO) (Fox and Moreland, 2015). Studies have found that teens use SM as a form of escapism, a distraction from more mundane tasks and that they often experience guilt about the amount of time they spend in them (e.g. Waters and Ackerman, 2011). Moreover studies in other CMC environs found that vulnerable teenagers (lonely, introverted and self-conscious) are often more susceptible to addictive internet behaviours (Cao et al, 2007).

The extensive networks and ‘sharing’ culture have led to concerns about teens’ unchecked disclosures in SM and suspicions that sites like FB encourage negative behaviours such as self-promotion, narcissism, duplicity, exhibitionism, aggression and reduced empathy for others (Garcia and Sikstrom, 2014; Leung, 2013). One study found that there was an over-representation of negative content on FB, with teens often broadcasting risky behaviours (e.g. swearing, alcohol and partying) through their statuses and photographs, potentially leading to negative implications in the future (Shelton and Skalski, 2014). Furthermore some teens have been found to use FB as a coping strategy, reaching out for social support

to help them solve their problems online rather than F2F (Carpenter, 2012). In the early days, Gross and Acquisti (2005) found that young people demonstrated much lower regard for their privacy than adult users, their networks were vaster, 'friends' often included loose acquaintances and they revealed their personal data thereby exposing themselves to personal, social and commercial risks such as identity fraud, emotional and physical abuse. Whilst there is some evidence that teens may have become more aware of privacy risks (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008b; Patchin and Hinduja, 2010) this is not consistent with PEW's findings suggesting that they are sharing more personal details (see section 3.2) (Madden et al, 2013). Peter and Valkenburg (2011) argue that teens need to be taught how to balance the risks and benefits to their self-development of disclosing. The behaviours established (by teens) in SM have undoubtedly shifted the boundaries of privacy over time.

Personal interactions in FB have also led to increased teenage relationship issues such as conflicts, bullying and jealousy (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008a; Valenzuela et al, 2009). As discussed earlier the buffer of the Internet results in reduced inhibitions and increased confidence, with teens being more assertive and outspoken online than in RL and this can lead to more public confrontations which escalate and involve others (Fox and Moreland, 2015). Users conduct wider, deeper and historic social comparisons of others' selective self-presentations often generating jealousy and the feeling that their own life is not as exciting (Garcia and Sikstrom, 2014). Furthermore, wider networks and 24/7 connectivity mean that teens see more of their romantic partner's social interactions with others which can increase jealousy. Add to this mix the increased likelihood of users maintaining contact with their previous partners and the result is relationship tension and conflict (Muisse et al, 2009). Once suspicions are heightened, individuals are more likely to increase partner-monitoring and a vicious cycle of surveillance and jealousy ensues.

Finally there is increased evidence that FB users spend more time consuming the lives of others than posting their own content (Metzger et al, 2011). A few studies have identified voyeuristic practices and social grooming (browsing and exchanging social information about people) (e.g. Bumgarner, 2007; Tufekci, 2008). Bumgarner (2007) went so far to say that FB was a tool to facilitate gossip and it was more interesting if you knew the target personally. He found that many users practiced mediated voyeurism frequently as a distraction and form of entertainment. Tufekci (2008) discovered that people browsed both their friends' and strangers' lives and that this was often a competitive activity; these voyeuristic practices increase concerns about both addictiveness and privacy in SM.

### 3.8. Chapter Summary

This chapter has critically reviewed the CMC literature, tracing the development of theory relating to human behaviour in SM and considering the evolution of technology, users and usage behaviours thus providing a substantial foundation for further study. The review identifies key definitions and categories such as: synchronous and asynchronous communications, cues, Internet buffer, anonymous and 'nonymous environs, 'system', 'self' and 'other-generated' content, selective self-presentation, mixed mode relationships and communal common ground. The latest usage statistics for social media have been reviewed and variations according to gender, age and income have been identified. Key motivations for SM consumption have been discussed including: relationship development, social comparison, instrumental purposes, identity-related behaviours, entertainment and social monitoring.

The strategies and resources used for self-presentation in SM have been explored and effect of external influences such as co-constructed identities, multiple audiences and public displays of identity have been considered. Social comparison practices have been examined taking into account upward and downward comparisons, the selected targets, the comparison dimensions and the outcomes on self-esteem, well-being and mood. The way in which people form impressions of others in SM, has been analysed reviewing the cues used to interpret a subject's personality, attractiveness and popularity. Finally the key risks and fears associated with SM are explored, notably addiction, privacy, safety, relationship difficulties and jealousy.

Social media provides an exciting and evolving context for research and with continual developments in technology and consumption behaviours offers plenty of scope for further research and theory development.

# Chapter 4

# Millennials

## 4.0. Introduction

This chapter investigates the participants of the study, namely UK millennial teenagers. They were selected because as the earliest adopters and heaviest users of social media (SM) they have established and shaped consumption patterns for the medium and for subsequent adopter groups. SM emerged at a key transitional point in many millennial's lives, teenage years and quickly satisfied their needs for social comparison, identity expression and constant immersion in their peer groups, so was therefore rapidly adopted. A generational cohorting approach was adopted to unpick the typical characteristics of millennial teens and identify the key influences on them in order to gain a better understanding of their consumption behaviours in social media.

## 4.1. Overview of Generational Profiling

### 4.1.1. The Millennial Label

Marketers have often used generational cohorting as a way of categorising and understanding consumers of different ages. There is a sustained argument that people who travel through life together experiencing the same environmental and external events at the same time in their life cycle tend to exhibit some similarities (Schewe and Meredith, 2000). Moreover stereotypical analyses of cohorts such as the 'silents', 'baby boomers' and 'generation X' have contributed much to consumer behaviour and to marketing thinking and strategies over the years.

The cohort under investigation follows Generation X and several different labels and birth dates have been proffered e.g. Internet generation, Echo boomers, Boomlets, Nexters, Generation Y, Nintendo generation, digital generation (Raines, 2002). The most prevailing terms for this group however are Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001); the Net Generation (Tapscott, 1998, 2008) and Millennials (Howe and Strauss, 2000). The first two are based on the premise that the advances in digital technology and networked communications during the 1990s caused a significant break in generational values and characteristics (Jones, 2011).

*"A really big discontinuity has take place. One might even call it a 'singularity' – an event which changes things so fundamentally that there is absolutely no going back." (Prensky, 2001 p1)*

Prensky (2001) argued that young people who have grown up with computers and the Internet have a natural aptitude and advanced skills with regards to new technologies and

therefore interact with it naturally and with ease, hence coining them 'Digital Natives'. He argued that whilst older people 'learnt' new skills for digital technologies they were never completely at ease with it and were therefore termed 'Digital Immigrants' (Prensky, 2001). Prensky (2001) did not specify birth dates but Palfrey and Gasser (2008) suggested that 'Digital Natives' were born from 1980 onwards.

Tapscott (2009) argued that 'Net Generationers' were born between 1977 and 1997 and put forward similar arguments based on his observations of young people's talent with digital technologies.

Tapscott supported his observations with:

*"Each generation is exposed to a unique set of events that defines their place in history and shapes their outlook" (Tapscott, 2009 p16)*

Both Prensky (2001) and Tapscott (2009) have been criticised, opposers claiming that neither concepts have been supported empirically or theoretically (e.g. Bayne and Ross, 2007; Bennett et al, 2008) and subsequent studies have concluded that the cohort is not homogeneous in relation to their technical use, access, preferences and proficiencies (e.g. Jones et al, 2010). Whilst the majority of young people utilise technology to some extent, those with advanced technological skills were found to be in the minority; a technical elite rather than a generation (Brown and Czerniewicz, 2010).

The Millennial label was introduced by Howe and Strauss (2000) and developed by Oblinger (2003) and colleagues. Whilst citing digital networked technology (the Internet) as a defining event for the cohort, it takes into account a wider range of influencing factors: economic, political, socio-cultural, technological, media, globalisation, multiculturalism and education. Moreover it also considers the cohort characteristics of their parents and grandparents and the prevailing narratives of child rearing during the period. This cohort definition therefore, views the group as the product of longer term historical and cultural processes rather than defining them simply by the technology they consume (Jones, 2011). Howe and Strauss (2000) determined that millennials were born between 1982 and 2002, whereas Oblinger (2003) constrained the group to 1982 to 1991. The author considers the millennial descriptor to offer a richer more sophisticated approach to understanding the peculiarities of this cohort and this is therefore the term adopted throughout this study.

Debevec et al (2013) argued that the millennial cohort has itself divided into two distinct sub cohorts; older millennials and younger millennials. Their proposition is that the Great

Recession of 2008 represented another cataclysmic event that reshaped the generation. Those 'coming of age' (17-23 years) during this period of global recession have experienced limited job opportunities, lower salaries and greater student loans, which has influenced their values, attitudes and outlook on life. Whilst their study was conducted in the US, parallel economic conditions have prevailed in Britain, the two countries sharing similar Hofstede (1984) dimensions (power distance, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity and uncertainty avoidance and long term orientation) thus it is likely that a comparable shift in values may have occurred (Debevec et al, 2013).

The millennial generation is the largest demographic group in the developed world (Foscht et al, 2009). Lindstrom claims that they are richest, most sophisticated and influential generation in history and that due to many years of global media exposure, they are a homogenous segment worldwide (Lindstrom, 2004). However Andersen et al (2007) disputed this, comparing Danish and Hong Kong tweenagers use of new media, they identified distinct differences due to culture, environment and gratifications sought. Other authors have argued that there is a digital divide in terms of income and access to technology (e.g. Raines, 2002). However whilst millennial characteristics may not be all encompassing, many common trends have been observed which provide some insights to young people today.

The British population has peaked and troughed over the last century largely due to the two world wars. From the 1940s onwards the largest spike in birth rates was between 1945 and 1950 as the men returned from the second world war (1947: ~900k: ONS 2016) . The next peak occurred unsurprisingly around 20 years later as that cohort reached their main reproductive years in the 1960s (1964: ~900k: ONS 2016), similarly there was a third boom in the late 1980s to early 1990s (1990: ~700k: ONS 2016), producing the first of the millennial babies. So millennials represent a mini boom in themselves and are sometimes referred to as 'echo boomers' or 'boomlets'.

#### **4.1.2. Previous Generational Cohorts**

Whilst this review focuses on millennials, to see this group in context it is important to have an overview of the preceding generations. Cohorts differ from generations, in that they are determined by the shared experience of important external events, as opposed to when people reproduce (Schewe and Noble, 2000). Arguably this concept is not transportable across cultures, however American and British histories are closely paralleled with similar momentous events marking out the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. World War I and II, 1930s Great



Depression, Internet) and have enjoyed close cultural and economic links over this period, resulting in strong coherence between their consumer cohorts (Debevec et al, 2013).

Six US cohorts have been identified: Lost generation (born 1883-1900); GI generation (born 1901-1924); Silents (born 1925-1942); Baby Boomers (born 1943-1960); Generation X (born 1961-1981) and Millennials (born 1982-2002) (Howe and Strauss, 2000 p41). A brief profile of the Silents, Baby Boomers and Generation Xers is reviewed below to provide context to the formation of the characteristics of 'millennials' (Howe and Strauss, 2000).

#### **4.1.2.1. The Silent Generation (born 1925-1942)**

The Silent generation endured hardship through the economic depression of the 1930s and the war years which made them thrifty, cautious and risk averse (Lehto et al, 2006). As children they were heavily protected and were therefore quite conformist compared to the next youth generation (Baby Boomers). They tended to marry and reproduce early, often resenting this later and seeking liberation, generating the now familiar set of social phenomena: 'mid-life crisis', high divorce rates and 'hands-off parenting'. As adults the 'Silents' rebelled against their overly protected and structured up-bringing by championing in more laissez-faire education policies, increased lifestyle diversity and open attitudes towards sex and drugs. As dual career parents they were largely held responsible for the 'neglected latch-key kids' phenomenon associated with Generation Xers up-bringing but then often became highly involved grand parents of early millennials (Howe and Strauss, 2000 p53).

#### **4.1.2.2. Baby Boomers (born 1943-1960)**

Baby Boomers span two decades and are therefore often divided into two subsets; leading and trailing-edge Boomers to differentiate their wider ranging characteristics (Schewe and Noble, 2000). As the largest cohort of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Baby Boomers had a significant effect on world economies and culture per se. They lived through periods of unprecedented economic growth. Postwar Britain experienced rapid growth during the 1950s and 1960s and living standards improved dramatically (May, 1996 p447).

Baby Boomers are viewed as ambitious, hard-working, selfish, judgemental, vain and creative, often termed the 'me generation' (Harwood, 2002; Howe and Strauss, 2000). They questioned authority, rebelled and were responsible for many social and political movements of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century such as civil rights, feminism, equality, yuppies and consumerism as well as generating many cultural trends in music, fashion, art and literature (Howe and Strauss, 2000; Lehto et al, 2006; May, 1996; Roberts and Manolis,

2000). They were the first credit card generation, prepared to live in debt to possess goods they desire and enjoy their lifestyles (Roberts and Manolis, 2000).

Boomers were brought up to be independent and believed they controlled their own destinies (Mitchell, 1995 cited in Roberts and Manolis, 2000) yet as leaders and parents they placed educational emphasis on standards, morals and team-work. Baby Boomers are considered to be more adventurous than 'Silents' and prone to emphasise the need for fun, although now ageing many are keen to cling onto their youthful values (Lehto et al, 2006). Boomers are more affluent in retirement than any previous elderly generation and therefore continue to be hugely influential political and social campaigners and also mass consumers of youth maintenance and leisure products (Roberts and Manolis, 2000). Many have been exposed to and are frequent users of digital technology, however whilst they perceive it as useful, they are not as intuitive in their use of it as younger cohorts (Yang and Jolly, 2008).

Importantly they are parents or grandparents of millennials and therefore an influential force in the cohort's characteristic make-up.

#### **4.1.2.3. Generation Xers (born 1961-1981)**

Gen Xers were the children of Silents and early Boomers and as a result of the equality movement many became the 'latch-key kids' of the 1970s and 1980s, as both parents pursued ambitious careers (Schewe and Meredith, 2000). This backdrop together with non-prosperous economic times in Britain as many Xers came of age left them feeling rather resentful and individualistic as a cohort. They felt that their ambitions had been thwarted by society and often developed pessimistic expectations of under-achievement (Roberts and Manolis, 2000).

However, they were the first generation to grow up with digital advancements such as cable TV, personal computers, the Internet and mobile media and generally developed a natural affinity with it (Roberts and Manolis, 2000; Yang and Jolly 2008). Many Xers enjoyed early success as part of the silicone boom and are more intuitive with digital technology than Boomers, readily adopting innovations such as Internet-enabled smart phones (Scadler, 2006 cited in Yang and Jolly, 2008).

Xers have also influenced working patterns; favouring intensive blocks of project and contract work punctuated by periods of inactivity as opposed to traditional 9-5 working. As

developed societies have moved towards 24/7, 365 days a year services, this flexibility has become ever more necessary.

Gen Xers often delayed marriage and parenthood, remaining at home for longer to preserve their disposable income. They tend to be preoccupied with material possessions and see their goal in life as making money to buy products (Roberts and Manolis, 2000). Some suggest that they delayed growing up, however as parents many have embraced 'child-first' values perhaps as a response to their own 'less attentive' childhoods. In relation to this study they represent many millennial parents and are therefore key influencers.

## **4.2. Economic and Political Background (1982-2017)**

Britain experienced troubled economic times during the 1970s with high inflation and numerous public services strikes culminating in the so called 1979 'Winter of Discontent', this continued into the early 1980s. Unemployment was at its highest since the Great Depression of the 1930s peaking at 3.3 million in April 1984 (BBC, 2013). This was particularly compounded amongst the youth population; 1.2 million 18-24 year olds were unemployed in 1984 (ONS, 2014).

Furthermore this period witnessed: the Falklands War; the miners' strike in 1984; race riots and general discontent amongst the population during one of the worst recessions in Britain's history. However the mid to late 1980s brought renewed prosperity (GDP >5%, 1988: BBC, 2013) and unemployment reduced to around 2 million by 1989 (BBC, 2013); strikes generally dissipated and the population settled into a more content way of life.

Born towards the end of this period, millennials were not exposed to these difficult times and instead grew up in a world with a positive outlook, increased tolerance of ethnic diversity and steadily increasing wealth and materialism. This continued for some time and whilst there was a recession between 1990 and 1993, it was less severe than the 1980s recession, output fell by less (3.9% c.p. 5.5% BBC, 1993) and it had far less impact on the majority of people's day to day lives.

In 1997, Tony Blair and New Labour swept a further change of positivity through the nation. There was a period of consistent GDP growth from 2000 to 2008 (1.6% to 3%: ONS, 2010) and inflation remained steady at around 2% (Economy Watch, 2010). New Labour introduced a number of strategies to reduce unemployment; they increased taxation,

borrowing and public spending; introduced the minimum wage and moved Britain away from manufacturing towards a service based economy.

Blair was also instrumental in changing attitudes towards education, having a significant effect on millennials as they came of age. Blair's stated intent that 50% of all young people should go to university, significantly raised expectations, influenced educational policies and delayed the time before the bulk of young people joined the workplace.

The decline of the working class and disempowerment of trade unions meant that New Labour had to appeal to the dominant middle classes, as such there was a convergence of political ideologies. Whilst this was positive for economic stability; without the two opposing ends of the political spectrum, people generally became less interested in politics, particularly young people who had not endured any negative experiences as a result of political actions (Kavanagh, 2011; PEW Research Center, 2010). Instead society became more individualistic, there was a passion for home ownership and 'choice' became the buzz word. This was emphasised in public sector strategies of the time; for instance giving parents more choice about where their children went to school (Kavanagh, 2011).

High streets thrived and consumerism boomed with people flocking to purchase items for themselves, their houses and their children. After a short-lived although significant hike in the early 1990s, interest rates and consequently mortgage rates decreased to an all-time low in the late 1990s and remained there, credit was easy to come by, thus encouraging people to live beyond their means. This coincided with a resurgence of cultural and sporting gains and Britain was dubbed 'Cool Britannia' (Economy Watch, 2010).

Whilst there was some significant political unrest during this period in the form of wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Northern Ireland, they mostly took place remotely, therefore in contrast to previous wars; people did not feel intensely involved; their everyday lifestyle was unaffected. They were wars experienced through the media (Shaw and Carr-Hill, 1991).

The early noughties boom, charged in part by the rapid advances in technology, continued to sustain an optimistic feeling amongst the British population. New Labour introduced Child Trust Funds providing a generous £250 initial investment for babies in 2002 to encourage parents to save for their children, so the perception of good times and even better times ahead prevailed through most millennials' childhoods and has profoundly affected their characteristics, values and attitudes to life (The Guardian, 2003).

Young people growing up during this period generally experienced comfortable affluence. As a youth cohort they had higher discretionary incomes and more purchasing power than previous generations (Foscht et al, 2009). Added to which they were often indulged by doting parents and grandparents, extending their consumption power further still. However there remained a north south divide in terms of wealth and opportunities, with London and the south east benefitting more from globalisation and other areas continuing to be more reliant on manufacturing and public sector employment (Kavanagh, 2011).

Times began to change around 2003, a key milestone was the introduction of nominal tuition fees for university courses. Then in 2007 the worldwide banking crisis loomed and it became clear, with the collapse of Northern Rock, that the bottom had started to fall out of the economy. Over the next few years many well-known retailers faltered and disappeared from the high street, unemployment increased again and Britain started to feel decidedly squeezed. This global financial downturn and the debt crisis in Europe has become known as the 'Great Recession' (Debevec et al, 2013).

By 2009, Britain's GDP fell by 6.4% (ONS, 2010), unemployment rose to 2.47m (8%) (BBC, 2015) and youths (18-24s) were the most severely affected with 943,000 (20%) unemployed in November 2009 (Telegraph, 2009). A number of reasons have been put forward as to why this may have been. Firstly, because of the influx of immigrants since 2004, particularly from Eastern Europe; although Lemos and Portes' study (2008) did not support this claim. Secondly, the introduction of the minimum wage in 1999 and its inflationary effect on lower salaries, hence affecting young people the most (The Economist, 2009). Thirdly, advancing technology and increasing automation reduced the need for routine and manual work, which also affected young people disproportionately (The Telegraph, 2012).

High youth unemployment is a serious concern for any economy, studies have shown that where young people's early careers are stunted, this continues to affect them throughout their working lives, so the effects are felt long term (The Economist, 2009; The Telegraph, 2012). Moreover the coalition government in 2010 introduced austerity measures; spending cuts and stricter immigration policies. A key defining moment for younger millennials was the increase in university tuition fees in 2012, significantly raising the cost of higher education to families (Dearden et al, 2011).

Furthermore there were concerns about increasing youth crime, epitomised by the riots in August 2011 when thousands of youths took to the streets, enabled by social media, vandalising and looting high street stores for their own gain. These riots were different to those of the 1980s, whilst ostensibly sparked by the police shooting of a young black man; the subsequent events were motivated more by consumerism, greed and disgruntlement than racial tensions (Lewis et al, 2011). Young rioters reported feeling compelled by advertising and peer pressure to desire branded and luxury goods. Having the 'right' possessions was ingrained into their generational culture and they felt a sense of injustice that they could not afford them, either due to unemployment or low incomes. They reported feeling excited by the temporary lawless situation and the opportunity to get stuff for free. Some mentioned higher level motives such as the increase in university tuition fees and frustrations with policing methods, specifically 'stop and search' but on the whole the majority of offenders were fuelled by excitement and opportunism (Lewis et al, 2011).

#### 4.2.1. BREXIT

The EU Referendum in June 2016 resulting in the decision that Britain would exit the EU (coined BREXIT) had a dramatic effect on British Millennials. Polls showed a stark generational divide with 71% of 18-24s voting to Remain vs only 36% of over 65s; the overall vote being 48% Remain: 52% Leave (YouGov, 2016). Add to this that turnout amongst 18-24s was low compared with older groups and that (unlike in the Scottish Referendum) 16-17s were not permitted to vote, the injustice of the outcome left many millennials feeling angry and resentful, summed up by the statement below.

*"The younger generation has lost the right to live and work in 27 other countries. We will never know the full extent of lost opportunities, friendships, marriages and experiences we will be denied. Freedom of movement was taken away by our parents, uncles and grandparents in a parting blow to a generation that was already drowning in the debts of its predecessors."*  
(Financial Times, 28 June 2016)

These words highlight the key points of contention against BREXIT for the young. Britain leaving the EU is likely to make it harder for them to: work abroad; study in other European countries and travel freely. Several of the privileges that millennials value highly and had taken for granted are threatened by BREXIT; they stand to lose rights that they believed they were entitled to (Financial Times, 2016b).

Moreover if, as many predict, BREXIT triggers another recession in Britain, the impact of a poor economy historically affects the young the most, making it harder to secure a job and suppressing salary levels for several years. Some argue that a reduction in the number of

immigrants will improve job prospects and help more young people to get on the housing ladder however that is dependent on the Britain's on-going prosperity (The Guardian, 2016).

In summary BREXIT was the most important political decision that Britain has taken for decades and those who stand to be most affected by it, for the longest time, feel that their voices were not heard. Millennials will however be the generation who take responsibility for managing the country's future outside of the EU (Financial Times, 2016c).

### **4.3. Technology/Media**

Major developments in technology have occurred over this period (1982-2017) significantly impacting on the everyday lives of British people. During the 1980s user-friendly microcomputers were introduced in the workplace, opening up the computing world to mainstream users in a work context. These were rapidly adopted and paved the way for the transfer of many technologies from the workplace to the home (Brown and Venkatesh, 2005).

The introduction of the worldwide web and search engines in the mid 1990s revolutionised access to information and global communications. This sparked consumer purchases of personal computers (PCs) for use at home during the late 1990s and the Internet, email, word processing and spreadsheets were rapidly adopted for a range of personalised purposes. The diffusion of innovation was even faster for families as there was a perception that children needed access to a computer and the internet for educational purposes (Brown and Venkatesh, 2005). Interestingly whilst home PCs were initially purchased for utilitarian reasons, as technology advanced they were increasingly used for hedonic purposes e.g. games, socialising with friends (Brown and Venkatesh, 2005).

The millennial generation has therefore been accustomed to digital technology from an early age and consequently has an intuitive relationship with it, often surpassing that of their parents, teachers and those trying to market to them (Bennett, 2006). They have a natural affinity to digital media and gadgets such as mobile phones, iPods, social media and blogs and use them to effectively manage their lives. Young people have increasingly taken a lead in this arena and this has led to a more fluid and flexible digital and media world. User-generated content is rife and media generated messages and images are often appropriated and adapted to suit. Software developments have enabled users to produce and adapt digital stimuli to a level which almost matches the professionals. This has

produced a generation who are no longer passive to marketing communications messages but who adapt, mould and redistribute stimuli at will (Doster, 2013).

Some refer to the noughties (2000-2010) as the 'Digital Decade' because of the way that digital technology has changed consumers' use of communications and lifestyles (OFCOM, 2011). Whilst these developments have affected all consumers, the impact on younger consumers has been more pronounced as they have embraced new technology and media faster and more readily (Yang and Jolly, 2008). To put this into context: the majority of UK homes now have digital television (96%: 2016); access to the Internet (86%: 2016) and 93% of adults use a mobile telephone (2016). Smart phones have an even greater take-up amongst teenage consumers with the majority (90%: 2016) now possessing one (OFCOM, 2016). In fact the latest research found that adults now spend more time consuming media and communications than sleeping (OFCOM, 2016).

Amidst media generated concerns of increased stranger danger and other crimes against children during the 1990s and 2000s (see sections 1.4 and 4.4.) children's freedom to play outdoors was severely curbed compared to previous generations. However whilst millennials were supposedly safe at home, unbeknownst to their parents, they were discovering all sorts of freedom online. Studies revealed that teens often used the Internet after school before their parents got home and were therefore gaining more independence from their parents online than off (Bennett, 2006). With legislation struggling to keep pace with new forms of media, teens were potentially at greater risk in online forums than in the real world, to their parents' oblivion. On the positive side, having become prolific users from an early age, they rapidly become streetwise to the dangers, thus fast becoming adept at coping in these digital environs (Bennett, 2006).

Teens use the Internet for a range of activities including studying, searching for information and communicating (Bennett, 2006). However despite parental and educational expectations, teens predominantly use it for fun; entertainment, socialising, listening to music, playing games, relieving boredom and shopping (Yang and Jolly, 2008). Indeed much of the rapid adoption of digital technology has come about to satisfy entertainment as opposed to utilitarian needs (Deloitte, 2016). The disparity between generational expectations of technology has been described as the 'digital divide' and has caused some conflicts and misunderstandings between teenagers and their parents. However, Livingstone (2003) argued that free-form use of the Internet at home develops different and more advanced skills than those learnt at school.



Many entertainment and activities that were previously enjoyed offline have transferred online; teens often playing “old games in new media” (Andersen et al, 2007). All forms of media have increasingly become intertwined; television and radio programmes have associated websites, sports can be experienced through any type of media, online brands are frequently advertised in traditional media and most televisions are now Internet-enabled. Teen behaviour has adapted to suit this environment, they often multi-task e.g. watching TV and consuming social media at the same time. The practices of meshing (multi-tasking with related media) and stacking (multi-tasking with unrelated media) have become steadily more prevalent; the latest studies finding that 16-24s now manage to squeeze 13hrs 11mins of media activity into 8hrs 56mins (OFCOM, 2016), thus the ‘always connected society’ has become a reality (Spero and Stone, 2003).

There are indications that the digital revolution and mobile technology have generated some addictive tendencies, particularly amongst young people. Nearly two-thirds of 16-24s (60%: OFCOM 2016) admit to spending too much time online, around half of 18-24s check their phone within 5 minutes of waking up (Deloitte, 2015), 79% of teens said that they feel ‘hooked’ to their communication device(s) (OFCOM: 2016) and 25% of 16-24s say that they feel nervous or anxious when they are offline (OFCOM, 2016). Inevitably this usage behaviour has impacted on other areas of their life with 60% of teens saying that it had negatively affected their work, 57% admitting that they had missed out on spending social time with friends or family and 72% saying that they had lost sleep and felt tired the next day as a result of spending too much time online (OFCOM, 2016).

In addition these behaviours have affected social etiquette and communication methods, younger consumers increasingly opt for instant messaging (IM) over telephone calls (36% vs 15%); using social media (SM) to keep in touch with their friends (15%); being less concerned than adults about using their phones in social situations and more likely to communicate with others via digital communications even whilst in the same place (OFCOM, 2016). Teens cite various reasons for this type of sharing, for instance laziness, secrecy, noisiness, self-expression and “because we wanted other people to see on SM” (OFCOM, 2016). These behaviours have sparked concerns that mobile technology is eroding F2F social interaction and have led many parents (77%) to impose rules limiting their teens’ Internet use, the most popular of which is no phones at mealtimes (40%:OFCOM, 2016).

Teenagers use their mobile phones more often and for more purposes than adults and one of the predominant drivers is SM, which has reached almost universal usage (99% of 16-24s use SM at least weekly: OFCOM, 2016). Young people now spend less of their time consuming live television or radio and more time consuming on-demand content and communicating. Moreover their preferred channels have changed too, after instant messaging, SM is the most favoured, outstripping email and phone calls. Young people now devote 18% of their total media and communications time to SM, averaging 2hrs 26mins per day (OFCOM, 2016).

Parents, schools and authorities have expressed concerns about youth use of the Internet and SM. As the earliest adopters, teenagers have rapidly evolved their own modes of behaviour and codes of conduct in digital environments which are of interest to researchers and practitioners. Cautious ethical guidelines for researching child consumers have increasingly meant that researchers have shied away from studying the under 18s, often opting to ask parents about their children's use instead (Livingstone, 2003). This significantly disadvantages the understanding of teen behaviours in digital environments because as discussed, much of what children (especially teenagers) do online is outside of their parents' knowledge and often expertise. So to get a more accurate picture of teenage life online researchers really need to speak to the teenagers themselves.

To summarise therefore technological advances in the last 30 years have undoubtedly had a profound effect on the character formation and lifestyles of the millennial generation and equally they have played a major role in developing and establishing online practices for society as a whole.

#### **4.4. Family Structures**

Families are the first and primary source of children's socialisation and consumer socialisation theory indicates that childhood and adolescence are the most crucial stages for acquiring consumption-related orientations (Grant and Stephen, 2006). It is reasonable to assume therefore that family structures and trends have had a marked effect on the development of the millennial generation's character and behaviours.

Born in the 1980s and 1990s millennial children were often part of dual career and double income families. As women focused on building their careers, the average age of child bearing increased (ONS 2015a), so parents were often more mature and affluent by the time they started their families and had more positive attitudes towards their offspring,

resulting in a marked shift in attitudes towards children (Grant and Stephen, 2006). Inspired by Piaget's ideas on contemporary childhood there was a move away from concept of the 'child as vulnerable' to the 'child as a competent actor in his/her own life' which changed the way that parents and teachers treated children (Andersen et al, 2007; James et al, 1998).

Millennial babies were very much wanted by parents and were doted on, pampered and protected. Parental affluence meant that they could afford to spoil their children with clothing, possessions and activities. Dual career families were short of time as opposed to money and many substituted the emotional support of their children with spending (Dunn, 1993 cited in Roberts and Manolis, 2000). There was an increase in movies and programming specifically targeted at children and a dearth of products and child-charged brands aimed at families (Lindstrom, 2004). Furthermore as millennials were mostly the product of trailing edge boomers they themselves generated a boom in birth rates (1990: ~700k: ONS 2016). So there were more of them and their families were more affluent and eager to spend money on them.

Another key influence on family structures at this time was the extended family. As life expectancy increased and grandparents tended to be fitter and healthier they were often more involved in their grandchildren's lives (ONS 2015b). Millennials therefore grew up surrounded by adults who idolised them, spent money on them, made sacrifices for them and had high expectations of them.

However, millennial children were over-protected compared to previous generations. Children's freedom was severely curbed, media stories about stranger danger and crimes against children were over-emphasised and children were watched 24/7 (Howe, 2005). As millennials turned into teenagers, an ID culture developed; stricter alcohol laws were enforced, the age of smoking was raised from 16 to 18 years (2007), self-restraint and safe-sex were strongly advocated and millennials were actively encouraged to be nice and 'clean living' (Howe, 2005).

In addition more child-oriented services emerged. Families employed babysitters, nannies and after school clubs to look after their children whilst they were working. Millennial kids attended clubs and activities from horse-riding through to music and drama lessons. In short they were 'looked after' from dawn to dusk, encouraged to aim high and achieve much and their parents increasingly boasted about their successes. Moreover as they grew,

electronic gadgets were often employed to keep an eye on them, CCTV, computer spy tools and mobile phones (Grant and Stephen, 2006).

Parental styles also changed during this period, physical discipline was discouraged and families were encouraging to instead nurture their children with targets, praise and rewards. In turn this altered the nature of family relationships, they became much more democratic as opposed to patriarchal and children increasingly had a greater say in family affairs. So families turned into negotiation units and children had more influence on family decision making as well as becoming consumers in their own right from an earlier age (Andersen et al, 2007; Harwood, 2002; Lindstrom, 2004).

Increased autonomy and exposure to consumer culture seemed to encourage children to grow up faster, studies observed that they stopped playing with toys and games earlier and became fully fledged consumers and brand connoisseurs at a younger age (Andersen et al, 2007). Although apparently at odds with this, increasing numbers of millennials delayed entering the workplace to pursue higher education studies, stayed living at home and remained reliant on their parents for financial support for longer. O'Connor (2006) found that many teens rejected adult scenarios like marriage and families and exhibited signs of not wanting to grow up. As relationships with parents were generally closer than previous generations and it was more challenging to get onto the property ladder, many millennials opted to stay at home and retain high levels of disposable income to spend on themselves.

## **4.5. Globalisation**

Globalisation refers to the crystallisation of the world in one space or paradoxically the extension of economics, culture and politics across the world (Nayak, 2003; World Youth Report, 2003). Giddens (1991) defines it as:

*"The intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa."*

*(Giddens, 1991)*

Globalisation is an economic, political and cultural process and is characterised by the increasing importance of markets, increased international competition, accelerated spread of networks and knowledge via new technologies and dependence on random shocks anywhere in the world (Mills and Blossfeld, 2003). The result of this is increased uncertainty as nation-states have reduced powers to shape the national economy and the key beneficiaries are multinational corporations (MNCs). Young people are the group most

affected by these changes; at the start of their careers facing the prospect of fewer life-long jobs, increased likelihood of unemployment, part-time work, fixed term contracts and more flexible employment arrangements (Nayak, 2003). Uncertainty about their on-going employment and economic future often leads them to postpone major commitments, thereby delaying adulthood (Mills and Blossfeld, 2003).

However in many ways, millennials are the cohort that epitomises globalisation; some claiming 'Global Youth Culture' to be the same worldwide due to their consumption of the same clothes, music and media (e.g. Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003). Other researchers dispute this, arguing that globalisation is experienced differently in different places (e.g. Andersen et al, 2007; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006) according to nation-based institutional systems like education, employment, welfare regimes and family (Mills and Blossfeld, 2003). Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) argued that young people adapt global cultural practices and artefacts to fit their local contexts. The young frequently re-appropriate media resources; reinterpreting and representing them to produce new meanings for identity purposes (World Youth Report, 2003).

The dominant opinion is that globalisation has reaped negative outcomes for millennials, increasing uncertainty and insecurity around employment, intensifying social divisions and creating additional stress and pressures through accelerated practices. However young people are active participants in the global economy, they are cultural innovators and as consumers, are engaged in social transformation. They have initiated many new cultural processes, blending practices and artefacts across time and space e.g. British Asian Bhangra (Nayak, 2003). Moreover they increasingly reside in multicultural urban communities and are more tolerant and open to diversity than previous youth generations (Nayak, 2003). The breaking down of country boundaries and low cost air travel has enabled many to travel more widely and gain exposure to more cultures and experiences, enjoying greater choice, flexibility and opportunities for individuality. Whilst there are inequalities and a predominant western focus, much of global culture is youth culture, they use it to narrate their life stories and the sharing of common values provides a sense of belonging (World Youth Report, 2003) thus, globalisation is a key influence in the characterisation of millennials.

## 4.6. Education

It is argued that millennials are better educated and have on average studied a more developed and regulated curricula and achieved higher academic standards than previous youth groups (Noble et al, 2009). Added to which higher parental expectations have resulted in them being pressured to achieve throughout their lives (Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010). Furthermore encouraged by higher educational policies, more of them have continued their studies for longer than previous generations.

Over the last fifteen years or so there has been a significant shift in teaching approaches to provide more appropriate provision for millennials' preferred learning styles. Schools, colleges and universities have all embraced the concept of experiential and collaborative learning, thus increasing activity based methods such as problem solving, games, experiments, investigative projects and real life cases. Prensky (2001) was one of the key protagonists for these changes calling for a move away from legacy content (reading, writing and arithmetic) and towards future content (logical thinking, digital , ethics, politics, sociology and languages).

Much of this change has been technology driven, with young people increasingly looking to the Internet for knowledge as opposed to libraries (Oblinger, 2003). Moreover to engage students, learning stimuli has become more sensory rich, visual media has increased and reading requirements have reduced. Learners are encouraged to work more collaboratively with their peers but also with other institutions and increasingly internationally, enabled by digital technology and networked communications (Jones, 2011). Learning facilities typically incorporate laboratories, video games, simulations, virtual applications; some have even termed this approach 'edutainment' (Prensky, 2001). In addition there has also been an increase in self-activated learning, students accessing knowledge via blogs, peer-to-peer activities and through social interaction (Oblinger, 2003).

Furthermore millennial children were treated differently from previous generations at school, teachers encouraged children's positive contributions and creativity, praising rather than criticising, endeavouring to maintain children's self-esteem and ensure that every child reached their full potential (Howe, 2005). Corporal punishment was abolished (in 1986) and school discipline methods were generally less harsh. As a result, millennials acquired the confident attitude that anything could be achieved if they put their mind to it.

There was a steady increase in young people taking undergraduate degrees (+29%; 2003-2012: HESA, 2014) however this levelled out in 2012-13 after the tuition fee reforms. In

addition the 'Great Recession' negatively impacted graduate job opportunities since 2008 and the net effect of increased graduates and reduced employment was challenging for young people. By 2015, graduate employment rates had recovered to pre-recession rates and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey (2013-14) showed that 94% were in employment six months after graduation. However, high skilled employment rates remain lower than 2008 and graduate salaries have stagnated since 2008, so taking inflation into account, they have gone down in real terms (BIS, 2016).

#### **4.7. Millennial Characteristics: Values, Attitudes and Behaviours**

The millennial generation are a product of their upbringing, education, the economic, political, technological, social and cultural environment and prevailing attitudes towards childhood and parenting. As children they were generally more affluent than previous youth generations, having lived through mostly prosperous economic times and benefitted from greater levels of financial support from their parents and grandparents (Lindstrom, 2004). They are on average better educated and as a result of this and their parent's high expectations of them, are often achievement oriented and ambitious (Foscht et al, 2009; Noble et al, 2009). The combined effect of the environment they have been raised in has produced a millennial attitude that "being smart is cool" (Howe, 2005 p22).

Millennials are also confident and optimistic about the future and their significant part in it. They see themselves as the power generation; cutting edge, creative, technologically gifted and astute. They have grand ambitions and believe that they will be able to change the world for the better (Foscht et al, 2009). They are also great team players, environmentally aware, community minded, often getting involved in social causes and volunteering and have a strong sense of civic purpose. Older millennials (born 1982-1990) are considered to be quite conventional, favouring discipline, generally behaving well and conforming to authority (Howe, 2005). Younger millennials (born 1991 onwards) appear to exhibit different qualities; challenging authority, choosing unconventional lifestyles, being less thrifty, less religious, less green and more sexually permissive (Debevec et al, 2013).

Britain's population has become increasingly multi-cultural over the last 20 years thus millennials are more diverse in their ethnic profile than previous youth generations (ONS: 2011b). Many millennial teens emanate from mixed race backgrounds and as schools, communities and universities have increasingly focused on integration, virtually all have

been exposed to alternative cultures on a daily basis. This has resulted in the majority being culturally aware, tolerant and accepting of difference (Inkling, 2017; Noble et al, 2009). They are also more globally aware than previous generations, having travelled much more extensively and been constantly exposed to world media (PEW 2010). From a young age they conversed with peers overseas (BRANDchild study: Lindstrom, 2004) and as older teens have travelled far and wide exploring different climes and cultures (Machado, 2014).

Until recently the millennial group have not expressed much interest in politics. During the dominant part of their up-growing the government was fairly stable and times were pretty good (PEW Research Center, 2010). However this has changing since the economic downturn in 2008 and BREXIT in 2016 and millennials are feeling the effects. The cohort was particularly affected by the rise in university tuition fees in 2012 and by the reduction in job opportunities and lower entry level salaries (Taylor et al, 2011). However evidence seems to suggest that younger millennials are not internalising the implications of the poor economy, protected by on-going parental support they are instead delaying adulthood and focusing on enjoying life to the full. Taylor et al (2012) concluded that despite the challenges, young people remain optimistic about the future.

As millennials are maturing, the positive characteristics that symbolised the 'millennial child' are increasingly being seen as problematic. As discussed they have been over-protected, sheltered and some might say spoilt during their early lives. In addition they have been raised to have high expectations, which may now not be realised. Positive nurturing has engendered a 'can do' attitude which some are now interpreting as over-confidence, demanding, impatience and lacking in work ethic. This has led to tensions as millennials have hit the workplace, with older generations feeling that they need to be prepared to get some experience first and should not assume that the world is going to be handed to them on a plate (Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010; Raines, 2002).

The combination of frantically scheduled childhoods and enduring relationships with technology has resulted in an over-stimulated generation who exhibit short attention spans and are prone to boredom easily. There have been concerns that technology and digital media have displaced other activities such as sport and outdoor playing, resulting in a growing childhood obesity problem (Stamatakis et al, 2010). Their thirst for change and fickleness has led to accusations that they are shallow and their fascination with social media, brands and reality television has been criticised by older generations who see this as evidence of their weaknesses (Foscht et al, 2009). Social media has undoubtedly had a



significant impact on their lives and their propensity for 'sharing' and projecting their identities publicly has led to some calling them the 'look at me!' generation (Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010).

As consumers they have been active from a young age and are highly astute. Compulsive spending tendencies increased from Baby Boomers, through Generation Xers and Millennials seem set to continue the trend (Roberts and Manolis, 2000). They are well informed and wield their technological expertise to supplement this knowledge and search for bargains. They are highly perceptive to advertising and brand cues especially those focusing on indulgence and entitlement (Debevec et al, 2013) and they thrive on change, so are extremely brand and fashion conscious (Foscht et al, 2009). They do not expect to be informed by traditional media, preferring to mould advertising messages for themselves. They expect brands to be available 24/7, interactive and of course digital, have relatively high discretionary incomes and therefore strong purchasing power (Lindstrom, 2004).

#### **4.8. Chapter Summary**

To summarise, millennials have many positive characteristics, they are ambitious, achievement-oriented, team players, culturally diverse, globally aware and technologically savvy (Foscht et al, 2009). They have a strong sense of purpose and are determined to make their mark on the world. However their nurtured up-bringing, bolstered self-esteem and obsession with technology, combined with reduced opportunities as a result of the Great Recession has resulted in a generation which is increasingly being seen as self-centric, pleasure seeking and indulgent. Some have gone so far as to call them the 'entitlement' generation (Debevec et al, 2013).

As the earliest adopters and heaviest users, millennials provide an ideal context for this study of consumer behaviour in social media. Their characteristics have significantly affected the way they have pioneered adoption of the medium and evolved their practices therein. Gaining an understanding of millennials' use of SM will shed light on the behaviours of later adopter groups and provide insight to SM consumption behaviours in general.

# Chapter 5

# Methodology

## **5.0. Introduction**

This chapter first reviews the methodological philosophies underpinning the study of consumer behaviour and the evolution of their use. Following this several theories of interpretivism are reviewed and justification is provided for the selected methodology. Then the research questions, design and data analysis process are explained, stage by stage with supporting rationale. Finally the trustworthiness of the study is considered including aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, integrity and ethics.

## **5.1. Philosophical Paradigms**

There are two predominant research paradigms, positivist and interpretivist, at either ends of the continuum (Collis and Hussey, 2003 p48). The assumptions of these two philosophical paradigms determines the way that one sees the world and thereby guides research strategy and choice of research methods (Saunders et al, 2012 p128). Philosophical paradigms can be considered in terms of their ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions. Ontology is concerned with people's view of the world and the nature of reality; epistemological assumptions determine what is considered to be acceptable knowledge and axiology is concerned with the values one assigns to research. Theoretical perspectives determine the philosophical stance that underpins a researcher's methodology. They take into account any assumptions that the researcher makes and explain how they are incorporated into their chosen methodologies (Crotty, 2011 p7). In short they outline how the researcher makes sense of the world and how they believe knowledge and meaning are created.

## **5.2. Research Methodologies for Consumer Research**

Consumer research has historically been and to some extent remains dominated by positivist methodologies. This preference stems from its historical origins in economics. Early philosophical conceptualisations of the consumer were as a passive cognitive agent in a rational economic system (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995 p240). However, new perspectives of consumption and the consumer began to emerge in the 1980s. This led to a shift towards the 'new consumer behaviour', favouring non-positivist philosophy and interpretivist methodologies (Belk, 1995 p58).

Belk (1991, 1995) identified four stages in the evolution of consumer research: the economic, rational consumer of the 1920s/30s; the emotional consumer of the 1950s; the information processing decision making consumer of the 1960s/70s and the postmodern

'active' consumer (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995) described as "socially connected human beings participating in multiple interacting cultures" (Belk, 1995 p62). New consumer approaches to research emerged as a result of several academics joining the marketing field in the US from disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and literary criticism thereby integrating new perspectives (e.g. Eric Arnould, Janeen Costa, Jeffrey Durgee, Annamma Joy, John Sherry and Barbara Stern) (Belk, 1995).

The paradigm shift in consumer behaviour has resulted in the discipline becoming more interdisciplinary and embracing multiple methodologies (Hogg and Maclaran, 2007). Increasingly more consumer researchers adopt qualitative methodologies (Hackley, 2003) to address their research questions. Many argue that qualitative techniques are more effective at understanding consumer's meanings, concepts and experiences (Belk, 1995; Hirschman, 1986). Qualitative methods now sit alongside the established quantitative methods such as surveys and experiments, both contributing to the development of consumer research theory (Ger, 2005).

Since the 1980s this body of non-positivistic consumer research has continued to grow and explore an ever expanding range of topics (e.g. materialism, international marketing development, gender and consumption and macro consumer behaviour). Furthermore a range of non-positivistic research methods have also emerged (e.g. critical theory, ethnography, historical analysis, literary criticism, naturalistic enquiry, phenomenology, psychoanalytic methods, projective methods and semiotics). Belk argued that the new consumer behaviour methods opened up a "Pandora's box full of 'new' substantive questions to be investigated" (Belk, 1995 p64). Increasingly consumer research focuses more on social and cultural issues than psychological factors.

The paradigm shift in consumer research has generated many clusters of interest. This review focuses on those that relate to this project, namely consumption symbolism, property and possessions and consumption and the self (Belk, 1995). Consumption symbolism studies investigate how consumption can be used to convey messages to ourselves and others about who we are: our age, gender, ethnicity, personality and mood (Belk, 1995 p64). Property and possessions studies explore consumers' expression of self through their possessions (e.g. Belk, 1988). Directly related to this is the body of research focused on consumption and the self. Instigated by Levy (1959), developed by Sirgy (1982) and Belk (1988) in the 1980s, work in this field has proliferated thereafter. Studies investigate products with enduring personal meaning to consumers, some even exhibiting

sacred qualities (Belk et al, 1989). Belk (1988) developed the relationship between consumption and self further, conceptualising that such goods can be perceived as extensions to the self, they are expressive, support identity and can be used to ensure continuity and even immortality (e.g. bequeathed goods). Possessions, including other people and pets, can provide an individual and shared sense of past and present identity. Such items become incorporated into the individual's self through appropriating and controlling them, creating or buying them (Belk, 1995).

Arnould and Thompson (2005) brought this wealth of new consumer research together in consumer culture theory (CCT). CCT is a brand representing a family of theoretical perspectives and multiplicity of research methods exploring sociocultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption. The framework applies postmodern perspectives to consumption, proposing it to be a complex human behaviour affected by culture, symbols and language (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995 p243) immersed in the dynamics of fragmentation, plurality, fluidity and the hybridization of everyday life. CCT pulls consumer research together into four major interdisciplinary and inter-related thematic domains; consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures, sociohistoric patterning of consumption and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumer interpretation strategies (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

The consumer identity project (CIP) theme relates most closely to this study. CIP explores consumer practices with market generated symbolic materials to construct narratives of identity. It views consumers as identity seekers and makers and conceptualises CIPs as being goal driven whilst also accepting that consumers often experience conflict, internal contradictions and ambivalence which may call for coping strategies and compensatory mechanisms. Furthermore it recognises that the marketplace itself present consumer positions that consumer can choose to inhabit; adapting and personalising cultural scripts to align their identities with the global consumer environment. Holt (2002) proposed that the postmodern economy produces 'unruly bricoleurs' who express personal sovereignty and authenticity through consumption and thus the marketplace and its symbolic resources are central to their identities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

CCT focuses on the cultural meanings, sociohistoric influences and social dynamics that shape consumer experiences and identities in their everyday life. The research investigates consumers and consumption practices across a range of social spaces drawing on multiple data sources and applying triangulation techniques. CCT does not view the real world as

rational or unified but proposes that consumers construct their lives around multiple realities which are often played out in their identity practices. It embraces a diversity of opinions, disciplines, philosophical paradigms, research methods and contexts, viewing the cross-fertilisation of ideas as a positive means to evolve and advance theoretical development (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

The CCT brand has achieved much recognition in marketing, encouraging and providing a home for a proliferation of consumer research studies (Arnould and Thompson, 2015). It continues to encompass a multiplicity of theoretical approaches and methodological orientations to satisfy the needs of a wide range of stakeholders.

So in conclusion, consumption is too complex to be understood using one research methodology. People use consumption to express self but also to mediate their relationships with others. As consumer research has developed it has focused more on social and cultural issues and has drawn on a wider range of disciplines (Belk, 1995). Contemporary consumer culture encompasses an interconnected system of symbolic materials and resources that people use to construct meaning and identities to make sense of their environments, experiences and lives (Arnould and Thompson, 2015). CCT today therefore does not seek to predict and control consumer behaviour for marketing management purposes, but instead endeavours to understand consumption processes in their broader or contextual sense and this therefore calls for a range of different methodologies (Belk, 1995).

### **5.3. Ontology: The Nature of Reality**

The two dominant ontological positions are objectivism and constructionism (Crotty, 2011 p8-9). An objectivist stance maintains that a meaningful reality exists independent of human consciousness; therefore in any situation an objective truth is obtainable. Constructionists reject this notion and claim that there is no single objective truth; truth only comes into existence with human consciousness and engagement with objects and the world about us. Constructionists argue that there is no meaning without a mind and that truth is constructed by individuals in their interaction with the object, therefore many different truths may emerge constructed by different people with different perspectives about the same phenomena. (Crotty, 2011 p9).

The third epistemological position is subjectivism. In subjectivism meaning is imposed on objects by the subject(s), the object itself therefore makes no contribution to the meaning,

the subject determines the meaning based on their own perspective and meanings brought from elsewhere in their consciousness and experiences (Crotty, 2011, p9).

A constructionist approach is most complementary to this study. Teens are developing meanings in partnership with their peers and the technology but furthermore the researcher was involved in this development of reality too, drawing on her knowledge and experiences to interpret meaning. The researcher is an important part of this process and could be viewed as an instrument in the research, analysis and interpretation process. Sherry (1991) supports this approach in the development of postmodern inquiry and terms it “researcher-as-instrument”.

### **5.3.1. Constructionism**

Constructionists believe that meaning or truth cannot be described as ‘objective’ they believe that all meaningful reality is constructed from the interaction between humans and their world (Crotty, 2011 p43). They argue that humans and objects are partners in the generation of meaning; that humans interpret and develop perceived reality as they engage with the world about them. Constructionism is akin to the concept of intentionality from phenomenology, that when a mind becomes conscious of something it reaches out to and into that object to know it and to understand it. These meanings are then transmitted between humans in a social context (Crotty, 2011 p43).

Intuitively therefore, different people might make sense of the same reality in different ways due to their varying cultural, age or value perspectives. There is therefore no single ‘true’ reality or interpretation of a phenomenon but instead multiple possibilities, so objectivity and subjectivity are bound up together (Fish, 1990). Interpreted meanings emerge from the subject’s interaction with the object and the researcher’s interaction with the phenomenon they are studying.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) described researchers as ‘bricoleurs’; adept at many tasks and able to draw on a toolbox of interpretive paradigms (e.g. feminism, Marxism, cultural studies, constructivism) to address any given problem. Alternatively Levi-Strauss (*The Savage Mind*, 1966 cited in Crotty, 2011 p49) defined ‘bricoleurs’ as people who are skilled at making something new out of existing materials that previously made up something else. Materials can be considered in the form of ideas and concepts, so research in a constructional ontology should not be constrained by conventional meanings, researchers should approach the task with an open mind to maximise the potential to develop new and richer meanings or reinterpretations.

### 5.3.1.1. Social Constructionism

*"Social constructionists emphasise the idea that society is actively and creatively produced by human beings, social worlds being 'interpretive nets woven by individuals and groups'." (Marshall, 1994: p484)*

*"Social reality is, therefore a function of shared meanings; it is constructed, sustained and reproduced through social life." (Greenwood, 1994: p85)*

As the above definitions illustrate, social constructionists criticise the way that we traditionally understand our world and challenge the (positivist) assumption that knowledge is based on objective unbiased observation. They argue that 'taken for granted' categories e.g. male or female are not real but are socially constructed by humans (Burr, 2003 p3). Furthermore social constructionism holds that the ways of understanding any phenomena are culturally and historically specific, thus emerging knowledge is a product of the culture and of that point in time. So people construct knowledge between them in their daily social interactions and that version of knowledge becomes ingrained in the society. Social constructionist researchers therefore endeavour to understand social practices and the language that people use, to discover the way they understand the world (Burr, 2003 p5).

Giddens (1976) argued that the natural world is already there, whereas humans create the social world. So natural world researchers have to make sense of what is already in existence, whereas with the social world, researchers have to understand the people's frame of meaning too. Crotty (2011 p57) argues that there are not two separate distinct worlds but just one human world and that both are already interpreted before we arrive. Nevertheless social researchers need to understand lay people's categories and terminologies in the world they inhabit in order to develop understanding and meaning. Blaikie (1993 p36) supports this and posits that the natural scientist researches from the outside, whereas the social scientist has to work together with the 'actors' involved to develop meaning together.

Several researchers argue that humans are born into a system of meanings; historically, socially and culturally, systems and codes already exist which are used to construct further meaning (e.g. Fish, 1990; Geertz, 1973). Institutions of intelligibility precede us; rules, mechanisms and instructions governing behaviour are already present in a community and these form a lens to view phenomena and interpret meaning. Oakley (1974) argues that culture teaches people the way to see things and also the way not to see things.



This study relates to the social world and the teens that inhabit this have developed and continue to develop their own frames of reference and meanings in social media and in their consumption of it. It could be argued that the teens themselves have inherited a set of meanings which they have ascribed to the arena of social media from the non-digital social world and from their cultural and historical backgrounds. Once immersed in the social media world however, they develop new meanings in conjunction with the technology, co-production therefore takes place. Social constructionism aligns with the research problem when considering teens in their collective sense, however when seeking to access participants' individual meanings, social constructivism offers a more suitable approach (see 5.4.2.1.) (Crotty, 2011).

## **5.4. Epistemology: Acceptable Knowledge**

Epistemological assumptions deal with the study of knowledge and what is considered acceptable and valid knowledge (Collis and Hussey, 2003 p48). Again there are two opposing perspectives; positivism and interpretivism which divide further into several sub-categories.

### **5.4.1. Positivism**

Positivism tends to be closely linked with objectivism, adopting scientific principles to research methods. This perspective underpins many research methods used in scientific, social and consumer research. Positivists claim that what has been posited or directly experienced is what has been observed using scientific methods. They strive to find order in the world, establishing laws that can be scientifically proven and identifying relationships between variables. Positivists endeavour to apply research methods from natural science to the practice of social science. The methods typically utilised are observation, experiment and comparison (Saunders et al, 2012 p134).

In addition positivists seek to conduct research in a value-free way; the researcher remains external and neutral to the research process so as not to influence the phenomena (Saunders et al, 2012 p134). Research is conducted in a structured and objective manner discounting the subjective state, and feelings of the participants. Furthermore positivist researchers do not bring their own values to data collection or analysis (Collis and Hussey, 2003 p52). They believe that scientific knowledge should not ascribe meanings but should discover meanings that are present in the objects themselves. They maintain that objects have meanings independent of human consciousness and that these meanings can be

summarised in facts, figures and numbers which can be generalised for application elsewhere (Crotty, 2011 p27).

The verification principle is important to positivists; no statement is meaningful unless it is capable of being verified. Statements can only be verified by experience and only through the senses i.e. sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. They hold that knowledge is factual above all else and that beliefs, emotions and aesthetic judgements are meaningless and subjective as they cannot be verified as facts. Therefore positivists value only observation and experimentation in the discovery of new knowledge (Crotty, 2011 p32).

This study endeavours to understand teen behaviours and the meanings they ascribe to SM consumption. The researcher does not see technology as an object independent from its human users, thus the users' beliefs, feelings, emotions and judgements are tied up with meanings and essential to understanding the phenomenon. A positivist perspective is therefore not appropriate for developing meaning in this study.

#### **5.4.2. Interpretivism**

Interpretivism is closely linked with constructionism and was conceived to develop a natural science of the social world thereby providing an alternative framework from positivism to study human inquiry. Interpretivism looks for "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world" (Crotty, 2011: p67) and rejects positivist value-free detached observation approaches.

The founder of interpretivism is widely thought to be Max Weber (1864-1920; Crotty, 2011: p68). Weber argued that in the study of human science we should focus on 'Verstehen' (understanding) as opposed to 'Erklaren' (explaining) which is dominant in the natural sciences, particularly when looking to identify causality. Dilthey (1976) proposed that natural reality and social reality are different kinds of reality and that investigation therefore requires different methods. Dilthey (1976) further posited that research in the social sphere serves a different purpose; whereas natural science looks for consistencies, regularities, laws and generalisations; human inquiry is more concerned with individual cases. Social and cultural research is concerned with understanding the development of unique and individual phenomena.

Validation and causality is an area of debate amongst interpretivists. Weber argued that social scientists should seek empirical validation of any claims they make in the same way as natural scientists. Weber's "*Verstehen*" sociology stated that:

*“Sociology is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order to thereby arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects” (Weber, 1968 p3)*

Conversely, Silverman stated that:

*“Interpretivism rests on the emphatic denial that we can understand cultural phenomena in causal terms” (Silverman, 1990 p126)*

Weber (1962 p59) held that social research should explain as well as understand and should seek to gain understanding of causality through interpretive understanding of social action and explanation of the antecedent phenomena. He did not however insist on the rigorous techniques of validation and falsification used in positivist study, but talked instead of adequate causality; if on the basis of past experience it seems probable that the phenomenon will reoccur in the same way that would suffice as adequate causality. Weber’s overriding view was that “*Verstehen*” should be supported and validated by empirical evidence.

Linked to this Weber developed a methodology based on the Weber ‘Ideal Type’. Ideal types are conceptual or mental constructs which embody the ‘pure case’. These constructs are formulated by the social scientist from the emergent data and should bring the various strands of data together. Forming these ideal types requires imagination, they are utopian in nature and never truly exist in reality but are helpful to explain the phenomena and to guide the researcher (Crotty, 2011 p70). More recently, interpretivists have drifted away from Weber’s ideal; not placing the same emphasis on causality or empirical evidence and accepting that different research methods are suitable for social sciences. See further discussion in section 5.8.

The interpretivist paradigm is the most appropriate for this study as the focus is on individual cases and understanding the phenomena as opposed to developing laws and generalisations. Interpretivism has been developed from Weber original ‘*Verstehen*’ through three streams: hermeneutics, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Phenomenology is the most relevant for this study so is explored next.

#### **5.4.2.1. Phenomenology**

Phenomenology focuses on the phenomena itself, researchers are required to suspend any pre-existing understandings and perceptions and revisit the phenomena to regain first impressions and through this discover new meanings or extend or authenticate existing meanings (Crotty, 1996). Phenomenology is primarily about going ‘back to the things

themselves!' It encourages researchers to adopt a constructivist epistemology engaging with the data and trying to make sense of it (Moustakas, 1994).

Constructivism differs from constructionism in that it describes the individual engaging with objects and making sense of them whilst constructionism holds that everyone is introduced directly to a whole world of meaning influenced by the melange of cultures shaping our thinking and behaviour thus pre-empting the task of meaning making (Crotty, 2011). Phenomenology urges researchers to unhitch themselves from their culture and allow themselves to experience the phenomenon directly:

*"Primordial phenomena: the immediate original data of our consciousness; the phenomena in their unmediated and originary manifestation to consciousness"* (Crotty, 2011: p79)

The intention is to uncover new perspectives by encouraging researchers to question their culture, assumptions and way of seeing the world (Wolff, 1984 p192). Phenomenologists view culture as constraining as it creates boundaries and can hamper new discoveries (Heidegger, 1962 p164). Phenomenological reduction involves adopting an attitude that throws suspicion on everyday experiences and can help researchers reinterpret phenomena with renewed and richer meanings (Armstrong, 1976 p252).

Phenomenology also focuses on wholeness, it aims to explore experiences from all perspectives until a unified vision of the phenomenon is achieved (Moustakas, 1994). Inevitably in research, the constructs that are developed are never quite capable of encompassing everything about the phenomenon (Adorno, 1981; Dewey, 1929 p48). A phenomenological approach aims to harness those parts thus forth unexplained. It encourages a critical approach as it encourages researchers to question everything they have taken for granted.

Phenomenologist researchers gather data by means of unstructured interviews; they use open-ended questions to ensure that the facts rise out of the data naturally and are not prejudiced by the researcher. Phenomenology is experiential and qualitative; the initial focus is often on the participants' feelings and this sets the scene for future data collection and analysis. Adopting an open approach ensures that researchers do not pre-empt their research design and analysis categories and maintain an object-focused rather than method-centred approach (van Kaam, 1966 p295).

Central to phenomenological methods is intentionality, researchers should always be intentionally conscious of the phenomenon they are investigating and that consciousness

should have direction and meaning. Researchers are encouraged to suspend their preconceived biases and open their senses to the experience, constantly reflecting on what it is and what its possible meanings are. They then describe what comes into view in full vivid detail, reflecting on all the textural and structural meanings, combining these to arrive at the essences of the phenomenon concerned revealing new reinterpreted and fuller meanings (Moustakas, 1994).

There is also an aspect of objectivity in phenomenology, researchers are in search of objects of experience rather than being content with the raw descriptions of the experiencing participant. They question everything, taking nothing for granted (Crotty, 2011). Phenomenologists adopt a highly descriptive approach, allowing the phenomenon to speak for itself. The intention is to capture participants' comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon, thereby accessing the meaning of it for them. From these individual descriptions they derive general and universal meanings. Their objective is to uncover meaningful concrete relationships that are implicit in the original descriptions of experience in the context of a particular situation (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenologists look for meaning in appearances; researchers reveal the essence of a phenomenon through intuition and reflection on their experiences and those of their participants which lead to ideas, concepts, judgements and understanding (Moustakas, 1994). To achieve this they stay close to the original data, to avoid losing the texture of things and to keep the phenomenon and its meanings alive.

Many consumer researchers have employed phenomenological approaches (e.g. Belk, 1984; Cotte et al, 2004; Fennell, 1985; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Mick and Demoss, 1990; Thompson et al, 1989; Thompson et al, 1990; Thompson and Haytko, 1997). Phenomenology provides researchers with a philosophy with which to explore consumer experiences from their own lived experiences and therefore opens the possibilities of discovering something new.

This study sought to reveal new meanings underpinning teen consumption of social media. The researcher recognised that the structural patterns of meaning rooted in her own and her participants' social, cultural and historic frameworks influence consumption behaviour and the construction of meaning in this context. However as a relatively new phenomena, SM provided teens with a social environment which was unadulterated by the established cultural practices of the previous generation thus millennial teens evolved new structures

of meaning and cultural practices specific to this environment and to their generation. It was essential therefore that the researcher suspend her preconceptions about the medium and about teen culture per se in order to open her mind to new discoveries and reinterpret the phenomena with new richer meaning. Furthermore it was recognised that whilst the ideas and interpretations that participants present reflect reality, meaning is not limited to the interview context (Höijer, 2008). It was essential that the researcher looked beyond these descriptions and questioned everything to capture the full meaning of this phenomenon, thus phenomenology was selected as the most suitable approach for this study.

### **5.5. Axiology: Research Values**

Axiology is concerned with values and the role that researchers' values play in the research process (Saunders et al, 2012). Heron (1996) argues that it is important for researchers to be able to articulate their values to heighten their awareness of how they affect the process of their research; the topics they choose, their philosophical approach, their data collection methods and the judgements that they make (Saunders et al, 2012).

Positivists believe that the research process is value-free, they aim to remain detached from the research process and regard the phenomenon under investigation as objects. Furthermore they maintain that the objects were present before the research took place, that they will be unaffected by the process and that they will remain present afterwards (Collis and Hussey, 2003).

Conversely phenomenologists believe that all researchers have values and that those values affect the overall research process and thereby the interpretations drawn from the data, determining what is considered fact. In short they believe that researchers are involved in every stage of the research process (Collis and Hussey, 2003).

This study concerns the understanding of people and the meanings they construct in a particular social context. It aims to understand teen behaviours and the meanings they ascribe to their SM consumption. The researcher believes that the participants develop meanings in conjunction with each other and the technology and that these meanings are influenced by their inherited sociocultural frameworks. Furthermore she believes that their beliefs, feelings, emotions and judgements are intertwined with their interpreted meanings and thus essential to revealing the essence of their experiences. Therefore to understand this phenomenon and reveal new and rich insights, it is essential that the researcher is

involved in the research process, thus qualitative in-depth interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method. Moreover whilst a phenomenological approach has been adopted, thus suspending preconceptions and allowing the phenomenon and data to speak for itself; the interpretations and conclusions are based on the researcher's reflections, intuitions and ideas which are determined by her own value judgements. So in summary the researcher believes that research is value-laden and that her involvement in the research process serves to illuminate the findings and provide richer insights to the phenomenon and its teen protagonists.

## 5.6. Research Questions

This study examined the social media phenomena with a specific focus on Facebook (FB) as the dominant platform of choice in the UK (31 billion users in 2016: <http://avocadosocial.com>) and aimed to provide holistic insights into the earliest adopters' consumption behaviours, namely teenagers by examining their culture, behaviours and meanings through data drawn from descriptions of their experiences. In addition it endeavoured to understand the self-presentation and impression management strategies used to manage the impressions of others and develop a sense of identity. Furthermore it aimed to gain an understanding of passive consumption of SM (watching others). The study revealed dynamic and emergent social norms and different perceptions of reality plus the dispersion of these behaviours to other social arenas and groups. Insights were therefore gained into teen consumption and the SM consumption behaviour of later adopter groups.

The initial exploratory research questions were:

1. How and why do teens consume social media in their everyday lives?
2. How do teens develop, present and defend their identities in social media?
3. Why do teens watch others in social media, what benefits do they obtain and what needs does it satisfy for them?

These questions were refined as the research progressed, which is consistent with a phenomenological approach (Moustakis, 1994) and the final questions were:

**RQ1.** What strategies and resources do teens use for self-presentation in social media?

**RQ2.** How do teens maintain and defend their identities in social media?

**RQ3.** How does social media affect teenage social comparison behaviours?

**RQ4.** How is voyeurism characterised and enacted in social media?

## 5.7. Research Design

The study was conducted in two stages:

- Stage 1 - A pilot study of teen diaries and 5 in-depth interviews
- Stage 2 – 26 in-depth interviews and an observational analysis of 13 teen Facebook Timelines.



### **5.7.1. Background**

The initial interest for this study was prompted by the researcher's observation of her teenage children's growing use of social network sites. Her teenage daughters were spending up to 3 hours a day creating, designing and refining their personalised profiles within Bebo, a popular social network (8.5 million visitors: Clicky Media, 2009). As time elapsed teen use of social media evolved and UK teens converged on Facebook, hence this study's focus. The researcher previously conducted a content analysis of teen Bebo profiles exploring self-presentation strategies in social media (Doster, 2013). The earlier study revealed aestheticizing of teen digital personas; however the pilot revealed that this activity held less importance in FB, so the focus of this study was widened to explore teen consumption behaviours and feelings, their self-presentation strategies and their reasons for watching other people in SM.

Prior to embarking on the project the researcher joined FB and Twitter and immersed herself in these environs to experience the prevailing culture, behaviours and to familiarise herself with the terminology (official and unofficial). By adopting a phenomenological approach the researcher was in effect 'standing back', assessing her 'first impressions' of consumption of SM without being prejudiced by the cultural perspectives of the teen users (Crotty, 1996). This enabled greater understanding and insights to teen behaviours. The researcher then interacted directly with teen participants to gather their experiences of this phenomenon utilising teen diaries, in-depth interviews and observational analysis of their FB postings.

The study was cross-sectional, data was collected over a 6 month period and was iterative in nature; new themes were allowed to emerge during the collection period. For instance the pilot study informed the initial interview questions but as interviews progressed and new topics surfaced that seemed to have general resonance, additional questions were added. Furthermore where specific cases (e.g. cultural ethnicity) generated diverse responses, additional participants were purposively sought to explore those responses further (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989).

### **5.7.2. Stage 1 – Pilot Study of Teen Diaries and Debrief Interviews**

The first stage was exploratory, to gain a better understanding of the phenomena and develop the research design going forward. SM provided teens with an identity-making toolkit; a ready-made stage to perform on and a wide and attentive audience to provide feedback. New strategies and resources were being invoked in this unique digital

presentation of teen-selves and this stage explored these behaviours.

Diary research is recommended as a less obtrusive data collection methodology when researching young people (Tinson, 2009 p57). This provided the opportunity to gain insights into social phenomena in a natural setting, thus offering the potential to see things from the teen point of view (Alaszewski, 2006 p36). Moreover it proved valuable in uncovering concealed behaviour and accessing data about 'taken for granted' activities which are common sense to participants but often obscured to researchers (Alaszewski, 2006 p37).

#### **5.7.2.1. Participant Recruitment**

Five teenagers were recruited via personal contacts and asked to maintain a two-week 'spoken diary' of their activities in Facebook (FB). The location of the study was the West Midlands, as this was the area that the behaviour had been first observed and where the researcher had access to teen participants.

Three girls and two boys were purposively sampled (aged 16-17 years) on the basis that they were active FB users and willing to participate (Alaszewski, 2006 p48). Older teens (16-18s) were selected, firstly because they were on the cusp of adulthood, in the important identity transition period just prior to leaving school and moving on to university or the workplace. Secondly as this cohort has grown up with SM, their evolving consumption behaviours were informative. Thirdly focusing on older teens alleviated the ethical constraints on the research (the ethics panel recommended focusing on teens over 16 years).

#### **5.7.2.2. Spoken Diaries**

The pilot study focused on unstructured 'spoken diaries' to gather exploratory data about their behaviour, usage, habits, rituals, feelings, opinions, perceptions of others and their interactions with others. Spoken diaries have not been commonly used (excepting Papadopoulos and Scanlon, 2002) therefore the approach was somewhat experimental. Teens were provided with dictaphones to record their thoughts whilst online. The methodological intention was to ease the diary task, and encourage participants to record more data, as sustained motivation is one of the challenges of diary research (Tinson, 2009 p87; Alaszewski, 2006 p51). The researcher allowed participants to record whatever was important to them, but also provided a prompt guide and note book (Appendix 5.2) as an alternative recording mechanism with instructions and a non-prescriptive checklist (Corti, 1993).

The researcher briefed participants on the purpose of the diary, how to maintain it and answered any questions (Alaszewski, 2006 p71). Meetings took place in the participants'

homes, with a parent present in the house. In addition the researcher contacted participants halfway through the two week diary period to check that they were happy and refocus them if they had forgotten (Tinson, 2009 p87).

#### **5.7.2.3. Debrief Interviews**

At the end of the two weeks the researcher debriefed participants via a short interview (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977). It quickly became evident that the 'spoken diaries' had not been successful. The teens admitted that they had not been comfortable using the dictaphones mostly because they tended to use FB whilst simultaneously participating in other activities e.g. watching TV, doing homework, often with other people present. They were therefore uncomfortable voicing their personal thoughts and feelings out loud. Most of the participants had written more in the notebooks than they had recorded on the dictaphones. However the written diary entries were also limited and often created after the event, thus defeating the purpose of capturing data at the time of the event (Alaszewski, 2006 p2). Some of the participants had even dictated their written notes into the dictaphone afterwards to conform with the researcher's instructions. This was clearly not the intention and it was evident that the diary methodology had disrupted the teens' usual behaviour, so the researcher withdrew the spoken diary methodology thereafter.

However the pilot highlighted several important aspects:

- That aestheticizing their self-presentations was not as important in FB as in previous SM (e.g. Bebo)
- Teens frequently multi-tasked so SM activity was sometimes peripheral and sometimes central
- That teens often used SM in other people's company
- Teens were not comfortable speaking into a dictaphone or writing their thoughts in a book; they preferred typing their thoughts and feelings into a laptop/PC.
- Debrief interviews yielded much richer data than the diaries and provided valuable information to inform the research design for stage 2 (see Appendix 5.3).

On reflection the diary method may have been more successful in a digital or online form, however unfortunately this was not considered at the time. The teen participants were, in the main, quite comfortable talking to the researcher about their SM experiences face-to-face and consequently these discussions drifted on much longer than expected (45 minutes to an hour) and could therefore be classified as in-depth interviews.

### **5.7.3. Stage 2 - In-depth Interviews and Observational Analysis**

This formed the main part of the data collection and aimed to address RQ1-4. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with 26 teen participants. The interviews were conducted in a Sixth Form College in the West Midlands. This site was chosen for convenience, access was obtained via contact with one of the teachers (see Appendix 5.4). Participants were interviewed individually over a period of 8 weeks during their free study periods.

#### **5.7.3.1. Participant Recruitment**

The study was promoted to potential participants (16-18 years) via a poster outlining the topic, research questions, involvement and desired participants (see Appendix 5.5). The poster was displayed in the Sixth Form for a week prior to the study and students were invited to volunteer. A small participation incentive of a £10 voucher was offered. The researcher encouraged equal gender quotients and participation from a range of ethnic backgrounds. However limited numbers of ethnically diverse participants were recruited (3/26). In addition social class diversity was limited, so insufficient data was gathered to analyse the potential effect of these variables in any meaningful way. However in interviewing the participants it became evident that there was a great deal of variation in their personal and psychological characteristics which yielded rich data and informative findings (Appendix 5.6: Participant Profiles).

#### **5.7.3.2. Interviews**

The interviews were semi-structured and in-depth, lasting between 45–75 minutes. Semi-structured interviews are often used in qualitative phenomenologist research (King, 2004), outline themes and open-ended questions were devised in advance; however the actual questions varied from interview to interview according to the focus. The research process was iterative; the original research instrument (Appendix 5.3) was revisited in light of the data which emerged during data collection period. In addition the researcher adapted to interviewing teenage participants taking into account the potential power balance due to her age and perceived status (McLeod, 2007 p278).

Another major advantage of in-depth interviews was the ability to probe the subjects, to gain a more in-depth understanding and increase credibility (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). Meanings and interpretations were clarified and their terminology explicated from participants (e.g. Facebook stalking, fraping and FOMO). This was ideal for establishing rapport and thereby richer data from teenage subjects who have a tendency to be reticent about taking part in research (Tinson, 2009 p57). Interviews were audio recorded for

subsequent transcription and notes were taken by the researcher to annotate transcripts with participant behaviours and observations. All participants were thanked for their time and input and the researcher requested permission to return and gather further data from the participants if required.

#### **5.7.3.3. Observational Analysis**

At the end of each interview participants were asked whether they would allow the researcher to 'befriend' them on FB for two weeks and monitor their activity to gain further insights to their experience. 13/26 participants agreed to this request. After two weeks the researcher 'unfriended' participants and reassured them that they were not being monitored thereafter.

Informed consent was obtained thereby avoiding any deception or covert observation. The observational analysis enabled the researcher to monitor actual activity in SM thereby complementing the interview data and mitigating against any misinformation, evasions and lies. This data was then cross-referenced with the data emerging from the interviews.

#### **5.7.3.4. Data Analysis**

A thematic analysis technique was adopted which was systematic and comprehensive. The analysis was data driven and inductive so themes were allowed to emerge from the data. Patterns of meaning and the most pertinent themes to teen social media consumption were identified. Some themes originated from extant theories (*deductive*) whilst others emerged from the data itself (*inductive*) data. The process adopted is illustrated in Fig 5.1 (Spencer et al, 2013).

The data was initially read straight through as whole to get a feel for overall meanings (*familiarisation*) (Moustakis, 1994). Subsequently the data was coded in NVivo10, line-by-line enabling units of meaning to emerge. Stage 1 of coding (*indexing*) simply labelled data and topics (Scale, 1999). Stage 2 (*categorising*) involved abstracting the coding, so comparing participant's views and positions on the topics to draw up an analytical framework (Ritchie et al, 2013). In this study several of the themes overlapped and had the potential to be organised in different hierarchical formats depending on perspective, so various different codes and combinations were explored to try to encapsulate all aspects of the data. The data analysis was divided into two overarching themes, self-presentation and watching others to address RQ1 to RQ4 and to make sense of the data. Bolton et al's (2013) adopted a similar approach in their framework of 'contributing' and 'consuming' in social media.

Thereafter the Framework analysis method (Spencer et al, 2013) was used and a series of matrices were produced to analyse each theme. The emerging themes were compared with relevant extant theories, thus enabling meaningful and context specific interpretations to be developed (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The researcher tried out various ideas and conceptualisations, the most relevant themes were pursued dependent on the richness of the data, relevance to the research questions, contribution to knowledge and theory (*abstraction and interpretation*) (Spencer et al, 2013).

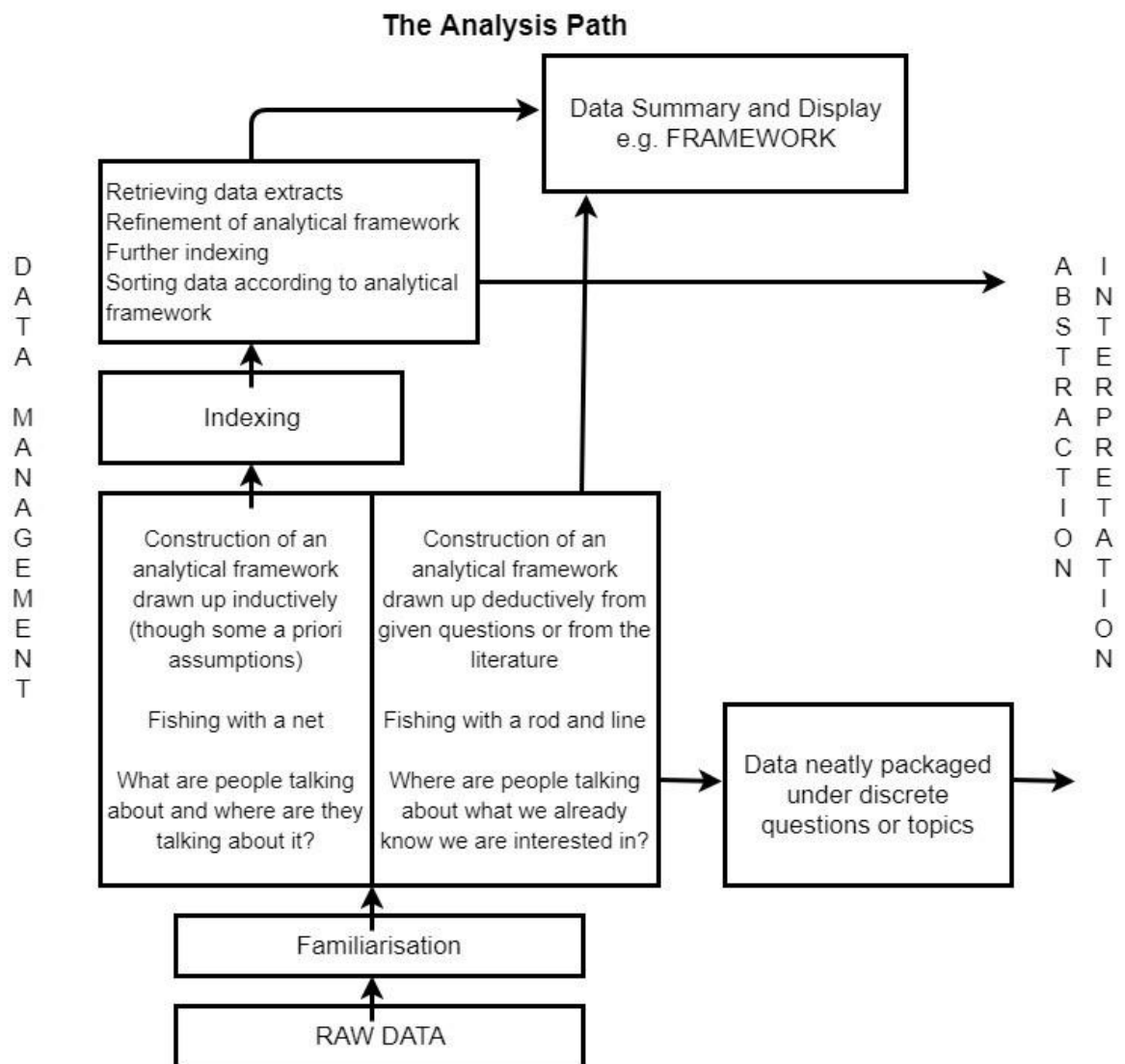
Analytical frameworks were developed for each theme, the self-presentation data was analysed under sub-themes of strategies, resources, influences and audiences then abstracted themes of unwritten rules and defensive strategies. The watching others data was analysed under sub-themes of external influences, subjects, content, reasons for watching, darker motives and observers. Throughout the analysis the researcher constantly revisited the original transcripts and recordings to stay close to the data and avoid losing the essence of the whole data. The analytical frameworks were constantly reviewed and refined which resulted in some being abstracted further and others discarded (e.g. content).

Framework matrices comprised summarised data from each participant, theme by theme and linked back to the data with verbatim quotes plus notes from the researcher retaining the language of the interviews and diaries. This process enabled the data to be synthesised, comparing cross case and within cases thereby facilitating creative thinking and theory building. Analysis of each theme focused on a range of meanings, behaviours, attitudes and strengths of views. The emerging data was constantly linked back to the literature and to extant theory. Data was compared between variables for instance attitudes and behaviour, plus relationships between socio-demographic characteristics and behaviour were explored and patterns were identified. As a result of this analysis some typologies were developed e.g. Categorisation of subjects (see Table 7.1) together with more complex outcomes such as the conceptualisation of the teen stalker profiles (see Figure 7.2). Conceptual models were reviewed and checked for fit and substantiation and discarded where they could not be substantiated e.g. 'apathetic stalker'.

The data in the observational analysis was linked to each participant and to their interview data. It was therefore context specific; the two sources of data complemented each other, triangulating the data for each participant. This analysis focused on general consumption behaviours and interactions between peers. The participants' FB Timeline data was analysed in a matrix, data was itemised in the following categories: self/typical statements, status

examples, number of friends, status frequency, number of photos, profile photo, average likes, interests, photo types, notes for general interpretations (Appendix 5.8).

In addition much of the data was organised into diagrams to summarise relationships between themes and structures and to visual the findings. Converting the concepts to diagrams enabled further conceptualisation and the themes to be brought together e.g. Millennial Teen Self-Presentation in Social Media (Figure 6.8).



**Figure 5.1. Framework Analysis Path (Spencer et al, 2013)**

## 5.8. Trustworthiness

As discussed in section 5.4.2. interpretivist research is less concerned with determining laws and generalisations and more focused on understanding unique and developing phenomena (Dilthey, 1976). Furthermore interpretivists do not subscribe to a singular version of reality, believing instead that phenomena are experienced in the interaction between objects and human perceptions and responses, thus forming many possible realities (Höijer, 2008). Moreover whilst the researcher's perspective is that underlying social and cultural structures affect an individual's perceived reality, she also supports the view that research findings are time and context specific (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). These participants were investigated during a key life transition point, whilst SM technology was at a particular point of evolution, it is impossible therefore to replicate these exact conditions with these or other participants at another point in time.

However whilst the researcher would not claim that the findings emerging from this study can be generalised, the following sections aim to substantiate their credibility and illustrate their transferability to other contexts. The typical positivist procedures for assessing validity, reliability and generalisation do not apply to this interpretivist study instead Wallendorf and Belk's (1989) and Lincoln and Guba (1986) guidelines for assessing trustworthiness were used to evaluate the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, integrity and ethics of this research.

### 5.8.1. Credibility

Establishing credibility requires ensuring that the constructs presented in the study represent adequate and believable representations of the phenomena under consideration (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). To assess credibility both data collection and interpretation procedures are considered.

To gain an understanding of contemporary teenage culture and meanings prior to primary data collection, the researcher conducted comprehensive desk research on computer mediated communications (Chapter 3) and on the millennial generation (Chapter 4) and as described in 5.7.1., actively participated in two SM sites. Moreover the researcher's engagement in the study was at no point covert; research purpose, questions, procedures and the researcher's identity were explicitly declared in all participant communications (see Appendices 5.2, 5.5 and 5.7). Richer insights were extracted by being open, honest and ethical (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989).



The researcher maintained prolonged engagement with this study over several years. The research was conducted alone, therefore data collection and interpretation procedures were consistent throughout; the disadvantage was the absence of different perspectives available in a research team. To counter this the researcher built in periods of reflection between stage 1 and 2 to adjust constructs and approaches, for instance adaptating the data collection method from spoken diaries to in-depth interviews. A further reflective gap between data collection and analysis also proved valuable as the distance from the data enabled her to return to it with fresh eyes revealing new aspects and more holistic interpretations.

Data collection, analysis and interpretation were triangulated by multiple data collection methods: diaries, interviews and onservational analysis. Furthermore the findings from the pilot enabled a more purposive selection of participants for stage 2, for instance more males and ethnic minority participants. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, mostly by the researcher herself, helping reinforce her understanding of the data and allowing her to revisit the raw data at all stages of analysis thereby re-experiencing it from a distance both in terms of time and personal proximity. Negative cases were revisited frequently to challenge the researcher's initial perspectives based on her own experiences of SM (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). She recognised for instance that the positive view of SM consumption that she had cultivated was not universally experienced across all participants and that SM served different needs for different people. This recognition contributed towards the conceptualisation of different types of stalkers and the exposure of the dark side of SM.

Moreover the researcher discussed her research and interim interpretations (anonymously) with various audiences, at conferences, PhD events, with her supervisor, friends and teenage daughters to expose herself to different perspectives. Some of these conversations challenged her interpretations, for instance colleagues reactions to the 'violent' terminology (e.g. fraping, stalking) and the non-empathetic responses contributed to the 'dark side' and 'critical culture' conceptualisations. In addition these discussions helped the researcher to recognise and mitigate her own biases and ethnocentrism (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989).

Finally during the interviews the researcher checked intended meanings with participants. Summarising and clarifying with questions such as "So can I just check that what you mean is...?" Furthermore as the interviews proceeded, meanings were developed and checked

out with the participants in later interviews to verify the researcher's interpretations. (Sherry, 1991). These member checks help to ensure credibility and to correct any misunderstandings or misinterpretations during data collection.

So in summary, the credibility of this study was ensured through thorough preparation and immersion in the SM environment prior to and during the data collection and by prolonged engagement with the phenomenon, incorporating periods of reflection to ensure both a closeness and distance from the data. Moreover findings were triangulated by comparing data across different methods, sources and cases. Analyses and interpretations were challenged and tested through discussions with a wide range of stakeholders, themselves holding varied perspectives and through member checks with participants to ensure that data meaning was accurately interpreted.

### **5.8.2. Transferability**

Transferability reflects the extent to which findings might be applicable in other contexts or with other participants and is a more relevant for a study of this nature than generalisability (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). To evaluate transferability; data design, sampling approaches and flexible interrogation of the data were considered.

Although participants were self-selecting, the recruitment posters provided a degree of purposiveness, requesting mixed gender and ethnicity. A strong transferable study needs 'good informants'; people who represent their designated cohort well (Höijer, 2008). The participants represented a good variation of personality types, lifestyles, social groups and perspectives so could be deemed good spokespeople for the group under investigation. Moreover to increase transferability, the researcher asked probing questions about: their siblings' experiences, their experiences when they were younger and their experiences in different SM. The latter contributed to the conceptualisation of varied incentive structures in different SM sites generating different behaviour.

Freud argued that psycho-dynamic forces are more accessible in abnormal cases (Höijer, 2008). The researcher probed participants who disclosed negative or 'different' experiences such as: stranger danger, bullying, conflicts, victims of gossip and hacking to understand more about these cases and the resultant effect on their on-going behaviour and attitudes. This increased her understanding of teens' holistic experiences in SM and led to a conceptualisation of teens getting 'burned'. Once 'burned', they were reticent to put themselves out there again. It partly explained the increasing inclination of many teens to watch rather than actively participate in FB.

The emergent research design helped to increase transferability of findings. The research instrument was continually refined, questions were added, deleted and edited which generated more (anonymous) examples to share with subsequent participants and modified the scope of the study from self-presentation to watching others to voyeurism, revealing nuances in the phenomena. For instance finding that teens used SM to mitigate perceived risk in initiating new relationships and life transitions such as going to university provided a transferrable context. It is reasonable to assume that other consumers might use SM to mitigate risk in other scenarios also.

The transferability of this study's findings was enhanced through purposive recruitment of participants, ensuring they were 'good informants' for their group (Höijer, 2008) and through probing questions about their wider experiences. In addition the researcher investigated abnormal cases to reveal deeper insights and the emergent design of the data collection enabled the role of SM in alternative contexts to be explored. As the earliest adopters, teens have established practices and behaviours for the medium for subsequent adopters to follow. Later adopters are joining a social environment where the rituals and cultural meanings have already been established, so whilst their personal characteristics might adjust their responses, the accepted norms of behaviour in the environment tend to be adopted.

### **5.8.3. Dependability**

Dependability considers the extent to which findings would be repeated if replicated with the same (similar) respondents in the same (similar) context (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). This study was cross-sectional and the phenomenon was linked to a particular time and change process. It would be interesting to revisit participants later and investigate what has changed, now that they are at a different life stage. It would also be interesting to study subsequent teen user groups and other consumers to reveal behavioural changes as SM technology develops.

### **5.8.4. Confirmability**

Confirmability relates to establishing that the findings are not biased or unduly affected by the interests of the researcher (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). The positivist concept of neutrality or independence does not hold in interpretivist research as the researcher is involved in the meaning making process. She immersed herself in SM to experience the phenomenon first hand, the interviews were interactive, and she teased out the participants' experiences by building rapport with them. The key challenge was for the

researcher to recognise her perspectives, possible biases and ethnocentrism and minimise the effect of them on the research design and interpretations of the data (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989).

As discussed in section 5.8.1. the researcher frequently discussed her interim findings and interpretations with various audiences to incorporate contradictory perspectives. In addition re-reading field notes and revisiting recordings and transcripts of the interviews helped to ensure that final interpretations were grounded in the actual data.

The reflexive journal (Appendix 5.9) reveals the researcher's acknowledgement of her ethnocentrism and possible biases and how they may have influenced the outcome of the study. The researcher was an extroverted teen and enjoyed high social capital in her social group; the researcher's initial 'positive perspective' of SM was therefore tempered by these experiences. Engaging and re-engaging with alternative participant viewpoints and other audiences has helped to extract the lived meanings of the participants and tease out their distinctive characteristics, thus over time a range of perspectives have been considered and a more holistic conceptualisation of the phenomenon has evolved.

### **5.8.5. Integrity and Ethics**

Conducting research with integrity requires ensuring that findings are not affected by misinformation, evasions, lies and fronts (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). Ethical requirements overlap with integrity considerations thus they are discussed together. Ethical approval was granted by both Coventry University and Royal Holloway College for this data collection.

#### **5.8.5.1. Ethics**

As some participants were under 18, ethical considerations were paramount, therefore the research design was carefully devised to ensure that both the participants' and researcher's rights were protected and that the data reported was accurate and representative. The researcher was cognisant of the age difference and that she might be perceived as a parent or authority figure. Teens might therefore: withhold information; respond with answers that they perceived the researcher was looking for; skew information to make themselves look better; exaggerate their behaviours to impress, shock or test; avoid, deceive or feel obliged to respond to sensitive topics or use the research to further alternative agendas (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). It was therefore critical that the research design ameliorated these potential risks and that in her early interactions with participants she quickly developed a rapport and gained their trust. The researcher maintained a healthy scepticism

(Douglas, 1976), looking out for these behaviours and making notes for consideration when analysing this data to reduce any bias.

At the start of the data collection briefing documents were provided to both participants and parents providing full details of the nature of the research (see Appendices 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.7). Informed consent from participants and their parents (<18 years) was obtained prior to interviews, observational analysis and diary activities.

In Stage 1 the researcher explained the brief, answered questions and addressed any concerns with a parent present (Appendices 5.1 and 5.2). A check-back was made half way through and a debrief interview at the end of the diary period. For Stage 2 interviews, participant information and informed consent were provided in advance, to allow time to review the information and sign the consent form (Appendix 5.7). In addition the researcher obtained CRB clearance as these interviews were conducted one-to-one with the teen participants.

As discussed in Section 4.3, cautious ethical guidelines for researching children have hampered investigations into child and teenage consumption behaviour (Livingstone, 2003). Teenagers in particular and specifically in digital contexts often partake in activities that are outside of their parents' knowledge and beyond their expertise. As the innovators and early adopters of social media it is critical that consumer researchers are able to harness teen intelligence in the medium. The majority of published studies have focused on older subjects (e.g. Carpenter, 2012; Fox and Moreland, 2015; Valenzuela et al, 2009; Waters and Ackerman, 2011) thereby failing to capture and document the nuances of the consumption behaviours of the under 18s. The Marketing Research Society (2014 p18) supports the interviewing of children without a responsible adult being present in cases where it could introduce bias. To navigate this issue ethically and ensure the richness and credibility of the data, teen participants were interviewed either at home or at school with responsible adults on the premises but not in the room, thus providing protection for both parties without losing the richness in the data.

#### **5.8.5.2. Good Interview Technique**

The interview technique has already been detailed in 5.7.3.2. However further details are described here to explain how they were designed and conducted to ensure integrity.

#### ***Research Setting***

For stage 1 the debrief interviews were held in participants' homes, in some cases this seemed to inhibit interactions. For Stage 2 participants were interviewed at school, a more

'neutral' environment. This site worked better, participants relaxed very quickly and settled into an easy rapport with the researcher.

### *Interview Process*

To aid rapport, the researcher dressed casually for the interviews. Interviews were introduced by reviewing participant information, the research questions, estimated time required and checking consent for the audio recording. Participants were reassured that their data would be anonymised and confidential and that they could decline to answer questions or withdraw at any point (see Appendix 5.7).

The interactive data collection method enabled two-way communication, so concepts, meanings and interpretations could be discussed and clarified on the spot. Interviews began broad with general questions about participants' use of SM to build a rapport. If participants mentioned anything new or interesting, the researcher encouraged them to tell her more, letting them know that their contributions were valuable, thus encouraging further disclosures. As interviews progressed, questions were more probing and broached more sensitive topics. The researcher moved back and forth between question themes, directing conversations depending on the behaviour and responses of the teen. In addition the researcher drew on her own and other participants' experiences (anonymised) in SM to encourage teens to 'open up', to cross check data and look for support or contradictions, thus triangulating the findings (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989).

Audio recording interviews can sometimes inhibit participants and make developing a rapport more challenging (Britten, 1995). However in this case the opposite was experienced. Participants expressed no concerns about the audio recording and the fact that the researcher was then able to actively engage in the discussion, maintaining eye contact throughout as opposed to taking copious notes enhanced the quality of the conversations (Tinson, 2009 p49).

Interview themes were consistent however the research process was iterative with additional questions inserted to probe emerging themes. Data was triangulated between sources for individual cases (diaries, interviews and observational analysis) to check for consistencies and contradictions. Moreover the researcher frequently referred back to the raw data to confirm, disconfirm and evidence interpretations and conceptualisations (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989).

### **Risks**

The researcher made contingency plans for any unexpected situations. The study was designed to limit the risk of participant distress and it was unlikely that it would cause or encourage participants to engage in situations or environments that they were not already engaged in. However, qualitative methodologies sometimes encourage disclosure of pre-existing situations. There was a minor risk that the questions about feelings and relationships might generate emotional reactions or lead to the disclosures which required support. The researcher is experienced at working with young people and has attended various seminars on child protection, so is conversant with Child Protection (CP) advice and guidance. In addition a list of CP contact numbers was kept to hand in case additional support or a referral was required.

#### **5.8.5.3. Confidentiality and Anonymisation**

Participants were assured that any data they shared would be anonymised and kept confidential. This helped to gain their trust and to open up to the researcher and discuss their behaviours, feelings and perceptions. It was explained to parents that any information disclosed to the researcher by their child would be strictly confidential from all parties including themselves.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality each participant was allocated a pseudonym and all recordings were labelled with the pseudonym. Transcripts were scrutinised for any references that might reveal identities and any references were removed or anonymised. Recordings and transcripts will be retained in secure storage for a maximum period of six years for analysis, after which time they will be destroyed.

#### **5.8.5.4. Incentives**

As detailed in 5.7.3.1., an incentive was offered to participants in the form of a £10 voucher from a High Street retailer. This was intended to motivate participation and was a relatively small amount, so unlikely to constitute undue inducement to the participants and skew the data (Grady, 2001).

#### **5.8.5.5. Risks to Researcher**

The researcher minimised any risk to themselves in visiting the participants' homes and school by utilising known contacts, arranging dates and times in advance, notifying responsible others of locations and expected timings and carrying a mobile telephone.

#### **5.8.5.6. Summary**

To summarise integrity was ensured by rigorous and thorough ethical planning and considerations and by thoughtful research design which remained sensitive to protecting the rights of the participants and ensuring credible outcomes. The researcher employed good interview techniques, developing rapport and trust effectively and retained a healthy scepticism to counter misinformation. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from different sources, methods and cases and by shifting focus between abstracted and raw data. Overall communication between the researcher and her subjects was open and honest, anonymity and confidentiality was assured and maintained throughout.



# Chapter 6

## Data

### Analysis I

#### Self-

## Presentation

## 6.0. Introduction

This chapter analyses the strategies that teenagers use to develop and protect their identities in social media (SM), particularly Facebook (FB). The first part of the chapter identifies the key external influences on self-presentation in SM and describes the digital symbolic resources used to express self in this arena. The second and most substantial section analyses the data from teen interviews, diaries and observational analysis; exploring the strategies teens deploy, the resources they draw upon and the external factors affecting this process. Evolving teen consumption behaviours in SM are revealed, which have generated a set of dynamically changing unwritten rules. Having developed and projected a digital personae, teens are challenged to maintain and defend it; the latter part of the chapter explores the strategies employed to protect their personae. The chapter provides an insight into teen identity development and maintenance strategies, the predominant forces acting upon them in this process and the behaviours, rules and power structures that they have evolved as early adopters of the medium.

Several key theories underpinned this analysis; Bauman's concepts of Liquid Modernity and Liquid Consumption (2007); Belk's Extended Self in a Digital World (2013); Belk (1988); boyd (2007); Goffman (1959, 1961); Mittal (2006) and Schau and Gilly (2003). A brief review of these theories is provided below (for further discussions see Chapters 2 and 3).

## 6.1. Self-Presentation

The presentation of self is the deliberate and tangible component of identity (Goffman, 1959), the self that individuals project to others to explain who they are and how they wish to be perceived. Traditionally linked to consumption, people frequently draw on symbolic materials (e.g. brands) to convey their identity messages. In the pre-digital era, objects such as clothes, hairstyles and music were consumed to communicate symbolic meanings of self to others (Kleine et al, 1995; Nuttall, 2009). SM has provided more possibilities with its abundant digital symbolic materials, available independent of material consumption. Self-presentation has been identified as one of the key reasons for FB use (Wilson, Gosling and Graham, 2012). As the early adopters and heaviest users of SM, teens lead the way in these new practices and are thus fertile grounds for research (Doster, 2013).

Previous studies of self-presentation in SM (see Chapter 3) revealed several key differences. Firstly that people tended to be more planned and reflexive than in RL, keen to present the best image of themselves, they edit and polish their displays of self, conveying

a 'hoped-for-self' rather than a wholly authentic self (Zhao et al, 2008). Studies have found that teen identity displays are often experimental and playful, at times presenting multiple digital identities (e.g. boyd, 2007; Donath and boyd, 2004; Grasmuck et al, 2009; Larsen, 2007; Zhao et al, 2008). Unlike traditional self-presentation, the body is not the central locus of consumption, in SM social presence does not require physical presence and this has been termed telepresence (Schau and Gilly, 2003). Researchers have also found that SM users are more inclined to present themselves implicitly through their behaviours and affiliations as opposed to explicitly, this has been coined "showing rather than telling" (Zhao et al, 2008).

## **6.2. External Influences**

Several external influences on self-presentation in SM were identified pre-analysis: wider networks, wider audiences, sharing culture, co-construction of self and distributed memories, these are reviewed briefly first. Post analysis two additional external influences were identified; acceleration and SM incentive structures, these are discussed in section 6.11.

### **6.2.1. Wider Networks**

Friend networks tend to be significantly larger and more diffused in SM than in RL (Tong et al, 2008). The average teen maintains a network of 300-400 FB 'friends' (Madden et al, 2013; Manago et al, 2012) compared with ~150 friends in RL (Dunbar, 2010). However unlike earlier anonymous computer mediated environments, teens mostly interact with people that they know offline as opposed to strangers (Zhao, 2006).

It can be assumed therefore that SM 'friends' include a significant number of people with whom they are only loosely connected with offline, friends of friends of friends and so on. Granovetter (1973) termed these acquaintances 'weak social ties' as opposed to 'strong ties', who are close contacts that people have frequent interactions with. Moreover Granovetter (1983) identified that social interaction with 'weak ties' could provide more information, resources and perspectives to people, thereby developing their 'bridging social capital'. SM networks provide access to a greater range of identity displays than in RL, thereby increasing ideas and resources for self-presentation but equally laying one's own identity expressions open to appropriation by a wider range of others.

### 6.2.2. Wider Audiences

It follows therefore that wider networks inevitably result in wider audiences in SM. Potential recipients span 'strong' and 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) and traverse several social groups where individuals may occupy contrasting identities (e.g. friends vs family). Furthermore the public nature of social interactions means that teens have less control over their projected identities as others potentially 'contaminate' their posts transforming meanings (see section 6.2.4.). These factors render it more challenging to divide audiences for self-presentation (Belk, 2013). In the past, projected messages could be adapted for parents, school friends, partners, work colleagues and so on, now they are all present in the same arena. In addition, teen identity displays are in greater competition; playing in the same field as their 'weak ties' as opposed to just their 'strong ties'. It is therefore challenging for millennials to navigate these issues and effectively manage impressions to their various referent audiences.

### 6.2.3. Sharing Culture

The millennial generation have evolved a more 'sharing culture', coined the 'look at me!' generation (Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010). They are more inclined to share information about their lives, feelings and emotions than previously and SM has undoubtedly encouraged this (Belk, 2013; Schwarz, 2010; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007; Waters and Ackerman, 2011).

SM encourages self-disclosure; FB teases with open questions: 'What's on your mind?'; 'What are you doing?' 'How are you feeling?' 'Where are you?'. Users are coaxed to document every detail of their lives and FB provides a symbolic tool box with which to do it. The millennial generation have been raised to be creators, not just passive receivers of marketing messages but moulders and shapers of their own content, particularly with regards to messages about their own identity (Howe and Strauss, 2000). Furthermore Bauman and Lyon (2013) argued that the condition of being watched is not a threat, but a temptation that urges the public display of the inner self, citing SM as a good example of this trend.

Early digital environs (e.g. Internet chat rooms) were often anonymous, users operating under pseudonyms and interacting with strangers. In these arenas users tended to disclose more readily (and role play and deceive). SM platforms are generally 'nonymous, users operate under their real name with people that they are acquainted with. The tendency to disclose has reduced in these 'nonymous environments, as users are identifiable in RL

hence there are consequences. However the barrier of the internet provides a perceived distance between sender and recipient so the 'sharing' trend has continued (Belk, 2013).

#### **6.2.4. Co-Construction of Self**

Sharing stories has long been an established mechanism for social bonding (Belk, 2013; Dunbar, 2010), it is unsurprising therefore that increased sharing via SM develops group identities as well as individual identities. As individuals share content (e.g. statuses or photographs) others respond adding their own comments. These additions adapt and append further meaning to the original posts adding 'digital patina' (Davies, 2007). Identities in SM are effectively co-constructed by the SM community and identity becomes more of a group practice than an individual endeavour.

Other people's contributions to digital identities have the power to transform meanings and 'contaminate' intended identities for good or bad. Ownership of personal digital content is an illusion or at best temporary. So people find impression management increasingly challenging as they have limited control over the 'group project' which was once their individual personal identity. However despite these difficulties, identity-crazed teenagers, at a critical transition in their lives are compelled to try to establish their identity amongst their peers in the environs of teen choice, social media.

#### **6.2.5. Distributed Memories**

Unlike pre-digital communications, SM content is recorded for posterity and can be resurrected at any time without warning (Belk, 2013). Furthermore the incessant public documentation of everyday lives and ease with which digital photographs can be created and broadcast have produced content in abundance. In addition the tendency towards co-constructed identities and shared stories also results in shared ownership of memories, thus the 'persistence' and 'searchability' capabilities of SM (boyd, 2007) render it more difficult to escape previously discarded selves and increase the likelihood of past and present selves colliding (Belk, 2013).

FB's Timeline provides a chronological narrative of self, enabling individuals to recall, review and evaluate the consistency of their own and others' identities on a regular basis. However like physical photo albums, SM memories are selective, recording the happiest moments rather than the ups and downs of everyday life. So the potential for constructing selectively positive memories has increased (Belk, 2013). Therefore 'distributed memories' in the digital realm may have more significant consequences (Belk, 2013).

### 6.3. Symbolic Resources

SM offers an infinite range of symbolic materials to support teen self-presentation, unlike the pre-digital era these resources are immaterial and largely free of charge thus teens are not constrained by financial resources and are able to appropriate a wide range of symbols from various sources, drawing them together to create complex and customised identity messages (Doster, 2013). Millennials have grown up with digital technology and are technologically savvy and creative (Yang and Jolly 2008). They have become adept at sourcing and reflexively manipulating digital resources through a process of bricolage, revising and refining their projected selves in perpetuity. As a cohort they have developed shared understandings of symbolic meanings, allowing them to code and decode their own and others' identity displays.

For the purpose of this study the portfolio of symbolic resources were divided into six categories: **user-generated content**, **digital photography**, **social media features**, **applications**, **other multi-media generated resources** and **other users' content**. Symbolic materials encompass artefacts such as photographs, videos and news articles as well as the tools with which to present them.

User-generated content includes any content created by the users themselves (Tong et al, 2008) for instance statuses and messages. Digital photographs account for a large proportion of symbolic resources, so have been separated into a category of their own. SM features that facilitate self-presentation include tools such as *Statuses*, *Check-ins*, *tagging*, *likes*, and *relationship status*. Appendix 6.1 details FB's resources and terminology and FB features are indicated by italics throughout this chapter. Applications include games, quizzes, lists and so on. Other multi-media generated resources encompass any symbolic materials drawn from other commercial providers which can be wielded in SM, for instance videos from YouTube or news items from The Guardian. Finally other users' content relates to any materials appropriated from a fellow SM user and re-shared to their own networks.

## 6.4. Conceptual Model: Millennial Teen Self-Presentation in Social Media

The key theories discussed above (Bauman, 2007; Belk, 1988, 2013; Goffman, 1959, 1961; Mittal, 2006; Schau and Gilly, 2003) were adapted and combined to develop a framework to analyse teen self-presentation in social media (see Figure 6.1).

Self-presentation strategies were categorised under six themes (see Figure 6.2):

- embodied self (face, body, personality, feelings, skills and achievements)
- relationships (friends, partners, family)
- interests, activities and opinions (arts and culture, sport, current affairs, opinions)
- associations (places, brands, celebrities)
- behaviour (intentional, unintentional)

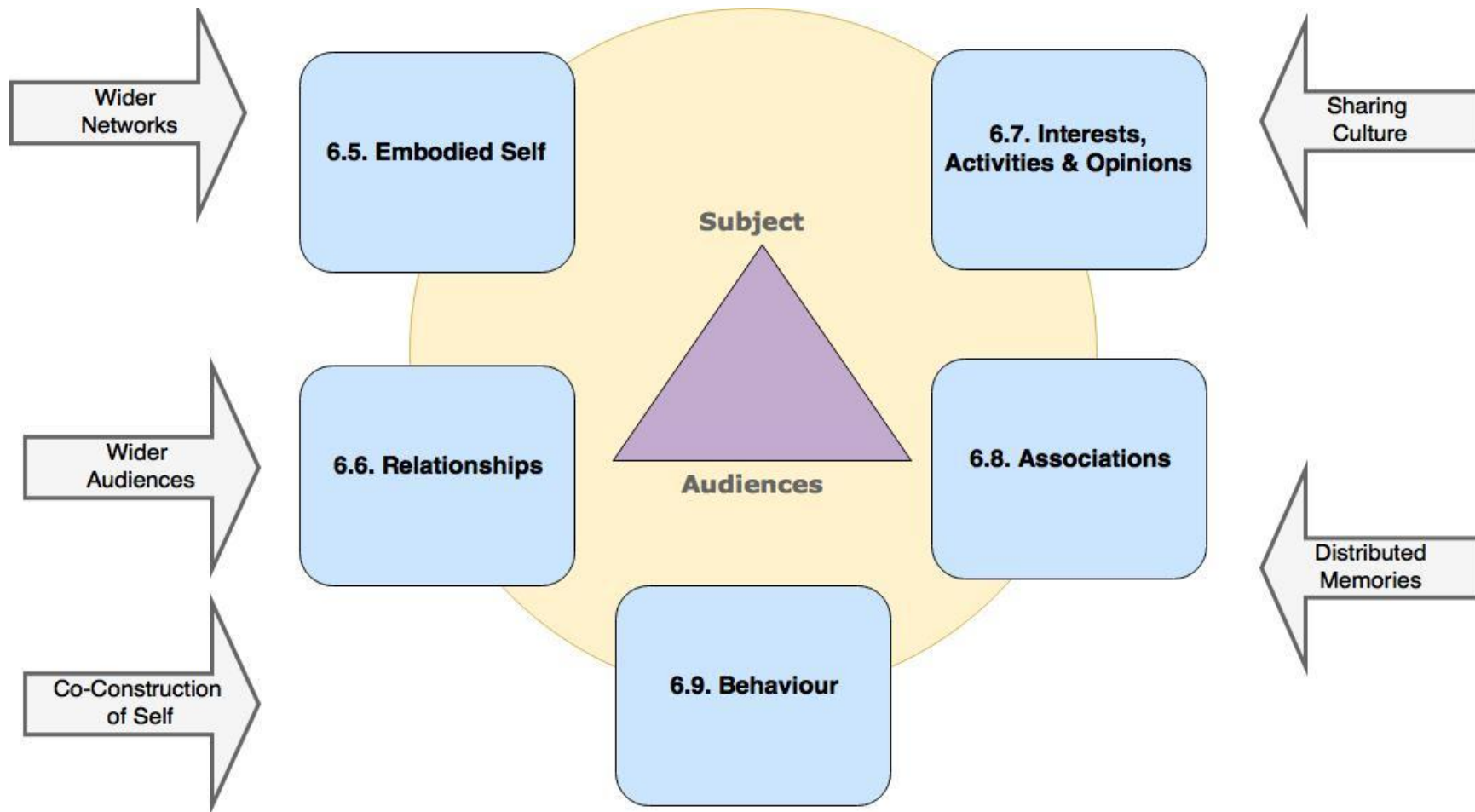
Supporting these strategies were a portfolio of symbolic resources:

- user-generated content
- digital photography
- social media features
- applications
- other multi-media generated resources
- other users' content.

External influences dynamically affect and distort teen self-presentations, transferring meanings and received impressions.

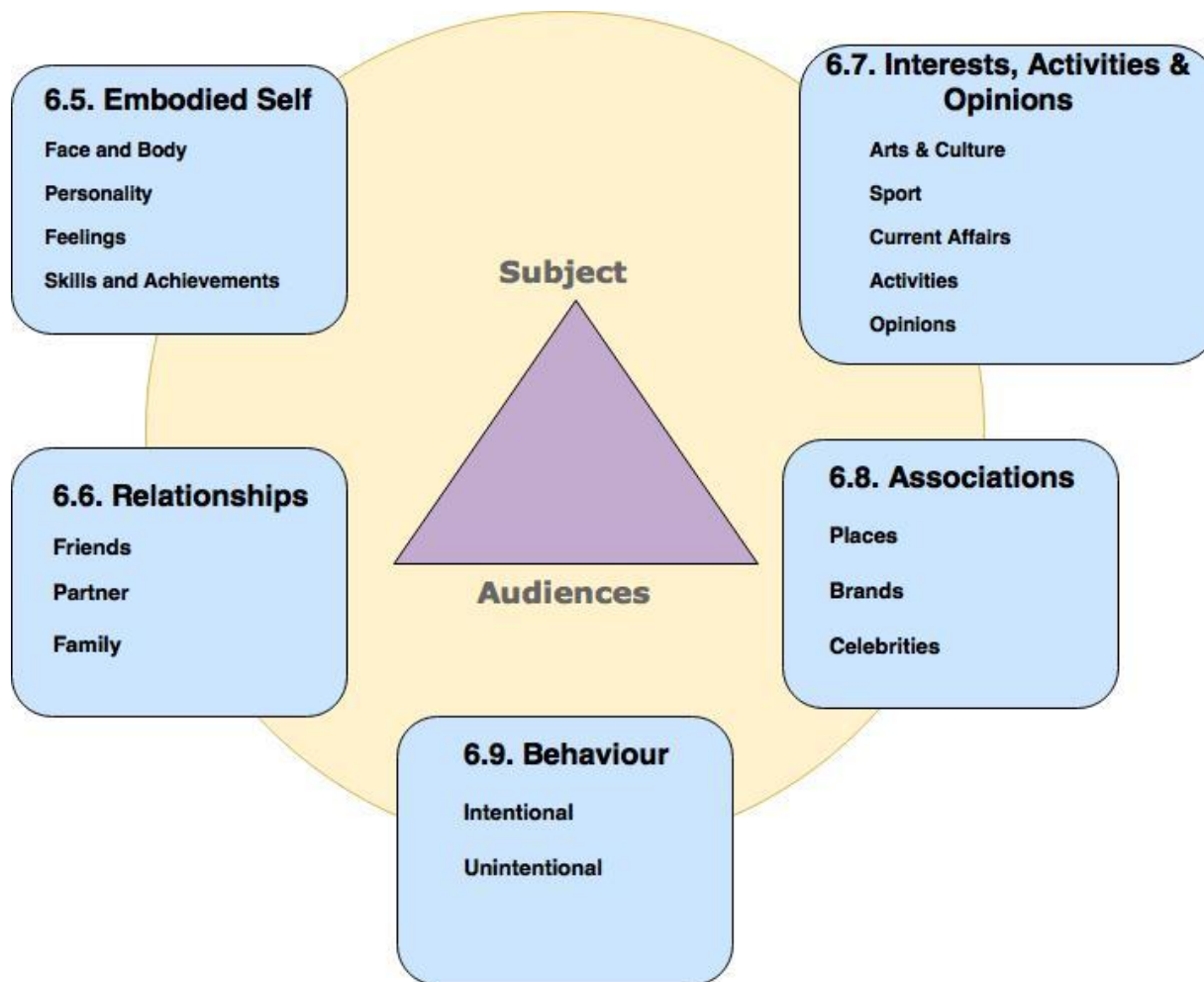
The **external influences** identified pre-analysis were:

- wider networks
- wider audiences
- sharing culture
- co-construction of self
- distributed memories



**Figure 6.1 External Influences on Self-Presentation Strategies**





**Figure 6.2 Strategies for Self-Presentation in Social Media**

# Embodied Self

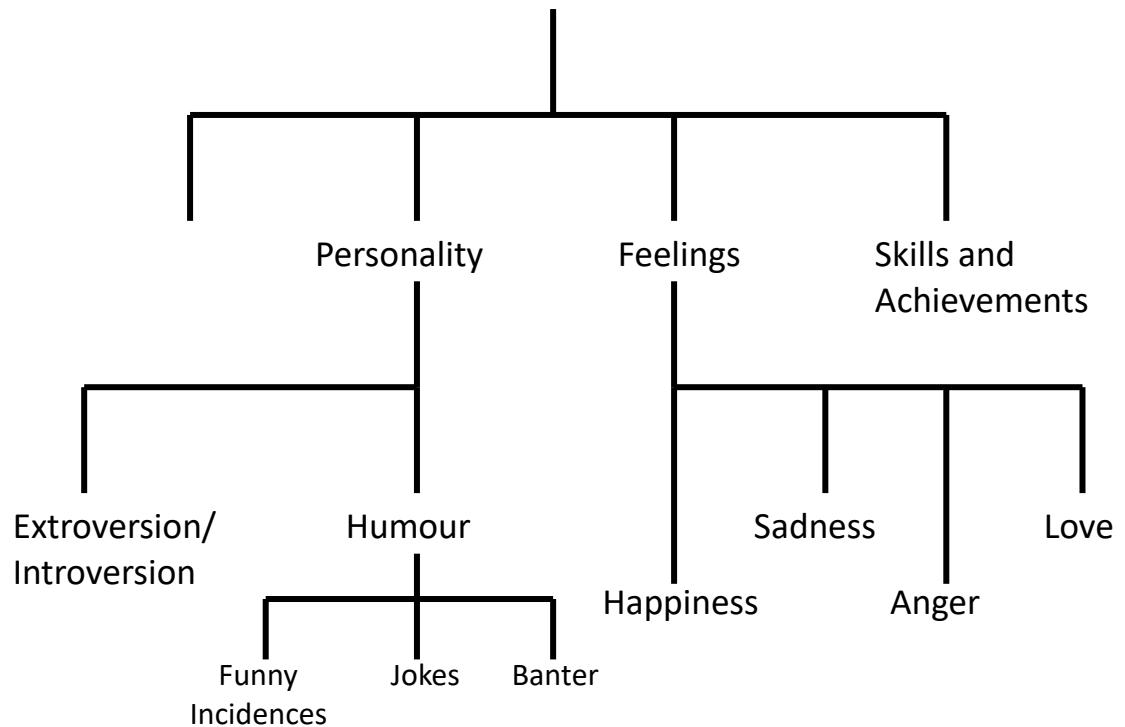


Figure 6.3. Presenting Self through the Embodied Self

## 6.5. The Embodied Self – Face, Body, Personality, Feeling Skills and Achievements

The embodied self encompasses anything that is integral to the person; including the face, body, personality, feelings, skills and achievements. These aspects are more challenging to project in digital media compared with RL, however millennial teens exercise their creative and technical skills to project their physical selves in electronic intangible form.

### 6.5.1. Face and Body

In line with previous researchers (Belk, 1988; Saren, 2007) this study found physical appearance to be the most important aspect of self-presentation. Appearance focused millennials strived to present their best side, *photographs* were key (Zhao et al, 2008) and this was epitomised in the *profile photo*; acting as a marker for their digital identity. *Profile photographs* were carefully selected; attractive, flattering with nice clothes and styled hair or alternatively, 'edgy' images displaying tattoos and piercings. Girls in particular often enhanced these images with multiple takes, editing and flattering poses (see Observational Analysis, Appendix 5.8).

*Because like everyone puts nice photos on FB, and they always make a really big effort to look nice in their profile picture, I think more people sort of edit their photos to make them look better. Like, many people edit their photos so much and do different poses ... (Emma)*

*I think appearances are like a lot like – I'm not the best looking guy, but I make sure like... I actually look alright, is my hair alright, because if it's a bad hair photo, it just like ruins the photo (Andrew)*

Boys also felt pressured to look good; their hair, skin and bodily attributes (e.g. muscles, torsos). *Photos* of boys participating in sport to demonstrate their athletic prowess were also common.

The importance of physical appearance generated substantial pressure on teens. For some it was quite competitive (the most *likes* on photos). However whilst looking good was critical, it was also important not to be seen to be trying too hard. Teens who posted excessive *photos* of themselves, edited too obviously or posed provocatively were strongly criticised for being vain, shallow and attention-seeking. Goffman (1959) categorised impression management strategies into 'given' (deliberate) and 'given out' (inadvertent). Teens navigated a difficult path of seemingly unplanned impression management; looking good but naturally! This dichotomy generated various coping strategies to avoid being perceived as egotistical or vain: group *photos* as opposed to solo; other people's *photos* as opposed to their own; funny rather than beautiful *photos*; child *photos*, *photos* of something else e.g. pet, favourite band and not changing their *profile photos* frequently.

*I think there is a pressure to look nice ... it's like a competition, I suppose, not really with me, because I don't take photos of myself just on my own, but em, you see like, with other girls, it's like a competition to see who can look nicest and who has more likes on the photo than the other person. (Saskia)*

*I'd have pictures like of me on FB which are not nice but I don't really care like everyone doesn't look perfect all the time but I won't put it as a profile picture. I have in the past actually. It was a picture of me pretending to be a camel, next to a giant camel and I am literally ugly on that and I put it on just for a joke. (Serena).*

## 6.5.2. Personality

Personality data was analysed considering McCrae and Costa's (1999) Big Five Personality traits (extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness). The analysis focuses on the traits discussed most frequently; humour and extroversion.

### 6.5.2.1. Humour

After physical appearance, humour was seen as the most effective means to gain attention, communicate sense of self and develop and enhance relationships with others. Various

different types of humour were employed: funny incidences, jokes and banter. Millennials were creative with their humour, appropriating and augmenting content with their own meanings.

#### **6.5.2.1.1. Funny Incidences**

Participants frequently shared stories about funny or embarrassing situations occurring to themselves or others. Events were typically presented in narrative form via a *status*, *post* or *comment* and augmented with visual content e.g. *photographs*, *videos*. They aimed to engage their audiences and coax responses. Three types of humour were employed; aggressive, self-defeating and affiliate (Martin et al, 2003).

*... Like yesterday, my mate ...drove his car – he got lost, and he drove his car along on a footpath, like in a pedestrian area ... and then his reverse broke, so he got stuck on a hill and he couldn't... [laughing]. I took a picture of that and uploaded it ... onto FB from my phone. It was just so funny, because he was stuck there for like two hours, and ended up getting the bus back [laughing] (Adam)*

**[Aggressive Humour]**

*“Ever do something so uncool whilst you’re on your own that you are actually embarrassed by yourself?”*

*(Julian’s FB status)*

**[Self-defeating Humour]**

*Cookie dough in your mouth or in your teeth and you've made yourself look really ugly like erghh [pulls a face] or something and then ... we were like putting it on our tongues and being gross ... So that was the photo that she put on, cos I understood why she did it and I knew the silliness behind it so it was OK (Kezia)*

**[Affiliate Humour]**

Aggressive humour may be detrimental to a third party (Martin et al, 2003). Adam’s friend may be embarrassed as his story is shared widely, likely attracting further mockery. Adam attempts to generate social interaction and attention to his own digital identity; at his friend’s expense.

Self-defeating humour pokes fun at the initiator (Martin et al, 2003), Julian pokes fun at himself, illustrating his good nature, inviting ridicule and banter via *likes* and *comments* thus extending the reach of his identity messages.

Kezia’s friend has used affiliate humour to enhance her relationships with others (Martin et al, 2003). The group photo reaffirms relationships within the group through shared memories; whilst simultaneously conveying to outsiders that they are fun, do not take themselves too seriously, are not vain or egotistical and have their own group identity with shared secret meanings. Belonging is important to millennials and humour provides a means for them to co-create group identity messages.

### 6.5.2.1.2. Jokes

Teens frequently shared jokes comprising of user-generated content, other multi-media generated content and annotated versions. Content ranged from innocently witty to controversial and crude. They were expressed in narrative and visual form (*statuses, posts, comments, photographs*) or combinations thereof.

*So like, me and my friend get along so well and we found these really weird things on YouTube! There's like llamas in hats and they've got really weird quotes [laughing], and I'll always put them on her walls and she'll put them on mine - so like "Friendship is two friends munching on heavily roasted faces together." (Katherine)*

*No – I think if I comment on somebody's status or something – it would be something relevant or trying to be funny. When I am writing it I think will people actually find this funny or will I sound like an idiot. (Simon)*

**[Co-construction]**

*Like when you see something that's like out of the blue you're like oh they've been fraped! .... But you can tell when it's a frape and you can tell when they're joking ... I got fraped once and it was like "My armpit hairs are so smelly", I'm like thanks, thanks a lot! But people knew, they were like have you been fraped? I'm like yes I have indeed. (Kezia)*

**[Fraping]**

Jokes ranged from aggressive, self-defeating, affiliative and neutral humour (no central subject). Whilst shared publicly, they were often 'in-jokes' between friendship groups, proclaiming group identification whilst excluding outsiders from the real meaning. Katherine and her friend project their unique weird humour, thereby showcasing their close and exclusive friendship.

Jokes are intended to generate on-going social interaction, so teens develop and extend them by adding their own comments, thereby enhancing their own self-presentation. Simon thinks reflexively about what to post to enhance his own identity. Jokes are augmented by interaction and teens engage in co-constructing their projected identities to their various audiences. Belk (2013) referred to this as 'contamination' or 'digital patina'.

Occasionally teens played practical jokes on each other, for instance '*fraping*' (Facebook rape - hacking into another person's profile and posting embarrassing content). It was mostly fun and usually obvious to audiences. However being 'fraped' could damage or enhance a teen's personae by demonstrating their sense of humour and popularity.

### 6.5.2.1.3. Banter

Playful social interactions were common and referred to as 'banter'. Teens often poked fun at each other through their *statuses, photos, directed posts* and *comments*. The behaviour echos F2F scenarios, but as it is shared publicly, it is visible to wider audiences. The material

for 'banter' is spontaneous and user-generated, teens bounce off each other and influence each other's identities.

*Well me and my friends all kind of post things on each other's walls, like take the mick out of each other, so if I see that xxx's commented on yyy's wall then I will comment on that. (Cameron)*

*So him and his friend, they just basically, em...they just find these really weird things on YouTube [laughing], and then they kind of quote them on their status and just kind of have banter with each other, even though they're sat next to each other. (Katherine)*

'Banter' was mostly mentioned in relation to male social interactions. Teenage boys often expressed themselves through humour; bonding with their male peers was high priority. It was also less threatening; they present themselves as a group rather than as individuals. Interestingly even when teens were in close proximity they often shared 'banter' in SM (Katherine). Some teens used SM as a 'stage' to project their humorous identities to audiences and the 'banter' could become competitive as more was at stake.

#### **6.5.2.2. Extroversion /Introversion**

Extroversion and introversion reside at opposite ends of a single continuum (McCrae and Costa, 1999). Extroverts are typically outgoing, talkative, exhibiting energetic behaviour, whereas introverts are more reserved, exhibiting solitary behaviour. Extroverts have been found to be more likely to strategically manage their self-presentation in SM to make themselves look more popular (Zywica and Danowski, 2008) and to win social approval (Marcus, Machilek and Schutz, 2006). In addition some studies found that number of friends was an indicator of perceived extroversion, physical attractiveness and popularity (Tong et al, 2008; Utz, 2010).

Teens often sought to present themselves as extroverted, outgoing or sociable. Extroversion was symbolically linked with fun, parties and often alcohol. References to drinking in *statuses*, *check-ins* and *photos* communicated extroversion.

*So usually I change my status on a Monday – say like going to the [nightclub] with the girls! ... then people will write "see you there..". You just take pictures of anything because you can and then put them on FB! And it's funny ... We take pictures of strangers ... The pictures are like a storyline – by the end of the night we're pulling off our fake eyelashes! (Fiona)*

*Yeah, quite a lot of my statuses, I get a few responses, like...pictures and stuff, I've had like...tens and hundreds of 'likes'..... it kind of...it massages your ego if, you get more 'likes', and that's...that's pretty much the only reason why I can think of anyone would do it, like if you put something up there that you want a response from. (Stephen)*

*Like we went to an Olly Murs concert, because the girls thought it would be funny, like because I'd be like the only boy there ... And they made me put on an Olly Murs t-shirt and they took a photo of it, and it got like 16 likes or something ... I got completely ribbed like by the lads for going ... I think that they don't have the confidence to do something like that ... whilst I was just I don't really care – laugh at me if you want. (Stephen)*

Stephen and Fiona are extroverts, frequently posting *photos* and *statuses* broadcasting their exciting social lives to others. Many of Fiona's statuses were in capital letters also to grab attention (see Appendix 5.8). Feedback is important to them, Stephen boasts about the number of *likes* he receives and admits that it boosts his ego, underscoring extroverts' need for affirmation (Belk, 2013). Extroverted teens were confident of their personal social power and the requisite responses, for many teens the risk of putting themselves out there and failing was too high. Most teenage boys would find the concert situation embarrassing, but Stephen revelled in the occasion, posting *photos* to show off and enjoying the *likes* and resultant 'banter'. Stephen and Fiona's claims were reflected in their profiles both garnering higher than average *likes* on their content.

Extroversion and introversion in RL was often replicated in SM. However introverted teens were sometimes more outgoing online. The barrier of the internet and the ability to reflect and edit reduced their awkwardness and enabled them to interact more with their peers (Makarius, 1983).

*In person I can be really shy and not very talkative and quite quiet ... with texting and FB. I talk a lot more – sometimes I'm difficult to understand cause I mumble –you can't really mumble on FB ... While you also have that idea if you have a mask, and no one can really directly get to you so you can go that bit further ... you can stop and step back, well look back ... you can scroll back up see what they've already said and then think – and phrase it slightly differently so it seems less intrusive or you don't repeat yourself. But if you're face to face with someone you don't really get that much chance. (Gary)*

*Like I'm quite bubbly and loud, but on FB, I never post anything, like status-wise, and so I'm different because I'm never really shy of saying anything in lessons and stuff, but yet, on FB, I wouldn't really post just...on my own. (Saskia)*

There were some cases (e.g. Saskia) where RL extroverts found it more difficult to express themselves in SM. This may be due to the predominantly written communication format; teens who manage F2F situations well, may not be as proficient or confident in writing. Additionally as audiences are larger, teens who are extroverted within their close social groups may feel less confident in larger arenas encompassing more dominant groups and individuals.

### 6.5.3. Feelings

The barrier of the Internet and perceived distance increased teens' confidence to share their feelings and over time cumulative disclosures coloured and shaped their projected identities and others' perceptions of them. Teens expressed happiness, sadness, anger, love and affection.

#### 6.5.3.1. Happiness

Participants often shared happy events such as birthdays, gifts, holidays, and achievements through *statuses*, *photos* and *emojis*.

*I like that you can share your feelings ... yesterday was a great day for me . . . I came home from work and it's like "we're getting a hamster" and I'm like "ooh that's exciting!" And then I was bought some flowers and then my dad also told us we're going skiing, so wow three surprises in one day! So I wrote that on FB to share my happiness .... whenever I put something that's good for me I usually find I get a lot of people 'liking' it. Not in a big headed way but I feel like they're happy for me and I like that. (Kezia)*

*It doesn't get better than this I'm transfixed in this absolute bliss (Kezia)* **[self-statement]**

By sharing their happiness publicly teens extended their positive feelings across time and space. Happy messages infer that they are positive and achievers. Moreover, feedback from others (*likes* and *comments*), augment these impressions further, conveying popularity and empathy. Kezia's 'happy' persona was consistent with the observational data in her profile content and self-statement (see Appendix 5.8).

#### 6.5.3.2. Sadness

Teens also shared their sad times: relationship conflicts, bereavements, disappointing exam results; often seeking sympathy, support and affirmation (cf Morris et al, 2010 cited in Belk, 2013). Sad feelings were mostly expressed via *statuses* and had given rise to the term 'emotional statuses'. In addition some teens expressed their feelings symbolically e.g. song lyrics or poems.

*If I was having problems with like relationships ... I wouldn't write like, "Oh, me and him are like having so many problems". Like you sort of 'indirect' it, so ... I'd probably put like..."Oh, I'm in such a bad mood," but I wouldn't say why. If people ... asked "What's wrong?" I'd be like, "Oh, inbox me" – don't really want to say over FB, like so everyone can see. (Emma)* **[Emotional status]**

*Feeling a bit low tonight (Elliot)* **[Emotional status]**



'Emotional statuses' were generally regarded negatively, the observational data verified that statuses like Elliot's, invariably received no or little response, teens considered them attention seeking or felt uncomfortable, Kezia explained:

*Because I think people feel like they have to step away. (Kezia)*

### 6.5.3.3. Anger

Teens expressed their anger and frustrations through *statuses, posts* and *comments*. Three types of angry behaviour were observed; 'keyboard warriors', 'indirect statuses' and 'ranting/venting'.

*'Keyboard warriors'. They'll like have arguments on FB – but they won't actually do it in person. Like they probably say what they truly think, or just start an argument for the hell of it ... on FB you've got the comfort of the keyboard and you know they can't punch you in the face if you're sitting behind a computer screen. (Frances)*

**[Keyboard Warriors]**

*People can be nasty on FB ... an example was these two girls who just really didn't like each other, and one of the girls posted a status like "I absolutely hate you, you're disgusting, you're ugly," she never actually said the girl's name, but it was so obviously about her that the other girl got really upset, she deleted her FB. (Saskia)*

**[Indirect Statuses]**

*So, if something is annoying you on FB ... and you want to just vent, you can do it on Twitter. I don't understand what benefit it brings ... I think it's like you're sort of telling them that you're annoyed... I might tweet like "Oh parents blah, blah, blah..." It's not going to make them stop doing the annoying thing ... I think it's just like a bit of weight has been lifted off you. You feel like, okay, got that out in the open now – people can share my pain [laughing]? (Saskia)*

**[Venting]**

'Keyboard warriors' conducted venomous arguments over FB yet remained silent in RL. By posting in an open forum they felt safer and might muster support from others. Similarly teens used 'indirect statuses' to assert their anger, making noxious unnamed statements about evident targets. This was common after relationship breakups and in girl on girl conflicts.

In addition teens used SM to disperse suppressed anger and avoid confrontation. Twitter was favoured over FB for this purpose. Teens admitted 'ranting' or 'venting' their frustrations through tweets, not expecting or requiring any kind of response but feeling relieved as a result. Interestingly acceptable behaviours varied across different SM platforms, teens perceived Twitter as being less pressurised than FB, audiences were considered less critical and responses were not expected.

#### 6.5.3.4. Love and Affection

Participants expressed love, affection and sympathy to those closest to them. They communicated this through their *relationship status*, *photographs* (particularly *profile*), *statuses*, *posts*, *comments*, *likes* and *tags*. Teens frequently posted messages to their loved ones appending jokes, quotes, items of personal meaning, thereby projecting caring qualities and encouraging reciprocity.

*My best friend has been on a weight-loss programme and he's done really well, so he'll put about his weight-loss and I'll comment on that, because, you know... If it's nice things, then I'm quite happy to comment. So ...like friends getting engaged and stuff, you know, it's all really nice and that sort of thing ... (Harriot)*

Public demonstrations for instance, birthday wishes, enquiring how friends were feeling and so on communicated their affection to the subject whilst simultaneously presenting the caring side of their identity to a wider audience.

#### 6.5.4. Skills and Achievements

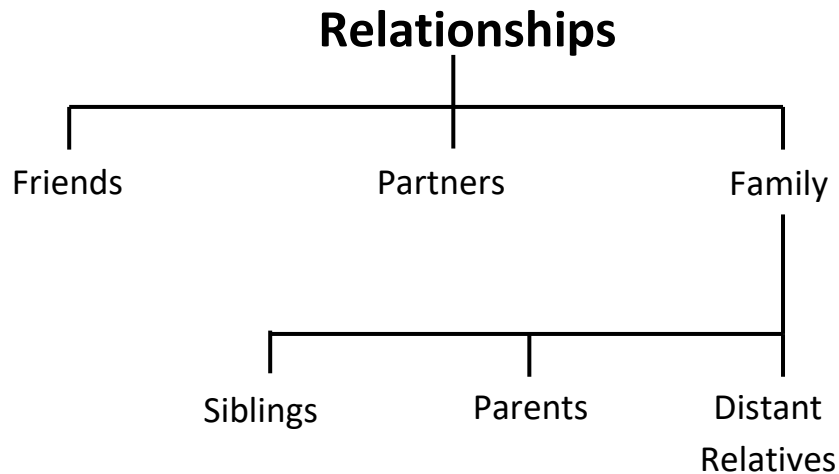
Milestones such as passing exams, driving test, offers from universities were shared as *statuses*, *photographs* and *videos*. For achievement oriented millennials these were perceived as important and justifiable statuses as opposed to mundane every day happenings.

*If it feels important enough – Like driving test or getting into uni. I don't post anything that's not very important. (Elizabeth)*

*CONGRATULATIONS! Your place at University of Bristol ..... has been confirmed! (Kezia) [FB worthy status]*

*I put some videos up of me in Buggy Malone and I got a lot of likes on that. Oh, and achievements as well – like, I got asked to be on an agency ... that got like over a hundred likes as well, which was pretty cool so... Like one of my photographs was me in Buggy Malone when I'm throwing the water over, em, my friend who was in the production, and I look hideous in that, but I just thought it's just such a brilliant moment of the production, which I loved doing, every single night. It just, like I just thought, I'll put it as my profile picture because I loved it. (Stephen)*

Achievement identity messages transcended social group boundaries, effectively positioning self for all audiences. Feedback was guaranteed and boosted self-esteem. Skills and talents were often a central cue to teens' identities: sporting, musical, artistic and dramatic talents were communicated via *statuses*, *photos*, *videos* and importantly *profile photos* signalling the prominence of this aspect of their identity. In Stephen's case his appearance ('hideous') is less important than his drama achievement, which is central to his identity.



**Figure 6.4. Presenting Self through Relationships**

## 6.6. Relationships

Teenagers predominantly aligned themselves with friends and partners, however family members also featured in both an affiliative and oppositional sense. FB resources supporting this form of self-presentation were *relationship status, no of friends, tagging, statuses, profile photographs, photographs, birthday messages, group messages, wall posts and comments*.

### 6.6.1. Friends

Millennials are team players so presenting their friends as part of their ‘extended self’ enabled them to communicate popularity, group identity, place in the social hierarchy, personality, physical attractiveness, interests and activities. In addition public interactions with their friends helped to boost their self-esteem, validate their opinions and guard against negative perceptions, such as being perceived as vain.

*Because you want to have friends on FB. You don't want to have like...50, especially if you go to a big school like this, because there's loads of people here, so...why hasn't she got a lot of friends if there's a lot of people in the school? (Saskia)*

*Again that depends if you want to add randoms or not, like some people will just add whoever .... I've got one friend who's got like 1500 friends, so he obviously doesn't know them all, probably knows half of them. Whereas me I only add people I know so I've got about 500 friends something like that maybe 600 not sure? But I didn't before and it got to the stage where it was ridiculously high and then I just went through and had a clear out. (Ameet)*

*Number of friends* was an important indicator of popularity, however too many suggests that you ‘friend’ anyone (‘friend whore’) and too few that you are unpopular (cf Tong et al,

2008). Previous studies found that people tended to have an average of ~300-400 friends (Manago et al, 2012) but only interact regularly with about 30% of them (Viswanath et al, 2009). In this study the optimum was 400 to 500; with teens like Ameet periodically adopting friend management to maintain this balance. Another key indicator of popularity was the number of *likes* on *statuses*, *posts* and *comments*. These provided public validation about appearance, humour, opinions, music taste, sporting views and so on thus strengthening their projected identity and boosting self-esteem.

The observational data revealed that teens used group *photographs* to communicate popularity, group status, position in the social hierarchy and their attractiveness.

*So they might see me and be like, oh, he hangs around with, that group, so he must be like kind of alright, like popularity-wise ... But then you've got kind of people that know me differently, who may say, oh, but he's at the bottom of that social group. So, therefore, people see me differently. Obviously, I want the image of "oh, you're quite popular." (Andrew)*

*Like when me and my friends went out or something, we might take photos together maybe sometimes but usually it's my friends who take photos and if am there they tag me in. I am not really one of these people that ... I don't know... I don't want... to put myself out there. .... It's less about me. (Serena)*

Being seen in photos with a 'popular group' (high in the social hierarchy) infers that Andrew is popular too, although this may not be the reality. The observational data suggests mid hierarchy, average no of friends, average no of *likes* (see Appendix 5.8). Several studies have identified that perceived attractiveness is influenced by the attractiveness of friends (e.g. Tong et al, 2008; Walther et al, 2008). So teens utilise friends to enhance their individual projected identity, Lee et al (1999) termed this 'basking'. There is safety in numbers and teens (like Serena) opted for group *photos* to avoid being perceived as overly vain. The challenge to portray a positive self-image without appearing to 'try too hard' was evident and teens navigated this by portraying their relationships with friends. By not posting *photos* of herself, only appearing in other people's *photos*, Serena presents her identity by 'showing' rather than 'telling' (cf Zhao et al, 2008).

### 6.6.2. Partners

Girlfriends and boyfriends provided a key positioning stake for many teens. Declaring new relationships through their *relationship status* was seen to validate the relationship ('FB Official!'). Teens acquired enhanced kudos by association with their partner ('basking') but also from the fact that they were 'in a relationship'. By publicly announcing relationships they declared possession of their mate, thereby warning others off.

*I think the relationship one is a big thing if you have your first relationships it's like "have you put it on FB yet?" It's like "No" Oooh then it's not 'FB official', so it's not real. (Kezia)*

*When me and my boyfriend went to London, I posted... some pictures of when we went to the zoo [laughing] ... I tagged him in one of my posts, em, I posted statuses of my boyfriend, what he said at the zoo.... And my profile photo is a photo of me and my boyfriend. (Katherine)*

Katherine's relationship with her boyfriend was prominently presented in her *relationship status, profile photos, tags, general photos, statuses, posts and comments*. She did not have a wide circle of friends at school, compensating for this with her romantic relationship. Through her activities with her boyfriend, she was able to present more dimensions of her identity to a wider audience. In addition by posting her boyfriend's words in her *status*, she claimed possession of him into her 'extended self'.

*Because you obviously have your relationship status on FB, and everyone thinks it's a really big thing. When you see that on your newsfeed, so-and-so has gone from 'in a relationship' to 'single', everyone's like "Oh my God – what happened?!" and that would really annoy me because I'll talk about it with who I want to. (Elysha)*

*... I don't put that I'm in a relationship with my boyfriend at the minute, and he doesn't put it either, because ...a relationship is between two people, not two people plus everyone on Facebook. It's like, because if you were to break-up and change the relationship to 'single' ... all of a sudden, everyone gets involved. (Harriot)*

Romantic relationships carried higher social risk than regular friendships; public conflicts and break ups were difficult, as Elysha describes. Public humiliation and liberal sharing of intimate secrets by wronged parties could be hugely damaging for teenage identity and self-esteem. For some (like Harriot) this risk was too high, so they chose instead to maintain their privacy and keep their romantic relationships off FB.

### 6.6.3. Family

#### 6.6.3.1. Siblings

In contrast, brothers and sisters were a more stable, less risky option for teen relationship positioning. Siblings conveyed shared history, private meanings and attained extra kudos by association ('basking'). Older siblings communicated added coolness through maturity and experiences, whilst younger siblings conveyed cuteness. Teens presented their brothers and sisters via their *profile photos, photos, statuses, family and relationships*.

*One [status] I set recently was a quote from TV channel and me and my sister found this bit hilarious, so I thought I'd put it on FB – then my sister can see – and laugh every time ... So she's quite happy with that. Then there's the element of everyone else to see the episode, and if they do, they get the reference and perhaps comment or 'like' or something. (Gary)*

Gary (introvert – see p135) presented his sibling relationship as part of his ‘extended self’ thereby communicating more of his identity. By connecting publicly with his sister about a TV programme, he hopes to generate social interaction with others. Importantly, like other shy teens, he is more confident about presenting himself as part of a pair, than alone.

### 6.6.3.2. Parents

Despite the fact that millennials tend to have closer relationships with their parents, they mostly preferred to segregate these relationships from those with their peers; parents mostly representing oppositional identity markers.

*I refuse to add Mum – she’s seen most the pictures and stuff but I just don’t think it’s necessary for her to see all the things that go on my FB. ... there are photos and things that you would not want your mum and dad to see... but now you can have different privacy levels, so in a close group of friends we have photos that we share with each other which we would not want anyone else to see –So that’s quite good - you can block whoever you want from the photos. (Fiona)*

*Em, either like of myself or like of my friends... or like my family obviously as well, say me and my Mum or something, something like that (Emma)*

**[Profile photo]**

Fiona was highly extroverted, socially active and adventurous and the observational data in her profile (Appendix 5.8) contained references and images of drinking, swearing and sexual images e.g. cleavage. Whilst she had a good relationship with her mother, she saw her FB social space as separate and proactively adjusted her *privacy settings* to ensure the division. Other teens (e.g. Emma) presented their parental relationships quite prominently, in their *profile photograph* for instance. However further probing revealed some tension around the presence of her mother in her teen social space and the admission that whilst the relationship is important to her, it does not enhance her profile amongst her peers.

*Yeah. I got three likes but...off my Mum, which doesn’t really count [laughing]! It’s so not cool, having Mum on FB. (Emma)*

*No. I like – it’s nice to have her sometimes, like she’ll comment on my status quite a lot, which I don’t mind because I’m not embarrassed with it or anything [laughing]. I just wouldn’t write some things because I wouldn’t want her to see or just...like...want her to know ... You keep your friends and family kind of separate, so obviously, friends wouldn’t mind what you put like that, but your mum like would. (Emma)*

Emma’s comments illustrate the conflicting pressures that many teens experience; trying to project an attractive and desirable identity to peers whilst avoiding offending their parents through exclusion and shielding them from content likely to draw disapproval. Parental relationships in SM are complicated; as teens journey towards independence and

adulthood; impression management to their peer group is their highest priority and mum and dad mostly do not further that mission. Whether they feature depends on the personality and confidence of the teen, their relative power in their peer social group and the balance of power and the strength of bond with their parents. Managing all their various role identities in one arena is problematic for young people (cf Odom et al, 2011). For teens this requires vigilance to ensure that they are cognisant with the latest privacy features and know how to use them.

#### 6.6.3.3. Distant Relatives

SM facilitates regular communication with geographically dispersed families, this was important for culturally diverse millennials. By presenting their extended families they communicated multi-cultural roots, connections in far flung places and demonstrated themselves as part of a greater unit.

*Like the Asian side of my family is, em, I mean, kids as young as 10 have got their FB so they can talk to us all and...it's quite good. But there are about a hundred of them ... I'm Italian and I've got some English and then I've got ... some German and ... and my uncle married a Filipino girl, and then my other uncle married an Australian lady ... (Claire)*

*And then there's some albums that are just set like to my family that want to see them, like of my baby cousins and stuff, so they're just set to like my aunties and uncles. (Elysha)*

Claire indirectly conveys her multi-cultural extended family through *photographs*. Claire is 'role relaxed' and tries to present a unique and non-conformist persona. Her extended family supports this identity and communicates depth behind her opinions and values.

In other cases (like Elysha) teens segregated their extended families from their peer audiences, viewing them as private and not to be shared. So relationships were sometimes presented publicly as part of teens' 'public self' and other times suppressed, retaining those relationships within the 'private self' (cf Goffman, 1959).

## Interests, Activities and Opinions

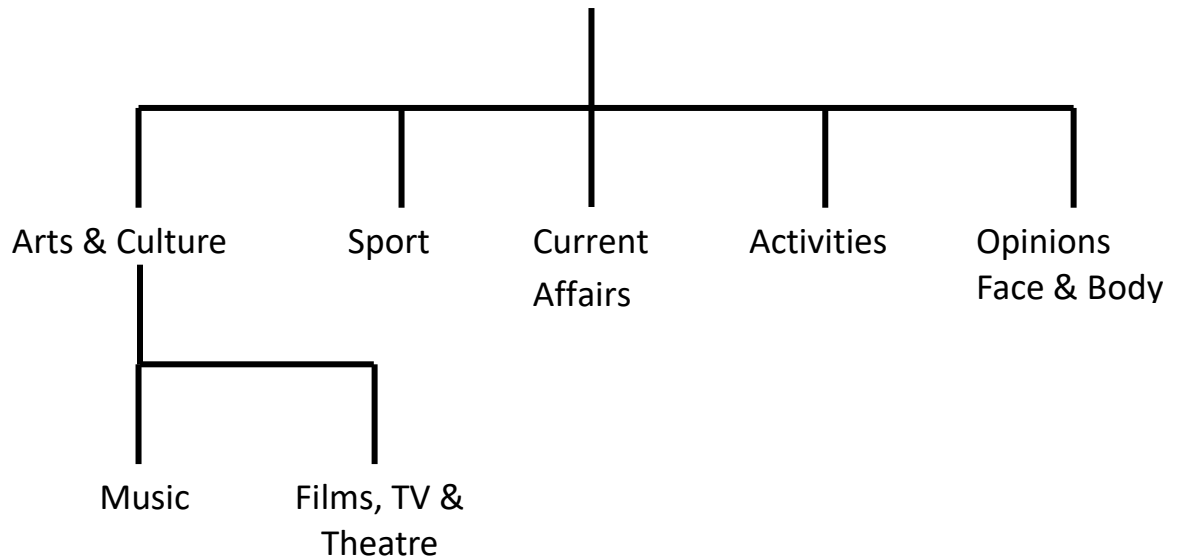


Figure 6.5. Presenting Self through Interests, Activities and Opinions

### 6.7. Interests, Activities and Opinions

FB's information pages were not considered to be an accurate indicator of teen preferences, either because they were not populated or not updated. Unlike previous SM platforms (e.g. Bebo) where social interaction took place in *profile* space, FB interaction is focused in the *newsfeed*, so there is less impetus to update this information. FB prompts content by promoting groups and special interest pages through the *newsfeed* and adds responses to users' *profiles*. However teens did use their interests, activities and opinions as vehicles to present their identity. The analysis is organised under five categories: arts and culture, sports, current affairs, activities and opinions.

#### 6.7.1. Arts and Culture

##### 6.7.1.1. Music

Musical taste was often central in teenage identity presentations, favoured genres, artists, concert attendances and song lyrics were communicated via *statuses*, *check-ins*, *photos*, *videos* (YouTube), *information pages* and *groups*.



*Like I'll say have liked the Foo Fighters, and that will say that on my profile ... but also...I think, to an extent, I want to see myself, or I'd like people to see me as a certain person who, yeah, you know, likes the Foo Fighters, likes rock sort of bands or whatever. (Brad)*

*It's not for other people to see I don't think? If I like something I'll click 'like' on it for example Biffy Clyro the band, I've clicked 'like' on that because it posts stuff about events that are coming up cos I'd quite like to go and see them so that's why I've clicked 'like' on them and it's not so that everyone knows that I'm a fan of their music (Cameron)*

*At the moment its (profile photo) one from a concert I went to in October ... it's of the band playing – I'm not in it ... Well – I don't find myself very photogenic (Gary)*

*People love to say that they knew it first... someone to set the stage and somebody has to say, "I already knew that, ... I've liked that band for six years" even if they only just listened to them... It's very competitive, definitely. (Serena)*

Some teens (e.g. Brad) consciously reflected on the effect of their musical preferences on their projected image, others (e.g. Cameron) resisted notions of intentional self-presentation in SM, insisting on personal utilitarian motives whilst striving to maintain privacy and ownership of their personal information. Brandtzaeg et al (2010) found that some users restrict their sharing activities due to privacy and social surveillance concerns. These struggles reflect the fragility of the fluid identity in SM, particularly lack of control over personal artefacts, information once shared is in the public domain and beyond the user's control (Bauman, 2007).

Some teens personified their idols further by featuring them in their *profile photograph*. Lacking confidence in his physical appearance, Gary communicates his identity through the symbolic meaning of the band. Moreover by substituting the band for an image of himself in the critically self-representational *profile photo*, he merges his identity with that of the band, actively allowing others to construct his identity for him.

Teens often augmented their postings with video clips from YouTube or Spotify. Some competitive behaviour was observed (Serena); teens claiming to being first to hear about a new artist. Where an interest was central to their identity, participants felt pressured to demonstrate their knowledge.

#### **6.7.1.2. Films, TV and Theatre**

Films and TV programmes provide catalysts for group bonding and affirmation. Teens shared their attendance, opinions and favourite films via *statuses, check-ins, pages, groups, quotes and video clips*.

*Maybe I'll like write, "Have you seen The Notebook?" like a proper chick-flick, it's like, "oh, he...he's a lad, he shouldn't be watching that", and I'll be like "that's a great film actually". (Andrew)*

*There's a film out at the minute ... it's like a lot of people have taken a real interest in it, so you've got people constantly posting like the soundtracks to it on everyone's walls. It doesn't matter what taste in music you have ... it's to do with like the film is the reason that they post it (Harriot)*

Shared interests, particularly if topical, initiate social interaction. Andrew deliberately posts a provocative status portraying unexpected self-impressions to gain attention and present a different side of himself through the symbolic meaning of the film.

### 6.7.2. Sport

Teens, particularly boys 'bantered' about sport (e.g. football, rugby and boxing) pre-match, post-match and throughout via *statuses*, *posts* and *comments*. When attending live events they would *check-in*, post *statuses* and *photos* to share their experience, generate further debate and build bonds with others. Pledging their allegiance to their favourite teams they would *like pages* and join *groups* thereby adding to their *profile information pages*.

Teens also *liked pages* and joined *groups* for electronic games, e.g. Playstation, Xbox linking this to their *profiles*.

*On PS3 and Xboxes you can connect your game to your FB account so when you get an achievement - it then appears on your FB account. It then causes people to see that you are playing this game ... so that then sends a message to potentially play the game as your friends are playing it. (Gary)*

*There was a couple of games I played on but for some reason you keep getting requests from other people about games and the game sends you stuff and it just gets annoying and then when you do something on the game, like if you get to a new level or a higher score or something it will automatically post on your wall and write something for you like "hey I just did this" and it's like I didn't put that and I don't really want people to know that I'm playing on some game it's just ... I dunno an invasion of privacy I think? (Cameron)*

Some teens (e.g. Gary) like the automated prompts for interaction with others, because it relieved them of the need to initiate conversation. Others (e.g. Cameron) resented this interference and guarded against his private activity becoming public. The observational data in Cameron's profile (Appendix 5.8) shows him to be extroverted and a frequent poster however he likes to be in control of the information he shares. So, depending on teens' extroversion and need for control (NFC) SM coercion can be seen as positive or negative.

### 6.7.3. Current Affairs

Whilst the millennial cohort have not been very political thus far, this is changing (see section 4.2) and some participants expressed their views, shared news, politics, causes and petitions via their *statuses*, thereby augmenting their identities whilst spreading awareness. Some also *liked pages, groups* and added preferences (e.g. political views, religious beliefs) to their *Information pages*.

*I don't really put as many statuses as I used to. I more sort of just post specifically about something I've done ... or, if I'm sort of commenting on something that's happened in the world or whatever or on the BBC ... (Brad)*

*One thing that I sometimes get offended by is like some of the groups that people set up like ... There was like a huge outrage on FB like half the people didn't even know what the story was all about ... and I got quite angry that day. I was like defending myself saying like people shouldn't be joining this group ... because the amount of like EDL pages that I've seen and even the BNP Party page .... I joined it just to see what they posted on it. And like BNP say that they are anti-racist but everything on there was anti-Muslim and racist everything ... (Ameet).*

Current affairs provided a catalyst for social interaction. As teens feel increasingly self-conscious posting about themselves; third parties, such as news service providers provide a perfect buffer for non-egotistical discourse (Scopelliti, 2016).

Extreme and offensive views were sometimes expressed, where Ameet's 'core' identity (religious beliefs and values) was challenged, he felt compelled to express his own views, to educate and influence his peers and prevent negative perceptions of his religious identity (muslim). This was further substantiated through the observational data in Ameet's profile which featured his political views and several prominent black role models (e.g. Martin Luther King, Barack Obama).

### 6.7.4. Activities

Whilst FB encourages expressive millennials to share every moment of their life, the prevailing practice, was to reserve *status* announcements for events which are at least mildly momentous (cf Arvidsson, 2016).

*I would feel silly changing it [status] for something really stupid! ... So usually I change my status on a Monday – say like “going to the [nightclub] with the girls!” Or if something funny has happened, nothing too major.... But lots of people put song lyrics and “having a cup of tea on the sofa!” Which I would not put, it's a bit stupid and nobody wants to know (Fiona).*

*I like mobile uploads because you're capturing what happened. So, normally, my mobile uploads are something that's happened with friends, so I can guarantee that someone will 'like' it or 'comment' on it ... there's a lot of*

*interaction when someone puts up a photo, because then a conversation will start on the photo or...loads of people will 'like' it. (Saskia)*

*Well, like, if I'm at the bus-stop, then I'll tweet that "my bus is late" [laughing], or if something funny has happened, then you can tag your friends in it. Or ... if you like a song, you'll say what song you like ... everyone tweets.... (Saskia)*

Events that incorporate interesting places, quirky happenings or friends were considered 'status worthy', however day to day activities were considered boring and attracted criticism. Group activities guaranteed engagement particularly if the participants were 'tagged', as Saskia describes. Millennials often aestheticised experiences via photographs to render content more exciting and less 'boast-like' as the photo acts as an intermediary. Again teens preferred communicating their identities by 'showing' rather than 'telling' (Zhao et al, 2008). Interestingly different behaviours prevail in other SM, as Saskia explains, it is acceptable to share everyday mundane moments on Twitter.

### 6.7.5. Opinions

Some teens deliberately presented controversial views and opinions to gain attention; outrageous or crude statuses, photos or multi-media content aimed at sparking a reaction or negative debate.

*"The acting in Waterloo Road is awful tonight" or it's usually quite slating, something that I hope I get a reaction from. I like controversial, but not something I'm going to get in trouble for... I have wrote quite a lot of crude statuses which begged for 'likes' and quite a few people 'liked' it, but it was more of a joke, no seriousness in it, and people would be like ha-ha, that's funny that. Then, my aunty popped up – "This is disgusting!" and I was like oh...! (Andrew)*

**[Controversial]**

*There have been a few people that I've taken offence, or felt defensive towards a certain group of people. I mean, you see some atrocious statuses going up, like racist jokes and things like that, and it's just not appropriate...and I've taken it upon myself to sort of ask them to take it down because it's offensive and people could take it the wrong way and it's not funny and... Humour isn't portrayed very well across the Internet. You can't tell if someone's being sarcastic and you've really got to think - "Is this going to upset someone?" (Claire)*

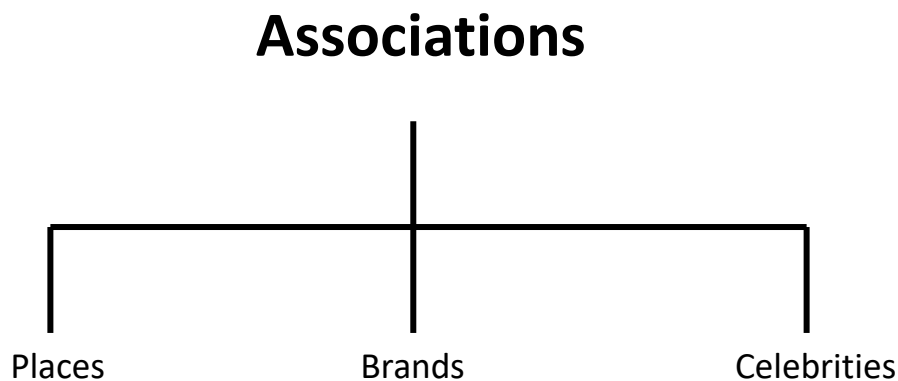
**[Response]**

*I think I was a bit of a bellend last night sorry everyone"*

**[Andrew's self-statement]**

It was clear from the observational data (Appendix 5.8) and his self-statement that Andrew often adopts this approach to grab attention from his friends. In this case however, Andrew damaged his image with another audience, his aunt. He consciously prioritised one of his role identities (peers) over the other. Shocking others and acting rebelliously is a strategy that young people have adopted for generations (Hebdidge, 1979) to experiment with their

emerging identities and enhance their appeal, this is simply being played out in a different social space. However in SM, the audiences are wider and the ‘persistence’ and ‘searchability’ features mean that teens may be more accountable for their actions today or in the future (boyd, 2007).



**Figure 6.6. Presenting Self through Associations**

## 6.8. Associations

Teens associated themselves with places, brands and celebrities through their *statuses*, *check-ins* and *photographs*; embellishing their identity with appropriated ‘brand’ meanings.

### 6.8.1. Places

Places and venues can communicate a range of identity messages and featured heavily in teens’ SM self-presentations, the *check-in* function encouraging this behaviour.

*I never give too much away ... like you can check into places ... Like, you can add “Adam checked into the HMV Institute” It’s just em...it’s just the novelty of it. So you just look on locations and...oh, I’m here .... I think it’s just good. (Adam)*

*I’d check in somewhere I was excited to be – like an airport or the London Eye etc... not common places. (Fiona)*

*Check-ins* broadcast users’ locations without the need for a *status*, which helped introverted teens like Adam who lack confidence in writing statuses to present themselves. Adam checks-in everywhere, unaware that this conveys an ‘uncool’ image, according to Fiona, a ‘high self-monitorer’, who is more aware of FB’s ‘unwritten rules’, so more selective and discriminating, ensuring that she only *checks-in* to places that will impress others (Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011).

*Because we go quite a few places ... I make sure that it's [profile photo] like I'm in an interesting surrounding ... because ...I think it shows, me, what the person is like, more than taking it in the bathroom mirror or something, if you include an interesting background or different people that you meet around in them (Claire).*

*Before I went to Boston I probably had the same profile picture for at least a year. And every time it comes up with the thing so and so and 20 others of your friends have changed their photo I always think what should I change it to? But after Boston I changed my profile picture ... mine's with my Dad and brother at the basketball stadium. (Elliot)*

Claire gives much thought to what the places in her *profile photo* communicate, being seen as 'well-travelled' and multi-cultural is important to her identity. She is 'affinity-seeking', highly focused on her self-presentation and the impressions she conveys to others (Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011). Elliot communicates several dimensions of his identity with his Boston *profile photo*; his travels, his sporting interests and his family.

These excerpts also illustrate marked differences in impression management skills; 'high self-monitorers' and 'affinity-seekers' like Fiona and Claire were better able to assess social situations and had a wider range of social scripts to call upon than 'low self-monitorers' like Adam and Elliot. FB's 'unwritten rules' were largely obscured to Elliot, who noticed that others frequently change their profile photos, but was unsure how best to 'present' himself. This was further evidenced in the observational data (Appendix 5.8); Fiona had over 3000 photos of herself on her profile and posted 2-3 statuses per day about going to London or nightclubs, receiving an average of 15 *likes* and, whereas Elliot had very few photos of himself and posted 1-2 statuses per day about homework or feeling sad for which he received 0-1 *likes*.

### 6.8.2. Brands

Increasingly millennials appropriate brands and associate their symbolic meanings with their digital identities.

*You can read articles and it will come up on your profile, like so-and-so has read this article from the Guardian, and I think you can tell, the sort of things people read, makes a bit of a difference. (Elysha)*

*You have loads of different pages for different clothing, and people like tend to like them ...then they'll see a post maybe for like...say TopShop ... and then they'll post it on someone else's wall that they think might have the same tastes in that ... you've got people doing it for different drinks, different sweets, different food types as well ... what started off as being like just music and clothing has gone a lot wider, like even to technology. (Harriot)*

Teens conveyed their political opinions and intellect by associating themselves with The Guardian for instance. In addition to the brand's symbolic meaning, the specific interests are communicated through the content of the articles shared. Harriot widens this to other categories and explains how these associations can support group identity relationship development and provide financial gain as teens act as brand ambassadors.

### 6.8.3. Celebrities

Similarly, teens associated themselves with celebrities to acquire transfer of symbolic meaning to their own identities (McCracken, 1986).

*I like Sean Bean as an actor, and he's seen as a bit of a hard man, and people think he's pretty cool, so I've liked him, but another, I don't know...a less cool actor, who I might secretly like but, you know... I might think they're pretty...actually quite a good actor, but I wouldn't want to broadcast that to other people, so I wouldn't like his page, for example. (Brad)*

Brad's deliberation illustrates the challenge facing teens in such appropriation, they need to consider the celebrity's public image and thereby the likely reflection on their own identity from the association.

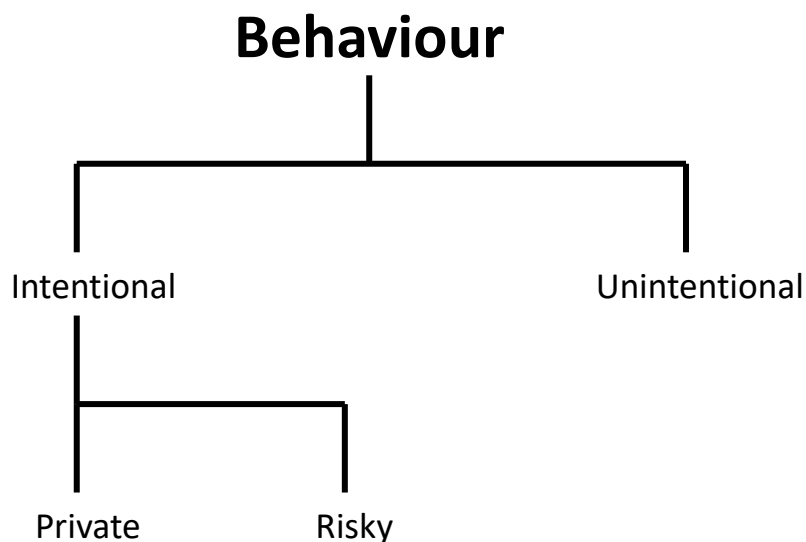
*So my cover picture would be like me and my friends and for my profile picture, me and a celebrity, cos they are like more my real friends in there as well. (Nellie)*

*... and recently when Justin Bieber was on TV and loads of the boys were like "oh my god he's so gay, he's a girl" and I was just like that's such a ridiculous thing to say, because it's not true. So I 'unfriended' quite a lot of them because it annoyed me. The other day, my friend posted something really inappropriate about Justin Bieber and I'm sure he did it to annoy me cos he knows I get wound up like that, so I 'unfriended' him for the day but we are friends now, just to make a point... And I said I reported him to FB but I haven't and I wound him up a bit so I let him know. (Nellie)*

Nellie has strong and enduring commitments to celebrities; meeting and being photographed with them wherever possible. She associates herself with them prominently through her *profile photographs*, considering the celebrities to be her 'real friends'; thus subsuming them into her 'extended self'. When peers criticise her favourite celebrities she vehemently defends them and 'unfriends' the friend; her relationship with the celebrity is more important to her than her relationship or portrayed image with her peers.

In conclusion, associations to objects, brands, places and celebrities are an important part of teens' digital self-presentation. Many deliberate over their choices ensuring that the resultant transfer of meaning to their identities is positive, complementary to their desired projected image and momentous in some way (cf, Arvidsson, 2016). Teens have differing

levels of involvement and commitment to their associations, some (e.g. *check-ins*) are random, transient and relatively unimportant; others (like Nellie's celebrities) represent deeper, more enduring commitment to the associated object. Associations are used to append symbolic meaning to individual identities and to support relationship building and group identity development.



**Figure 6.7. Presenting Self through Behaviour**

## 6.9. Behaviour

Whilst teens actively engaged in impression management behaviour, they also unwittingly gave out identity signals through their unintentional behaviours. Goffman (1959) divided people's behaviours into: intentional ('given') behaviour (e.g. verbal communication) and unintentional ('given out') behaviour (e.g. body language); this division also applies in the digital environment.

### 6.9.1. Intentional ('given') Behaviours

Participants frequently posted boasting or provocative *statuses, photographs, wall to wall postings* and *comments* to garner attention from others and prompt responses (*likes* or *comments*). Moreover some teens planned the timing of their statuses to maximise impact and if responses were not forthcoming, deleted the status.

*There's a so-called prime-time of putting your status on, where the most people are online, and therefore ... you're most likely to get the greatest number of likes or comments or whatever. A term's come up called a 'like whore' ... which .... just sort of means that you're putting statuses up not because of any genuine reason, more just for the attention ... there is stigma attached to people who delete their statuses ... because that shows that*



*you only did it to get the 'likes' or 'comments' and the attention and to attract people to your sort of...identity. (Brad)*

*You should see my profile photos; they are all edited [laughs]. I make them lighter, I just think it looks better ... well I keep all my photos but after a while if I have loads of them, I would probably delete some, only because I don't want people to get bored when they go on my FB because there's too much to look through. Recently my 'view photos of me' was on like 550 - so I deleted all the ugly ones! [laughs] (Alice)*

Some teens manipulated impressions by editing or deleting negative or nil responses to imply popularity. However it is evident from Brad's comments that peers often see through this, and teens who do this may receive a backlash and be nicknamed a 'like whore' or 'king begs'.

Alice is strategic in her impression management, by editing and actively managing her *photos* she maximises the impact of her physical attractiveness and generates more interest among peers. In addition, her profile observational data included *photos* of her wearing revealing clothing and posing provocatively. So Alice conveys identity messages by her deliberate 'given' behaviour.

*I check spellings and use commas, apostrophes etc. I've just always done that. I hate when people abbreviate stuff to the point that you can't even read it ... I don't do it to be-little other people or make them feel stupid – and if I have corrected someone it's only as a joke! (Simon)*

Millennials are highly educated and have evolved the attitude that it is cool to be smart (Lindstrom, 2004). By correcting others' grammar, spelling and punctuation, Simon demonstrates his language skills, his confidence to point out others' mistakes and his humour in turning it into a joke. Although this may not be how his actions are being received; teens who behave like this were referred to as 'Grammar Nazis.'

*But with people I am friends with on FB that I don't speak to that often, let's say that they have an argument or, if someone says something really out of order to somebody else ... I will probably say "Okay, just leave it", if nobody has said anything else. I'll probably just ... you know. "Just calm down or take this off FB, nobody really wants to see it". I am sort of the police in FB. (Serena)*

Teens communicate their responses to conflict; some (like Serena) take it upon themselves to intervene to calm or alleviate situations, whilst others stand back, actively avoiding such encounters. Their behaviour communicates their values, confidence and courage.

### 6.9.1.1. Private Behaviours

Teens admitted to various ‘behind the scenes’ behaviour aimed at maintaining their RL social group boundaries in SM. These behaviours either limited their visibility to others or others’ visibility to them.

*I generally don't have my chat on ... I turn it on to chat to specific people and sometimes I forget and people pop up and I'm like "oh hey" but generally I just check it for a minute and if it starts to get into conversation then I am there for ages so quite often I have it turned off... There's one thing that I do like is that you can be offline to certain people, so certain people you don't want to talk to you can just make it look like you are offline. (Nellie)*

*Yes – I've done that [delete/unfriend people]. But I've also hidden people so they don't come up on your news feed (Simon).*

*Then you just do a big inbox and add all your friends and they just talk. (Rachel)*

Teens resented FB indicating their online status and circumvented this by appearing ‘offline’ to avoid unwanted conversations. In general, teens preferred asynchronous conversations as there was less pressure to respond. Nellie took this one step further, proactively adjusting her settings, dividing ‘friends’ into those she does and those she never wants to chat to.

In addition to restricting their synchronous availability, teens created unseen boundaries from their unwanted peers by *hiding* their *posts* from their *newsfeed*. This was less confrontational than ‘unfriending’ them; ‘*hiding*’ them or ‘*unsubscribing*’ from their posts avoided undesirable social interaction without causing offence.

Whilst FB is an inherently public social interaction space, much communication goes on behind the scenes. Teens ‘Inbox’ each other to discuss private matters and set up *group messages* to converse away from the public eye. By performing these hidden practices, teens manage to recreate the boundaries in their RL social groups, whilst simultaneously engaging in a wider online social network.

### 6.9.1.2. Risky Behaviours

Teens are often experimental and rebellious, trying out adult activities such as drinking alcohol, sex, drugs, piercings, tattoos and extreme views. Some teens use risky behaviours as a vehicle to present themselves through *statuses*, *photographs*, *posts* and *comments*.

*... So, I think everyone does that really ... I don't know, might say, on a Sunday, oh, you know, completely hungover ... trying to make out, you know, I had a massive Saturday party or whatever, so they try and make out that, you know, every weekend, they're out ...on the lash, even if they don't seem like that sort of person at sixth*

*form ... or they try and make it look like they're pretty cool, you know, with a beer or whatever, even if they're not that much of a drinker, so...because that's seen as a cool thing. (Brad)*

*Mmm it's very light and I just saw a morning jogger as I walk home. Heavy night. (Simon)*

**[Status]**

*I think like some girls just go too far ... because they obviously probably want attention off boys as well, so they sort of do these like poses and they're probably like wearing minimal clothing and just look like...so they get that attention, they get 'likes'. It's just like, I don't know, just for attention really. (Emma)*

*She's so like on FB she's got pictures of her like in bed with her boyfriend and it's like - you're clearly naked! You've taken this photo and put it on FB? (Kezia)*

Despite millennials clean living reputation, like previous youth generations, getting drunk and being hungover are considered 'cool' things to do. Brad describes boasting and exaggerating drinking behaviour to demonstrate 'maturity' and impress peers. Simon's status drawn from the observational data (see Appendix 5.8) illustrates this, indirectly communicating his wild night out. There were some examples of smoking and drug taking, however this was less prevalent.

Sexuality, nakedness, provocative poses and statements were commonly shared, as teens experimented with their sexuality. Girls often tried to appear desirable and attractive; and these performances were often role played. However as Kezia recounts, some teens publicly declared their sexual activity, through *photos*, conveying that they had passed a key 'growing up' milestone.

Whilst some teens used risky behaviours to make themselves look 'cool' and draw attention, given the wider audiences and 'persistence' of SM it was surprising that teens openly exposed themselves in this way online (boyd, 2007). Many teens thought that there would be little or no consequences to their actions, as SM was poorly regulated. They believed they were sharing their information amongst peers, rather than adults who would likely reprimand them. Interestingly as the medium has matured and their experiences have increased, they are realising that the consequences of such behaviour may in fact have more far reaching implications than similar behaviour in RL.

*I would prefer to keep my FB like quite subtle and I don't tend to get involved in like stuff like that because, em, like I'm aware that employers ... look at FB before they employ you, and I don't want to be perceived as like...an outrageous teenager! (Katherine)*

Consequently teens such as Katherine increasingly suppressed any risky behaviours for fear of reprisals and concern about how it might adversely affect their future career prospects.

Millennials use SM as an experimentation ground, trialling new activities and deliberately exhibiting risky behaviours to test other people's reactions. The medium feels safe; private details are revealed at a distance and can be deleted or withdrawn afterwards. Teens felt empowered to role-play behaviours in SM before enacting them in RL. However as the medium evolves they are starting to recognise the 'persistence' of online personal data and the potential dangers from the 'searchability' and 'replicability' features of SM (boyd, 2007).

### 6.9.2. Unintentional ('given out') Behaviours

Despite efforts to manage their behaviour, 'given out' behaviours communicated messages that were often stronger. For instance level of usage, the frequency of posts, how often they appeared to be online and when. This information conveyed their level of involvement (addiction) with SM. Conversely, lack of usage or visibility also conveyed meaning about individuals.

*Em, you'd look at like what they post, and I think a big thing is how often they post, because some people will write every few minutes and some people will hardly ever write anything and what their friends might say on their wall or comments and stuff on photos. I guess you'd look at that and that would tell you. (Elysha)*

Millennials are team players and other people's interactions ('contamination') provided cues to an individual's identity, popularity and status (Belk, 1988, 2013). For instance the number of *likes* received, how many people post *comments* on their *wall*, *photos* they were *tagged* in. Identity messages in SM are not all within the individual's control; no matter how carefully they try to manage their self-presentations, friends' *comments* and actions shape impressions and thereby others' perceptions of them.

*Even stuff like grammar – this is going to sound really petty, but, does he just write really chavvy statuses? (Brad)*

*Yeah cos like when I was on about my sister's friends you can tell that they are younger people from the way that they like... it's the language that they use and the way that they write, so instead of writing "text" for a text like "I text you" it would be "I txt u". It's like really? (Kezia)*

As can be seen from Brad, Kezia and Simon's earlier comments, communication style conveys a range of messages; whether they used full sentences or text speak, if their grammar and spelling was correct, if they were polite or if they used swear words online. Inadvertently through their use of language, correctness of grammar, spelling, punctuation, use of slang terms and *emojis*; teens conveyed messages about who they are, what is important to them, their age and maturity.

*Well, you look at their conversations, and their photos, if they seem quite shallow, they have, "Oh, bad picture, no make-up on," it's like, well, why are you putting it onto FB then? You're doing it for the attention ... you're doing it so people say, "Oh, you look fine with no make-up on!" and then, right away, I can see like that you care about your appearance, a bit too much. (Andrew)*

*Music is a massive influence on FB as well, and you have Spotify, where you can listen to music and it's online so it links to your FB, and you can see what people are listening to. I don't like that. I turn my Spotify offline so people can't see what I'm listening to. (Saskia)*

A girl's seemingly self-deprecating *post* displays behaviour which is perceived as attention seeking and shallow to Andrew. As teen SM interactions are primarily confined to local networks, frequent *status* types (e.g. boasting, emotional, attention-seeking) communicate strong messages to audiences which form and shape impressions of them.

Applications like Spotify communicate users' consumption behaviours without their intervention. Some teens (like Saskia) resent this and take proactive measures to avoid inadvertent identity messages being broadcast. These situations illustrate the need for teens to be constantly vigilant to manage and protect unintentional impressions of themselves in SM.

## **6.10. Unwritten Rules**

In keeping with millennials inclination to craft their own practices and meanings, participants revealed various 'rules of engagement' or communal common ground (Walther and Parks, 2002). These 'unwritten rules' applied to:

- how FB tools should be used (e.g. *profile photographs, statuses and check-ins*)
- how to behave with different audiences
- consumption behaviours (e.g. number of friends, disclosure of personal information, frequency of updates, different practices for different SM platforms)

Moreover it was also evident that this complex set of rules were dynamic, so teens needed to keep abreast of the constantly changing landscape and operate accordingly. Appendix 6.2 details the full range of unwritten rules, this section provides an overview.

### **6.10.1. Profile Photographs**

*Profile photographs* were perceived as the most important representation of self; teens must present a positive image whilst guarding against being perceived as narcissistic. Unwritten rules to navigate this are to post humorous or group photos and incorporate an interesting background location to portray a unique identity.

### 6.10.2. Statuses

FB culture places a strong emphasis on *statuses* and teens feel pressure to ensure that statuses are 'worthy of Facebook', this is affirmed through responses (*likes* and *comments*). There was an unwritten rule therefore that if you received no response within a certain period of time (5–30 minutes) then it was best to delete the *status* to avoid embarrassment. However others considered it more embarrassing to be seen to delete *statuses*, this was a good example of the evolving nature of unwritten rules. To guard against a lack of response, some teens pro-actively plan their *statuses* for times when their friends were online or made tactical requests to ensure *likes*.

### 6.10.3. Photographs

It was common practice to edit and enhance *photographs* and to impression manage their display to maximise perceived attractiveness. The practice of '*untagging*' unflattering photographs shared by others was widespread and rendered them unsearchable (this is covered in more depth in section 6.14.2).

### 6.10.4. Number of Friends/Friend Requests

Maintaining an optimum number of friends (400-500) was important. Unwritten rules decreed that too many friends means that they are not real friends and you live your life in FB; too few and you must be really unpopular. The established process related to accepting or rejecting friend requests involved: checking mutual friends; scanning their photos and checking that you are acquainted with them in some way. However there were gender variations, requests from girls were more likely to be accepted than requests from boys. This perhaps reflects the fact that girls are generally perceived as more trustworthy than boys (cf Kramer et al, 2017) and that romantic attraction was a key driver for boys to initiate friend requests (cf Wang et al, 2010).

### 6.10.5. Likes/Comments

There were rules around *liking* or *commenting* on other people's content depending on their friendship level. It was inappropriate to *like* a friend of a friend's status or photographs, *likes* should be limited to close friends. In addition parents' comments were really embarrassing so they were generally discouraged from interacting publicly with their offspring and their friends.

## 6.11. Emergent Themes

### 6.11.1. Unwritten Rules

Millennials have established and continue to evolve a complex web of rules for social media consumption. It takes time to gain a comprehensive understanding of these consumption behaviours and there is an initiation period during which teens acclimatise and get socialised by their peers. This reflects Saren's (2007) findings on the role of consumption in the social rituals of groups, the unwritten rules guide teen rituals and practices in FB and enable teens to bond with their respective groups and determine social hierarchies within and between groups. 'Unwritten rules' were therefore incorporated into the model alongside strategies, as it was critical that teens understood the latest rules to be able to present themselves effectively.

### 6.11.2. Acceleration

In conducting the analysis it was evident that the five external influencing factors did not encapsulate all the data. Firstly consumption behaviours in social media were dynamically evolving; even during the data collection period, technological advances introduced new features and updates which altered user behaviours (e.g. new settings). Moreover teens themselves continually changed their rules of engagement (e.g. posting song lyric statuses was acceptable but then it became 'uncool'). So there was an underlying lack of stability and certainty as to how best to present ones-self. This aligns well to Rosa's (2013) theory of social acceleration. Rosa observed acceleration across several fields; technology, social change and in the pace of everyday life. This phenomenon means that people are less able to draw on their past experiences to guide their future actions so the world feels fluid and worrying. Rapidly changing consumption practices in SM were evident from the data thus acceleration was identified as an additional external influence.

### 6.11.3. Social Media Incentive Structures

Whilst this study focused predominantly on FB, throughout the data collection teens periodically referred to adopting different practices in other SM platforms. For instance it was acceptable in Twitter to share mundane everyday incidences, teens did not expect a response unlike in FB, and there was no critical judgement of such actions.

*I think, with Twitter – because, with Facebook, there's a lot of pressure to... Because, if you post a status and no one likes it, it's a bit like, oh, it shows that it doesn't really seem like you have any friends, but then, on Twitter, you can just tweet whatever you want and people can respond if they want to or not, just leave it, and there's no pressure to write something witty or funny. (Saskia)*

Social interaction mechanisms are structured differently across SM platforms and self-presentation tools and features vary also; thereby generating different behaviours. For instance in Bebo, social interaction was focused on teens' personal profiles and there was a plentiful supply of design tools to aestheticise digital identities (Doster, 2013). Whereas the social interaction in FB is focused in the newsfeed and there are limited stylistic tools. So teens project their identity by proclamation through their *statuses*, *check-ins* etc... and through their interactions with others in the *newsfeed* rather than aestheticising their profiles, which are rarely consulted. Moreover the communal nature of this interaction and FB's implores of 'What's on your mind?'; 'What are you doing?' 'How are you feeling?' 'Where are you?' encourages more sharing and more identity co-constructions, thereby less control over individual digital personas.

So it was evident that the structure and incentive systems inherent in SM platforms significantly influence behaviours and practices in those environs, thus an additional external influence emerged which the researcher termed social media incentive structures.

#### **6.11.4. Millennialness**

As discussed in Chapter 4, millennial teens are a product of their up-bringing and environment and as such exhibit a range of cohort specific characteristics. They have been on average more highly educated than previous youth generations and this combined with high parental expectations has led them to be achievement oriented (Howe and Strauss, 2001). In addition the developments in educational methods have encouraged them to be more creative, generating ideas and content of their own and to work with others collaborating on group projects (Howe and Strauss, 2001). Having grown up with digital technology, they are more intuitive with it and have readily integrated it into every part of their lives (Prensky, 2001). They have been encouraged to express themselves and their feelings from a young age and advancements like SM have furthered the tendency to share and project themselves to audiences, some terming them the 'look at me generation' (Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010). Finally they are reflexive, they have been encouraged to continually review, reflect and improve themselves and this has made them very self-aware and considered about their self-evaluation, self-development and impression management. These millennial characteristics have therefore been summarised in the model (Figure 6.8) as creative, technological savvy, achievement oriented, emotionally expressive, team players and reflexive.



## 6.12. Revised Conceptual Model: Millennial Teen Self-Presentation in Social Media

The key theories discussed above (Bauman, 2007; Belk, 1988, 2013; Goffman, 1959, 1961; Mittal, 2006; Schau and Gilly, 2003) were therefore adapted and combined with the emergent themes from the data analysis (Rosa, 2013) to form a holistic conceptual model of teen self-presentation in Social Media (see Figure 6.8).

**Self-presentation strategies** were categorised under six themes:

- embodied self (face, body, personality, feelings, skills and achievements)
- relationships (friends, partners, family)
- interests, activities and opinions (arts and culture, sport, current affairs, activities, opinions)
- associations (places, brands, celebrities)
- behaviour (intentional, unintentional)
- unwritten rules (commonly understood ways to behave in SM).

**Digital symbolic resources** supporting the implementation of these strategies:

- user-generated content
- digital photography
- social media features
- applications
- other multi-media generated resources
- other users' content.

In SM teens enacted different strategies to present themselves to their key **audiences** and adapted their strategies through an iterative process on the basis of the feedback received from these audiences:

- school friends
- other peer groups
- family
- work colleagues

Moreover, teen self-presentation in SM does not exist in a vacuum; external influences relating to the social and cultural environment, incentive structures within SM platforms

and themes of liquid consumption dynamically affect and distort teen self-presentations, transferred meanings and received impressions.

The **external influences** were:

- wider networks
- wider audiences
- sharing culture
- co-construction of self
- distributed memories
- **acceleration (new)**
- **SM incentive structures (new)**

Finally the characteristics and behaviours specific to the millennial generation (see Chapter 4 for more detail) influence teen self-presentation in SM. The model conceptualises their strategies as being filtered through a lens of 'millennialness':

- Creative
- Technological savvy
- Achievement oriented
- Emotionally expressive
- Team players
- Reflexive.

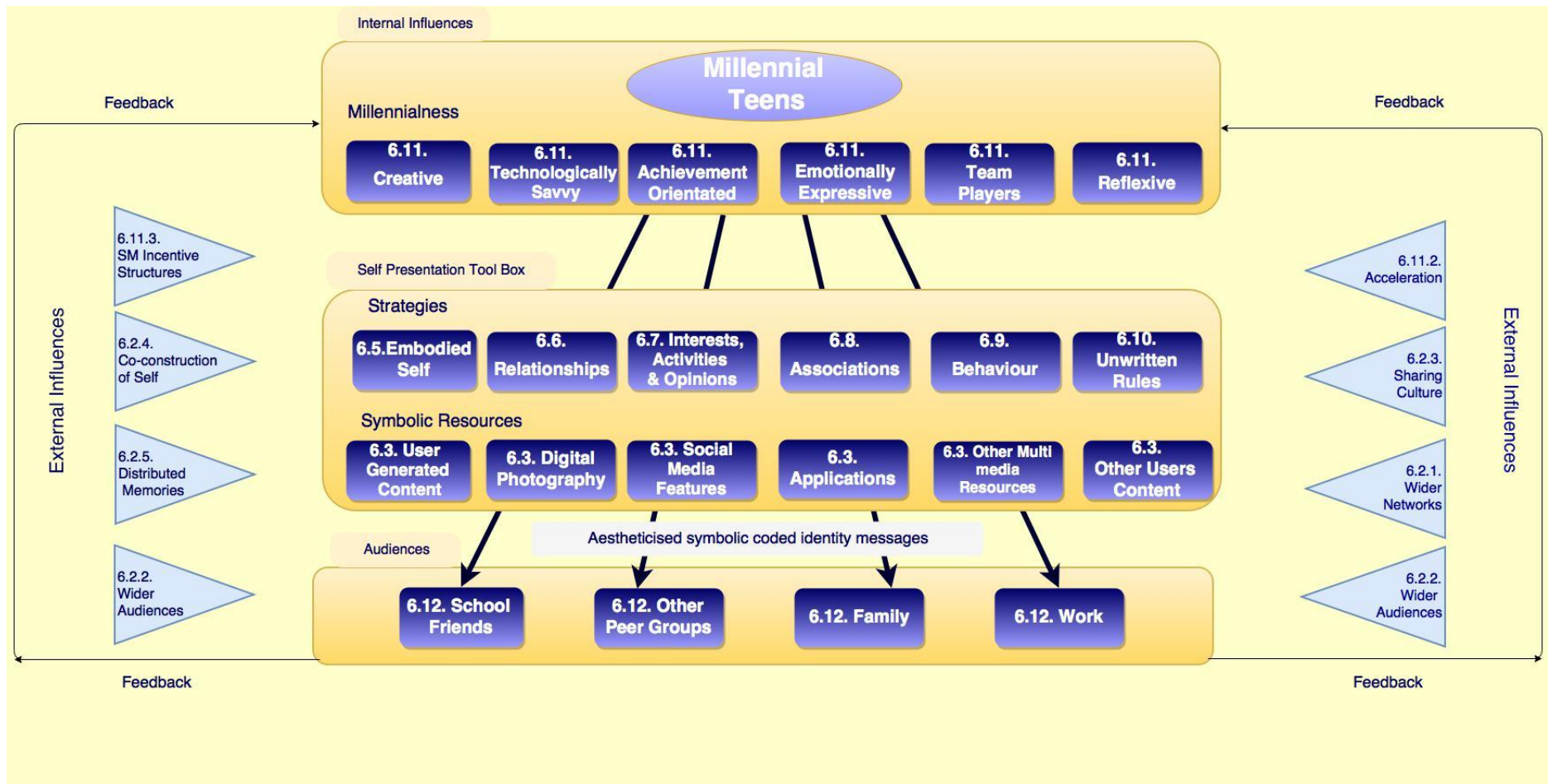


Figure 6.8. Millennial Teen Self-Presentation in Social Media

## 6.13. Challenges to Maintaining Digital Identities

Having devoted time and effort to construct, develop and enhance their digital identities, teens are highly motivated to protect and maintain them from damage or attack. External influences (wider networks, wider audiences, sharing culture, co-construction of self, distributed memories, acceleration and SM incentive structures) on self-presentation in SM render the task of impression management particularly challenging. The four emergent themes related to this struggle were explored below together with the various strategies that teens have developed to combat these challenges (see Figure 6.9).

- Lack of control
- Identity bleed
- Enemies within
- Enemies without

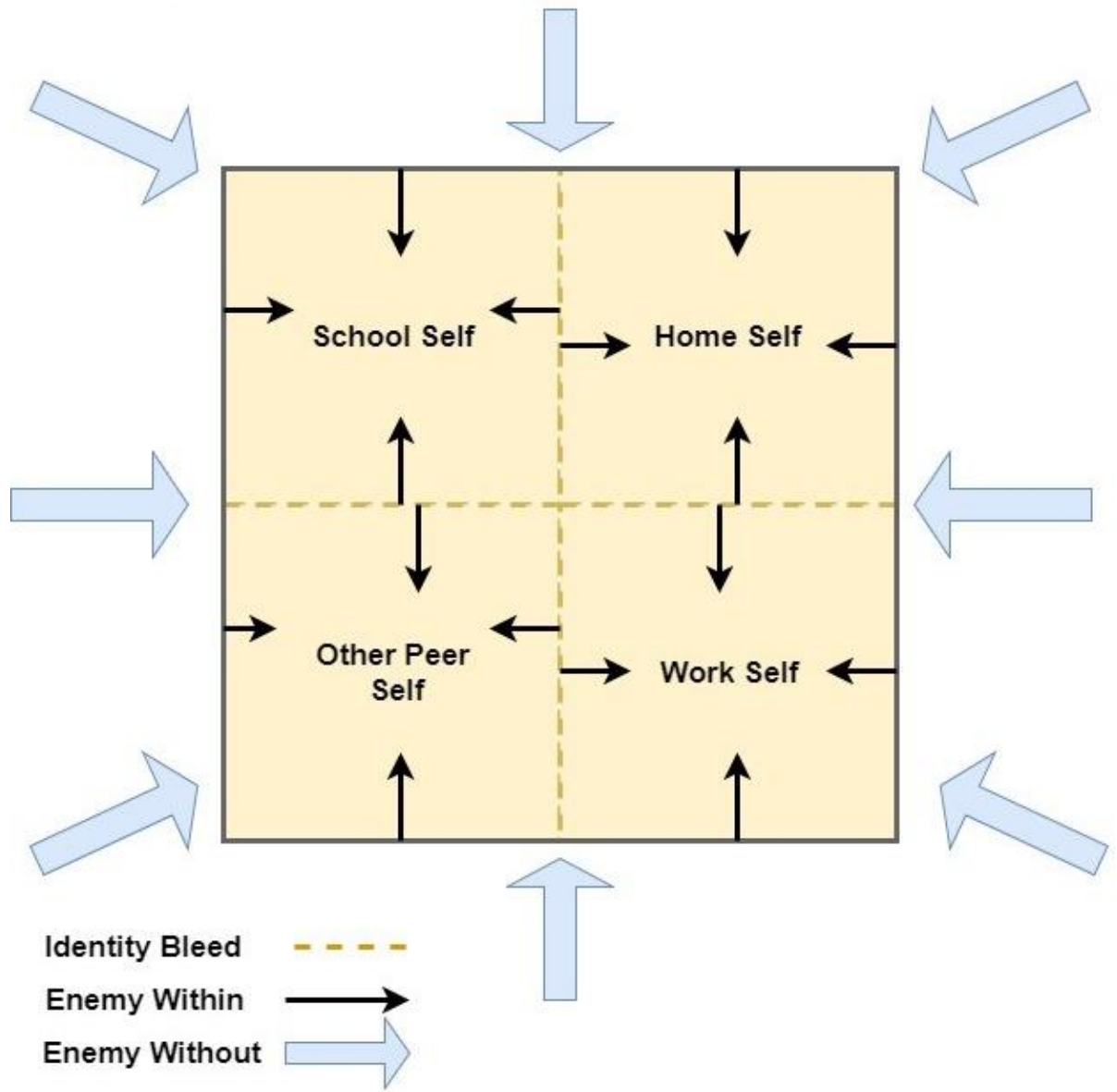
### 6.13.1. Lack of Control

The challenge of identity co-construction and thereby lack of control means that no matter how careful teens are with their self-presentations; a friend, family member or even complete stranger can post a photograph or comment which seriously damages their projected identity. Teens experienced frustrations with the lack of control over their digital identities and were constantly subject to 'contamination' from friends and from the SM platforms themselves. In addition changes and updates to FB features and settings often left users open to privacy invasions where they had previously protected themselves.

### 6.13.2. Identity Bleed

Wider networks in SM have broken down the traditional barriers between time, space and social groups. This fluidity is problematic for identity conscious teenagers as their self-presentations are exposed to their various audiences in a single social space. Moreover several of their identities are present concurrently; home, school, work and past identities. Impression management is therefore complicated, not only do they need to strategically craft their current projected identity to their priority audience (peers), they also need to protect their various identities from 'identity bleed' (overlap) with their other identities. Compartmentalising identities in digital space is more difficult than in the pre-digital era where natural boundaries existed (c.p. Hazaz-Berger and Yair, 2011).

Figure 6.9. Challenges to Maintaining Digital Identities



Teens' prime concern was 'identity bleed' between their teen and family identities. They worried about their parents discovering that they had indulged in risky behaviours and were equally concerned about their parents compromising their 'teen identity' by engaging in social interactions in the presence of their peers in their SM space. Similar issues arose with overlaps between different peer social groups where teens had established contrasting identities.

### **6.13.3. Enemy Within**

Even within the same social groups, teens experienced attacks on their digital identities through co-construction and 'contamination'. Attacks came from friends and 'enemies' alike; sometimes they were intended to be funny, such as fraping or embarrassing incidents; other times they were more malicious, bullying or vengeful, which could be quite distressing. The 'enemy within' represented the day to day impression management struggle for most teens.

### **6.13.4. Enemy Without**

In addition to their own networks, teens' identities (and safety) were also subject to attacks from external parties (e.g. Facebook, stalkers, paedophiles and hackers). Their key concerns were threats to their privacy, safety and security. However whilst they were aware of the potential risks, they were unsure what made them vulnerable to these attacks. Previous research found that users worried about their privacy if they had too many 'friends' (Brandtzaeg et al, 2010). Teen participants in this study expressed concerns about the security of their personal information; address, contact details and anything that could identify them such as photos. However the true extent of these external dangers and ways to counter them were often obscured to them, which resulted in many putting them to the back of their mind.

## 6.14. Strategies for Maintaining and Defending Digital Identities

As a response to these attacks on their digital identities, teens developed a range of strategies to pre-empt and fend off threats and these behaviours underpinned much of teen activity in SM. Four strategies were identified (see Figure 6.10):

- Manage audiences
- Manage content
- Call for help
- Walk away

This supports Madden et al's (2013) findings that that teens take steps to restrict and maintain their profiles, manage their networks and conceal certain information.

<p><b>6.14.1. Managing Audiences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Friend Management</li><li>• Customised Sub Groups</li><li>• Multiple FB Profiles</li></ul>	<p><b>6.14.2. Manage Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limit Disclosures</li><li>• Damage Limitation</li><li>• Customised Settings</li></ul>
<p><b>6.14.3. Call for Help</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Friends</li><li>• Authorities<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Facebook</li><li>◦ School</li><li>◦ Parents</li></ul></li></ul>	<p><b>6.14.4. Walk Away</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Disable Account</li><li>• Change SM Platform</li></ul>

Figure 6.10. Strategies for Maintaining and Defending Digital Identities

### 6.14.1 Managing Audiences: Resurrecting the Walls

The first strategy was to try to separate audiences to avoid 'identity bleed' by:

- Friend Management
- Customised sub groups
- Multiple SM profiles.

#### 6.14.1.1. Friend Management

Many teens excluded parents and managers from their social network by refusing their friendship requests. They could then focus on developing and maintaining one of their role identities. However depending on the nature of these relationships this was not always an option, some teens felt obliged to accept such requests so other strategies were required.

In the event of harmful disclosure, teens sometimes took the extreme measure of 'unfriending' others. 'Unfriending' was considered quite drastic and potentially offensive, so teens reserved this strategy for times when other routes had failed. Bevan et al (2012) discovered that people experience negative emotions when 'unfriended'. Stephen's comments illustrate the seriousness of this action from a teen perspective.

*When you've delete someone off FB, that's when they know they've pissed you off, because they can't look into your life then, because that's what FB is. (Stephen)*

Finally the most significant way to segregate audiences was to *block* people, resulting in them being unable to see any of the subject's posts, *tag* them, *message* them, invite them to *events*, start a conversation or add them as a friend. In this study this strategy was mostly confined to protecting teens from unwanted approaches from strangers.

#### 6.14.1.2. Customised Sub Groups

Teens often customised their settings to reconstruct their RL close social groups in SM. *Closed message groups* and customised *photo album* settings were utilised to contain social interactions to smaller groups of friends, thus providing teens with more control over their impression management. This supports Wang's (2015) argument that changing privacy settings was more likely than 'unfriending' in FB. Fiona explains how her friendship group keep some of their interactions amongst their close friends, thus retaining more control.

*If you're friends with a person you can see their photos but you can have different privacy levels, so in a close group of friends we have photos that we share with each other, which we would not want anyone else to see – so other people can't see those photos even though they're friends with us. So that's quite good. (Fiona).*



### 6.14.1.3. Multiple SM profiles

There is evidence that some teens set up additional SM profiles to segregate their social interactions with different audiences. boyd (2007) referred to these as ‘mirror’ profiles. No instances of this behaviour were revealed to the researcher in this study however it is a strategy available to teens.

### 6.14.2. Manage Content

Teens were not always able to segregate their audiences, furthermore their digital identities were at risk of contamination from within their social groups too (‘enemy within’), so they had also developed strategies to manage their broadcast content. Increasingly teens claimed to post less about themselves online; learning from their experiences they were careful, selective and reflexive. Three strategies were revealed:

- Limit disclosures
- Damage limitation
- Customised settings.

#### 6.14.2.1. Limit Disclosures

*If I just had my friends on FB I'd be a completely different person. I'd change the way that people that see me at [school] as well - but because I have got family on FB I've always got to be careful of what I say, like I never talk about anything sexual in my statuses and I don't swear and stuff, my family don't like that (Ameet).*

*I don't really put private stuff on there, so I wouldn't put anything that would make me look stupid or that's personal because it's just like...you just don't ... (Emma).*

Increasingly teens presented constrained or hybrid identities in an attempt to please all of their audiences simultaneously. Ameet felt that he could not express his real (teen) self on FB because he had to conform to his family's expectations. Emma restricted her disclosures to avoid looking stupid, preferring to post little or nothing rather than risk criticism or mockery. These findings contradict earlier studies claiming that FB users disclose more because of their need for popularity (e.g. Christofides et al, 2009). As consumption has evolved it seems that reflexive millennials have become more inhibited.

#### 6.14.2.2. Damage Limitation

In the event that damaging content was uploaded, teens required recovery strategies. Where it was within their control, they edited or deleted content they did not like or was unflattering to preserve their image (see Andrew below). *Untagging* or ‘taking down’ photos was such a prevalent strategy to limit damage, that it is discussed in Box 6.1.

*If someone wrote an insult on my wall, I will just remove it, because then if someone goes, like wants to have a browse on my wall, and they see this, then they'll be look, ooh, what's happened there – "why is he a dickhead", or something like that. So I'm just going to remove it – I don't want negative stuff on my wall (Andrew)*

#### **6.14.2.3. Customised Settings**

Teens frequently manipulated their privacy and security settings to limit the data available to different audiences. This strategy aimed to protect their safety and privacy (enemy without) as well as their differing identity presentations. Gary describes adjusting his settings to allow him to review any content about him before it is shared, thus preventing embarrassing *tagged photographs* being posted to his *timeline* by others.

*I managed to change my privacy settings so I can check everything before it appears. So if there's a picture of me at a party – I can have it not being shown – so they (parents) will never find out – which is quite convenient (Gary)*

### Box 6.1: 'Untagging' vs 'Taking Down'

In the event of an unflattering or embarrassing photograph being uploaded, teens have the choice of 'untagging' (removing the name *tag* that links it to their timeline, thus restricting 'searchability' and limiting audiences exposed to the photo) or requesting that the photo be 'taken down' (asking the originator to delete it). The first option is within their control, users can remove their own name tags regardless of who posted the photo; whereas they are at the whim of the originator for the latter. The question of whether to *untag* or 'take-down' is a frequent dichotomy for teens. Generally speaking if the photo is not too bad they *untag* to limit circulation, but if it is hugely embarrassing or damaging, to their identities they request that it is 'taken down'.

There are social consequences to requesting that a photo be 'taken down'; there may be other people in the photo, some people may have already seen it or commented on it, the request may offend the originator or it may have been uploaded deliberately to agitate the victim. So teens tend to reserve these requests for dire emergencies. 'Untagging' however is commonly invoked. However whilst the photo no longer appears in their profile, it still exists in the originator's profile so may resurface at a later date.

*If they tagged me in it, I'd probably just untag myself because I know that there are a lot worse photos out there and if you make a big deal, then it shows up on people's timelines, because people have commented and... I think if you just keep it quiet, unless it's really, really bad, then I probably won't ask them to remove it. (Claire)*

*I'll just put more photos on and get the tags down the line, cos when you tag it, the ones you did ages ago are right at the bottom, so I'd just get more on and tag them so that that one went away (laughs) (Kezia).*

Claire avoids making a fuss in the hope that the offending photo is quickly forgotten. Kezia adopts an alternative strategy, 'burying' the photo under several others, so that it ends up so far down everyone's newsfeeds that they do not notice it.

### 6.14.3. Call for Help

There were times when despite their best efforts teens did not have the power to recover the assaults on their identity themselves and had to request help from others. In these instances they garnered help from:

- Friends
- Authorities – Facebook, School, Parents

#### 6.14.3.1. Friends

In their attempt to segregate identities, teens often proactively request that their friends avoid posting damaging content. Ameet made tactical requests to friends to refrain from posting photographs of him drinking or not to *tag* him, however he had to remain constantly vigilant in case they forgot, because for him the consequences of ‘identity bleed’ were higher than for other teens.

*You know I tell my family I don't drink and even though I do sometimes and I have to tell my friends not to tag or upload any photos of me holding any alcohol, because I would get in so much trouble if my parents find out. (Ameet)*

Where teens found themselves under attack from other peers and felt that their identity was at risk they sometimes called upon their close friends to support them.

*Yeah it did annoy me when she got all her friends to post things about me and it probably did upset me a bit really ... and then a lot of people, all of my friends were commenting to her saying you're pathetic and stuff which made me a lot better (laughs) (Alice)*

As in Alice’s case, teens can feel very isolated in these situations and it is difficult when peers attack them publicly in SM. Teenage years are tumultuous times and conflicts are common, the difference here is that reputations can be seriously damaged when tempers are high and personal details, true or false are broadcast to wide audiences. Whilst the support of friends may help the victim feel better, unfortunately this often escalates the situation, leading to some form of authority having to step in and ‘police’ the situation.

#### 6.14.3.2. Authorities

When other routes have failed, teens may report the situation to a higher authority such as their school, parents or FB itself. However this option presents further problems, so teens generally prefer to avoid it. For the situation to have got this far there is likely to be extremely damaging material involved. The fact that they are considering reporting it means that they are sufficiently concerned that it will negatively affect their reputation with their referent audiences, yet invariably they need to report it to one of these

audiences to prevent further damage. For this reason, teens prefer to report such incidences to FB firstly, as this is seen to be anonymous and therefore the teen does not have an identity to maintain in this sphere, unlike school and home.

*You can report abuse, but if I can't get to that photo... So, say everyone turned against me, and like that person who's uploaded the photo has 'blocked' me, then I can't physically search them ... can't review that photo to then press a "report abuse", which then it gets deleted...I am screwed! You then have to get the school involved, so that they tell them– that they have to delete it. Because if I say to the teacher, "Sir, there's a picture of my private parts on the Internet," obviously you know what I mean? You're kind of basically screwed! (Andrew)*

However, as Andrew describes in this hypothetical situation FB will only intervene if the violation is considered serious. Moreover, if relations have broken down between the perpetrator and the victim, then FB's settings preclude the victim from viewing the content or reporting the incident. In the meantime the rest of their SM audience is still viewing the damaging content. In these situations teens are left with no choice but to ask their school or parents to intervene.

#### **6.14.4. Walk Away**

Finally if all else fails teens have one last resort, to take themselves out of the environment altogether. In extreme situations where teens have tried every other avenue they may opt to disable their FB account. Regardless of what goes on subsequently in SM space they are no longer part of it. Although RL and SM overlap as teens mostly interact with people they know, this strategy did seem to take the steam out of the situation. Teens are much bolder online than offline, so in conflict situations shielded by the Internet, they felt emboldened to say worse things than they would RL.

*Yeah, my FB got hacked a couple of years ago, and, ... the person, whoever was doing it, was putting statuses that were like, well, I haven't put that, and they were posting my pictures onto other people's wall .... So I ended up having to try and shut it down before the person could do anything else. But then you've got the problem of people being really upset by some of the comments and stuff. You're having to go round and say, "Look, that wasn't actually me," but then again, then it's out of your hands then because you don't know what else has been done, which is probably why I'm so careful with it, you know (Harriot).*

In Harriot's case the situation was extremely serious and she felt she had no option but to disable her account to protect her reputation and relationships from further damage. She was then able to recover the situation offline and when she ventured back online she took precautions to avoid being compromised in that way again.

Beyond the scope of this study, a further option for teens is to move to a different SM platform or to use multiple platforms (Lenhart, 2015). Increasingly teens have shifted their peer to peer interactions from FB to Twitter, Instagram and SnapChat (<http://www.thelasthurdle.co.uk>). This allows them to enjoy new features in these environments but also helps them to compartmentalise their digital identities as parents are slower to follow.

### 6.15. Chapter Summary

Social media (SM) platforms like Facebook (FB) have revolutionised teen communication and social interactions worldwide. These digital identity-making spaces offer a myriad of opportunities for observation, experimentation, self-presentation and feedback.

This chapter analysed the strategies that teens used to present themselves in FB through their: embodied self, relationships, interests, activities and opinions, associations and behaviour; whilst remaining cognisant of an evolving set of unwritten rules. Millennials employed a range of FB tools and drew upon an infinite supply of immaterial digital symbolic resources to enact their identity displays. Symbolic materials were either self-generated or appropriated from FB, other multi-media providers and other users and free of charge, so unconstrained by financial resources.

Millennials directed their identity displays at four key audiences: school friends, other peer groups, parents and work colleagues with the former generally being assigned highest priority. Feedback was essential and received via *likes* and *comments*; teens adjusted their strategies on on-going basis depending on the feedback from their audiences.

Seven external factors were identified as influencing teen self-presentation and impression management: wider networks, wider audiences, sharing culture, co-construction of self, distributed memories, acceleration and SM incentive structures.

For these teens, self-presentation was conducted through a lens of 'millennialness'; the cohort's key characteristics (creativity, technologically savvy, achievement orientated, emotionally expressive, team players and reflexive) shaped the rituals and practices of self-presentation in SM. Furthermore as innovators, teens had established unwritten rules for SM and have therefore laid the ground for the consumption behaviours of subsequent adopters.

The holistic model depicting the self-presentation process provides a flexible framework for understanding self-presentation in SM which can be adapted for different subjects and for alternative SM platforms (Figure 6.8).

In addition the data revealed the key challenges that teens experienced in protecting and maintaining their digital identities in SM. These revolved around managing multiple audiences in the same social space; coping with the lack of control and 'contamination' from co-construction and protecting themselves from privacy breaches and dangers such as stalkers, paedophiles and hackers. A range of pre-emptive and defensive strategies that teens employed to manage these issues are described: managing audiences, managing content, calling for help and walking away, thus revealing further insights to teen consumption culture in SM.

Chapter 7

Data

Analysis II

Watching

Others



## 7.0. Introduction

This chapter analyses the behaviour of watching others (WO) in social media (SM) in particular Facebook (FB). Previous studies have identified that people often engage in passive lurking and observation rather than posting content themselves (e.g. Pempek et al, 2009). Some of this preoccupation can be ascribed to social comparison (SC) (Festinger, 1954) however some researchers have suggested other reasons for this behaviour. Bumgarner (2007) highlighted surveillance and voyeuristic motives and Lampe et al (2006) revealed that people conduct social searches to investigate others and learn more about them. Social comparison theory (SCT) therefore provided the primary theoretical lens for analysis, then frameworks from mediated voyeurism (MV) were drawn upon to make sense of the remaining data.

Firstly a brief review of SCT and an overview of MV theories is presented identifying the key environmental factors influencing WO. The second and most substantial part of the chapter analyses the data from teen interviews and diaries, exploring their subjects and reasons for WO. The final part of the chapter analyses the observers, combining their behaviours with their personal characteristics to present five distinct profiles of teen observers (stalkers).

## 7.1. Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory (SCT) asserts that individuals compare themselves across a range of attributes with similar and close others for self-evaluation purposes (Festinger, 1954). Comparisons may be upwards or downwards, upwards providing inspiration for self-improvement (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997) or making people feel inadequate and negatively affecting their well-being (Marsh and Parker, 1984). Downwards increasing self-enhancement and thereby self-esteem. The need to maintain self-esteem drives SC and this study adopts the following definition of social self-esteem:

*“An individual’s evaluation of their self-worth or satisfaction with three dimensions of their selves: physical appearance, romantic attractiveness and the ability to form/maintain close friendships.”*

*(Valkenburg et al, 2006)*

People often perform ‘constructive social comparisons’ to maintain self-esteem (Goethals, 1986) and those with lower self-esteem conduct SC more often and are more (negatively) affected (Frison and Eggermont, 2016). SC often generates negative emotions (e.g. envy,

guilt, inadequacy) and can negatively impact relationships leading to mistrust, jealousy and dislike of out-groups (Utz and Beukeboom, 2011).

SC is affected by the social environment (Garcia et al, 2013), SM provides easy access to people's personal information which has led to prolific SC, particularly amongst identity-seeking teenagers. Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick (2014) found that people adopted downward comparisons to improve or regulate moods. There is concern that the perpetual cycle of SC is addictive and may lead to long term negative effects on millennials' self-esteem and well-being (White et al, 2006). For a fuller discussion see sections 2.2 and 3.5.

## **7.2. Mediated Voyeurism**

Although social monitoring was discussed briefly in Chapter 3, the mediated voyeurism (MV) literature has not been reviewed in depth and does not naturally fit in any of the preceding literature review chapters. As the WO data analysis developed, mediated voyeurism theories provided a valuable lens for interpreting significant chunks of the data, so was integrated iteratively to the analysis. Therefore an overview of the key concepts is provided here.

Voyeurism has long been considered a deviant behaviour; deriving pleasure from watching the private lives of others, without making your presence known. Mediated voyeurism (via television, radio, print media or the Internet) is defined as:

*"The consumption of revealing images of and information about others' apparently real and unguarded lives, often yet not always for the purposes of entertainment but frequently at the expense of privacy and discourse, through the means of the mass media and the Internet."*

*(Calvert, 2004 p2)*

Calvert (2004) identified several key characteristics of MV. Firstly that it was revealing; showing private or personal information that was often salacious and breached social conventions. Secondly that it was real and unguarded; revealing spontaneous, unscripted activities featuring unsuspecting or unwilling subjects. Thirdly that it denigrated privacy; it is usually one-way at a distance with no interaction between the voyeur and subject. Finally due to its deviant nature, it is usually enjoyed alone.

People often participate in MV for entertainment purposes but it also supports identity, social and instrumental needs. Entertainment wise, MV can enhance moods, provide humour, relaxation, escapism and alleviate boredom. It also supports identity practices such as social comparison, self-evaluation, understanding one's place in the social hierarchy

and provides aspirational and oppositional role models. In addition it supports social needs; stimulating conversation, developing relationships, encouraging people to share their opinions and provide companionship. Finally it can fulfil instrumental needs such as acquiring information, surveillance and learning (Calvert, 2004).

In her study of the 'male gaze' Mulvey (1975) argued that voyeurs feel a sense of power, exerting control over their subjects and this translates into mediated environments too. People often feel superior to others, thereby improving their own self-esteem and at times revelling in other's misfortunes. In addition by watching others, people learn vicariously from their lifestyle and experiences and can apply them to their own situations. For some it can help them feel a sense of belonging to a social group and may encourage parasocial relationships (one-sided relationships, typically with celebrities, where the observer imagines themselves to be in a regular relationship with their subject, whilst the subject has no idea of their observer's existence) (Calvert, 2004 p57).

Voyeurs favour a range of subjects; similar or different to themselves, often lower status and real people as opposed to celebrities (Calvert, 2004). Subjects are both exhibitionist and non-exhibitionist and may be willing or unwilling, aware or unaware that they are being observed. Exhibitionism serves voyeurism and is defined as:

*"The act or practice of behaving so as to attract attention to oneself" (Merriam-Webster, 2017)*

It is debatable whether the responsibility for voyeuristic behaviour lies with the exhibitionist or the voyeur; whilst the former makes themselves available, it is the latter's decision whether they partake or not.

In the digital era, Metz (2004) argued that mediated voyeurism lies in the guilty pleasure that can be enjoyed by anyone through electronic media on the Internet. SM specifically enables and encourages MV, as users can gaze safely, at a distance, at their own convenience (Baruh, 2010; Calvert, 2004). Some researchers have argued that SM has normalised voyeuristic activities, making them socially acceptable and thereby redefining what constitutes deviancy (e.g. Bumgarner, 2007; Munar, 2010). 'Anonymous SM environments provide subjects that are not just real people but people that the voyeur knows in RL, which is arguably even more tantalising (Tufekci, 2008). Undoubtedly SM has played a part in shifting boundaries between public and private content; the day to day social monitoring of others and associated gossip has become commonplace (Fox and Moreland, 2015; Utz and Beukeboom, 2011).

### **7.3. Social Environment and Situational Factors**

In their study of the psychology of competition, Garcia et al (2013) identified several environmental and situational factors that influence people's social comparison behaviour: number of competitors, incentive structures, social category fault lines and proximity to a standard. The first three of these factors (wider networks, social media incentive structures and social category fault lines) had resonance with the data emerging from this study, so were adapted to the social media context to support the organisation of the data analysis.

#### **7.3.1. Wider Networks**

Teens maintain much wider networks in SM than in RL (e.g. 300-400 FB 'friends' vs ~150 friends in RL: Dunbar, 2010; Madden et al, 2013; Manago et al, 2012) thus the pool of subjects is much larger, allowing teens access to a broader array of personal information and identity performances. FB 'Friends' span 'strong' and 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) and extend to strangers. Whilst SCT (Festinger, 1954) predicts that individuals would conduct fewer comparisons in this scenario, the opposite was observed in this study thus warranting further investigation.

#### **7.3.2. Social Media Incentive Structures**

As discussed in Chapter 6, the structure and format of social media platforms influences consumer self-presentation, similarly they affect social comparison behaviour. Munar (2010) supports this asserting that user behaviour is influenced by the embedded culture established within each SM platform. FB users are presented with the newsfeed comprising updates about their friends. Moreover they are encouraged by notifications to look at others' statuses, photographs and activities simply by engaging in the network. The newsfeed acts like a 'staircase' that they can choose to hop on and off to delve into more detail. The scene, for watching and comparing others, is therefore set by the environment. Furthermore, as the majority of teens access FB via their mobile telephones, they are always connected (Lenhart, 2015). So FB provides teens with continuous unfettered access to others' lives, at a distance and without their awareness.

#### **7.3.3. Social Category Fault lines**

Wider networks mean that teens were not limited to their immediate social group and could easily peruse the personal information of people outside of their direct social groups (across category fault lines) unnoticed, thus enabling more detailed social comparisons with dissimilar individuals and other social groups. These comparisons informed teens' self-evaluations and provided them with additional reference points compared to RL. This

behaviour contradicts SCT assertions that people primarily compare themselves with similar and close others (Festinger, 1954) but supports Garcia et al's (2013) argument that group social comparisons can alter an individual's terms of reference.

## **7.4. Subjects**

In this analysis those WO are referred to as 'observers' and those they watch their 'subjects'. Teen participants fell into both categories; they were 'observers' but were also 'subjects' of other people's observations.

Subjects were categorised in terms of their relationship distance (from the observer), their social hierarchy relationship, their behaviour and their awareness/willingness of being watched (see Table 7.1 overleaf). Teens selected a range of different subjects to watch with varying degrees of relationship proximity: close, intermediate, distant and self. The close and intermediate categories extend Granovetter's 'strong' and 'weak tie' framework (1973) encompassing strangers, intermediate links (acquaintances) and themselves (eye) as subjects.

### **7.4.1. Relationship Distance**

Whilst there was some interest in close friends and strangers, teens predominantly observed intermediate subjects; those on the outskirts of their social circle; people they knew but did not directly interact with on a regular basis. Intermediate friends were sometimes similar to the observer but in different friendship groups, other times the attraction was their dissimilarity. This contrasts with Festinger's (1954) assertions that comparisons tend to be with similar others and supports later studies arguing that comparisons with dissimilar others might be attractive if they provided useful or favourable information and reduced the observer's uncertainty (Mettee and Smith, 1977). Millennials are interested in diverse others, so wider comparisons providing additional reference points for self-evaluation and informing their self-development were welcomed.

Teens followed the activities of close friends, however as they were already aware of much of this information it did not constitute news. This correlates with Granovetter's findings (1983) regarding the information held by 'strong ties'. Distant friends or celebrities were seldom cited, perhaps because their lives were far removed from that of the observers.

The additional category of self (eye) as the subject was identified as SM is interactive, so watching can be reversed making the observer the subject, thus participants were able to provide both perspectives. In addition to being watched by their partners, typically over-

protected millennials were often subject to monitoring by their parents and were alert to this, tempering their behaviour accordingly. Furthermore teens were able to observe their own past behaviours.

<b>Table 7.1. Categorisation of Subjects</b>		
		<b>Description</b>
Relationship Distance	Close (inner circle)	<i>People they see/speak to on a regular basis e.g. - close friends, partners or close family</i>
	Intermediate (outer circle)	<i>People they know but don't speak to/see on a regular basis e.g. friends of friends, work colleagues, distant family, past friends, teens in different social groups</i>
	Distant (outside of circle)	<i>People they don't know personally/have never met/never speak to e.g. strangers, celebrities</i>
	Self (eye)	<i>Themselves</i>
Social Hierarchy	Aspirational (upwards)	<i>People they aspire to be like or would like to be closer to e.g. people higher up the social hierarchy, people they want to develop a relationship with</i>
	Associative (sideways)	<i>People with similar values, interests, opinions, attitudes at the same level of the social hierarchy</i>
	Dis-associative/ oppositional (downwards)	<i>People with contrasting values, interests, opinions, attitudes or lower in the social hierarchy</i>
Behaviour/ Activity	Spectacle	<i>People involved in some form of spectacle, sensational behaviour/situation e.g. relationship break-ups, arguments, risky behaviours</i>
	Incongruous	<i>People who behave differently in SM compared with Real Life</i>
Awareness/ Willingness	Unaware	<i>Most subjects are aware that they are potentially being watched, however many forget the extent of their potential audiences and who their 'outer circles' comprise of</i>
	Aware/willing	<i>Subjects aware that they are being watched and knowingly posting content to maximise their audiences (e.g. exhibitionists)</i>
	Aware/unwilling	<i>Subjects aware that they may be being watched and anxious about who the 'watchers' are so take proactive measures to protect themselves from unwanted attention</i>

### **7.4.2. Social Hierarchy Relationship**

Several studies concluded that social capital online parallels social capital offline (e.g. Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2011; Valkenburg et al, 2005), so socially active teens in RL are likely to be the same in SM and social hierarchy structures mirror those offline.

Observers tended to focus on aspirational or dis-associative rather than associative subjects. Attention was focused on teens that were dissimilar to themselves, either to emulate or develop relationships with aspirational individuals or to criticise and make downward comparisons with dis-associative/oppositional individuals. SCT suggests that individuals make sideways comparisons for self-evaluation purposes (Festinger, 1954); upward comparisons for self-improvement (Festinger, 1954; Wood, 1989) and downward comparisons for self-enhancement and to increase self-esteem (Wills, 1981). Millennials are achievement oriented and competitive thus it follows that they would watch aspirational subjects for self-improvement and relationship development and dis-associative/oppositional subjects for self-enhancement and improving self-esteem.

Social hierarchy categorisations worked at both individual and group level. Teens compared themselves with individual subjects and also compared their social group with other social groups, higher or lower in the group social hierarchy.

### **7.4.3. Behaviour and Activities**

#### **7.4.3.1 Spectacles**

Teens were particularly interested in subjects involved in any form of spectacle, drama or deviant/risky behaviours. New relationships, break-ups, arguments, drunken, sexual, naked incidents, achievements or bad fortune were prime fodder for millennials raised during a period of increasing celebrity culture (Cashmore, 2006).

Furthermore, observers were derogatory about subjects who shared boring, mundane or depressive activities. However this was considered acceptable on Twitter, as teens have evolved different rules and conventions for different SM platforms.

#### **7.4.3.2. Incongruous**

In situations where the subject's behaviour was surprising and paradoxical, teen interest was piqued. Most cases involved teens who were shy or reserved in RL, but outgoing and expressive in SM, thus supporting Hollenbaugh and Ferris's (2014) claim that introverts with low self-esteem have the opportunity to flourish on FB. Observers felt that they were

witnessing a private persona, an authentic one, not ordinarily accessible. There were parallels between the interest in incongruous and intermediate subjects. This correlates with MV whereby observers' interests are ignited by insights into intimate details about others. For instance voyeuristic research from reality television suggested that windows into real people's intimate lives hold a stronger attraction than celebrities as the public have become acclimatised to celebrity media culture (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007).

#### **7.4.4. Awareness/Willingness**

Whilst all SM users were aware that someone may be watching them, many were not cognisant of the size and scope of their potential audience. The majority of participants had forgotten how many FB 'friends' they had and who their 'intermediate' and 'outer circles' comprised of, so gave limited consideration to who might be watching them. The attractiveness of a subject was influenced by their apparent awareness and willingness.

##### **7.4.4.1. Unaware**

Unaware subjects posed a strong attraction for teen observers. Calvert (2004) defined 'video verite voyeurism' which relies on "candid, un-manipulated realism." Observers are drawn in by the real nature of the experience, the fact that they are watching at a distance, unbeknown to the subject and that they are seeing drama play out in real life as opposed to following a script. This is also referred to as the 'fly on the wall' scenario.

##### **7.4.4.2. Aware and Willing**

Some subjects were aware and willing participants; exhibitionists actively courting attention from observers. Exhibitionist subjects are similar to Calvert's 'Tell-All/Show-All' category, who knowingly reveal their private stories for public consumption (Calvert, 2004).

Emotionally open millennials often express their feelings publicly and SM provides an outlet for this. Participants were highly critical of 'over-sharing' subjects whom they deemed 'attention seeking' and whilst they provided opportunities for downward comparisons, thereby enabling self-enhancement (Wills, 1981), the prevailing feeling was that they should at least have something interesting to reveal, not just mundane aspects of everyday life.



#### **7.4.4.3. Aware and Unwilling**

Many teens were vigilant to the possibility that they were being watched and were unwilling subjects. These subjects expressed concerns, firstly in terms of privacy violations and secondly with regards to the potential dangers it might expose them to. Furthermore they took steps to protect their privacy such as: un-tagging themselves; restricting their privacy settings; de-friending people and creating multiple profiles (see section 6.14).

For observers, aware or unaware and unwilling subjects were equally as enticing. The shifting notions of privacy over the last few decades due to increased MV have resulted in millennials having a lower regard for the privacy of others (Calvert, 2004).

### **7.5. Reasons for Watching Others in Social Media**

The reasons for WO varied across teen participants as did their feelings/attitudes towards the activity. Whilst most admitted to participating in WO, some were highly involved in the practice, others expressed ambivalence and some were strongly opposed. Amongst all participants there was an underlying feeling that the practice was 'wrong' and that they probably should not be doing it, there were feelings of regret but these were framed differently across participants.

The key themes explaining the reasons for WO were:

- identity related
- entertainment
- relationships
- the dark side



**Figure 7.1 Reasons for Watching Others in Social Media**

### 7.5.1. Identity Related

Social comparison and identity related goals underpinned teens' enticement to WO. SM provides the perfect arena to observe, compare and appropriate identity-making resources. Comparisons were upwards, downwards and sideways, enabling them to carve out their own position somewhere in the middle.

Four themes relating to identity emerged from the data:

- Knowing Your Place
- Feeling Superior
- Aspiring/learning
- Moving on

#### 7.5.1.1. Knowing Your Place

Millennials have an overwhelming need to fit in and belong to their social group to understand their place within that group's hierarchy and in relation to other social groups. In addition they need to know where they do not fit. In SM teens can make comparisons with more subjects than RL and can self-evaluate, increase self-enhancement and identify strategies for self-improvement. The data supported Granovetter's (1983) argument that 'weak ties' enabled the exchange of alternative viewpoints and ideas.

*... I think a less popular person could post a status and it could get like, you know, one like, and, you know, a very popular person, could post the same status and get many more 'likes' and 'comments'. (Brad)*

Teens discussed 'popular' and 'shy' kids and used these comparisons to position themselves against others (see Brad). They drew on different comparison attributes: attractiveness, popularity, promiscuity, emotiveness, personality and intellect.

*'We are really bubbly bouncy characters on FB whereas they're all like ... "For god's sake my boyfriend...!" if they've done something wrong ... I mean somebody like me and I know that I'm actually quite a nice person and not extravagant whereas it's a bit like "Ooh you're a bit slaggy" or "You're a bit different" (Kezia)*

Teens also made group comparisons; Kezia compared her group with an oppositional group, stating that they are "a bit different". She bases her downward comparisons on promiscuity describing her own group in positive terms (e.g. nice, bubbly) normalising them, whilst using derogatory terms (e.g. slaggy) to describe the other group. Her assertions are consistent with the observational data in her profile; she presents positive, wholesome content (see Appendix 5.8). This comparison behaviour is known as the 'false consensus bias' whereby individuals overestimate the extent to which their values and

beliefs are typical and normal, placing themselves in the middle and positioning others as 'abnormal' (Bauman and Geher, 2002).

Social comparison with individuals and groups across the social spectrum aids teen identity clarification by providing additional criteria to delineate their identity and find their place in the social hierarchy. So WO supported teens' self-evaluations, sense of belonging, identity refinement and development.

### 7.5.1.2. Feeling Superior

Millennial teens are competitive, so they enhanced their self-evaluations by comparing themselves with inferior subjects, thereby boosting their own self-esteem. Comparisons were predominantly downwards, dis-associative or oppositional. The prevailing attitude was one of criticism, judgement and jealousy regardless of the subject's relative position in the social hierarchy. Where subjects were 'intermediate' and higher in the social hierarchy there was a tendency to deride their self-presentations and take pleasure in their downfall in embarrassing public moments (cf Utz and Beukeboom, 2011). Teens enhanced their self-evaluation and improved their self-esteem by making 'constructive social comparisons' (Goethals, 1986) to increase their feelings of superiority to their subjects.

*... I'll look at peoples' statuses and just be like why have they written that? People who quote songs it's like fair enough – then there are people who ... they're trying to get attention – and sometimes they do it in really odd ways – like they put under the status 'oh blady blady blah feeling sad' then it's like do you really want to tell everyone or did you want to tell a close circle of friends – which would probably be more beneficial. (Gary)*

*Well – I try and spell correctly as well I'm a bit of a ... it's like the people who get annoyed by text speak – they're described as grammar Nazis. ... I'd say I suppose I am like that. Because if someone spelt something wrong, I would pick it out – I won't say anything but it could bug me if I let it... (Gary)*

*....and then scroll through the statuses and judge people quietly in my head (Gary)*

Gary was an introverted teen (see p188) who WOs extensively, he was highly critical of many of his subjects and selected criteria that he was able to outperform them on such as grammar, spelling, attention-seeking and expressing emotions publicly. Whilst he does not make them aware of his criticisms, just quietly judging people in his head, the downward comparisons made him feel superior and enhanced his sense of self-worth.

*One lad, he makes statuses like he thinks he's really intellectual and witty ... about how rich he is, and how the poor need to sort their act out ... which is ridiculous ... like how his car insurance on his Mercedes that his Dad's got him is like £22k, he was like, "I bet you guys wish you could afford that," .....But he wouldn't ever say that to someone's face ... and then he'll like make a comment about the news or politics, thinking he's really intelligent, and you know people don't like what he says because they don't 'like' his statuses. Like, if there was a 'dislike'*

*button, I'm sure it would be like whooo, because, even people that don't know him, like I've heard them talking ... why has this person done this, like that's a bit...you know, (Stephen)*

Stephen was an outgoing popular teen enjoying high social power. This was supported by the observational data which showed that he had a high number of friends, is an active poster and receives an average of 30+ likes on his statuses (see Appendix 5.8). He is highly critical of a boy who is more intelligent and more affluent than him, so selects popularity and values to make downward comparisons, thus ensuring his superiority. He substantiates his view on the basis that other teens do not like this boy because of his bragging and lack of respect for his less affluent peers. So rather than feel jealous, he reassures himself that he has better values, is more in tune with the majority of his peers and is therefore more popular.

Downward and oppositional comparisons were common and subjects were criticised across a range of criteria in their self-presentations (e.g. boring, emotional, oversharing, promiscuity, vanity, attention-seeking, risky behaviours, poor grammar, nastiness). Feeling superior to others and sharing their criticisms with their peers, reaffirmed feelings that their own strengths and values were respected, thereby enhancing self-evaluations, boosting their self-esteem and helping to shape their identities.

### **7.5.1.3 Aspiring and Learning**

Teens acquired knowledge by observing other people's experiences to reflexively develop and refine their identities vicariously and with reduced risk. This supports previous findings that people watch others to identify with them and learn from them (Calvert, 2004; Giddens, 1991).

Ambitious millennials selected aspirational role models for self-development purposes, often those higher in the social hierarchy or older. They followed their photos, statuses and conversations to gain a better understanding of the person, the social power they commanded and how they achieved it.

*Like one of my friends ... she changes her personal style, like weekly, and ... she'd go from being like in a '60s style to being in like a short dress and a fur coat with tights, to being like a bit of a nemo, to being a bit of a punk, and she constantly changed, and she does that on Facebook ... So like, you'd see all these pictures of her and you wouldn't think it's the same person because of how much she changes... and she does that to fit in with people. (Katherine)*

Katherine spoke with warmth and admiration for her friend, carefully observing her strategies to constantly reinvent herself to fit into different social groups and to create and

maintain a cool identity with her peer group. Kjeldgaard (2009) recognised this practice of style-switching amongst young consumers either to fit in with different groups or to express their authentic self. Whilst Katherine did not replicated her friend's behaviours, she accrued some of her friend's coolness into her own identity by 'basking' in her association (Belk, 1988; Lee et al, 1999).

*Because of the way me and my group of friends are, ... so coz we are not like the most popular crowd. We are not trying hard all the time to be really cool ... while for (other) girls it's more serious ... like getting out to impress ... well I do it, sort of look at other girls' pictures and then other guy's pictures. Cos if I'm bored for an hour, I am gonna be on FB, I look at my friends' pictures, pictures of girls of my year, and I'll be like looking through like that outfit, that skirt ... wish I had that skirt...this kind of jealousy. (Nellie)*

Nellie spends a lot of time looking at other girl's profiles and photographs, admiring their clothes and lifestyle. She learns vicariously from WO and using the knowledge improves her own self-presentation (Wang, 2015).

*She's very interesting to have on FB because she's our age, or maybe she's a bit older, ... she's got a child, ... she has a boyfriend or ex ... Literally, we know so much about her life, and then we kind of go, ah, aren't we glad that we don't have a kid, aren't we glad we're not her, kind of... (Andrew)*

Andrew and his friends were fascinated by the lifestyle of a slightly older stranger. They discussed her day to day activities, deconstructing her behaviour and forming critical interpretations of her projected identity. Andrew and his friends are learning vicariously how to manage future situations such as raising children. They reject some positions and adopt others; the information they glean guides their identity development and reduces the risk in their future decision-making.

#### **7.5.1.4. Moving On**

Late adolescent participants (16-19s) compared their current SM behaviours with those of younger teens (12-15s) and with the behaviours of their younger selves to evidence their development and maturity and feel that they were making progress.

*I have quite a lot of younger friends on FB and in real life and I think they are just very competitive because they want .... to be like the older kids, the older kids they don't want to put anything on ... they don't want to impress people they don't know, they just want to impress their friends, to be more accepted. (Serena)*

*I think ... a few years ago then it would have been different so I would care a lot more about it and it was a much bigger part of your life, but I think now I'm older you can do more stuff you're allowed to go out more, you can see your friends more. Like before, when you are younger, you are not allowed to do that as much, so everyone depends on FB. (Rachel)*

Serena feels that older teens are more relaxed about who they are than younger teens, so do not feel the need to impress all the time. Rachel highlights that older teens have more physical freedom, so FB is not as important to them as it is to younger teens. Nuttall (2009) argued that teens crave immersion in their peer group to develop and refine their identities; SM fulfils that need and allows experimentation for younger teens whilst their freedom is limited, so is more central to their lives.

Teens were also frequently reminded of their younger self-identities; through past statuses and photos. They could therefore situate their identity across time, reflexively reviewing their current position in relation to previous and future positions.

*I remember when I first started, when I was younger, because on the Timeline you can look back when you first started FB, I used to set the most random statuses like what I was doing constantly... and I used to post more 'posey' pictures ... because that's what everyone did and as I've grown up I'm not doing it at all. (Serena)*

*I did have Bebo – but I think I'm going to go and delete it. I can remember it and am ashamed of it – when I thought I was so cool and going out and getting drunk with my mates etc. including the way I used to speak to people on it – quite chavvy! It went through two stages – it was Bebo then it was my friends saying you should get MySpace. Then I used both for a while before I just moved to MySpace and then the same for FB. (Simon)*

Echoing experiences in FB's Timeline re-presents past behaviours (watching self) which teens often find embarrassing, as they have outgrown certain behaviours (Serena). As discussed in Chapter 6, different platforms engendered different behaviours and teens were concerned about the 'persistence' of their past behaviours in digital space (Simon) (boyd, 2007). Journeying from one SM platform to another was common and offered other benefits like facilitating an escape from the reminders of 'past selves'.

So, three variables drove change: teens' developing identities and maturity, the progression of SM incentive structures and evolving user behaviours. For achievement oriented, impatient millennials, SM enables them to evidence their personal progress. Lily encapsulates the dynamic nature of millennial teen identity in SM, everyone is constantly moving on!

*Everyone just moved on – I think different things are important. Now it's like keeping in touch with your friends as people move on to university or whatever – and then it was just for fun really. (Lily)*

## 7.5.2. Entertainment

*“The postmodern is a visual, cinematic age; it knows itself in part through the reflections that flow from the camera eye.*

*The voyeur is the iconic postmodern self.*

*Adrift in a sea of symbols, we find ourselves, voyeurs all, products of the cinematic gaze” Denzin (1995 p1)*

Denzin’s (1995 p1) quote illustrates the increasing dramatization of postmodern life. Whilst he related this to film and television, SM has taken this yet further. Participants found WO highly entertaining both as individuals and in groups. For many the act of sharing their observations with others was key and maximised their enjoyment.

The three sub themes relating to entertainment were:

- Escapism
- Socialising and bonding
- Challenge

### 7.5.2.1. Escapism

Teens WO as a means of escape: to pass time, alleviate boredom, avoid studying or improve their mood. WO was a passive activity which teens found relaxing and engrossing, as something was always happening. Millennials have short attention spans and like being connected to technology, so WO provided them with regular welcome distractions.

*I will give it a good long...because it’s one of those things where, you know, you’re bored, you’re at home, you’re trying to prevent doing your schoolwork, trying to leave it a bit longer and longer, so it’s like, ah, I’ll have a little check on FB and then, before you know it, you’ve got to read loads and loads – and if it’s a good status, there’s lots of comment, like, here we go, it’s all kicking off, so then you read all that, (Andrew)*

The mood lifting crescendo is evident in Andrew’s remarks, illustrating his accelerating engrossment and high involvement in WO. He loses track of time indicating that he is in a state of ‘flow’ where the content is continuous and perpetual, with no natural start or end (Hoffman and Novak, 1996) so the distraction from his studies can continue ad infinitum.

### 7.5.2.2. Socialising and Bonding

Continued surveillance of others enabled observers to stay in touch with what was going on, thus feeling constantly involved in their social groups. Many teen participants took their surveillance to a higher level; monitoring intricate details of people’s lives, then bonding



with their friends over the resultant gossip. Calvert (2004 p4) described MV as “the curious peeking into the private lives of others,” these behaviours were mirrored in SM.

*Like if I don't go online ... I'm worried I would miss something..... because then I would miss what's been going on FB, cos I'm coming home from school and then people will be... oh have you seen the picture on FB posted last night and I would just be like oh I missed it (sad). (Nellie)*

*Gossip, looking at people's photos, what's going on – it's a way of being in people lives without even talking to them. Me and my friends will talk about things that have happened on FB – like did you see what he wrote on my wall! Did you see what she commented? It's a form of gossip – people will get their phones out to show pictures you may have missed. (Fiona)*

*If like an event has happened then like I'm definitely on it! The night it's happened or the day after or if I know that there's gossip ... so it's more curiosity is like the big umbrella and then there's the little thing underneath. (Kezia)*

*Without FB, a lot of conversation wouldn't have gone on ... someone will bring up something that's happened on FB ... without FB, I wouldn't have had that conversation. In some ways, I think it's kind of brought actually me and some people closer together because you are talking about someone. You both engage in it. (Andrew)*

SM has become the hub of teen social life hence teens, like Nellie, felt obligated to check their newsfeeds regularly to stay connected and ensure they did not miss anything. For Fiona, maintaining a keen awareness of news and ‘goings-on’ was a pre-requisite to sustaining membership of her group. Dunbar argued that shared knowledge was a signal of community membership (Dunbar, 2010 p82). This accords with Bumgarner's (2007) findings regarding ‘herding instincts’ in SM; teens are doing it because everyone else is doing it.

Curiosity, the desire to know about other people's lives particularly any dramas or secrets were the one of the strongest pulls for entertainment. Fiona and Kezia cite nosiness and gossiping as their key reasons for using SM. Their interest heightened when subjects were unaware and by ‘newsworthy’ behaviours (spectacles). Teen observers flocked to discover the latest gossip and share it with friends. Andrew's comments align with Dunbar's assertion that gossiping seals friendships; that exchanging gossip confirms that participants agree about ways to behave and by sharing information the implication is that they will also share favours for each other if needed (Dunbar, 2010 p82). Tufekci (2008) suggested that sharing gossip represents a key threshold in the securing of a friendship, as each party allows the other an insight to their inner values.

For some teens, WO satisfied parasocial needs, however the imagined or exaggerated relationships were more likely to be with ordinary people than celebrities and part of their wider social circle, whom they have a limited or non-existent F2F relationship with.

*That's why I'm still on it because it can be really entertaining. People in relationships, breaking up and embarrassing pictures. It's partly to connect with people but it's partly for entertainment as well. I can sit there and people watch all day – so for people like me it's really helpful. (Frances)*

*It's a walk through to see people without leaving a footprint – well then potentially that's FB stalking which I have noticed that I've started to do a lot recently. Like who are they – click on them! – And then leave and go look at someone else's account. But then if I did actually want to know them ... I'd look at it – then I'd think – if I wrote out what my actual thought would be – because there's a second side to everyone – sort of think about what they might actually be like based on what they've written. (Gary)*

Introverted teens revealed that they WO to connect and feel part of other teens' lives whilst remaining in the shadows. This supports previous research that individuals that feel less connected to their social groups in RL are attracted to FB to alleviate their loneliness (Hollenbaugh and Ferris, 2014; Moreau et al., 2015). People watching keeps Frances occupied, entertained and connected to her peer group although not directly interacting with them. It allows her to feel part of the community without the pressure to join in or the risk of being rejected. Gary tries to imagine what his subjects might be like by reading between the lines of their postings to reveal their real identities. However in real life they are barely aware of him because he has no social interactions with them.

WO for gossip and parasocial reasons was therefore driven by voyeuristic needs. Teen observers peek into subjects' intimate lives mostly without their knowledge. In line with voyeuristic characteristics they are drawn to events of a salacious nature, personal matters or those breaking social conventions (Calvert, 2004). Moreover in SM, the entertainment value was further enhanced by the 'real' and often spontaneous nature of the drama.

Teens frequently used the term 'stalking' to describe the extensive following of the SM activities of a subject. Whilst the activity is considerably different from psychological stalking ("a constellation of behaviours in which an individual inflicts upon another repeated unwanted intrusions and communications": Pathé and Mullen, 1997). There are parallels between the two behaviours. Linked to this Nonnecke and Preece (2001) defined 'lurkers' as: "One of the 'silent majority' in an electronic forum; one who posts occasionally or not at all but is known to read the group's postings regularly." The author posits that 'stalking' differs from 'lurking' in that it tends to focus on particular subject(s) and intrudes into their private lives.

### 7.5.2.3. Challenge

Techno-savvy millennials enjoy playing in digital space and WO had the power to engross teens, drawing them into a continuous cycle of activity where they lost track of time. One of the conditions encouraging 'flow' is that the activity provides just the right amount of challenge to keep the individual interested, but not so much that they cannot solve the puzzle (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). For some highly involved participants, WO became a problem to be solved, a secret to be discovered, a game to be played and the truth to be revealed.

*Oh, I completely investigate, I investigate everything, yeah. I'll click onto this and then click onto that and then click on that, and then like ... I've clicked onto so-and-so, who's clicked onto so-and-so, and it's like, oh, they know so-and-so, and then like...it's like little triggers – it's like, oh, I haven't seen what he's been up to for a while, I'll go and have a look ... And just from him writing on his wall he's now in a relationship with her. ... I say it's research, and especially ... you never know when it's going to come in handy. (Andrew)*

*Really it's more just nosing at people..... If somethings happened at school I'll go onto that particular person's profile, whoever the arguments between and see if I can spot things for myself, find out more of the gossip or just sort of stalk some people... If I say go on ZZZZ's profile I'll see what she's been up to see what she's been doing and you 'generally stalk' somebody if you know they've got a bit of gossip behind them or if you know that they've got a secret and you want to see if you can work it out. (Kezia)*

*If it's like 'gossip stalking' then you have to go deeper and look at other links and it's so annoying when people have their profile as private cos you can't go on. You get stopped and it's like oh no! ... so you've got to have everybody (as friends) so that you can have links to each person, so when there was like a big drama in the year above, I had some of the girls that the drama was between, so I could see it happening so I was ooh what's going on (laughs). You're not going find out in real life so you have to find out over FB (laughs). (Kezia)*

'Flow' is highly apparent, Andrew seamlessly moves from one subject to another, led by 'little triggers', ensuring perpetual engagement. Kezia persistently pursues different routes through her 'friend' network to hone in on gossip. The challenge makes it more enticing and rewarding, having to 'investigate', trying to 'spot things' and developing strategies to navigate around obstacles, provides a sense of achievement. Their involvement is illustrated in their language, Andrew refers to his WO behaviour as 'research', proud of his ability to root things out and retain the information. Kezia differentiates between 'general' and 'gossip stalking' and talks about going 'deeper' to discover what is going on. By sub-categorising 'stalking' she demonstrates a high level of involvement in the activity. Finally there is an element of competitiveness, Andrew considers himself particularly skilled at 'stalking' and Kezia revels in discovering new gossip before her friends.

*You can judge a lot by the profile pictures, but then ... I like to pick on tagged photos because .... you're not prepared for them, so then that's more of a ... you get to see some people's bad sides. Whereas profile pictures ... I know ... a lot of girls actually edit their photos. .... I found out that this girl apparently spends about an hour and a half editing a photo before she puts it on Facebook, and I just think that's... [pulls a face] a bit like that, but that's one of the... like the high profile like popularity kind of girls that ... I don't like looking at them – I think they're really shallow and... I thought they were just genuine girls. (Andrew)*

Millennials try to cut through the gloss of the post-modern world to discover the authentic identities of their subjects. Andrew knows that profile photos are carefully selected to present teens' best side, so he scrutinises tagged photos instead, hoping to catch people off guard and reveal more of their 'real self'. He feels cheated when he discovers that a girl's photos are edited, judging her to be shallow and not genuine. Accessing others' authentic selves is part of the challenge, teens gain satisfaction in uncovering a nugget of truth about someone. Giddens (1991 p186) argued that the search for authenticity is key to relationship development in postmodern societies; teens need to be able to trust others before disclosing their own true self.

### 7.5.3. Relationships

Relationships are important for teen identity development; friends significantly affect who they are and what they might become. Teens continually seek to develop, initiate and maintain relationships and these needs form another key reason for WO in SM.

#### 7.5.3.1. New Relationships

Participants gathered information about potential new friends through SM, undetected. They assessed physical appearance, interests, attitudes and values, prior to deciding whether to progress with a relationship.

*I treat it as a way of contacting people .... it's a stage between having someone's phone number and having just met them. You meet them, you talk on FB, then maybe progress on through that. It's a good source of in-between... you can get idea of what sort of person they are from it ... and like, share information like music and things that you like. (Gary)*

*If we know of someone or met someone out and we knew their name but not of them then we can search on FB and see their profile picture and any tagged pictures. You get a sense of who they are without having to add them as a friend. (Fiona)*

*But if someone added me and I didn't know who they were, I would accept them and then nose around, and then, if I didn't know them, I would delete them. (Saskia)*

Teens viewed SM as an intermediary space in the development of new relationships. Initiators used it instrumentally to find subjects they were interested in, as an assessment tool to determine fit and as a speculative introductory mechanism before F2F contact. Gary (introvert) valued being able to identify common interests and develop relationships online initially, where he felt more confident, thereby easing the subsequent F2F interactions. Teens have always bonded with each other through common interests and lifestyles; having prior knowledge about a subject enhances the possibility of a positive response and reduces the chance of an embarrassing rejection (Kleine and Kleine, 2000). Fiona (extrovert) liked being able to locate and assess potential new friends covertly before committing. Similarly, recipients of new friendship approaches, like Saskia, used WO to assess suitors and decide whether or not to progress with the 'friendship'. So teens watched others to reduce perceived social risk and enhance their chances of success with new relationships. This risk-averse approach fits with millennial tendencies to be cautious about embarking on new things, through fear of failure.

### **7.5.3.1.1. Going to University**

Several participants were about to go to university and were anxious about this major life transition, particularly in terms of developing new relationships.

*Yes – just sussing them out – who they are. I don't know if they could look at me – I haven't put details of my course and where I will be living. There were two girls but then it's like what if they turn out to be a bit weird – or they think I'm weird. So I'll just wait till I get there .... Yeah – want to find someone that's similar ... It's also finding the people you fit in with. (Elizabeth)*

*The people I'm moving in with I've looked through their pictures to see what they are like to get an idea. ... to find things in common ... One of the things I kept saying - I hope I don't get housed with loads of people that I'm not going to get along with at all ... So getting to see them and getting an idea – helped. Once I got to speak to them it made me feel much better – as you think, I can get along with this person as I know he likes rugby etc - so common interests help. So if you had a problem with talking to people at least you know what they are like and where they're from – like a conversation starter. (Simon)*

The anxiety about leaving home, going to university, living with strangers is evident in both excerpts. Elizabeth and Simon were worried about 'fitting in' with new social groups, their concerns were two-way; would they find people they like and would other people like them? They scoured subjects' profiles to identify common interests and like-minded others. Both gained some reassurance, Simon by talking to his new house mates online in advance and Elizabeth, although a hesitant poster, evidenced by the observational data (see Appendix 5.8), identified a few kindred spirits to approach when she starts. So, WO alleviated millennial anxiety and reduced perceived risks when transitioning to new life stages.

### **7.5.3.2. Maintaining Relationships**

Tong and Walther (2011 p99) define relational maintenance as “the performance of behaviors, which sustain both the existence of the relationship and satisfaction of each partner” for all types of relationships (friends, families and romantic partners). Previous studies have claimed that habitual social monitoring of friends and family via SM has become a commonplace and socially acceptable (Fox and Moreland, 2015; Utz and Beukeboom, 2011). This was borne out in this study, participants WO to maintain long distance, peer and romantic relationships.

### **7.5.3.2.1. Long Distance Relationships**

*My second cousin, she's got a baby sister – well, we haven't been able to see her, so they post photos ... We can't see her in her first couple of years because everyone's working ... but it's nice to just sort of have that little bit of link (Harriot).*

Millennials come from more diverse backgrounds and are more travelled than previous youth generations, so value being able to maintain relationships with distant relatives and friends. Harriot maintains an emotional connection, sharing milestone moments and sense of presence with her distant family, sustaining the relationship although separated geographically.

### **7.5.3.2.2. Peer Friendships**

*My boyfriend and my friend, they just basically, em...they just find these really weird things on YouTube [laughing], and then they kind of quote them on their status and just kind of have banter with each other, even though they're sat next to each other. (Katherine)*

*You can get like close with your friends like you can you know stuff that you talk about in the day you can relate back to over FB ... It's just a good way of like communicating with your friends ... if I'm socialising with friends I'll be like clicking on the newsfeed and commenting on their stuff. (Ameet)*

Millennial teens enjoy being constantly immersed in their peer groups and SM and mobile phones have enabled them to be 'always connected' (Lenhart, 2015). Katherine and Ameet's excerpts illustrate that monitoring close friends' SM activity is important for maintaining and affirming peer relationships whilst also engaging with them regularly F2F. This was further evidenced in the observational data where Ameet frequently posted supportive messages to his peers (Appendix 5.8).

### **7.5.3.2.3. Romantic Relationships**

*I always check my boyfriend's one to see what weird statuses he's put ... because he lives in XXXX, I can't always see him every day so... (Katherine)*

*So if I was going to stalk my boyfriend I'd go on and look at who he's been talking to and read everything if it said "XXXX has commented on his status' or something I'd think oh another girl, so I'd click on it and then think oh its nothing, so there's no "oh my gosh he's commented on it" but I just like to know what he's talking about or see if he's changed his picture or just to see what they're doing and it's the same for everybody. (Kezia).*

In romantic relationships close monitoring of partners was commonplace with positive and negative motives and outcomes. Katherine checked her boyfriend's newsfeed to retain a daily connection and to develop and sustain their relationship. Kezia's extensive monitoring behaviour, constantly seeking reassurance of her boyfriend's commitment and loyalty was

not unusual. Monitoring may relate to the power balance in a relationship, whereby surveillance is more prevalent among the party with less power. Mulvey (1975) argued that voyeurs seek to exert control over their subjects, so teens may be driven to WO to wrestle back some power in their relationship.

In SM, lives are more open and public, which can reduce trust and lead to increased suspicion, and jealousy (Fox and Moreland, 2015). One reason for excessive partner monitoring may therefore be to reduce the risk of public embarrassment in the event of a partner's infidelity. See further discussion in section 7.5.4.4.



## 7.5.4. The Dark Side

*“Many gazes and many pleasures: supervising, controlling, malefic, investigative, destructive, self-protective, clinical, erotic, indifferent, self-constructive.”*

*(Denzin, 1995 p49)*

Denzin’s quote highlights the dark side of voyeuristic behaviours. Whilst there were many positive outcomes of WO, there were also many negative motives driving this behaviour.

The dark side themes identified were:

- Addiction
- Invasion of privacy
- Critical culture
- Scheming and monitoring
- Negative feelings

### 7.5.4.1. Addiction

Internet addiction disorder (IAD) is defined as an individual’s inability to control their use of the Internet, eventually causing psychological, social, school or work difficulties in their life (Davis, 2001). Millennial teens are highly susceptible to addictive tendencies given their infatuation with mobile technology. For some this compulsion verged on addiction and in a few cases they forcibly withdrew themselves.

*It was just so distracting. I think I got to the point with FB that I just checked it for no apparent reason. I just went on it because it was the norm. (Saskia)*

*Because I did sit on it for hours and if I was trying to revise and I had it up then people would keep contacting me and I would keep refreshing the page to see what was going on. It was very distracting. Then I tried to use it less but then I gave myself a time limit and I would still go over it. So in the end I had to just cut it off in order to concentrate and it worked. But after my exams it made me realise that I do waste a lot of time. (Simon)*

Saskia and Simon described symptoms of addiction, feeling compelled to check FB frequently, continually refreshing pages and trying to reduce time spent on FB but failing. Simon was not in control of his behaviour and the symptoms he described suggest addictive tendencies.

Previous studies identified impulsivity and lack of perseverance as key influencers of IAD (Burnay et al, 2015; Cao et al, 2007; Lu et al, 2010). Participants experienced urges to WO, lack of control, losing track of time, distraction from their studies and difficulties in

inhibiting their behaviour. In addition some studies have cited sensation seeking as an influencer of IAD (Lin and Tsai, 2002; Przybylski et al, 2009); this can be linked to teen attraction towards salacious spectacles (see section 7.4.3.1).

#### **7.5.4.2. Invasion of Privacy**

Celebrity culture and the celebritisation of the ordinary have influenced many young millennials (Calvert, 2004). SM provides a rich source of consumable content about the lives of others. This has challenged the boundaries of privacy and influenced social norms. Participants wrestled with their conscience; on the one hand feeling drawn to stories about personal relationships and so on, on the other feeling intrusive and embarrassed about what they witnessed. Participants demonstrated varying attitudes towards private content, termed; no regrets, ambivalent and against.

##### **7.5.4.2.1. No regrets**

Those with 'no regrets' showed little remorse when breaching privacy boundaries. Their view was that if it was available then they were entitled to watch it.

*Some girls in my year found this girl, from Blackpool, and eh, she's very interesting to have on FB ... literally, her life is all on FB – we know everything.... she's got an open profile, so we all know ... what her kids are like, what's going on with her and her partner, kind of what her gran thinks ... (Andrew)*

*That's why I'm still on it because it can be really entertaining. People in relationships, breaking up and embarrassing pictures. It's partly to connect with people but it's partly for entertainment as well (Frances)*

For Andrew the attraction is enhanced because the subject is (seemingly) unaware that they are watching her. Besides the salacious content, Andrew experiences the added thrill of breaching social conventions; strangers would not ordinarily have access to such intimate details. Andrew places the responsibility for this breach with his subject, for disclosing and for having limited privacy settings.

Frances (introvert see p194) gains pleasure and entertainment by WO covertly without interacting, she therefore sacrifices their rights to privacy for her own gratification. This aligns with the concept of 'radical individualism' where individuals place their own needs above those of others (Bork, 1996 cited in Calvert, 2004).

##### **7.5.4.2.2. Ambivalent**

Some participants felt more ambivalent about their intrusions into the private lives of others.

*...but sometimes like things go on on FB, like if people are arguing or something, and you don't – like, you'll read it and stuff, but you don't want to be involved, so you don't want to like anything or comment on it, but you still see it ... (Elysha)*

*Like if someone ... like a few of my mates have naked photos on Facebook of themselves on night outs and I don't understand why they don't delete them because that's just a complete like...for me, that's just utterly unprivate and I'd be like whoa, come on, that's a bit weird. (Stephen)*

Elysha feels ambivalent about witnessing someone else's argument, she reads it, but she is embarrassed and careful not to draw attention to the fact that she has read it. Stephen considers naked photographs to be inappropriate, referring to them as “utterly unprivate”. In doing so he starts to determine his own boundary criteria for privacy.

*I think there's got to be a line of what freedom is. Like, wherever you go, there's always a law, there's always a rule that's laid down, and FB doesn't really seem to have that. So ... I think they should just draw the line on nudity because ... the people that put it on there, they might find it funny, but they don't think about the humiliation that the other person may feel. (Stephen)*

*There's these two people in my year ... oooh you should see what they are like on FB! It's just rank, it's vile it's like errh I don't want to know that. They make like sex talk over FB but it's not like real it's like oh no it's horrible, I don't even want to say it cos it's embarrassing, I read it and I'm like eww. (Kezia)*

Stephen uses terms like ‘there's got to be a line’, ‘laws’ and ‘rules’ and starts to consider potential negative effects on subjects. Kezia feels embarrassed and uncomfortable when subjects share explicit sexual content; in this case she feels the negative effect as the observer. So whilst teens enjoy the freedom to WO, they want regulations to protect themselves and as is typical of millennials they evolve their own rules. ‘Ambivalent’ observers accept some of the responsibility for maintaining privacy boundaries by withdrawing.

#### **7.5.4.2.3. Against**

Some participants were against WO per se, considering it to be intrusive and disrespectful to subjects. They maintained that they would never breach other's privacy and disapproved of those who did.

*I wouldn't because I feel that it would be like stalking do you know what I mean? Because it's like going through someone's head. And like cos photos are their memories and then like their walls, kind of like their thoughts and stuff and I just feel that it would be a bit too weird to be scrolling through it and reading everything and seeing who they are friends with and all their photos... ... out of respect for them really, I just wouldn't scroll through their wall and stuff. (Cameron)*

*I don't think looking through their wall posts like for the past two years and who they are friends with would really help ... I just see that to be like a stalker and a bit like why don't you try to know them yourself rather than*

*looking through all that stuff.... cos a lot of time I feel like it's their own business, so I don't get involved in stuff that has nothing to do with me. (Serena)*

Cameron feels that it is highly intrusive to look through a subject's profile, he speaks metaphorically likening their postings to 'thoughts' and 'memories', so to him 'stalking' represents a violation of their personal faculties. Serena expresses disdain for peers who pry into subjects' historical postings, friends, photos etc... and feels that other people's private business should be respected even if they have shared it on SM. 'Against' observers take full responsibility for respecting and maintaining privacy standards, although they can look, they choose not to.

#### **7.5.4.2.4. Own Right to Privacy**

Millennials have a keen sense of their rights when it comes to their own privacy (as a subject) and feel empowered to secure them.

*I thought this is my FB it is about me, my personal information and I want it to be just available to my friends and people I know and trust. (Ameet)*

*I don't like my personal stuff being talked about, like kind of a break-up or anything like that or details of like a relationship. (Andrew)*

Teens expressed concern about their own privacy; they were aware that a range of people could be watching them and were keen to protect themselves. Double standards applied in that some teens happily 'stalked' others but were protective of their own privacy (Andrew – prolific stalker). Participants employed various strategies to protect themselves such as: restricting their privacy settings, setting up multiple profiles, defriending people, and deleting themselves from FB altogether (see Section 6.14).

#### **7.5.4.3. Critical Culture**

Millennial teens are ambitious, nurtured to believe in themselves and in their potential for future success. Their resultant high self-esteem often engendered competitiveness which manifested itself in criticism of others.

##### **7.5.4.3.1. Bitching, Grammar, Oversharing and Emotional Statuses**

*Well, I definitely judge people – that's one thing that FB kind of does for you ... people bitch about other people on FB. You know if they do it on there, they're like that in real life, perhaps worse in real life. But then there's the other side of things that people are more confident to bitch about people on FB because it's over the Internet and they don't have to do it to other people's faces. (Stephen)*

*Some people post stuff like every two minutes and it's like very bad English as it's all text speak and the grammar is really bad – so it's really annoying .... And people post private stuff about themselves – like they say*

*"I'm having such a bad day" and other people will say "what's wrong?" but then they say "I don't want to say!" - then why did you post it on FB then! (Frances)*

*It's like depressing statuses ... she puts statuses constantly like, "All I want to do is to have you back here in my arms," and stuff like that, and I'm just like, if you want him that much, just speak to him – don't put statuses about it! (Katherine)*

As Stephen highlights participants were often judgmental, dismissive, lacking in empathy and bitchy. Previous studies found negative feedback to be harsher online F2F as the perceived distance and barrier of the Internet reduced inhibitions (e.g. Makarius, 1983; Suler, 2004). Participants were frequently punitive about their peers, expressing strong emotions towards minor offences such as 'oversharing' and poor grammar.

Teens demonstrated little empathy for subjects experiencing difficult times. 'Emotional statuses' were considered depressing, unnecessary and annoying. Katherine's and Frances's sentiments were echoed by many; there was a lack of tolerance and negativity towards anyone publicly expressing some form of turmoil.

#### **7.5.4.2.2. Appearances, Bereavement and Cancer**

*You talk a lot about photos– especially with me and my friends, we sit down and if people have been tagged in new photos, you're like, "Oh God, did you see that photo of so-and-so - didn't she look horrendous?" [laughing] (Saskia)*

*Some people when their relatives have died and they've just covered their FB with how sad they are, how upset they are and I just think I personally wouldn't want to, that I would want to keep that more within the family rather than on FB I think. If you're on FB writing that, then you're clearly not that upset about it cos I'd personally keep that private. (Kezia)*

*They have like photos of people with like cancer, like some horrible stuff like that, and it's just like ... Obviously, everyone knows people have cancer, but they just ... they just put up pictures and say, oh, like ... get people to like it ... I just don't see the point why you'd put someone with cancer on it? Or ... like some people take the piss about things, like that, they'll put a photo just taking the mick, and I just think it's horrible. Or they just try and make jokes, which I think is inappropriate. (Emma)*

Critical comments and communal mockery of a subject's appearance such as Saskia's were common and went unchecked as observers did not witness the subject's hurt feelings. Critical behaviour had become so ingrained and commonplace that some teens felt emboldened to criticise and be insensitive about issues like bereavement and cancer.

Kezia criticises someone else's public expression of grief, cruelly inferring that they aren't really that upset. Emma admits not wanting to see photos of cancer patients and describes other people's despicable behaviours towards vulnerable people. The mask of the Internet

means that teens are sometimes more forthright in their postings than in RL, but what was evident was that they can be even crueller behind the scenes.

The data supported Fox and Moreland's (2015) argument, that attitudes and behaviour towards others in SM have drifted from mostly positive and supportive (Doster, 2013; Valkenburg et al, 2006) to negative, critical and undermining.

#### 7.5.4.4. Scheming and Monitoring

Social media holds a considerable amount of data and teens sometimes used this to facilitate unsavoury behaviours.

*It's mainly, for me to stalk people, like basically, not maliciously, I don't mean it maliciously, but it's really, you get to know a lot of stuff about a lot of people, and then it actually comes in handy when ... You never know when something might – in an argument, someone might bring something up, and you'll be like, "oh yeah, but didn't you do this?" They're like "Oh, how did you know?!" and it's like, "Well, you put it onto FB." (Andrew).*

Andrew's comments are quite sinister; he deliberately gathers information about his peers to use for his own devices at a later date. Section 7.5.3.2., considered the monitoring of friends and partners. In some cases these surveillance behaviours became obsessive and got out of control.

*If I do fancy somebody like this person that I met on holiday then I will literally look at his FB 5 times a day and if I see any comments from girls then I'd have to read what they were talking about (laughs). (Alice)*

*Noticed JR was online so went on his profile to see if any girls had been commenting, they had, so I read their wall to wall comments. Noticed he used to put ly xx (love you) on the end of his comments to her, this annoyed me as he has never said ly [love you] to me!! (Alice's Diary)*

Alice persistently monitored a boy that she was attracted to, checking his interactions with other girls. 'Gaze theory' suggests that she held the power as the observer (voyeur) (Mulvey, 1975). However her surveillance places her in the subordinate position and puts her well-being at risk when she discovers upsetting information as seen in this extract from her diary.

Teens were also often subjected to parental or sibling monitoring.

*My sister, she's a bit of wild card and she did have FB account and me and my mom were both friends, then she started getting caught out, she's three years younger than me, and she started getting caught drinking ..... so she blocked like me and every single one of my friends and the entire family ... she's in with a dodgy crowd so, it's partly nosiness and it's partly ... I don't want her to be really getting in with that sort of crowd, like she started smoking and things like that ... it's just not good, so my parents said if you see anything let us know. (Nellie)*

The problem with covert monitoring is that you are precluded from confronting your subject with your findings without revealing your secret surveillance. Nellie's younger sister is suspected of participating in risky behaviours. She is enlisted by her parents to monitor her sibling's activities and report back. However this has backfired and her sister has blocked all of them to avoid being monitored, so monitoring often becomes futile as observers need to decide between acting on the information or maintaining on-going access.

#### 7.5.4.5. Negative feelings

The culmination of these dark practices led to teens experienced a range of negative feelings towards the activity of WO in SM.

- Judgement
- Fear of Discovery
- Out of Control
- Danger.

#### *Judgement*

Valkenburg et al (2006) argued that negative feedback in SM decreased teen social self-esteem; however they found at that time, that feedback was predominantly positive. This study revealed an overwhelmingly critical culture among teens and their subjects in SM. While teens were not fully cognisant of what others said about them, their own critical behaviour had led them to speculate about this. As a result participants worried about being judged and this has caused them to be more reflexive and inhibited. This view was supported by Nabi et al (2003) (cited in Wang, 2015).

*A lot of girls post pictures of themselves and all have their friends "oh you're so pretty and stuff" but I've never done it, partly in fear that nobody will comment on it and partly because I don't want to go online, I don't want people to see me. I think if you put photos of yourself out there, you're sort of asking to be judged. I don't want to be judged by anybody on FB. I'd rather have someone say "oh you look really nice" in person than on photos (Serena).*

*I don't really put private stuff on there, so I wouldn't put anything that would make me look stupid or that's personal because ... it's just like you don't want everyone to know your business. (Emma)*

*You want to be on FB as well to see the drama, but you don't want to be part of it. You just want to [laughing] watch the drama! (Saskia)*

Serena was reticent about putting herself 'out there' for fear of being judged; she was as concerned about not being noticed as being criticised. Wider audiences increase the potential and scope of public judgements and thereby personal risk. Whilst enjoying WO, teens were increasingly reticent about being drawn into the limelight themselves; feeling exposed, embarrassed, made to look stupid or bullied.

Koutamanis et al (2015) argued that teens partaking in risky online self-presentations were more likely to invoke negative feedback. Emma is careful, avoiding posting anything private or personal and focuses on staying under the radar. Saskia (prolific stalker) was horrified at the idea of being the subject of a spectacle herself. Public evaluations in SM, positive or negative, are seen by more people and visible for longer therefore more likely to affect people's self-esteem (boyd, 2008; Elkind and Bowen, 1979).

### *Fear of Discovery*

Whilst WO was commonplace there was a fear of being discovered, especially where the observer had been 'stalking' extensively.

*I always do get scared about that. I worry that FB will bring in a new thing where you can see who has been on your profile, then YYYY would see that Alice has been on his profile like a triple figured amount of times (laughs). I was conscious of that when I used to go on his profile all the time. (Alice)*

*One time I was like it's my neighbour opposite, he's a bit weird, and he got a girlfriend, so I was like oh my gosh so I went on and added her as a friend and it kind of backfired a bit cos I was expecting her not to say anything but she started talking to me so I was oh no now I look like a big stalker, well I was stalking but then I looked like a stalker. And I was just like "oh I live opposite XXXX" so I felt like I was like some kind of crazy girl that was looking at him. (Kezia)*

Alice worried that her subject might discover her 'stalking', so whilst willingly engaging in the activity, she acknowledges that it is wrong and importantly knows that if discovered, it would not reflect well on her. Kezia got caught 'stalking' her neighbour and when the behaviour was reflected back on her she felt embarrassed, like "some kind of crazy girl".

So millennials were concerned about being judged, being embarrassed in a public arena and being exposed either for their private activities or for their risky stalking practices. These feelings generated anxiety, caution and risk and could be damaging for their self-esteem. Over time this had led to teens posting less often on FB and moving to other SM platforms perceived to be less judgemental, such as Twitter (Elysha).

*I know this sounds really weird, but it seems just more chilled, and it's like less judged, what you're seen to put on Twitter. Because people will come in and be like, "Oh my God, did you see what she put on Facebook?" but*



*they don't tend to say that about Twitter. And, you won't post a status about certain things, but people would put it on Twitter. (Elysha)*

### **Out of Control**

The challenges that teens have with co-construction of self and contamination from friends in SM were discussed in section 6.13.1. It was established that teens felt out of control of their projected identity in SM. This section focuses on the lack of control they perceive themselves to have in relation to WO.

Some teens felt that Facebook itself was controlling them, the addictive tendencies discussed in section 7.5.4.1., resulted in them feeling compelled to use FB. Others worried that teens increasingly live their lives through FB and that it was controlling their thoughts and perceptions.

*FB controls, em...it can change the way people think, change the way people perceive others ... It's basically one big like directory of life, isn't it? It just controls everything that you do, if you get sucked up into it, or let yourself get sucked up into it. (Stephen)*

*I think, now, we tend to live our life through things like FB. You know, you constantly hear people like, "Oh, did you see what so-and-so put on Facebook last night?" and it's not, "Oh, did you see what they did in town the other day?" you know, "Did you hear what they did the other day?" it's just like..."Did you hear what they put on Facebook?" that kind of thing. (Harriot)*

*But then when you see on FB – like so and so is in a relationship, that's what people talk about, definitely – they call it 'FB official' so if it's not on FB then it can't be true. Then when it's on FB then it must be true – that's really bad as well. (Rachel)*

Stephen uses powerful metaphors to describe FB; "a big directory of life" and "sucking you up into it", the idea that teens have to resist the magnetic force towards the medium. Harriot's comments have similar resonance, that FB has become so ingrained in the rituals of everyday life that people live their lives through it, it facilitates social interaction and RL events are not as important unless validated in SM. This was further evidenced through many participants' comments about the validation of relationship status on FB (see Rachel).

### **Danger**

Whilst teens were aware of 'stalking' and had concerns about social monitoring by their partners and parents. They also worried about more significant dangers such as hacking, identity theft and stranger danger.

*My Facebook got hacked a couple of years ago and the person ... was putting statuses like, well, I haven't put that, and posting my pictures onto other people's walls ... So I ended up having to try and shut it down before*

*they could do anything else. But then you've got the problem of people being really upset by it ... You're having to go round and say, "Look, that wasn't actually me," but then it's out of your hands - because you don't know what else has been done, which is probably why I'm so careful with it ... If someone was to type my name in to Facebook to look me up, all they can see is my profile picture, they can't see anything else about my profile, and I think, if someone knows me, then they'll know my picture, as opposed to adding me randomly. (Harriot)*

*I don't really tend to let random people add me because I had a creepy old man from America try and add me once ... and I had no idea who he was but I kind of stalked him back and saw his friends all seemed to be teenage boys that had pictures of themselves topless, so I ignored him and blocked him. (Cameron)*

Having her FB account hacked resulted in negative consequences to Harriot's reputation, relationships and self-confidence. She was shaken up by the whole experience and it has understandably led her to be highly critical of FB and cautious about her security settings and usage. Other teens discussed incidences of 'stranger danger' where they had received approaches from suspicious persons (cf Wilcox and Stephen, 2012).

Cameron's response to 'stranger danger' was to turn the tables on his predator, 'stalking' him back to check him out. Many teens deployed defensive techniques to protect themselves from such dangers (see section 6.14) however potential risks still lurked in the background. Some teens like Harriot felt the danger on behalf of themselves and their peers and expressed concern about those who they felt put themselves at greater risk.

*You know, you've got younger generations of people trying to be older, so they think the way to get attention is by the photos that they take, so their photos become more revealing, and then they're making themselves like ... They're putting themselves out there to people, because you get a lot of invites off people that you don't know ... (Harriot)*

## 7.6. Observers

The teen participants in this study varied widely in their observing behaviours. Some were highly involved and engrossed in watching others in social media, frequently surfing around their friends, friends of friends, strangers etc... getting lost in the flow of the activity (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). Others expressed limited interest, participating infrequently for shorter periods but not feeling the strong urge to look into other people's lives (Bumgarner, 2007). Moreover some participants were strongly opposed to watching others and considered it intrusive and inappropriate to nose around in other people's business.

The analysis in this chapter has considered: subjects, reasons for watching others, behaviours, feelings and attitudes towards privacy. These analyses were cross referenced and considered alongside participants' personalities, position in the social hierarchy and involvement in WO and five typical teen observer profiles were conceptualised. The in vivo term 'stalker', used frequently by participants to describe the extensive following of the social media activities of another user has been adopted to label the profiles: The Gossip Stalker, The Relationship Stalker, The Shy Aspirer, The FOMO Stalker and the Anti-Stalker (see Figure 7.2).

### 7.6.1. The Gossip Stalker

*I guess most people are like me having a  
nosey around ... if I know that there's  
gossip, then like I'm definitely on it!*  
(Kezia)

The Gossiper is a highly involved observer, watching others many times a day, sometimes for lengthy periods (2-3 hours). They tend to be extrovert and medium to high in their social hierarchy. Their subjects are many and varied: close, intermediate and distant; aspirational, associative and dis-associative and mostly unaware they are being watched (adding to their enjoyment). Subjects involved in some form of spectacle (new relationships, break-ups, embarrassing moments, drunken incidences and sexual content) are of particular interest and they enjoy sharing their findings and criticising their subjects with friends at a distance. They sometimes watch others in groups, bonding over the resultant gossip.

Gossip stalkers have little regard for others' privacy and are prepared to drill down into historic postings, friends of friends of friends' profiles and wall to wall conversations to discover more about the subjects that pique their interest. They exhibit characteristics of

'radical individualism' (Bork, 1996 cited in Calvert, 2004) placing their own sensation seeking entertainment needs above their subjects' privacy.

The activity of watching others meets several of their needs: social, entertainment, self-enhancement, learning, social power, self-protection and relationship development. Gossipers thoroughly enjoy watching others, frequently using it for escapism and often exhibiting addictive tendencies, for instance losing track of time. Their high involvement relates to an obsessive passion for stalking, as opposed to any particular person. They view it as an enjoyable and competitive challenge, getting a buzz out of it and seeing it as an achievement if they are the first to discover something, suggesting that they are in a state of 'flow' (Hoffman and Novak, 1996).

The only negative feelings they express about watching others are guilt for being distracted (from their studies) and fear of their 'stalking' being discovered. At some level they acknowledge that their prying is wrong and that it breaches social conventions, this leads them to reflect on who might be 'stalking' them and the possible negative consequences. Paradoxically this group maintains high security settings to protect their own privacy, going to great lengths to ensure that they do not become the subject!

### 7.6.2. The Relationship Stalker

*If I do fancy somebody ... then I will  
literally look at his FB 5 times a day and  
if see any comments from girls then I'd  
have to read what they were talking  
about (laughs)  
(Alice)*

The Relationship Stalker is highly involved in watching others, with a specific purpose; to develop new relationships or maintain existing relationships. Their 'stalking' can be quite intensive, verging on obsessive, focusing on one subject. They watch others many times a day often for lengthy periods (2-3 hours). Their subjects are selected; people that they are attracted to or their existing partner. Subjects are often people in their intermediate circle or people that they have met recently, become interested in and want to develop a relationship with.

Relationship Stalkers did not conform to one personality type, they were extrovert, introvert; high, low and mid social hierarchy, male and female but with a common aim of developing or sustaining a particular relationship. They were more likely to 'stalk' alone, given their personalised motives but occasionally participated in group 'stalking' with close friends.

Relationship stalkers have little regard for others' privacy and will delve back historically, searching through their subject's previous relationship partners and friends, scrutinising their social interactions. For new relationships they identified common interests to enable conversations, viewing 'stalking' as an intermediary stage to increase their chance of success in F2F encounters. They also 'stalk' to filter out unsuitable potential partners, who are rejected without knowing that they had been under consideration.

Those in relationships, monitor their partner's every movement, their behaviour is similar but more motivated by jealousy, distrust and fear of embarrassment if their partner cheats. They scrutinise status updates, photographs and dissect interactions between their partner and other subjects, particularly if perceived to be a threat, often stalking their profiles too (cf Utz and Beukeboom, 2011). Watching others satisfies several of their needs: relationship development, entertainment, self-enhancement, learning, social power, risk reduction, self-protection and enhanced confidence. Relationship stalkers are highly involved sometimes to the point of obsession and addiction, frequently losing track of time. They are highly focused on their subject, their needs are personal and they endeavour to stay connected with the person concerned at all times.

Relationship stalkers feel embarrassed about their obsessive monitoring and are concerned about being discovered. Their personalised motives mean that the risks are higher and their experience of watching others is not always enjoyable. Developing obsessions with subjects who have no interest in them or discovering unfavourable information about an existing partner can cause Relationships Stalkers distress and damage their self-esteem. Furthermore the consequences of exposure could be catastrophic, almost certainly negatively affecting their prime goal.

### 7.6.3. The Shy Aspirer Stalker

*It's a walk through to see people without  
leaving a footprint – like who are they? –  
click on them! – sort of think about what  
they might actually be like.  
(Gary)*

Shy Aspirers are highly involved observers, watching others several times a day, sometimes for lengthy periods (2-3 hours). Shy Aspirers are introverted and typically low in the social hierarchy, mostly staying in the background in real life, not participating in group interactions beyond their close friends. Their 'stalking' is wide and deep, focused on

intermediate and distant subjects, who are almost certainly unaware that they are being watched and they seek to gain a deeper understanding of their wider network.

Shy aspirers have little regard for others' privacy and will probe into personal and intimate content. They are lone 'stalkers' and unlikely to share their findings with others. Their subjects are aspirational, generally higher up the social hierarchy, extroverts and 'popular' kids whom they do not socialise with in real life. By following their social media activities they share their experiences vicariously, gleaning strategies to increase their own social power. However they are also highly critical, frequently making 'constructive social comparisons', using criteria that they exceed their subjects on (e.g. grammar) thereby achieving self-enhancement and increasing their self-esteem.

Shy Aspirers satisfy several needs by watching others: sense of belonging, entertainment, self-enhancement, learning, social power, risk reduction, self-protection and enhanced confidence. Some were highly immersed, verging on addiction, rehearsing future social interactions and imagining themselves as part of their subject's social circle (parasocial relationships) (Calvert, 2004). Similar to other highly involved 'stalkers' they lose track of time, are highly focused on the task and feel in control demonstrating 'flow' (Hoffman and Novak, 1996).

In terms of negative feelings they are concerned about the distraction from their studies and are fearful of discovery by their more confident subjects. 'Stalking' gives Shy Aspirers a sense of power, a feeling of superiority over their subjects that they do not have in real life, which is rather enticing. However despite their downward comparisons, watching others may make them feel more inadequate and jealous of their subjects, thereby decreasing their self-esteem. As Shy Aspirers tend to spend a lot of time alone, 'stalking' provides them with escapism, entertainment and 'company'. So whilst they acknowledge that the intrusion to their subject's privacy is probably wrong they cannot help themselves because it meets so many of their core needs.

#### 7.6.4. FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) Stalker

*Like if I don't go online ... I'm worried I would miss something..... because then I would miss what's been going on FB, and then people will be... oh have you seen the picture on FB posted last night...(Nellie)*

FOMO stalkers are less involved in watching others, they participate but only because everyone else does and through fear of missing out on some news or gossip, thereby being out of the social loop (cf Madden et al, 2013). Their watching others behaviour is limited compared to previous 'stalkers'; they check their newsfeeds relatively frequently to ensure they do not miss anything but they do not spend extended periods browsing.

They tend to be mid social hierarchy and can be either extrovert or introvert, but watching others does not entice or engage them as much as it does others. However they are easily influenced and likely to conform to accepted practice, the 'herding instinct' takes over (Bumgarner, 2007). So they will skim statuses, photos and so on that come up on their newsfeed; but will not venture into more personal content unless prompted to do so.

They will join in gossip but will withdraw if topics become too personal or opinions too critical. They feel embarrassed knowing too much about other people's lives and would rather not get involved. They check people out before progressing new friendships and find social media interesting and fun but can take it or leave it.

Watching others satisfies fewer of their needs: social, relationship development, bonding with friends, risk reduction and self-protection. FOMO Stalkers do not experience 'flow', they are able to control their behaviour in social media and limit their participation, even forgetting to participate if unprompted by friends.

They feel intrusive reading other people's personal content and express negative feelings about those who stalk extensively. They accept responsibility for the boundaries of privacy and disengage if they feel something is inappropriate, regardless of whether it has been disclosed by the subject. FOMO Stalkers feel that SM can be distracting and addictive and they worry about friends who engage in it more frequently.

### 7.6.5. The Anti-Stalker

*I wouldn't because it's like  
going through someone's head ... photos are  
their memories and then like their walls kind  
of like their thoughts - that would be a bit too  
weird to be reading everything ... out of  
respect for them really.  
(Cameron)*

The Anti-Stalker actively disapproves of watching others; they interact with their close friends in SM but do not snoop around looking at other people's profiles, interests, photo albums and conversations. They consider this type of activity intrusive, rude, and disrespectful and are confident enough about their own values to express that to others and to abstain. These teens likened 'stalking' to taking ownership from the subjects either tangibly (e.g. photographs) or intangibly (e.g. thoughts and memories). Personality types varied; extrovert or introvert but these teens are 'role relaxed' thus not easily influenced by others (Kahle and Shoham, 1995) and able to resist the 'herding instinct' (Bumgarner, 2007).

Anti-stalkers are acutely aware of the dark side of watching others and believe that it causes problems such as attention-seeking, arguments, fights and gossip and would prefer to stay out of those situations. They disapprove of prolific stalkers and think it is undesirable to be so critical and judgemental of their subjects. They are concerned that their peers find SM distracting and addictive and do not adhere to boundaries of respectful behaviour. They take full responsibility for respecting others' privacy, disengaging if they see anything inappropriate and they worry about teens that disclose too many details about their private lives, thereby putting themselves at risk.

Anti-stalkers have mostly negative feelings towards watching others and do not find the activity enticing at all. Their attitudes have often been shaped by personal experiences such as unsolicited approaches or hacking. 'Stalking' meets very few of their needs besides protecting themselves against potential dangers, so they are unlikely to engage in the activity. Unsurprisingly Anti-stalkers maintain high security settings.



## 7.7. Chapter Summary

The previous chapter analysed the observable outward projecting side of teenage SM consumption; their self-presentation and self-maintenance strategies. This chapter analysed the hidden side of teen SM consumption; the practice of watching of others. The data indicated that 'passive' consumption of other people's lives had become more substantial practice than 'active' self-presentation, that it accounted for a greater proportion of overall SM consumption time and explained more of SM's compelling attraction for teenagers.

The analysis drew on concepts from Social Comparison Theory (SCT) (Festinger, 1954) and Mediated Voyeurism (MV) (Calvert, 2004) to understand teens' reasons, attitudes and feelings towards WO, so as to characterise these behaviours.






Firstly the external factors affecting WO in SM were considered: wider networks, SM incentive structures and social category fault lines. Secondly subjects were categorised according to their: relationship distance, social hierarchy position, behaviour and activities and awareness and willingness. Initial analyses suggested that teens often favoured intermediate, aspirational or dis-associative, unaware and unwilling subjects plus those involved in some form of spectacle.

Four key themes emerged to explain the reasons for WO: identity, relationships, entertainment and the dark side. Whilst there were many positive outcomes of these practices: increased social comparison information, opportunities for vicarious learning, ability to situate identities across social groups and time, opportunities to develop and maintain relationships, increased social bonding and reduced social risk. There were also a significant number of undesirable outcomes: addiction and distraction, lower regard for other people's privacy, increased critical culture, lack of empathy, harsher judgements, more downward comparisons and increased social monitoring. The mask of the Internet (Makarius, 1983) encouraged critical attitudes towards others. As a result of these embedded practices, teens increasingly experienced negative feelings towards FB in particular: being judged, feeling out of control and worrying about the potential dangers of the digital world.

The thematic analyses were compared, cross-referenced and combined to conceptualise five 'ideal types' (Weber, 1962) of teenage observers: Gossip Stalker, Relationship Stalker, Shy Aspirer, FOMO Stalker and Anti-Stalker. Each profile was characterised using the

following categories: reasons for watching others, personality, social hierarchy position, involvement, subjects, behaviour, needs met and attitudes towards privacy and feelings.

Figure 7.2. Profiles of Facebook Stalker s

<i>The Gossip Stalker</i>	<i>The Relationship Stalker</i>	<i>The Shy Aspirer</i>	<i>The FOMO Stalker</i>	<i>Anti-Stalker</i>
 <p><b>Reason:</b> Fuel for gossip  <b>Personality:</b> Extrovert, Med/high in social hierarchy  <b>Involvement:</b> High  <b>Subjects:</b> Close, intermediate and distant, spectacles, incongruous  <b>Behaviours:</b> Wide, deep, historical stalking; sensation seeking; critical of others; loves a challenge; group stalking/sharing  <b>Needs met:</b> Social, escapism, bonding, entertainment, learning, self-enhancement, social power, self-protection, relationship development  <b>Regard for others' privacy:</b> Low  <b>Feelings:</b>            + Enjoyment, excitement            - Distraction, guilt, fear of discovery.</p>	 <p><b>Reason:</b> Develop/maintain romantic relationships  <b>Personality:</b> All types  <b>Involvement:</b> High  <b>Subjects:</b> Close, intermediate, partner, desired partner(s)  <b>Behaviours:</b> Focused, deep, historical stalking; stalks subject's associates also, stalks alone (covertly)  <b>Needs met:</b> relationship development, entertainment, self-enhancement, learning, social power, risk reduction, self-protection, enhanced confidence.  <b>Regard for others' privacy:</b> Low  <b>Feelings:</b>            + Reduced risk, improved confidence            - Jealousy, embarrassment, fear of discovery.</p>	 <p><b>Reason:</b> Feel involved with groups/ understand others  <b>Personality:</b> Introverted, low in social hierarchy  <b>Involvement:</b> High  <b>Subjects:</b> Intermediate and distant, aspirational, extroverts  <b>Behaviours:</b> Wide, deep, historical stalking; critical of others; stalks alone (covertly)  <b>Needs met:</b> Parasocial, escapism, entertainment, sense of belonging, self-enhancement, learning, social power, risk reduction, self-protection, enhanced confidence  <b>Regard for others' privacy:</b> Low  <b>Feelings:</b>            + Superiority, improve confidence            - Distraction, guilt, jealousy, embarrassment, fear of discovery, decreased self-esteem.</p>	 <p><b>Reason:</b> Fear of Missing Out  <b>Personality:</b> Introvert/extrovert, medium social hierarchy, easily influenced  <b>Involvement:</b> Medium  <b>Subjects:</b> Close, intermediate, spectacles, new friendships/relationships  <b>Behaviours:</b> Limited, skimming, group stalking (prompted)  <b>Needs met:</b> social, bonding, relationship development, risk reduction and self-protection  <b>Regard for others' privacy:</b> Medium  <b>Feelings:</b>            + Fun and Social            - Embarrassed/awkward breaching privacy, worries that it is distracting/addictive for others.</p>	 <p><b>Reason:</b> Against invading privacy  <b>Personality:</b> Introvert/extrovert, medium social hierarchy, role relaxed  <b>Involvement:</b> Low  <b>Subjects:</b> Close  <b>Behaviours:</b> Limited, skimming  <b>Needs met:</b> risk reduction and self-protection  <b>Regard for others' privacy:</b> High - rude and disrespectful  <b>Feelings:</b>            + Self-protection            - breaching privacy, Worries that it is distracting/addictive/dangerous for others. Dislikes critical culture, gossip, fights, attention seeking associated with SM.</p>

# Chapter 8

# Discussion

## **8.0. Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of consumption behaviours in social media and their effect on identity development processes. The study focused on millennial teenagers, as the earliest adopters and heaviest users of SM. This cohort rapidly adopted SM from its inception; establishing the consumption behaviours, rituals and unwritten rules for themselves and for subsequent adopter groups. This section brings the two data analysis chapters together; firstly reviewing the key findings from the initial research questions (see Chapter 5 section 5.6) then developing these discussions by comparing the data with extant literature to address the refined research questions (RQ1-4) and articulate the resultant conceptual models.

The analysis drew from a range of theoretical concepts notably: Bauman (2007); Belk (1988, 2013); boyd (2006, 2007); Calvert (2004); Festinger (1954); Goffman (1959); Granovetter (1973); Mittal (2006) and Schau and Gilly (2003). Overall the study: develops Belk's (2013) Extended Self in a Digital World in the specific context of social media (SM); adds to the body of social comparison literature (e.g. Festinger, 1954; Garcia et al, 2013; Wheeler, 1991; Wills, 1981; Wood, 1989) and extends Calvert's (2004) concepts of mediated voyeurism.

The qualitative study was designed using mixed methods; firstly a pilot study utilising teen diaries and five in-depth interviews (Stage 1). Secondly, 26 in-depth interviews with teen participants (16-18s), gender balance (10M 16F), varied personalities and some ethnic diversity (Stage 2) and an observational analysis of 13 FB profiles over a two week period (see Appendix 5.8).

## **8.1. Discussion of Initial Research Questions**

### **8.1.1. How and why do millennial teens consume social media in their everyday lives?**

Initial explorations of the data revealed ritualistic behaviour; teens would typically log in at similar times of the day and follow a routinized checking process. However closer scrutiny revealed diverse consumption habits across participants: light to heavy usage, low to high involvement; positive, negative and indifferent attitudes and feelings towards the medium. Their reasons for consumption were also varied and were initially categorised under four themes: instrumental, socialising, identity-related, entertainment.

This exploratory phase revealed that watching other people's activities was at least as important for teens as expressing themselves in social media (supporting Metzger et al, 2011) and thereby directed the data analysis into two overarching themes: teen self-presentation and watching others (Chapters 6 and 7) similar to Bolton et al's (2013) framework of 'contributing vs consuming'. Moreover it highlighted that behaviours were not uniform across the cohort, so it was unlikely that generalised rules would be generated.

### **8.1.2. How do teens develop, present and defend their identities in social media?**

Teens presented various aspects of their selves in social media and the data clustered these attributes into five themes: embodied self, relationships, interests, activities and opinions, associations and behaviours (similar to Mittal, 2006). They drew on various symbolic materials and used the facilities available to them in SM to communicate their identity messages. Thus, teens presented their identities in SM drawing on a range of strategies through a toolbox of digital symbolic resources. This led to self-presentation being conceptualised in terms of strategies and resources and the first research question was therefore refined accordingly.

**RQ1:** What strategies and resources do teens use for self-presentation in social media?

Four distinct audiences were identified for teen identity displays: school friends, other peer groups, family and work colleagues, the first two being highest priority. In addition it became apparent that the specific attributes of the millennial cohort influenced self-presentation behaviour. Millennials have been characterised as creative, technologically-savvy, achievement oriented, emotionally expressive, team players and reflexive (Howe and Strauss, 2000). These qualities affected their behaviours, for instance they developed creative digital expressions of self, often in conjunction with others which were competitive and demanding of feedback and affirmation. Moreover they were keen to ensure that they presented their 'best side' in social media and manipulated their identity displays accordingly.

Several external influencing factors were identified through the extant literature as affecting behaviour in social media: wider networks, sharing culture, co-construction and distributed memories (e.g. Bauman, 2007; Belk, 2013) and it became apparent that both SM environs and teen behaviours were constantly evolving and that FB's structure, features and embedded cultural practices strongly influenced these behaviours. Participants reported different practices in other SM platforms such as Twitter. This led to

the conceptualisation of two additional external influencing factors: acceleration (developed from Rosa, 2015) and SM Incentive Structures (developed from Garcia et al, 2013) (see sections 6.11.3 and 7.3.2.). Thus audiences, 'millennialness' and external influencing factors were integrated into the Self-Presentation in Social Media model (see Figure 6.8).

Further probing into participants' experiences revealed that the influencing factors generated challenges for self-presentation particularly in terms of managing multiple audiences in the same social space and coping with co-constructed identities and 'contamination' from others. Teens struggled to maintain the social group boundaries that exist naturally in RL and this resulted in them feeling out of control. To counter this they employed various strategies to defend their identities thus leading to the development of research question 2.

**RQ2:** How do teens maintain and defend their identities in social media?

### **8.1.3. Why do teens watch others in social media, what benefits do they obtain and what needs does it satisfy for them?**

As discussed in 8.1.1. the data showed that 'passive' consumption of SM was as prevalent as 'active' self-presentation and this helped to explain teens' compelling attraction to the medium. The data analysis (Chapter 7) firstly characterised the 'subjects' (the people being watched) and developed categories of: relationship distance, social hierarchy position, behaviour, activities, awareness and willingness (see Table 7.1). Then investigated the reasons for watching and identified four themes: identity-related, relationship development and maintenance, entertainment and dark motives. Teens experienced both positive and negative outcomes from watching others.

Positively, the wider networks produced increased social comparison information providing more opportunities for vicarious learning and thereby reducing social risk. Distributed memories enabled teens to monitor their identities over time, thus enabling them to evaluate identity consistency and self-development. Access to a 24/7 communal social space meant that teens were constantly aware of their 'friends' activities and the perpetual content was entertaining and a catalyst for social interaction both on and offline, thus increasing opportunities for social bonding (supporting Smock et al, 2011).

On the other hand, many found watching others distracting and addictive and it had wrought increased social comparison which was increasingly downward and critical.

Participants demonstrated a lack of empathy and a lower regard for other people's privacy, at times using the medium for intense social monitoring of others. These behaviours had generated many negative feelings amongst teens e.g. jealousy, feeling judged, feeling out of control (supporting Fox and Moreland, 2015; Ouwkerk and Johnson, 2016).

These initial findings helped to refine the research questions into two distinct strands which cut across the four reasons for watching themes: social comparison and mediated voyeurism. Firstly social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) was used as lens to address research question 3:

**RQ3:** How does social media affect teenage social comparison behaviours?

Secondly to explicate the entertainment theme specifically but also to shed light on the other themes, the mediated voyeurism literature (Clavert, 2004) was used to problematise voyeuristic behaviours in SM, thus leading to research question 4:

**RQ4:** How is voyeurism characterised and enacted in social media?

## **8.2. Discussion of Key Findings and Conceptual Models**

As a result of the initial findings, iterative analysis and comparisons with the extant literature the research questions were refined as:

**RQ1.** What strategies and resources do teens use for self-presentation in social media?

**RQ2.** How do teens maintain and defend their identities in social media?

**RQ3.** How does social media affect teenage social comparison behaviours?

**RQ4.** How is voyeurism characterised and enacted in social media?

The data was analysed adopting a cross-sectional phenomenological approach, initially working inductively through the content to develop an analytical framework. The 'Framework' data management tool was utilised to index, sort and review the data and to synthesise and identify emerging themes. The data was analysed under two overarching thematic areas; self-presentation (Chapter 6) and watching others (Chapter 7) which were brought together to form the holistic model of millennial teen identity process in SM (see Figure 8.1). Several sub themes were identified within each thematic area and were analysed using 'Framework' matrices (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Spencer et al, 2013):



- Self-presentation and feedback process
- Strategies to maintain and defend digital identity
- Social comparison behaviours
- Social media voyeurism categorisation and teen stalker profiles

The initial stage of the analysis focused on identifying the strategies and resources that teenagers employed to present themselves and the external factors affecting these processes. During this investigation it became apparent that watching others (WO) in SM was widespread and that this formed a critical part of teen identity development. So the second stage explored these surveillance behaviours, unpicking their purposes for social comparison, relationship development, entertainment and darker motives.

The study focused predominantly on millennial teens and Facebook (FB) so the cohorts' characteristics and FB's incentive structures significantly influenced the consumption behaviours observed. However, whilst the findings of this study are in a particular research setting, the model allows for adaptation to other SM platforms and user groups thus widening the scope of its application.

### **8.2.1. What Strategies and Resources do Consumers use for Self-Presentation in Social Media?**

Belk's (1988) extended self purported that people had an individual self with an inner core plus various aggregate selves related to other people or persons of importance to them. Moreover that the self was further extended by possessions and things to which they felt attached. In the pre-digital age, the self was seen as embodied and the components making up the extended self were material, other people having the potential to be both integral to the (aggregate) self and objects forming part of the extended self. Belk (1988) posited that the components of the extended self provided cues of an individual's self to others and acted as markers for collective memory. In addition he predicted that the self would develop and change over time and that meaningful possessions such as photographs could provide links back to past selves and emotions (Belk, 1991).

In the extended self in a digital world (Belk, 2013) updated these concepts to reflect the range of digital environments prevailing today. The major components of Belk's extended self in the digital era were: body, internal processes, ideas, experiences, people, places and possessions (Belk, 2013) and five thematic changes were identified: dematerialization, re-embodiment, sharing, co-construction of self and distributed memory.

In this study teens' self-presentation strategies were analysed under five categories adapted from Belk's (1988, 2013) models of extended self, Mittal's (2006) six components of self and Goffman's (1959) 'given vs given out' expressions of self. These categories were:

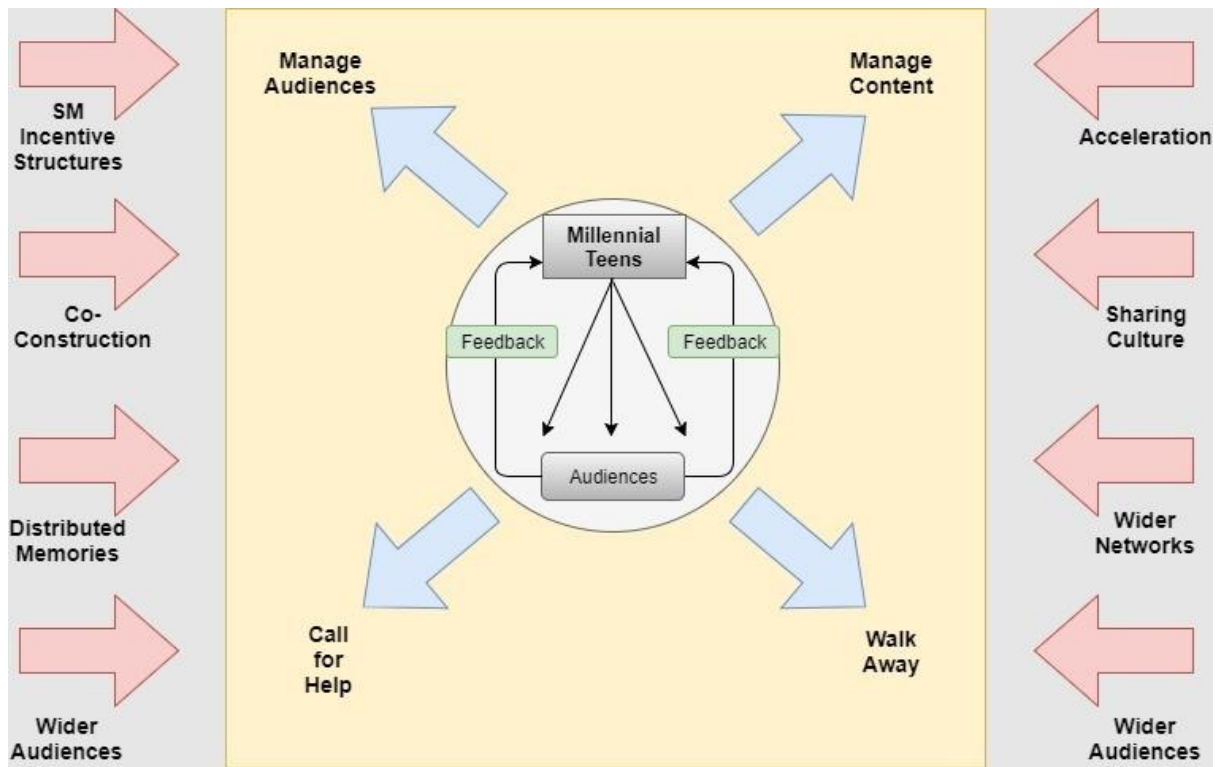
- the embodied self
- relationships
- interests, activities and opinions
- associations
- behaviour (see Figure 6.2).

In addition several external influencing factors affecting behaviours in SM were integrated into the model from the extant literature:

- wider networks (Belk, 2013)
- wider audiences (Belk, 2013)
- sharing culture (Belk, 2013)
- co-construction of self (Belk, 2013)
- distributed memories (Belk, 2013)
- acceleration (Rosa, 2015)
- SM incentive structures (Garcia et al, 2013)

Moreover this model recognised that self-presentation strategies in SM were mediated by the participants' millennial characteristics and through a toolkit of symbolic immaterial resources (user-generated content, digital photographs, SM features, applications, other multi-media resources, other users' content) applying a dynamic set of unwritten rules, resulting in different approaches to self-presentation.

Belk (2013) posited that potential audiences were wider in SM than in RL, that they crossed multiple roles and that people consciously presented themselves outwards to the world, which he termed 'sharing out'. This study found that teen audiences in SM spanned four key groups: school friends, other peer groups, family and work. It confirmed Tong et al's (2008) findings that teens maintained larger networks of 'friends' in FB (400-500 vs ~150 in RL: Dunbar, 2010) and whilst 'friends' were mostly people that they knew, rather than strangers, they invariably included a significant number of loose acquaintances. *Number of friends* in FB was seen as an indicator of popularity, thus teens felt obliged to maintain large (but not too large) networks to support their projected identity. Whilst the author supports Belk (2013) in that these networks provided valuable information to support



**Figure 8.1 Holistic Model of Teen Self-Presentation in Social Media**

teens' own self-presentations, for the most part, larger networks were less about presenting themselves to the wider world, and more about avoiding being seen as unpopular and/or causing offence by rejecting *friend requests*. As Belk (2013) argues, managing their various role identities across multiple audiences in the same social space was challenging and something they would ideally prefer to avoid; this is discussed in more depth in section 8.2.2.

Belk (2013) identified an increased predilection to 'sharing' and the public documenting of everyday life. Several other studies have argued that young consumers feel under pressure to be constantly active and interesting to their SM peer groups (e.g. Grohol, 2011; Wortham, 2011). Teens expressed their happiness, sadness, anger and love in FB, online disinhibition encouraging increased emotional expression, reflexivity and openness to feedback and support from others (Belk, 2013). The findings of this study support these assertions, agreeing that digital sharing has become ubiquitous in millennial teen culture, however there were indications that this was changing. Millennial teens constantly immersed themselves in their extended peer social environment via SM and were incentivised by FB to share their thoughts, feelings and activities whilst simultaneously consuming the digitally presented selves of others. However whilst teens felt pressured to stay connected, over time the evolved critical culture in FB had inclined them to watch more than share. They considered that events shared should be 'worth it', milestone moments rather than mundane. In addition this study extends Belk's (2013) paper by introducing the concept of 'social media incentive structures'; recognising that different SM environments exert different effects on self-presentation behaviours.

SM users experience a 'shared' sense of space, Belk (2013) posits that SM environments constitute what has previously been coined a 'third place'; a place other than home or work where people can relax and enjoy themselves (Oldenburg, 1999). Pre-digital studies into 'third places' found that social interaction with 'weak ties' (loose acquaintances) in these spaces could be valuable in developing bridging capital (Granovetter, 1983; Putnam, 2000) and Belk (2013) claimed that this applies in digital environs also. This study supports Belk's argument, however argues that the interactions with 'intermediate' friends (weak ties) are mostly passive, watching as opposed to interacting, conforming to one of the 'unwritten rules', that you must not visibly interact with people who are not close friends, even if they are your FB 'friends'. Additionally this study found that teens blend their SM space with their other social spaces, comfortably managing multiple channels in parallel, often interacting with the same people across different media and F2F simultaneously.

Belk (2013) argued that digital identities were increasingly the outcome of co-construction as opposed to individual endeavours. Other people's comments on photographs or statuses, add to and adapt the original meanings. Davies (2007) referred to this as 'digital patina', similar to Belk's (1988) description of 'contamination'. Belk (2013) argued that digital items acquire shared ownership and as conversations develop, identity messages accrue 'digital patina' becoming richer, less individual and more joint expressions of aggregate selves. This study supports Belk's arguments and extends the discussion by considering this behaviour alongside millennials' team-playing characteristics. They thrive on group working, so co-construction and group identity projects perfectly complement their preferred behaviours. Moreover teens understand that identity messages in SM are more powerful if expressed or affirmed by a third party and this study found that teens relied on friends to substantiate and validate their outwardly projected digital identities and also to reassure themselves of their own self-worth. SM makes this easy via *likes*, *comments* and *tags*. In addition teens preferred to present themselves as part of a group rather than as an individual as it bolstered their defences against criticism from others (see section 8.2.2.). On the other hand, in line with Belk (2013), this study found that co-constructed identities resulted in less control over digital identities and this generated other issues (see section 8.2.2.). So the author supports Belk (2013) in that FB 'friends' formed a coherent sense of aggregate self, their psyches of self and others merged and they participated in a shared aggregate space that transcended the individual, resulting in both positive and negative outcomes.

The anonymity experienced in early computer mediated environments has largely disappeared and visual digital environments, like SM, are mostly 'nonymous social spaces where individuals interact under their own name with people they also know in RL (Zhao et al, 2008). Belk (2013) argued that this generated a re-embodiment of online identities; people largely interacting as themselves, bringing their offline and online identities together. However he acknowledged that some behavioural differences remained, online disinhibition affording users the freedom to experiment and behave differently in SM. The participants in this study strived to present their 'best side' online, endeavouring to convey impressions that they were attractive, popular, happy, successful and funny then seeking feedback and affirmation in the form of *likes*, *comments* and *tags* as identified in previous research (e.g. boyd, 2007). Having grown up in a celebrity obsessed culture (Cashmore, 2006 p254) and in undergoing the transition from adolescence to adulthood, participants were highly focused on physical appearance. They drew on their advanced creative and

technological skills, and digital symbolic resources to enhance and embellish the presentations of their embodied selves. So this study extends Belk (2013) arguments by taking into consideration the combined effect of the SM environment and the typical characteristics and skills of millennial teens on their consumption behaviours.

This study supports Belk's (2013) assertion that SM spaces have become important sites for psychological development, the findings revealed that teens used SM as an experimental social space; testing out new behaviours online in advance of RL. For instance millennials sometimes chose to present themselves to peers through risky behaviours, such as drinking alcohol and sexual activities. They felt that their experimentation could safely be shared amongst their peer group with less accountability. However perceptions were changing as teens struggled to manage multiple audiences and increasingly recognised that SM's persistence, replicability and searchability capabilities increased the probability of their past, present and future selves colliding; generating serious consequences for their future prospects. So this study extends Belk's (2013) discussions by highlighting teens' changing behaviours as their experience of SM has developed.

In line with Belk (1988), teens extended their digital self-presentations through their associations with important others. Relationships were communicated via user generated content, appropriated content and FB features such as *relationship status, status, number of friends, photographs, tags, posts* and *comments*. For teens, peers took priority and they acquired kudos by publically displaying their relationships with friends, partners and siblings. Increasingly teens used FB to publically validate their (romantic) relationships and the term 'Facebook Official' was commonly used to denote that two people were 'in a relationship'. Lee et al (1999) termed this self-presentation tactic as 'basking' in the glory of others to enhance one's own projected identity. Furthermore these connections supported their co-constructed selves, augmenting their individual identity messages with additional meaning and depth and evidencing third party perceptions of themselves. This study also extends Belk's (2013) discussion by highlighting the practice of public 'bantering' between friends, often encoded, incorporating in-jokes and private meanings, thereby proclaiming their special relationships whilst simultaneously excluding wider audiences from the meaning of the conversations. As well as enhancing teens' outwardly projected identity, these public demonstrations of affiliation augmented the individuals' enjoyment of their social interactions, knowing that others were sharing in the moment.

Teens added depth to their digital self-presentations by communicating their interests, activities, opinions and associations via places, brands and celebrities. In doing so they conveyed their thoughts, likes, dislikes and pastimes through the medium of things. Moreover popular youth interests such as music, sport and the arts provided catalysts for social interaction, bonding with peers and developing relationships. Initiating conversations around a new band, a football match or an item of news were perceived as less boastful and more acceptable than postings about themselves. Associations enabled teens to symbolically enhance their self-presentations by transferring meanings associated with the item to their own identity (McCracken, 1989). This supports Belk's (2013) proposition that people develop and share group identities online via common interests thereby creating a sense of community. Furthermore it extends the discussion by highlighting the need for them to understand the 'unwritten rules' in order to know which things to align themselves with to successfully project a 'cool' image.

Belk (2013) identified that many 'possessions' were immaterial and intangible in digital environments and were perceived as less authentic, more transient and less central to identity than physical possessions. In SM he focused on photographs, which once posted, acquired shared ownership and were transient in that they were only available for as long as the Timeline displayed them. This study confirmed that symbolic resources used to support self-presentation were immaterial; often digital representations of their physical equivalents (e.g. photographs, music, videos). FB and other multi-media providers (e.g. YouTube) provide vast compendiums of free identity-making symbolic resources, thus teens were no longer bound by the constraints of physical consumption and financial outlay. They could selectively appropriate digital symbolic materials and use them to create aesthetically pleasing identity displays to referent others online. Thus, these findings challenge Belk's assertions that immaterial artefacts are less valued; he considered them in terms of their value as personal possessions to individuals; whereas here they are considered in terms of their utility value; that is their potential to enhance the individual's projected digital personae. In this sense their value to teens as symbolic identity making tools and their transience (flexibility) often exceeds that of physical possessions.

Digital artefacts such as photographs, statuses, mini blogs and events posted in FB are automatically stored and easily retrieved, enabling millennials to reflect on their past, both individually and in groups. Teen participants reported charting their self-development and identity consistency, recognising their increased maturity and enjoying opportunities to re-bond with friends through reminiscences. Belk (2013) referred to these artefacts as digital

autobiographical memory cues, likening them to family photo albums, encouraging people to bond through shared stories and events of significance thus developing co-constructed shared memories and aggregate identity. The study supports this assertion but extends it further, as SM allows teens to experience other people's distributed memories also, including more distant (intermediate) 'friends' thus permitting vicarious learning from aspirational subjects providing information and resources with which to reflexively develop and refine their presented identities.

Giddens (1991) claimed that identity is not found in behaviour, nor in the response of others but in the capacity to sustain a particular narrative over time. FB's Timeline organises activities in a linear temporal format, thus enabling users to recall, review and evaluate the consistency of their identity on an on-going basis. Akin to physical photo albums, digital mementoes tend to record selective (happy) memories as opposed to the ups and downs of everyday life. With the ubiquity of digitally altered photographs, the potential to construct selective positive memories are increased further (Belk, 2013). Moreover in the digital era, autobiographical memories are often co-constructed, shared and persistent, plus audiences are wider, so there is an increase in distributed memories (Belk, 2013). This study found that teens viewed the ability to visualise their identities across time as both positive and negative. They valued being able to evidence their self-development and increasing maturity but sometimes found the persistent echoes of their previous selves embarrassing, especially when aired publicly, with new audiences. Teens therefore tried to escape their younger selves by moving on to different SM platforms. For transitioning teens, sustaining a consistent identity narrative as Giddens (1991) suggests is not necessarily desirable, on the contrary, teens seek to evidence an evolving narrative, hence the 'moving on' theme in this study (see section 7.5.1.4.). SM's distributed memories, persistence and searchability capabilities therefore, both enabled and constrained teen identity development.

Navigating these various challenges resulted in teens conducting active and deliberate impression management in FB. Participants engaged in various intentional behaviours according to evolving 'unwritten rules' to ensure the presentation of their 'best self', such as planned and timed *statuses*, edited, selected and deleted *photographs*, deleted *statuses* and *comments*. Furthermore teens also manipulated their settings and utilised private *message groups* to maintain social group boundaries, for instance, setting their *status* to offline, hiding their posts from others or hiding others' *posts* from their *Timeline*. However,



teens also exhibited various unintentional behaviours (e.g. usage, frequency of posts and communication style) which added further meaning to their digitally presented selves.

### 8.2.2. How do Consumers Maintain and Defend their Identities in Social Media?

Teens had developed various coping strategies in response to the factors affecting consumption behaviours in SM (critical culture, co-construction, wider networks, non-segregated audiences, sharing culture, distributed memory, increased social comparison, infinite availability of symbolic resources and the competitive, self-critical nature of millennials). This thesis summarises these strategies to maintain and defend their digital identities as: managing audiences, managing content, call for help and walking away (see Figure 6.10).

The vast compendium of symbolic resources and infinite possibilities for self-expression exerted pressure upon teens to continually innovate and refresh their identity presentations (Bauman, 2007). In addition they felt compelled to maintain positive impressions of their co-constructed digital identities across different several audiences in the same social space. Belk (2013) proposed that participants experience multiplicity; trying to manage their various identities across time, space and social groups. This study highlighted the particular difficulty that teens have managing the overlap between their parents and peers. As they transition from adolescent to adult, they experiment with various identities, which most would prefer not to share with their parents. In addition FB regularly confronted them with embarrassing past personas, generating self-criticism and more cautious (inhibited) behaviour going forward. Furthermore teens increasingly expressed concerns about possible repercussions on their future personas, for instance starting university and future employment. The following strategies extend Belk's (2013) findings that SM users find multiplicity problematic by revealing the various strategies that they employ to manage these situations.

To re-segregate their various personas, teens tried to manage their audiences by limiting their friend network, for instance declined *friend requests* from parents, other adults and unwanted peers. Other strategies included restricting their settings, creating closed *message groups* and customised *photo albums*, hiding content from certain audiences, *blocking* people or *unfriending* them. Teens endeavoured to restrict access to their digital identities to re-establish the boundaries of their RL social groups.

In addition, teens attempted to protect their digital identities by managing the content. They were increasingly selective and cautious about the content that they shared in FB. With multiple audiences in the same space, some teens tried to maintain hybrid identities, aimed at pleasing all audiences. In the event that this failed, they employed various recovery strategies, editing or deleting offensive content. Conscious of their lack of control over other people's contaminating posts (Belk, 2013), for instance unflattering or incriminating *photographs*, they tried to combat the searchability and linkage to their named *profiles* by *untagging* the offending content (see Box 6.1.).

The third strategy that teens employed to protect their SM identity was to 'call for help'. For instance where they were concerned about their parents discovering their risky behaviours they would make tactical requests to their friends not to *post* or *tag* incriminating *statuses* or *photographs* of them. In cases where teens were subject to abuse or bullying, they would ask friends to post supporting comments. In more serious situations they would report incidences to a higher authority, for instance FB, their school or their parents.

Finally, in extreme situations for example where their account had been hacked, or they had been publically humiliated, teens felt they had no choice but to 'walk away'. Some teens disabled their SM account, taking themselves completely away from the social environment at least temporarily. Whilst there were overlaps between SM and RL, this approach generally seemed to take the steam out of a situation, as the other party was rarely as bold in RL as they were on SM, so any conflict usually dissipated fairly quickly.

At times SM left teens feeling vulnerable to privacy invasion, public embarrassment and safety breaches. So whilst they needed strategies to present themselves; maintenance and defensive strategies were equally important to enable them to manage their self across both SM and RL worlds. Moreover this impression management often required more effort and vigilance than developing and presenting self in the first place.

### **8.2.3. How does Social Media affect Teens' Social Comparison Behaviours?**

Social Comparison Theory (SCT) posits that people compare themselves with similar others for self-evaluation, self-enhancement and self-improvement purposes (Festinger, 1954; Wood, 1989). Later studies asserted that people also made social comparisons with dissimilar others if they provided useful and additional reference points for individual and group self-evaluation (Mettee and Smith, 1977). Other researchers found that people

compared themselves across a range of personal attributes (Hakmiller, 1962, 1966) and that they made downward comparisons to increase their self-enhancement and improve their self-esteem or sustain the belief that they have self-worth (Crocker and Park, 2004; Wills, 1981). Additionally Mettee and Smith (1977) investigated the utilisation of SC for interpersonal attraction purposes. More recently Garcia et al (2013) argued that the social environment had a significant influence on SC practices. This study revealed different approaches, reasons and outcomes for SC in SM and considered the effect of environmental factors (wider networks, incentive structures and social category fault lines) on user practices.

SM's wider social networks expand the potential for SC beyond close friends. Combined with the prevailing 'sharing culture', teens could peruse the lives of their loose acquaintances providing easy access to a breadth and depth of personal information, including historical details, that they would not have been party to in RL. Festinger (1954) proposed that people were mostly interested in comparing themselves with similar and close others and that the larger the pool of subjects, the fewer comparisons they would make. Conversely Granovetter (1983) argued that people utilised 'weak ties' as a source of new ideas and different viewpoints and perspectives. Similarly Putnam (2000) asserted that people developed valuable 'bridging capital' through their interactions with 'weak ties'. This study's findings support Granovetter and Putnam; participants compared themselves with a wide range of subjects: aspirational, associative and disassociative, within and across social category fault lines. Teens were particularly interested in scrutinising the lives of their 'intermediate subjects' (weak ties) and contrary to Festinger's prediction, access to a wider pool of subjects intensified SC behaviour and wrought a more competitive social environment. Figure 7.1 presents the range of reasons why teens watch others in SM.

For team oriented millennials, a sense of belonging within their social group was vital. Teens made social comparisons at individual and group levels and the information supported their identity development, allowing them to 'know their place' and their group's place in the social hierarchy, boost self-esteem, learn, aspire and realise self-development. Wider networks enabled teens to learn vicariously from more people's experiences and to model their behaviour accordingly to support their own self-development, thus supporting Giddens (1991). Furthermore this study extends Giddens' findings that people use SC to mitigate social risk, in the SM context. Teens increasingly relied on SC information from SM to support them when initiating new relationships and managing major life transitions such as going to university. However having access to more

information has caused millennials to be more cautious and reticent when embarking on new experiences than previous youth cohorts.

In addition participants sought to discover the real people behind the FB 'best side' personae. Many viewed this as a challenge and would 'drill down' beyond the carefully managed profile photos and statuses to *untagged* photos and other people's *comments*, to access subjects' 'authentic selves'. These findings support Firat and Schultz (1997) assertions that in postmodern societies consumers increasingly search beyond the hype for authenticity. Moreover competitive millennials increasingly conducted 'constructed downward comparisons', selecting comparison attributes favourable to themselves, to ensure their superiority.

Social comparison has therefore expanded and accelerated in SM, constant and easy access to wider networks enable teens to be continually immersed in social activity with their peer group. These factors have extended the purposes of social comparison, so that in addition to self-evaluation, self-enhancement and self-improvement, teens use it to support vicarious learning, relationship development, social bonding and risk reduction.

However, there were also several negative outcomes of this evolved behaviour; SC has become more intensive, competitive and intrusive and other people's privacy is often sacrificed at the expense of the observers' needs. In addition downward comparisons have led to a prevailing critical culture and increased negative feelings such as jealousy, being judged, feeling invaded, anxiety and inadequacy. The vast amounts of available information have encouraged prolific and perpetual SC behaviours which have resulted in some teens feeling out of control and addicted. Moreover SM has encouraged teens to be more self-reflective, to recognise their own self-development, to speculate about others' perceptions of them and to worry about their own privacy and safety. These findings support White et al's (2006) arguments that excessive SC can be addictive and lead to negative effects on self-esteem and well-being and extend Belk's (2013) propositions about the nature of relationships in digital arenas.

#### **8.2.4. How is Voyeurism Characterised and Enacted in Social Media?**

As discussed in section 8.2.3. watching others in SM supports other needs besides identity development. Teens utilised the information gleaned from their surveillance to support relationship development, as a form of entertainment, escapism and as an environment for play and challenge. In order to understand the data relating to the entertainment aspects

of watching others, theories of voyeurism and mediated voyeurism (MV) were examined and extended.

**Definition: Mediated Voyeurism**

The consumption of revealing images of and information about others' apparently real and unguarded lives, often yet not always for the purposes of entertainment but frequently at the expense of privacy and discourse, through the means of the mass media and the Internet.

Calvert (2004)

MV focuses on electronic media, essentially television and the Internet. As the definition suggests, voyeurism content is by nature revealing, implying some form of disclosure and enlightenment that the observer would not usually be privy to. Moreover it relates to people's real and unguarded lives, hence it is spontaneous and genuine as opposed to contrived or scripted. It is often enacted to serve entertainment purposes but it satisfies other motivations also. The consumption of other people's private lives frequently sacrifices privacy, can be with or without the subjects' awareness or consent and spectating is often prioritised over social interaction (Calvert, 2004).

Calvert (2004) identified several key characteristics of MV: conducted at a distance and without interaction between observer and subject; thriving on sordid, sensational, intimate and unusual content; driven by the discovery of truths with right to watch taking precedence over rights of privacy and enjoyment being heightened by the feeling that social conventions are being breached. Furthermore Mulvey (1975) argued that voyeurs hold the power and superiority in the relationship. MV has increasingly been integrated into different forms of entertainment particularly through television and Calvert (2004) delineated four categories: video verite, reconstruction, tell all/show all and sexual voyeurism. The increased prevalence of MV has been accused of: increasing the thirst for private life disclosures; desensitising and normalising deviance; denigrating privacy; reducing discourse and escalating the need for young people in particular to fulfil their sense of self by being watched by others (Bauman, 2000).

A considerable body of work has been produced relating to MV and Reality Television (RTV) (e.g. Barton, 2009; Baruh, 2009; Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007; Rose and Wood, 2005) and a few SM studies have referred to voyeuristic motives (e.g. Tufekci, 2008). However there has been limited focus on voyeurism in SM (excepting Stefanone et al, 2010 and

Wang, 2015) and to date no attempt to categorise SM voyeurism (SMV) as a category in its own right or to profile voyeuristic users. This study addresses this gap in the literature, thereby extending theories of mediated voyeurism in a SM context.

In many ways SMV aligns with existing theories of MV, teens sought to reveal their subjects' private personas, yearned for the truth, the authentic, discovering the real person or story behind the FB self-presentation hype. The pleasure of SM voyeurism for teens was the ability to peek into other people's lives secretly without their knowledge. Wang (2015) argued that FB users feel that they can enjoy voyeuristic pleasure without violating other people's privacy, as the information has been intentionally disclosed by the subjects. Teens covertly watched others at a distance, undetected, the mask of the Internet providing them with a 'cloak of invisibility'. The subjects are real people that they know in RL and their lives are real, unscripted and spontaneous. Downward comparisons abound and observers commonly felt a sense of superiority towards their subjects.

As with Calvert's (2004) depiction of MV, there was a predilection for sordid and sensational content; teen observers were magnetically drawn towards intimate, salacious stories and spectacles such as relationship break-ups, arguments and risky behaviours. Despite the easy access there was an underlying feeling that social conventions were being breaching as they accessed personal information and this element often added to the thrill of the activity, it was referred to as a 'guilty pleasure'. As these activities have become more commonplace, teens' respect for other people's privacy has reduced.

Similar to MV, SMV served a range of needs such as: entertainment, escapism, relaxation, mood improvement, humour, social bonding, parasocial needs, as well as identity related needs such as, learning and self-reflection. However whilst there were many similarities between MV and SMV there were also several key differences:

- the subjects were real people, known acquaintances in RL
- the distance between observer and subject was reduced and subject to sudden shrinkage
- the lens was two-way
- there was more potential for interaction between observers and subjects
- observers were more in control of the content and timing of their voyeurism
- it had become more normalised and habitual
- it was often conducted in groups rather than alone
- power relationships were more fluid

- it was used to reduce social risk.

Firstly, the subjects were not just real people like those in a RTV for instance, they were typically known acquaintances, people they knew and interacted with in RL thus the distance between them was not as great as in other MV contexts, moreover because of the overlap with RL; this distance was more susceptible to sudden shrinkage thereby exposing the voyeur's surveillance activities. In addition SMV was not one-way, teens were both observers and subjects, resulting in increased accountability, the implications of being watched were more evident, hence self-reflection increased, resulting in more inhibited behaviour. Moreover there was increased likelihood of interaction between observers and subjects, for instance teens often *liked* each other's *postings* thus signalling their observation and in public conflict situations, other peers often got involved to support one or other party or to mediate.

In addition easy, free and continuous access to SM via smart phones meant that observers were more in control of their surveillance compared to say TV and could therefore choose for it to be focused, wider, deeper and historic, thus serving as a personal interactive challenge. This has resulted in SM voyeurism becoming more widespread; teens have been encouraged by SM incentive structures, which in turn have made the practice more acceptable and normalised amongst the millennial cohort. As such whereas voyeurism has traditionally been a furtive individual pastime, today's teens frequently share and compare information reaped from their spying, at times even practising their voyeurism in groups. Whilst MV often acts as a catalyst for social interaction and gossip, with SMV, gossip is closer to home as it involves RL acquaintances as opposed to strangers, so is less abstract and more personal.

Furthermore access unconstrained by TV schedules or media editors provided fertile ground for addictive voyeuristic tendencies. Teens often felt distracted, engrossed, lost track of time and felt guilty about the time they spent on FB, thus suggesting for some there were signs of Internet addiction disorder (IAD). IAD is defined as an individual's inability to control their use of the Internet, eventually causing psychological, social, school or work difficulties in their life (Davis, 2001).

Calvert (2004) asserted that in MV the observer holds the power and control, taking information without reciprocal responsibilities. Similarly in Mulvey's (1975) 'male gaze' the voyeur seeks to assert their control over their subject. In SM, teen observers felt a sense of power and superiority through their criticism of subjects; in addition information was

sometimes obtained for darker purposes such as scheming and monitoring. However where teens adopted their surveillance to monitor potential or actual partners, the balance of power was less clear. In these situations the voyeuristic partner was often the one with less power in the relationship; hence it was critical that their activities remained covert, as discovery would likely harm their amorous objectives thus the researcher posits that power relationships are more fluid and potentially reversible in SMV.

Like MV, SMV was utilised for vicarious learning, however this study identified an additional motive of reducing social risk. SMV was used as an interim stage in initiating new relationships; teens often 'stalked' peers that they were attracted to, identified common interests for conversation openers and then communicated via SM before braving F2F interaction thereby enhancing their chances of success and reducing the social risk of public rejection.

As with self-presentation and social comparison, being the first and most prolific users of SM, millennial teens had evolved their own 'unwritten rules' which governed SM voyeurism behaviour. Defining their own boundaries of privacy and acceptability, many for instance drew the line at sexual activities, nudity and toilet related content, choosing to 'turn away' rather than watch. Others felt uncomfortable witnessing intimate moments such as relationship break-ups played out publically. Perspectives on this varied amongst participants depending on a range of factors including their involvement in SMV.

Whilst 'FB stalking' was commonplace, it was adopted to a greater or lesser extent by teens for different primary purposes. The variances in behaviour led to the conceptualisation of five stalker profiles: the gossip stalker, the relationship stalker, the shy aspirer, the FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) stalker and the Anti-Stalker (see Figure 7.2). Profiles were formulated initially around the core reasons for participation in SMV and theorised by integrating: personality characteristics; preferred subjects; level of involvement, consumption behaviours, needs met, attitudes towards privacy and feelings about SMV. The profiles provide a valuable insight and understanding into teen voyeurism behaviours in SM and unpick the phenomenon of watching others in SM. Furthermore as teens were early adopters of SM and therefore established the 'unwritten rules', they provide a foundation for understanding subsequent adopters' behaviours too.

This research therefore significantly extends and adds to the existing literature on MV, theorising a new category of mediated voyeurism and conceptualising five teen stalker



profiles. Finally this study proposes the following definition for Social Media Voyeurism, conceptualising its key characteristics, benefits and associated practices.

**Definition: Social Media Voyeurism**

The widespread reciprocal consumption of revealing images of and information about known acquaintances real and unguarded lives through social media. A potentially highly involving practice, satisfying several social needs including entertainment, relationship development, identity enhancement, vicarious learning and risk reduction, as well as darker motives, frequently conducted at the expense of privacy and discourse.

(Doster, 2017)

### 8.3. Discussion Summary

In summary this study has unpicked consumption behaviours in SM and has identified a number of significant effects on the identity development processes of millennial teens. The central concept is a holistic identity development process encapsulating: self-presentation and maintenance; social comparison and voyeurism; relationship development, entertainment and the dark side of these behaviours. The study substantially extends Belk's (2013) Extended Self in a Digital World , the body of social comparison literature and voyeuristic behaviours in the social media context.

Millennial teens with their cohort specific qualities (highly educated, technologically savvy, creative, team players, appearance oriented, emotionally expressive) rapidly developed strategies to present the 'best side' of themselves in SM (embodied self, relationships, interests, activities and opinions, associations and behaviour). Drawing on a vast compendium of free immaterial symbolic resources they co-constructed copious aesthetically pleasing digital identity displays for the consumption and affirmation of their referent others.

Furthermore accessibility to wider social networks has expanded the potential and practice of peer social comparisons and surveillance, which fulfil a vital part of the identity development process. Critically teens can now freely peruse the lives and identity displays of their 'intermediate subjects' (weak ties) allowing them to: 'know their place'; boost self-esteem; learn; aspire; appropriate ideas; develop relationships; realise self-development and be entertained. The ability to be 'always connected' and therefore constantly immersed in their peer group has therefore both expanded and accelerated millennials' identity related behaviour.

However the combination of external factors with millennial characteristics has resulted in a highly competitive environment and a critical culture. The perceived distance between observers and their subjects has increased leading to: downward comparisons, criticism, lack of respect for privacy and empathy, akin to that experienced in mediated voyeuristic environments such as reality television (RTV) when subjects are complete strangers. Moreover as teens are both observers and subjects, the predilection for surveillance and criticism has generated negative feelings such as: jealousy, being judged, feeling conflicted, anxiety, inadequacy, feeling out of control, addicted, invaded and inhibited. So impression management has become more important than self-presentation and teens have developed various defensive strategies to protect their identities in SM: unwritten rules; managing audiences; managing content; call for help and walking away.

Despite these negative experiences teens also reap many positive benefits from SM consumption. In addition to enabling identity related activities, millennials enjoyed watching others for entertainment, escapism, relaxation, social bonding and play. This study therefore theorises a new category of mediated voyeurism, Social Media Voyeurism (SMV). Whilst SMV shares many commonalities with MV there are several differences: the subjects are known acquaintances; SMV is two-way; voyeurs enjoy continuous access to their subjects thereby permitting wider, deeper and historical 'stalking'; the practice has become normalised, voyeurs often consume in groups and millennials have evolved their own 'unwritten rules of conduct' for the SM environment.

Furthermore teens have varied reasons for indulging (or not) in SMV, this study presents five distinct 'stalker' profiles (the Gossip Stalker, the Relationship Stalker, the Shy Aspirer Stalker, the FOMO Stalker and the Anti-Stalker) integrating characteristics of personality, involvement, subjects, usage behaviours, needs met, attitudes and feelings towards SMV. These 'ideal types' provide a valuable insight to teens' varied voyeuristic consumption behaviours in SM.

In summary, the FB environment whilst seemingly well suited to teen identity development and expression has proved rather difficult to navigate. Initially appearing to be a utopian adolescent virtual playground, social media has evolved into a challenging and at times dangerous social environment. Managing one's teenage self in a SM world inextricably linked with RL has generated significant pressure on millennials. They have to continually acquire new skills and strategies as well as be cognisant of the latest 'unwritten rules' in order to navigate their identity journey from adolescent to adult safely. Increasingly, their

responses to these pressures are to withdraw in some way, either by limiting their audiences or their content. So in conclusion, external factors combined with millennial characteristics and their evolved behaviour in SM have constrained the social space for teen self-expression, thereby reducing their proclivity for liberal sharing and increasing their inclination for peer surveillance and voyeurism.

# Chapter 9

# Conclusion

## 9.0. Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis, firstly the initiation for the study is revisited and key findings for each of the research questions are summarised. Then the theoretical and management implications are discussed and the key contributions emerging from the study are presented. Finally the limitations of the study are explained and potential areas for future research are explicated.

## 9.1. Key Findings

The increasing popularity and consumption of social media (SM) platforms has been well documented in both academic and popular media. The phenomenon has been extensively researched (e.g. Donath and boyd, 2004; Fox and Moreland, 2015; Walther et al, 2009; Zhao et al, 2008). However, thus far there has been limited focus on millennial teen consumption specifically and on unpicking the reasons behind their magnetic attraction to SM. Many teens feel compelled to check their feeds multiple times per day (79% FB users logon >14 times/day: 2013: IDC) and more recent research suggests that “Internet use is a near ‘constant’ for some teens” with Facebook remaining the most popular SM platform (PEW 2015).

Understanding teen SM consumption is critical as the earliest adopters and most prolific users they have established consumption patterns for the medium and laid the ground for subsequent adopters’ behaviours. Furthermore there is limited understanding of the effect of this behaviour on social norms and on teen identity processes. In his updated extended self in a digital world, Belk (2013) acknowledged the need for further research in context specific digital environs. As the platform with the highest and most established users, FB has, to a large extent, determined SM consumption behaviours and was therefore selected for this study.

This study aimed to explicate an understanding of teen consumption behaviour and practices in Facebook (FB) from their perspective and in doing so, extend and develop extant theoretical explanations of this phenomenon. In bringing together the composite strands of identity development: self-presentation, experimentation, impression management, social comparison, feedback and self-evaluation with the specific characteristics of millennials and FB’s digital resources, this study presents a holistic insight into contemporary teen identity behaviours mediated through digital social environments. Furthermore in addition to the expected identity activities, the data revealed elaborated social comparison behaviour serving entertainment and darker motives. This emergent

outcome led to the development of a new category of mediated voyeurism, Social Media Voyeurism (SMV) and to the conceptualisation of five teen 'stalker' profiles.

The research was structured around four research questions (see Chapter 5 section 5.6). The qualitative study was designed using mixed methods; firstly a pilot study utilising teen diaries and five in-depth interviews (Stage 1). Secondly, 26 in-depth interviews with teen participants (16-18s), gender balance (10M 16F), varied personality types and some ethnic diversity (Stage 2) and an observational analysis of 13 FB profiles over a two week period (see Appendix 5.8). The research questions were as follows and the key findings are summarised below.

**RQ1.** What strategies and resources do teens use for self-presentation in social media?

**RQ2.** How do teens maintain and defend their identities in social media?

**RQ3.** How does social media affect teenage social comparison behaviours?

**RQ4.** How is voyeurism characterised and enacted in social media?

### **9.1.1. RQ1: What strategies and resources do teens use for self-presentation in social media?**

An analytical framework was developed using similar principles to the researcher's previous study (Doster, 2013). Teen self-presentation was framed in terms of strategies and resources. This approach led to a diagrammatic representation of the holistic process of self-presentation in social media (see Figure 6.8).

#### ***Strategies for self-presentation***

By combining extant identity models (Belk, 1988, 2013; Goffman, 1959; Mittal, 2006) five self-presentation strategies were conceptualised. Teens presented themselves to others through their embodied self, relationships, interests, activities and opinions, associations and behaviour. In the visual environment of FB, physical attractiveness was assigned the highest priority enacted primarily through *digital photographs*. However other aspects of the embodied self, such as humour were also highly valued. In addition team oriented millennials also emphasised their relationships with partners and friends and used these associations to augment their identity displays.

### ***Unlimited free symbolic immaterial resources***

Participants employed various FB tools and drew upon a range of immaterial digital symbolic resources to enact their identity displays. Symbolic materials were self-generated or appropriated from other sources: *user-generated content, digital photography, social media features, applications, other multi-media resources* and *other users' content*. This identity-making toolbox was free of charge thus, unlike in the pre-digital consumption world, teens were unconstrained by financial resources.

### ***Peer audiences are top priority***

Teens directed their identity displays at four key audiences: school friends, other peer groups, family and work colleagues with school friends being assigned highest priority. Feedback was essential and received via likes and comments; teens adjusted their strategies on an on-going basis depending on feedback received.

### ***'Millennialness' has influenced self-presentation behaviours***

The unique cohort characteristics of millennials (creative, technologically-savvy, achievement oriented, emotionally expressive, team players and reflexive) complemented the SM environment. Drawing upon the prodigious store of free immaterial resources; creative and appearance conscious millennials crafted aesthetically coded identity messages, presenting their 'best side' to their audiences.

## **9.1.2. RQ2: How do teens maintain and defend their identities in social media?**

### ***Influencing factors, co-construction and multiplicity challenges self-presentation***

Both external and internal influences (wider networks, non-segregated audiences, sharing culture, co-construction, distributed memories, acceleration, SM incentive structures, critical culture, increased social comparison, infinite symbolic resources, competitive and self-critical millennials) made self-presentation in SM challenging. Teens had to maintain multiple positive identities across various audiences in the same arena, and often felt out of control and under constant threat of 'contamination'. Moreover the persistence of SM resulted in past and present identities often colliding causing embarrassment and concern about consequences to their future identities.

### ***Pressure to innovate and refresh identity displays***

Teens are experimental in their transition from adolescent to adult and expressed this via SM, whilst the unlimited supply of symbolic resources was an advantage, it also generated

pressure to constantly refresh and innovate their identity displays (supporting Bauman, 2007).

#### *Re-establishing real life social group boundaries*

To counter multiplicity, teens employed a range of pre-emptive defensive strategies to try to re-establish their RL social group boundaries. They achieved this either by restricting their audiences through ‘friend control’ and privacy settings (managing audiences) or by limiting the content (managing content) they shared, to maintain hybrid identities that were acceptable to all.

#### *Impression management strategies are more important than self-presentation*

Teens actively practiced impression management, adhering to an ever evolving set of ‘unwritten rules’ and drawing from four defensive strategies (managing audiences, managing content, calling for help and walking away) to protect their digital identities (see Figure 6.10). More extreme situations required them to invoke support from others or even disable their account. Thus, maintaining and defending identities in SM has become as, if not more, important than initial self-presentation and requires more effort and vigilance.

### **9.1.3. RQ3: How does social media affect teenage social comparison behaviours?**

Social comparison in SM served similar purposes to that in real life (RL); aiding self-evaluation, self-development, self-enhancement and increasing self-esteem. However, this study identified several key differences in the SM context.

#### *Increased social comparison information leading to accelerated teen identity development*

Easy access to wider networks and continuous immersion with peer groups provided teens with a greater depth of personal information for more subjects. Teens therefore probed wider, deeper and historically, comparing aspirational, associative and dissociative subjects both within and across their social groups; making comparisons at both individual and group level. However ‘intermediate’ or ‘weak ties’ (Granovetter, 1973) were the preferred subjects; known acquaintances but not people whose lives they would know as much about in RL, thus teens significantly extended their scope for vicarious learning from others’ experiences, gathering more reference points to develop and refine their own self-presentations, thereby accelerating their identity development. The findings supported Granovetter (1983) and Putnam (2000) assertions that ‘weak ties’ provide valuable bridging



capital and challenged Festinger (1954) and Mettee and Smith's (1977) claims that people prefer to compare themselves with similar and close others.

### *Emergence of a competitive and critical culture leading to inhibited and selective self-presentations*

Furthermore, the study revealed that in contrast to earlier SM research, where teens had been predominantly supportive in their feedback to their peers (e.g. boyd 2007; Doster, 2013), there was now an increased tendency to make downward comparisons. Millennials competitive predisposition for presenting 'best side' linked with the perceived distance (mask of the Internet) had led to a prevailing culture of criticism. Teens frequently adopted 'constructive social comparisons' (Goethals, 1986), carefully selecting criteria to ensure that they compared favourably with their subjects, thereby enhancing their self-esteem and superiority. Paradoxically however they increasingly experienced negative emotions such as inadequacy, jealousy, feeling out of control and addicted. Moreover their criticism of others increased their reflections on their own identity presentations, leading them to feel that they would be judged and consequently inhibiting their self-expressions or limiting them to those that were worthwhile (momentous), thus furthering the proclivity for 'selective self-presentation'.

### *Reducing the social risk involved in managing relationships and life transitions*

In addition the research found that teens watched others to reduce their social risk, especially with regards to developing and maintaining relationships and managing significant life transitions. SM was perceived as precursor to F2F interaction, teens gathered information and identified common interests with those they were attracted to, supporting real life conversations, enhancing their chance of success and reducing the risk of public humiliation. Teens in relationships maintained surveillance of their partner's social interactions to stay close to them and be alerted to any infidelities, again endeavouring to reduce social risk. In addition teens embarking on major life transitions, such as going to university, used SC information from SM to evaluate potential new university friends and alleviate their perceived risk and anxiety. Increased reliance on SC information, however had led to teens being more cautious about embarking on new experiences.

#### **9.1.4. RQ4: How is voyeurism characterised and enacted in social media?**

##### ***Emergence of social media voyeurism where regular surveillance of other people's private lives has become widespread and normalised***

A significant finding of this study was that teens watched others in SM as much for entertainment as for identity purposes. Teens found relaxation, escapism, fun and distraction from the mundane aspects of their lives by consuming the lives of their peers at a distance online. This behaviour aligned closely to extant theories of mediated voyeurism (MV) (Calvert, 2004), however the study identified several distinct differences which led to the conceptualisation of a new category of Social Media Voyeurism (SMV).

##### ***The key differences between social media voyeurism and mediated voyeurism***

In social media the subjects were often known acquaintances in RL, so there was less distance between observers and subjects and more likely to be social interaction between them. Unlike MV, the lens was two-way, teens watched others but were also being watched by others which made them more self-reflective about their own disclosures. Observers had more control over their consumption, they could select what and who they watched, how often and when, which encouraged addictive behaviours. 'FB Stalking' had become habitual and normalised and was often conducted in groups as opposed to furtively alone. Power relationships were more fluid, the observer was not necessarily dominant or in control.

##### ***Conceptualisation of Five Teen Facebook Stalker Profiles***

Teens demonstrated differing levels of involvement, varied reasons, attitudes, feelings and behaviours around watching others in SM. As a result five 'stalker' profiles were conceptualised focused around their core reason for watching/not watching and theorised by integrating personality, subjects, involvement, consumption behaviour, needs met, attitudes towards privacy and feelings towards SMV to explain teen voyeuristic behaviour in SM (see Figure 7.2).

## 9.2. Key Theoretical Contributions

This thesis makes three key contributions to knowledge which are explained below:

1. Development of a holistic teen self-presentation/impression management process in social media
2. Extending social comparison theory in a social media context
3. Defining a new category of voyeurism; social media voyeurism and conceptualising five distinct teen voyeur (stalker) profiles

### 9.2.1. Holistic Model of Teen Self-Presentation in Social Media

This research responds to Belk's (2013) call for further research to understand how people present and extend their selves in the digitalised world. It contributes to knowledge by developing a holistic model depicting the composite parts of the teen self-presentation process in social media. Teen self-presentation has been deconstructed into strategies, resources, internal and external influences and audiences providing a deeper understanding of the complex journey that teens navigate to effectively present themselves. Importantly the model recognises that both the environment and the users themselves affect behaviours and the ensuing cultural rituals, thus the variables of SM incentive structures and 'millennialness' have been incorporated to allow for adaption to other SM platforms and user groups.

Additionally the study unpicks the challenges presented by the evolving dynamics of these processes: co-construction, audience multiplicity and distributed memories and explicates the various 'unwritten rules' and defensive strategies that teens adopt to protect their digital personas. Rosenberg and Egbert (2011) called for research into the effect of audience segmentation in FB on self-presentation and how users deal with multiple audiences. The strategies to maintain and defend identity address this call, providing a better understanding of the way users manage multiplicity.

This model builds upon and extends previous digital self-presentation studies (e.g. Belk, 2013; boyd, 2007; Bumgarner, 2007; Doster, 2013; Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011; Schau and Gilly, 2003; Wang, 2015; Zhao et al, 2008). It extends knowledge and understanding of self-presentation behaviours in SM and provides an insight to the evolution of millennial teen identity and consumption practices as the digital environment develops and users become more experienced consumers of this medium.

### **9.2.2. Extending Social Comparison Theory in a Social Media Context**

This study extends social comparison theory meeting Wood's (1996) call for further research in contextualised settings and Haferkamp and Kramer's (2011) call for more studies on social comparison behaviours in SM specifically. The interpretative, qualitative approach adopted, provides rich and holistic insights, thus complementing recent related studies (e.g. Haferkamp and Kramer, 2011) and supporting other research findings (e.g. Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014) that teens often engage in social comparison for self-enhancement purposes, thereby focusing on downward comparisons.

Furthermore it brings to light that intermediate friends (weak ties), rather than close friends are the preferred subjects for social comparison in SM (cf Granovetter, 1973; Mettlee and Smith, 1977; Putnam, 2000). Moreover by learning vicariously from more and varied peer experiences, millennial teens are accelerating their identity development.

Importantly it reveals widespread 'constructed social comparison' practices (cf Goethals, 1986; Goethals et al, 1991), whereby teens manipulate their own and/or their subjects' self-constructs to ensure their superiority on selected comparison criteria, thereby rendering all social comparisons downwards; even those with aspirational subjects. However extensive and intensive social comparison behaviour has led to a prevailing culture of criticism, reduced self-esteem and decreased well-being. Moreover access to more information has increased their reliance on social comparisons to make decisions, making them more risk averse and having the potential to draw them into addictive comparison cycles.

Wang (2015) argued that self-presentation and watching others in FB were correlated and that users may be motivated to self-present through their experience of watching others. This study extends her proposition, elucidating the reciprocal and self-perpetuating relationship between selective self-presentation (best side) and self-enhancing social comparison practices, resulting in an increasingly competitive social environment.

### **9.2.3. Conceptualising Social Media Voyeurism and Teen Stalker Profiles**

This study contributes to existing knowledge by extending extant mediated voyeurism theory into a new and important context, social media. In addition it extends the body of literature relating specifically to social media consumption. Social media voyeurism as a distinct category has been unpacked and theorised, its commonalities and differences to existing forms of mediated voyeurism clearly delineated and defined. Moreover this study

supports and develops a small number of previous studies that recognised voyeurism as critically important in the rising popularity of these media (Bumgarner, 2007; Mantymaki and Islam, 2014; Stefanone et al, 2010; Tufekci, 2008; Wang, 2015).

Furthermore this study evidences the intertwined relationship between social comparison and voyeurism; social media users conduct both simultaneously. Whilst this arguably occurs in other voyeuristic contexts (e.g. reality television) the key difference is that subjects are known acquaintances, people 'just like them', thus performance comparisons should be more attainable. However enhanced self-presentations in social media often make this not so; indeed they often appear dramatised and when combined with the 'mask of the Internet'; create the illusion of greater distance between observer and subject. This incongruence and confusion between social comparison and voyeurism results in the self-perpetuating competitive and addictive identity behaviours discussed in 9.2.2., and to teens having a lower regard for their peers' privacy, thus normalising everyday voyeuristic behaviours (supporting Spinelli, 2010). The intertwining of these two constructs further extends social comparison theory; revealing the entertainment and escapism aspects and providing support for Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick's (2014) arguments that social comparison in social media is adopted for mood management purposes.

The conceptualisation of teen stalker profiles makes a unique contribution to extant knowledge of teenage identity behaviours in digital contexts. It provides a richer understanding of the diverse reasons for widespread SMV and explains how these are enacted by teens with distinctly different profiles. Furthermore it advances the social media consumption literature, providing further explanations of user motivations and needs met from social media. Specifically it responds to Mantymaki and Islam's (2014) call for further research into voyeuristic and exhibitionist behaviours in social media.

## **9.3. Methodological and Practitioner Implications**

### **9.3.1. Methodological Implications:**

1. Interpretivist methodologies such as those used in this study offer great potential in revealing richer insights to the perspectives of young people. Aural diaries which were introduced to ease data capture were not well received, millennial teens disliked talking to themselves, preferring to write, type or discuss their experiences F2F. However none of the participants were fazed or uncomfortable with their interviews being recorded, as would be expected with adult participants. This is useful for future researchers and practitioners to be aware of when designing their data collection methods for young people. It is advisable to offer multiple methods particularly for participant self-reporting data and to check back during the collection period to ensure that the methods are acceptable.
2. By immersing herself in the FB environment and experiencing the consumption practices first hand, the researcher was better able to relate to participants' experiences and develop an early rapport, thereby gaining their trust and confidence to disclose their behaviours, feelings and thoughts. This approach helped overcome the potential age and role barrier between the researcher and the participants. Again this is helpful as guidance for future researchers of young people.
3. The Framework data analysis method proved a particularly helpful tool in providing a mechanism to profile teen 'stalking' behaviour. Framework matrices enable researchers to cross reference data from several different variables simultaneously on a case by case basis. This technique could be helpful for other researchers to identify patterns and develop conceptualised models to explain complex and variable behavioural patterns.

### **9.3.2. Practitioner Implications:**

4. The study brings together the various aspects of social media consumption. By demonstrating the links between self-presentation, impression management, social comparison, voyeurism and identity development, these models enable SM practitioners to understand and predict the effects of the resources and facilities that they make available in their platforms. It can therefore guide them in developing these to continue engaging teen consumers positively and to minimise the negative impacts.

5. Understanding the various challenges that teens face in managing audience multiplicity, co-construction and managing privacy is informative for SM providers. Providing easier mechanisms for teens to segregate their audiences and secure their privacy settings would reduce the negative outcomes of social media use and may help retain teen users who will otherwise move onto new platforms to avoid adult audiences, reduce competition and escape past selves.
6. Unpacking entertainment and social media voyeurism (SMV) illuminates the overarching quest amongst millennials for authenticity. The interaction between dramatised digital 'best selves' and SMV has generated a self-perpetuating cycle driving the desire for truth and reality. Millennial teens have moved from entertainment based on fictional drama to reality TV to peering into the lives of people they know in RL. Whilst this arguably provides opportunities for designing new entertainment products that are likely to engage consumers, it also raises serious societal implications about privacy, safety and security for young people. Policy and legislation have been slow to keep pace with digital environments, but it is essential that both SM providers and policy makers take note of these issues and make suitable interventions to protect teenagers and children online.
7. The Teen Stalker Profiles developed in this study can be used as an analytical and diagnostic tool to develop a more holistic understanding of SMV consumption and of millennial teen values and attitudes per se. They reflect both the stereotypical millennial characteristics whilst teasing out individual facets thus illuminating the diversity that exists within the generational cohort.
8. Furthermore the outcomes of this research indicate the key drivers for teens to use SM. These drivers are socialising, relationship development, entertainment and identity needs. Note there are no commercial needs expressed, they see these digital environs as social spaces in which they can consume the lives of others. Providers and marketing practitioners therefore need to ensure that the commercial aspects (advertising and research) do not over shadow these desired benefits to avoid pushing teens out of their environments and fulfilling their social needs elsewhere.
9. Finally this study provides an in-depth understanding of the millennial cohort, unpicks what drives them, what worries them and provides clues as to how they will consume as adults thus informing both marketing academics and practitioners alike about this important emerging consumer group.

## 9.4. Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, firstly the sample population was small and relatively constrained. Whilst it was the intention to focus on the 16-18 year age group in their unique position as the earliest and heaviest users of social media on the cusp of adulthood; participants were from one region of the UK, resulting in limited diversification of income, socioeconomic group, education level and ethnicity. It is acknowledged that this limits the generalisability of the findings; however within the sample there was variation of individual factors such as gender, personality, interests and future ambitions which enabled rich insights into a diversity of responses and behaviour in the social media environment. For a more detailed discussion about the trustworthiness of the study in Chapter 5 section 5.8.

Secondly the research focused predominantly on one social media platform, Facebook which limited exploration of the effects of other SM environs on teenage behaviour. It was evident from data excerpts that there were differences in cultures of practice in Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr in particular and that each environment engendered different behavioural responses and resultant feelings, often directing teen preferences for one platform over another, thus prompting the SM incentive structures influencing variable. However it is acknowledged that the available resources in different SM environments, for instance the photographic tools in Instagram may require further adaption to the model to explicate consumption behaviours.

Thirdly, it was a cross-sectional study; the findings therefore represent a snapshot in time in a dynamic consumption context. It was evident from the data that participants were constantly adapting their 'unwritten rules', behaviours and preferred platforms, the on-going effects of this were therefore challenging to capture whilst retaining the depth of interpretivist enquiry desired for the study. A longitudinal study or follow-up cross-sectional study with the same participants would substantiate findings and reveal changes in consumption behaviours as a result of user maturity, lifecycle stage and evolving social media environs.

Fourthly, the methodology relied predominantly on participant's self-reported behaviours in interviews and diaries with some input from observational data. In addition, it is acknowledged that the researcher may have been perceived as an authority figure, which may have constrained the data that participants were willing to share. To mitigate this, the researcher immersed herself in FB for several months preceding the data collection and



maintained regular discussions with her two (non-participating) teenage daughters about their social media consumption throughout to gain further insights to teen perspectives of practices in the environment.

Finally, the study adopted a phenomenological interpretivist approach drawing on and extending theories from social psychology. It is acknowledged that alternative and relevant theoretical schools of thought such as consumer culture theory (CCT) and Foucault's technologies of self (Foucault et al, 1988) could have provided different and valuable insights to the data.

## **9.5. Directions for Future Research**

Going forward this study highlights several potential areas for further research; firstly it would be interesting to investigate a more diverse teenage sample group (socioeconomic, education and ethnicity) to compare their social media consumption behaviours. It would be anticipated that the variance in individual and cultural factors would impact on both their self-presentation practices and evaluation of others in social media.

Secondly it would be informative to compare self-presentation, social comparison and voyeuristic practices in other popular social media environments, in particular Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat which have increased in popularity amongst teens more recently. How do different social media incentive structures and symbolic resources affect behaviours in these media, how have they evolved as users have increased take up and usage of them, do users experience the same challenges such as audience multiplicity, co-construction and lack of control in these media and do similar cultures of (dark) practice occur over time?

Thirdly, it would be interesting to conduct a follow-up study with a sample of the same participants to understand the dynamics of social media consumption. To see how their behaviours evolve with their changing lifecycle stage, through higher education and the workplace, their maturity and their experience of SM consumption. Do they for instance still consume as frequently, is social comparison as important as when they were younger, how have their evaluative criteria altered over time, are 'intermediate friends' still favoured as voyeuristic and comparison subjects, how do they navigate multiplicity and identity co-construction as they have matured, particularly with regards to managing their professional and personal personas?

Fourthly it would be interesting to explore the consumption behaviours of other Facebook user groups such as the parents of teenagers, both in regards to their adoption of the media for surveillance of their offspring and their practices with regards to their own peers. Have they adopted the cultures of practice established by millennial teen innovators in the media, do their strategies for self-presentation vary from teenage users, do they indulge in social comparison and voyeurism to the same extent, how do their evaluative criteria vary, how do their maturity and generational attitudes and values (Generation X or Baby Boomers) affect their consumption behaviours and do the same 'unwritten rules' apply?

## **9.6. Final Words**

The main purpose of this thesis was to gain a deeper understanding of teenage consumption behaviours in social media. The study addresses four key gaps in the extant literature. Firstly it responds to Belk's (2013) call for further research to understand how people present and extend their selves in the digitalised world by presenting a visualised holistic and adaptable model combining self-presentation and impression management strategies, resources, internal and external influences in social media.

Secondly it responds to calls for further research on social comparison behaviours in contextualised settings and in social media specifically (e.g. Haferkamp and Kramer, 2011; Wood, 1996) identifying that teens conduct wide, deep and historical social comparisons, focusing on 'intermediate' friends with the predominant purpose of self-enhancement. Moreover it explains the reciprocal and self-perpetuating relationship between self-presentation and social comparison in social media.

Thirdly it supports and develops arguments that voyeurism is a key gratification of social media (e.g. Stefanone et al, 2010), extending the mediated voyeurism literature by delineating social media voyeurism as a distinct category in its own right and additionally introducing five teenage stalker profiles to elucidate the range of voyeuristic behaviours reported in social media. In doing so it highlights some key changes to societal norms in particular the quest for authenticity and shifting notions of privacy.

Fourthly this thesis provides a deeper understanding of the millennial generation through its investigation of their intense relationship with social media. It explains their seemingly contradictory behaviour and reveals their self-scribed 'unwritten rules' for navigating their identity journeys through these digital environs.

Overall the study contributes to the consumer research literature by providing a holistic understanding of teenage consumption behaviour in social media and thereby extending several areas of extant consumer theory plus deepening knowledge of the generation itself. Finally the study identifies several additional gaps in the literature thereby signposting opportunities for future research.

# References

## References

Adorno TW. 1981. *Prisms*. MIT Press. Cambridge.

Ahava A, Palojoki P. 2004. Adolescent consumers: reaching them, border crossings and pedagogical challenges. *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 28 (4): 371-378.

Ahuvia AC. 2005. Beyond the extended self: loved objects and consumers' identity narratives. *Journal of Consumer Research* 32: 171-184.

Alaszewski, A., 2006. *Using diaries for social research*. Sage.

Alemán, A. M. M., and Wartman, K. L., 2009. Online social networking on campus: Understanding what matters in student culture. *New York, NY: Routledge*.

Alicke, M.D., 1985. Global self-evaluation as determined by the desirability and controllability of trait adjectives. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 49(6), p.1621.

Andersen, L.P., Tufte, B., Rasmussen, J. and Chan, K., 2007. Tweens and new media in Denmark and Hong Kong. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 24(6), pp.340-350.

Antheunis, M.L. and Schouten, A.P., 2011. The effects of other-generated and system-generated cues on adolescents' perceived attractiveness on social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 16(3), pp.391-406.

Armstrong EG. 1976. "On phenomenology and sociological theory". *British Journal of Sociology*. **27(2)**: 251-253

Arnould EJ, Thompson CJ. 2005 Consumer Culture Theory: Twenty Years of Research. *Journal of Consumer Research* 31: 868-883

Arnould, E.J. and Thompson, C.J., 2015. Introduction: consumer culture theory: ten years gone (and beyond). In *Consumer Culture Theory* (pp. 1-21). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Arrowood, A.J. and Friend, R., 1969. Other factors determining the choice of a comparison other. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 5(2), pp.233-239.

Arvidsson, A. 2016. Platform Brands on Instagram. *Digital Consumption Symposium*, CASS Business School, 21 October 2016

Avocado Social, The Latest UK Social Media Statistics for 2016, <http://avocadosocial.com/the-latest-uk-social-media-statistics-for-2016/> accessed 13 April 2017

Back, M.D., Stopfer, J.M., Vazire, S., Gaddis, S., Schmukle, S.C., Egloff, B. and Gosling, S.D., 2010. Facebook profiles reflect actual personality, not self-idealization. *Psychological science*, 21(3), pp.372-374.

Banks M. 2001. *Visual Methods in Social Research*. Sage Publications Limited: London.

Bardhi, F. and Eckhardt, G.M., 2012. Access-based consumption: The case of car sharing. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(4), pp.881-898.

Barton, K.M., 2009. Reality television programming and diverging gratifications: The influence of content on gratifications obtained. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 53(3), pp.460-476.

Baruh, L., 2009. Publicized intimacies on reality television: An analysis of voyeuristic content and its contribution to the appeal of reality programming. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 53(2), pp.190-210.

Baruh, L., 2010. Mediated voyeurism and the guilty pleasure of consuming reality television. *Media Psychology*, 13(3), pp.201-221.

- Bauman, K.P. and Geher, G., 2002. We think you agree: The detrimental impact of the false consensus effect on behavior. *Current Psychology*, 21(4), pp.293-318. Utz & Beukeboom, 2011
- Bayne, S. and Ross, J., 2007, December. The 'digital native' and 'digital immigrant': a dangerous opposition. In *Annual Conference of the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE)* (Vol. 20). ac.uk/staff/sian/natives\_final.pdf [Accessed 20.3. 2013].
- Bauman Z. 2004. *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*. Polity: Cambridge.
- Bauman, Z., 2007. *Liquid times*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bauman, Z., 2013. *Liquid modernity*. John Wiley & Sons
- Bauman, Z. and Lyon, D., 2013. *Liquid surveillance: A conversation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Baumeister, R.F., Campbell, J.D., Krueger, J.I. and Vohs, K.D., 2003. Does high self-esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, or healthier lifestyles?. *Psychological science in the public interest*, 4(1), pp.1-44.
- BBC, 1993. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/26/newsid\\_2503000/2503271.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/26/newsid_2503000/2503271.stm) [accessed 20 April 2017]
- BBC, 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22070491> [accessed 20 April 2017]
- BBC, 2015 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10604117> [accessed 20 April 2017]
- Belk RW. 1984. A Manifesto for Consumer Behavior of Consumer Behavior in 1984 AMA Winter Educators Conference: Scientific Method in Marketing. Eds Paul F Anderson and Michael J Ryan. Chicago. American Marketing Association: 163-167.
- Belk RW. 1988. Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research* 15 (2): 139-168.
- Belk, R.W., 1995. Studies in the new consumer behaviour. *Acknowledging consumption*, pp.58-95.
- Belk, R.W., 2013. Extended self in a digital world. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(3), pp.477-500.
- Belk, R.W., Wallendorf, M. and Sherry Jr, J.F., 1989. The sacred and the profane in consumer behavior: Theodicy on the odyssey. *Journal of consumer research*, 16(1), pp.1-38.
- Benn J. 2004. Consumer education between consumership' and citizenship: experiences from studies of young people. *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 28: 108-116
- Bennett, C., 2006. Keeping up with the kids. *Young Consumers*, 7(3), pp.28-32.
- Bennett, S., Maton, K. and Kervin, L., 2008. The 'digital natives' debate: A critical review of the evidence. *British journal of educational technology*, 39(5), pp.775-786.
- Bevan, J.L., Pfyl, J. and Barclay, B., 2012. Negative emotional and cognitive responses to being unfriended on Facebook: An exploratory study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(4), pp.1458-1464.
- BIS, 2016. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/518654/bis-16-232-graduate-labour-market-statistics-2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/518654/bis-16-232-graduate-labour-market-statistics-2015.pdf) [accessed 27 April 2017]
- Blaikie N. 1993. *Approaches to Social Enquiry*. Polity. Cambridge.
- Bolton, R.N., Parasuraman, A., Hoefnagels, A., Migchels, N., Kabadayi, S., Gruber, T., Komarova Loureiro, Y. and Solnet, D., 2013. Understanding Generation Y and their use of social media: a review and research agenda. *Journal of Service Management*, 24(3), pp.245-267.
- Bornstein, G. and Erev, I., 1994. The enhancing effect of intergroup competition on group performance. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 5(3), pp.271-283.

- Bourdieu P. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (original work published 1979). Routledge and Kegan Paul: London
- boyd, D., 2006. Friends, friendsters, and myspace top 8: Writing community into being on social network sites.
- boyd, D., 2007. Why youth (heart) social network sites: The role of networked publics in teenage social life. *MacArthur foundation series on digital learning—Youth, identity, and digital media volume*, pp.119-142.
- Brandtzæg, P.B., Lüders, M. and Skjetne, J.H., 2010. Too many Facebook “friends”? Content sharing and sociability versus the need for privacy in social network sites. *Intl. Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, 26(11-12), pp.1006-1030.
- Brannen, J. and Nilsen, A., 2002. Young people's time perspectives: From youth to adulthood. *Sociology*, 36(3), pp.513-537.
- Britten, N., 1995. Qualitative research: qualitative interviews in medical research. *Bmj*, 311(6999), pp.251-253.
- Brown, C. and Czerniewicz, L., 2010. Debunking the ‘digital native’: beyond digital apartheid, towards digital democracy. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 26(5), pp.357-369.
- Brown, B. and Sellen, A., 2006. Sharing and listening to music. In *Consuming music together* (pp. 37-56). Springer Netherlands.
- Brown, S.A. and Venkatesh, V., 2005. Model of adoption of technology in households: A baseline model test and extension incorporating household life cycle. *MIS quarterly*, pp.399-426.
- Bumgarner, B.A., 2007. You have been poked: Exploring the uses and gratifications of Facebook among emerging adults. *First Monday*, 12(11).
- Burnay, J., Billieux, J., Blairy, S. and Larøi, F., 2015. Which psychological factors influence Internet addiction? Evidence through an integrative model. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 43, pp.28-34.
- Burr, V., 2003. Social constructionism.
- Calvert, C., 2000. *Voyeur nation*. New York: Westview.
- Carpenter, C.J., 2012. Narcissism on Facebook: Self-promotional and anti-social behavior. *Personality and individual differences*, 52(4), pp.482-486.
- Cashmore, E., 2006. *Celebrity culture*. Routledge.
- Cao, F., Su, L., Liu, T. and Gao, X., 2007. The relationship between impulsivity and Internet addiction in a sample of Chinese adolescents. *European Psychiatry*, 22(7), pp.466-471.
- Chan K. 2008. Social comparison of material possessions among adolescents. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 11 (3): 316-330.
- Charmaz, K., 2014. *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage.
- Chou, H.T.G. and Edge, N., 2012. “They are happier and having better lives than I am”: the impact of using Facebook on perceptions of others' lives. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(2), pp.117-121.
- Christofides, E., Muise, A. and Desmarais, S., 2012. Hey mom, what’s on your Facebook? Comparing Facebook disclosure and privacy in adolescents and adults. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 3(1), pp.48-54.
- Clicky Media. 2009. UK Social Network Statistics. Available at <http://www.clickymedia.co.uk/2009/07/uk-social-network-statistics-july-2009/> [accessed on 1 February 2011].
- Collis, J. and Hussey, R., (2003). *Business research: A practical guide for postgraduate and undergraduate students*.

- Coolican H. 1994. *Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology*. 2nd Edition, Hodder and Stoughton: London, UK.
- Cornwell T, Drennan J. 2004. Cross-cultural consumer/consumption research: dealing with issues emerging from globalisation and fragmentation. *Journal of Macromarketing* 24 (2): 108-121.
- Corti, L., 1993. Using diaries in social research. *Social research update*, 2(2).
- Coser LA. 1971. *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Social and Historical Context*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. New York.
- Cotte J, Ratneshwar S, Mick DG. 2004. The Times of Their Lives: Phenomenological and Metaphorical Characteristics of Consumer Timestyles. *Journal of Consumer Research* 31 :333-345.
- Crocker, J. and Park, L.E., 2004. The costly pursuit of self-esteem. *Psychological bulletin*, 130(3), p.392.
- Crotty M. 2011. *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. Sage Publications. London.
- Crotty M. 1996. *Phenomenology and Nursing Research*. Churchill Livingstone. Melbourne.
- Culnan, M.J. and Markus, M.L., 1987. Information Technologies In F.M. Jablin, L.L. Putnam, K.H. Roberts and L.W. Porter (Eds), *Handbook of Organizational Communication: An interdisciplinary perspective*, pp.420-443, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Davies, J., 2007. Display, Identity and the Everyday: Self-presentation through online image sharing. *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, 28(4), pp.549-564.
- Davis, R.A., 2001. A cognitive-behavioral model of pathological Internet use. *Computers in human behavior*, 17(2), pp.187-195.
- Davis, M.H. and Kraus, L.A., 1989. Social contact, loneliness, and mass media use: A test of two hypotheses. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 19(13), pp.1100-1124.
- Dearden, L., Fitzsimons, E. and Wyness, G., 2011. *The impact of tuition fees and support on university participation in the UK* (No. W11/17). IFS Working Papers.
- Debevec, K., Schewe, C.D., Madden, T.J. and Diamond, W.D., 2013. Are today's Millennials splintering into a new generational cohort? Maybe!. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 12(1), pp.20-31.
- Delamater J. 2006. *Handbook of Social Psychology*. Springer: New York
- Deloitte, 2016. *Global Mobile Consumer Survey, UK edition, May-June 2015*
- Denegri-Knott, J. and Molesworth, M., 2010. Concepts and practices of digital virtual consumption. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 13(2), pp.109-132.
- Denzin NK. 1978. "The Methodological Implications of Symbolic Interactionism for the study of deviance" *Contemporary Social Theories*. Ed A Wells. Goodyear. Santa Monica : 99-108.
- Denzin NK, Lincoln YS. 1994. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage. Thousand Oaks.
- Dewey J. 1929. *Experience and Nature*. Open Court. La Salle.
- Der Hovanesian, M., 1999. Spending it, investing it—coming on strong: The children of the baby boomers are affecting spending and investing as significantly as their parents did; the similarity ends there. *Wall Street Journal*, 12.
- Diener, E.D., Emmons, R.A., Larsen, R.J. and Griffin, S., 1985. The satisfaction with life scale. *Journal of personality assessment*, 49(1), pp.71-75.



- Diener, E., Diener, M. and Diener, C., 1995. Factors predicting the subjective well-being of nations. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 69(5), p.851.
- Dilthey W. 1976. "The rise of hermeneutics". *Critical Sociology: Selected Readings*. Ed P Connerton. Penguin. Harmondsworth: 104-116.
- Donath, J., 2007. Signals in social supernets. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), pp.231-251.
- Donath, J. and Boyd, D., 2004. Public displays of connection. *bt technology Journal*, 22(4), pp.71-82.
- Doster, L., 2013. Millennial teens design and redesign themselves in online social networks. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 12(4), pp.267-279.
- Douglas, J.D., 1976. *Investigative social research: Individual and team field research*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Drotner, K., 2000. Difference and diversity: trends in young Danes' media uses. *Media, Culture & Society*, 22(2), pp.149-166.
- Dubrovsky, V.J., Kiesler, S. and Sethna, B.N., 1991. The equalization phenomenon: Status effects in computer-mediated and face-to-face decision-making groups. *Human-computer interaction*, 6(2), pp.119-146.
- Dunbar, R., 2010. *How many friends does one person need?: Dunbar's number and other evolutionary quirks*. Faber & Faber.
- Easterby-Smith M, Thorpe R, Lowe A. 2002. *Management Research: An Introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London. Sage.
- The Economist, 2009 <http://www.economist.com/node/14062327> [accessed on 1 April 2011]
- Economy Watch 2010 [http://www.economywatch.com/world\\_economy/united-kingdom/uk-economic-history.html](http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/united-kingdom/uk-economic-history.html) [accessed on 1 April 2011]
- Eladhari, M., 2007. The player's journey. *The Players' Realm: Studies on the Culture of Video Games and Gaming*, pp.171-87.
- Elkind, D. and Bowen, R., 1979. Imaginary audience behavior in children and adolescents. *Developmental psychology*, 15(1), p.38.
- Ellison, N., Heino, R. and Gibbs, J., 2006. Managing impressions online: Self-presentation processes in the online dating environment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(2), pp.415-441.
- Ellison, N.B., Steinfield, C. and Lampe, C., 2007. The benefits of Facebook "friends:" Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), pp.1143-1168.
- Escalas JE, Bettman JR. 2000. "Using Narratives and Autobiographical Memories to Discern Motives" in *The Why of Consumption: Perspectives on Consumer Motives, Goals and Desires*. ed S. Ratneshwar, David Glen Mick and Cynthia Huffman. Routledge: New York.
- Feingold, A., 1992. Good-looking people are not what we think. *Psychological bulletin*, 111(2), p.304.
- Feinstein, B.A., Hershenberg, R., Bhatia, V., Latack, J.A., Meuwly, N. and Davila, J., 2013. Negative social comparison on Facebook and depressive symptoms: Rumination as a mechanism. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 2(3), p.161.
- Fennell G. 1985. "Things of Heaven and Earth: Phenomenology, Marketing and Consumer Research". In *Advances in Consumer Research*. 12 :544-549.
- Ferguson, S., 2011. A global culture of cool? Generation Y and their perception of coolness. *Young Consumers*, 12(3), pp.265-275.

- Festinger L. 1954. A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7(2): 117-140.
- Financial Times, 2016a Snapchat an enduring hit with British users <https://www.ft.com/content/f781b74c-243f-11e6-9d4d-c11776a5124d> [accessed 13 April 2017]
- Financial Times, 2016b <https://www.ft.com/content/f4dcdf62-399d-11e6-9a05-82a9b15a8ee7> [accessed 27 May 2017]
- Financial Times, 2016c <https://www.ft.com/content/ef0745e0-3d2c-11e6-9f2c-36b487ebd80a> [accessed 27 May 2017]
- Firat AF, Shultz II CJ. 1997. From segmentation to fragmentation: markets and marketing strategy in the postmodern era. *European Journal of Marketing* 31 (3/4): 183-207.
- Firat AF, Venkatesh A. 1995. "Liberatory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption". *Journal of Consumer Research*. 22(3): 343-73
- Fish S. 1990. "How to recognise a poem when you see one". *Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Eds D Bartholomae and A Petrosky. Bedford Books of St martin's Press. Boston: 178-191.
- Foscht, T., Schloffer, J., Maloles III, C. and Chia, S.L., 2009. Assessing the outcomes of Generation-Y customers' loyalty. *International journal of Bank marketing*, 27(3), pp.218-241.
- Foucault M. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, (ed. Gordon C) New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M., Martin, L.H., Gutman, H. and Hutton, P.H., 1988. *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault*. Univ of Massachusetts Press.
- Fournier S. 1998. Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 24(4): 343-373.
- Fox, J. and Moreland, J.J., 2015. The dark side of social networking sites: An exploration of the relational and psychological stressors associated with Facebook use and affordances. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 45, pp.168-176.
- Fox, J., Osborn, J.L. and Warber, K.M., 2014. Relational dialectics and social networking sites: The role of Facebook in romantic relationship escalation, maintenance, conflict, and dissolution. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 35, pp.527-534.
- Frison, E. and Eggermont, S., 2016. Exploring the relationships between different types of Facebook use, perceived online social support, and adolescents' depressed mood. *Social Science Computer Review*, 34(2), pp.153-171.
- Garcia, D. and Sikström, S., 2014. The dark side of Facebook: Semantic representations of status updates predict the Dark Triad of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 67, pp.92-96.
- Garcia, S.M., Tor, A. and Schiff, T.M., 2013. The psychology of competition a social comparison perspective. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 8(6), pp.634-650.
- Geertz C. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books. New York.
- Ger, G. 2005 *Reflections on Consumer Culture Research, Presentation at ACR Doctoral Consortium*, Bilkent University. Available from <http://www.acrwebsite.org/fop/index.asp?itemID=108>.
- Gibbons, F.X., Benbow, C.P. and Gerrard, M., 1994. From top dog to bottom half: Social comparison strategies in response to poor performance. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 67(4), p.638.
- Gibbons, F.X. and Buunk, B.P., 1999. Individual differences in social comparison: development of a scale of social comparison orientation. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 76(1), p.129.

- Giddens A. 1976. *New Rules of Sociological Methods: A Positive Critique of Interpretive Sociologies*. Hutchinson. London.
- Giddens A. 1991. *Modernity and Self Identity*. Stanford University Press: Stanford.
- Goethals, G.R., 1986. Fabricating and ignoring social reality: Self-serving estimates of consensus. In *Relative deprivation and social comparison: The Ontario Symposium* (Vol. 4, pp. 135-157). Erlbaum Hillsdale, NJ.
- Goethals, G.R., 1986. Social comparison theory: Psychology from the lost and found. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 12(3), pp.261-278.
- Goethals, G.R. and Darley, J.M., 1977. Social comparison theory: An attributional approach. *Social comparison processes: Theoretical and empirical perspectives*, pp.259-278.
- Goethals, G.R., Messick, D.M. and Allison, S.T., 1991. The uniqueness bias: Studies of constructive social comparison.
- Goffman E. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday: New York.
- Goffman, E., 2002. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. 1959. *Garden City, NY*.
- Gonzales, A.L. and Hancock, J.T., 2011. Mirror, mirror on my Facebook wall: Effects of exposure to Facebook on self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14(1-2), pp.79-83.
- Goulding, C., 2002. *Grounded theory: A practical guide for management, business and market researchers*. Sage.
- Goulding C, Saren M, Maclaran P, Follett J. 2004. "Into the Darkness: Androgyny and Gender Blurring Within the Gothic Subculture". *Association for Consumer Research* 7 : 1-27.
- Goulding, C., Shankar, A., Elliott, R. and Canniford, R., 2009. The marketplace management of illicit pleasure. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(5), pp.759-771.
- Grady, C., 2001. Money for research participation: does it jeopardize informed consent?. *American journal of bioethics*, 1(2), pp.40-44.
- Granovetter, M.S., 1973. The strength of weak ties. *American journal of sociology*, pp.1360-1380.
- Granovetter, M., 1983. The strength of weak ties: A network theory revisited. *Sociological theory*, 1(1), pp.201-233.
- Grant, I.J. and Stephen, G.R., 2006. Communicating culture: an examination of the buying behaviour of 'tweenage' girls and the key societal communicating factors influencing the buying process of fashion clothing. *Journal of targeting, measurement and analysis for marketing*, 14(2), pp.101-114.
- Greenwood J. 1994. "Action research and action researchers: some introductory considerations". *Contemporary Nurse*. 3(2) : 84-92.
- Grohol, J., 2011. FOMO addiction: The fear of missing out. *Psychocentral.com*.
- Gross, R. and Acquisti, A., 2005, November. Information revelation and privacy in online social networks. In *Proceedings of the 2005 ACM workshop on Privacy in the electronic society* (pp. 71-80). ACM.
- Grubb EL, Grathwohl HL. 1967. Consumer Self-Concept, Symbolism and Market Behaviour: A Theoretical Approach. *Journal of Marketing* 31: 22-27.
- Grubb EL, Hupp G. 1968. Perception of Self, Generalized Stereotypes, and Brand Selection. *Journal of Marketing Research*. 5: 58-63
- Grubb EL, Stern BL. 1971. Self-Concept and Significant Others. *Journal of Marketing Research*. 8: 382-385

- The Guardian, 2003 <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2003/apr/12/budget2003.politics> [accessed on 1 April 2013]
- The Guardian, 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/22/jobs-travel-study-how-brex-it-would-affect-young-britons-eu-referendum> [accessed on 27 May 2017]
- Hackley, C., 2003. *Doing research projects in marketing, management and consumer research*. Routledge.
- Hakmiller, K.L., 1962. *Social comparison processes under differential conditions of ego-threat*.
- Hakmiller, K.L., 1966. Threat as a determinant of downward comparison. *Journal of experimental social psychology*, 1, pp.32-39.
- Haferkamp, N. and Krämer, N.C., 2011. Social comparison 2.0: Examining the effects of online profiles on social-networking sites. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14(5), pp.309-314.
- Hall, J.A., Pennington, N. and Lueders, A., 2014. Impression management and formation on Facebook: A lens model approach. *New Media & Society*, 16(6), pp.958-982.
- Hamlyn DW. 1995. "Epistemology, history of The Oxford Companion to Philosophy". Ed T Honderich. Oxford English Press. Oxford. : 242-245.
- Hammersley M. 1985. "Ethnography: What it is and what it offers". Research and evaluation Methods in Special Education. Eds S Hegarty and P Evans. Nefar-Nelson. Philadelphia. : 152-163.
- Harwood, M.E.L.A.N.I.E., 2002. Talking to the generations: How to market to different age groups. *Community Banker*, 11(7), pp.28-33.
- Hazaz-Berger, H. and Yair, G., 2011. The social structure of the liquid self: exploratory lessons from Israeli flight attendants. *Sociology*, 45(6), pp.992-1007.
- Hebdige, D., 1979. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen.
- Heidegger M. 1962. *Being and Time*. Basil Blackwell. Oxford.
- Heron, J., 1996. *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*. Sage.
- HESA, 2014 <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2014/patterns-and-trends-in-uk-higher-education-2014.pdf> [accessed on 27 May 2017]
- Hill R. 1992. Transition in turmoil: when becoming an adult involves criminal behaviour. *Advances in Consumer Research* 19: 399–401.
- Hinduja, S. and Patchin, J.W., 2008a. Cyberbullying: An exploratory analysis of factors related to offending and victimization. *Deviant behavior*, 29(2), pp.129-156.
- Hinduja, S. and Patchin, J.W., 2008b. Personal information of adolescents on the Internet: A quantitative content analysis of MySpace. *Journal of adolescence*, 31(1), pp.125-146.
- Hirschman, E.C., 1986. Humanistic inquiry in marketing research: philosophy, method, and criteria. *Journal of marketing Research*, pp.237-249.
- Ho, M. and O'Donohoe, S., 2014. Volunteer stereotypes, stigma, and relational identity projects. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(5/6), pp.854-877.
- Hoffman, D.L. and Novak, T.P., 1996. Marketing in hypermedia computer-mediated environments: Conceptual foundations. *The Journal of Marketing*, pp.50-68.
- Hogg, M.K. and MacLaran, P., 2007. Reflexivity, representation and rhetoric: issues for interpretive consumer researchers.

- Hogg MK, Maclaran P, Curasi CF. 2003. Consumption, role transitions and the re-construction of the self: an exploratory study of social capital within the context of transitional consumers. *European Advances in Consumer Research* 6: 258-262.
- Hogg MK, Michell PCN. 1996. Identity, Self and Consumption: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Marketing Management*. 12: 629-644
- Höijer, B., 2008. Ontological assumptions and generalizations in qualitative (audience) research. *European Journal of Communication*, 23(3), pp.275-294.
- Holbrook MB, Hirschman EC. 1982. "The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings and Fun". *Journal of Consumer Research*. 9 :132-140.
- Hollenbaugh, E.E. and Ferris, A.L., 2014. Facebook self-disclosure: Examining the role of traits, social cohesion, and motives. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 30, pp.50-58.
- Holt, D.B., 2002. Why do brands cause trouble? A dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding. *Journal of consumer research*, 29(1), pp.70-90.
- Howe N, Strauss W. 2000. *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. Random House: New York.
- Howe, N., 2005. Harnessing the power of millennials. *School Administrator*, 62(8), p.18.
- Husserl, E., 1970. *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy*. Northwestern University Press.
- Inkling Report No 1: UK Millennials., 2017. Available at <http://www.thisisinkling.com/inklingreports/2016/1/21/inkling-report-no-1-uk-millennials> [accessed on 20th April 2017]
- James, A., Jenks, C. and Prout, A., 1998. *Theorizing childhood*. Teachers College Press, PO Box 20, Williston, VT 05495-0020.
- James W.1950. "What Pragmatism means". *Pragmatism and American Culture*. Lexington: 1-23.
- Jones S, Millermaier S, Goya-Martinez M, Schuter J. 2008. Whose space is MySpace? A content analysis of MySpace profiles. *First Monday* 13 (9). Available at <http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2202/2024> [accessed on 10 November 2010].
- Johnson, B.K. and Knobloch-Westerwick, S., 2014. Glancing up or down: Mood management and selective social comparisons on social networking sites. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 41, pp.33-39.
- Jones, C., 2011. Students, the net generation, and digital natives. *Deconstructing digital natives: Young people, technology, and the new literacies*, pp.30-45.
- Jones, S., Millermaier, S., Goya-Martinez, M. and Schuler, J., 2008. Whose space is MySpace? A content analysis of MySpace profiles. *First monday*, 13(9).
- Jones, C., Ramanau, R., Cross, S. and Healing, G., 2010. Net generation or Digital Natives: Is there a distinct new generation entering university?. *Computers & Education*, 54(3), pp.722-732.
- Kahle, L.R. and Shoham, A., 1995. Role-relaxed consumers: empirical evidence. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 35(3), pp.59-62.
- Kapidzic, S. and Herring, S.C., 2011. Gender, Communication, and Self-Presentation in Teen Chatrooms Revisited: Have Patterns Changed?. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(1), pp.39-59.

- Karababa E, Ger G. 2011. Early Modern Ottoman Coffeehouse Culture and the Formation of the Consumer Subject. *Journal of Consumer Research* 37: 737-760.
- Kavanagh, D., 2011. Thatcherism and the End of the Post-War Consensus. *British Broadcasting Corporation BBC*.
- King N. 2004. "Using Interviews in Qualitative Research" in Cassell C and Symon G (eds) *Essential Guide to Qualitative Research*. London. Sage : 11-22.
- Kjeldgaard D, Askegaard S. 2006 The Glocalization of Youth Culture: The Global Youth Segment as Structures of Common Difference. *Journal of Consumer Research* 33: 231-247
- Kjeldgaard, D., 2009. The meaning of style? Style reflexivity among Danish high school youths. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 8(2-3), pp.71-83.
- Klein, W.M. and Goethals, G.R., 2002. Social reality and self-construction: A case of "bounded irrationality?". *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 24(2), pp.105-114.
- Kleine RE, Kleine SS. 2000. Consumption and self-schema changes throughout the identity project life cycle. *Advances in Consumer Research* 27: 279-285.
- Kleine, S.S., Kleine, R.E. and Allen, C.T., 1995. How is a possession "me" or "not me"? Characterizing types and an antecedent of material possession attachment. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(3), pp.327-343.
- Kleine RE, Kleine SS, Kernan JB. 1993. Mundane consumption and the self: a social-identity perspective. *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 2 (3): 209-235.
- Koutamanis, M., Vossen, H.G. and Valkenburg, P.M., 2015. Adolescents' comments in social media: Why do adolescents receive negative feedback and who is most at risk?. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 53, pp.486-494.
- Kozinets RV. 2001. "Articulating the meanings of Star Trek's Culture of Consumption". *Journal of Consumer Research*. 28 (1): 67-88
- Kozinets, R.V., 2001. Utopian enterprise: Articulating the meanings of Star Trek's culture of consumption. *Journal of consumer research*, 28(1), pp.67-88.
- Knobloch-Westerwick, S. and Hastall, M.R., 2006. Social comparisons with news personae selective exposure to news portrayals of same-sex and same-age characters. *Communication Research*, 33(4), pp.262-284.
- Krämer, N.C., Feurstein, M., Kluck, J.P., Meier, Y., Rother, M. and Winter, S., 2017. Beware of Selfies: The Impact of Photo Type on Impression Formation Based on Social Networking Profiles. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8.
- Kunda, Z., 1990. The case for motivated reasoning. *Psychological bulletin*, 108(3), p.480.
- Labrecque, Lauren I., Ereni Markos, and George R. Milne. "Online personal branding: processes, challenges, and implications." *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 25, no. 1 (2011): 37-50.
- Lampe, C., Ellison, N. and Steinfield, C., 2006, November. A Face (book) in the crowd: Social searching vs. social browsing. In *Proceedings of the 2006 20th anniversary conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 167-170). ACM.
- Langlois, J.H., Kalakanis, L., Rubenstein, A.J., Larson, A., Hallam, M. and Smoot, M., 2000. Maxims or myths of beauty? A meta-analytic and theoretical review. *Psychological bulletin*, 126(3), p.390.
- Larsen, M.C., 2007. Understanding social networking: On young people's construction and co-construction of identity online. *Internet Research*, 8, pp.18-36.
- The Last Hurdle 2015, Social Media User Statistics in the UK, <http://www.thelasthurdle.co.uk/social-media-user-statistics-in-the-uk-for-2015/> accessed 13 April 2017

- Lea, M. and Spears, R., 1991. Computer-mediated communication, de-individuation and group decision-making. *International Journal of Man-Machine Studies*, 34(2), pp.283-301.
- Lea, M. and Spears, R., 1995. Love at first byte? Building personal relationships over computer networks. In Wood, Julia T. (Ed); Duck, Steve (Ed). (1995). *Under-studied relationships: Off the beaten track.*, (pp. 197-233). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc, xvi, 280 pp.
- Lee, S.J., Quigley, B.M., Nesler, M.S., Corbett, A.B. and Tedeschi, J.T., 1999. Development of a self-presentation tactics scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 26(4), pp.701-722.
- Lehto, X.Y., Jang, S., Achana, F.T. and O'Leary, J.T., 2008. Exploring tourism experience sought: a cohort comparison of baby boomers and the silent generation. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 14(3), pp.237-252.
- Lemos, S. and Portes, J., 2008. New labour? The impact of migration from central and eastern European countries on the UK labour market.
- Lenhart, A., 2015. Teens, social media & technology overview 2015. *Pew Research Center*, 9. April
- Lenhart, A., Smith, A., Anderson, M., Duggan, M. and Perrin, A., 2015. Teens, technology and friendships. *Pew Research Center*, August <http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2015/08/Teens-and-Friendships-FINAL1.pdf> accessed 10 April 2017
- Leung, L., 2013. Generational differences in content generation in social media: The roles of the gratifications sought and of narcissism. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(3), pp.997-1006.
- Levy, S.J., 1959. Symbols for sale. *Harvard business review*, 37(4), pp.117-124.
- Lewis, P., Newburn, T., Taylor, M., McGillivray, C., Greenhill, A., Frayman, H. and Proctor, R., 2011. Reading the riots: Investigating England's summer of disorder.
- Lin, S.S. and Tsai, C.C., 2002. Sensation seeking and internet dependence of Taiwanese high school adolescents. *Computers in human behavior*, 18(4), pp.411-426.
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G., 1986. But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New directions for evaluation*, 1986(30), pp.73-84.
- Lindstrom M. 2003. *Brand Child*. Kogan Page Limited: London.
- Lindstrom, M., 2004. Branding is no longer child's play!. *Journal of consumer marketing*, 21(3), pp.175-182.
- Lindstrom, M., 2004. *Brandchild: remarkable insights into the minds of today's global kids and their relationship with brands*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Lindstrom, M. and Seybold, P., 2003. *Brandchild. America: Kogan Page*.
- Livingstone, S., 2003. Children's use of the internet: Reflections on the emerging research agenda. *New media & society*, 5(2), pp.147-166.
- Lockwood, P. and Kunda, Z., 1997. Superstars and me: Predicting the impact of role models on the self. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 73(1), p.91.
- Lu, D.W., Wang, J.W. and Huang, A.C.W., 2010. Differentiation of Internet addiction risk level based on autonomic nervous responses: the Internet-addiction hypothesis of autonomic activity. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 13(4), pp.371-378.
- May, T., 1996. *An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1760-1990*. Longman, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.
- McAndrew, F.T. and Jeong, H.S., 2012. Who does what on Facebook? Age, sex, and relationship status as predictors of Facebook use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(6), pp.2359-2365.

- McCracken G. 1986. "Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods". *Journal of Consumer Research*. 13: 71-84.
- McCracken, G., 1989. Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process. *Journal of consumer research*, 16(3), pp.310-321.
- McCrae, R.R. and Costa Jr, P.T., 1999. A five-factor theory of personality. *Handbook of personality: Theory and research*, 2, pp.139-153.
- McLeod, A., 2007. Whose agenda? Issues of power and relationship when listening to looked-after young people. *Child & Family Social Work*, 12(3), pp.278-286.
- Machado, A., 2014. How millennials are changing travel. *The Atlantic*.  
<http://aimtvgroup.com/rawtravelblog/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/HowMillennialsAreChangingTravel-TheAtlantic.pdf> [accessed on 20 April 2017]
- Madden, M., Lenhart, A., Duggan, M., Cortesi, S. and Gasser, U., 2013. *Teens and technology 2013*. Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project.
- Madden, M., Lenhart, A., Cortesi, S., Gasser, U., Duggan, M., Smith, A. and Beaton, M., 2013. Teens, social media, and privacy. *Pew Research Center*, 21, pp.2-86.
- Maffesoli M. 1996. *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. London: Sage
- Makarius, L., 1983. The mask and the violation of taboo. *The Power of Symbols: Masks and Masquerade in the Americas*, pp.195-203.
- Manago, A.M., Taylor, T. and Greenfield, P.M., 2012. Me and my 400 friends: the anatomy of college students' Facebook networks, their communication patterns, and well-being. *Developmental psychology*, 48(2), p.369.
- Mantovani, F., 2001. Networked seduction: A test-bed for the study of strategic communication on the Internet. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 4(1), pp.147-154.
- Mäntymäki, M. and Islam, A.N., 2014. Social virtual world continuance among teens: Uncovering the moderating role of perceived aggregate network exposure. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 33(5), pp.536-547.
- Marcus, B., Machilek, F. and Schütz, A., 2006. Personality in cyberspace: personal Web sites as media for personality expressions and impressions. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 90(6), p.1014.
- Mares, M.L. and Cantor, J., 1992. Elderly viewers' responses to televised portrayals of old age: Empathy and mood management versus social comparison. *Communication Research*, 19(4), pp.459-478.
- Marketing Research Society, 2014. MRS Guidelines for Research with Children and Young People (January 2012 - updated 2014) <https://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/2014-09-01Children%20and%20Young%20People%20Research%20Guidelines.pdf> [accessed on 10 June 2017]
- Marks, G., 1984. Thinking one's abilities are unique and one's opinions are common. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 10(2), pp.203-208.
- Marsh, H.W. and Parker, J.W., 1984. Determinants of student self-concept: Is it better to be a relatively large fish in a small pond even if you don't learn to swim as well?. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 47(1), p.213.
- Marshall G. 1994. *The Concise English Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford University Press. Oxford.
- Martin, Rod; Patricia Puhlik-Doris; Gwen Larsen; Jeanette Gray; Kelly Weir (February 2003). "Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire". *Journal of Research in Personality*. 37 (1): 48–75.



- Merleau-Ponty. M. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge and Kegan Paul. London.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2017. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/> [accessed on 2 June 2017]
- Mettee, D.R. and Smith, G., 1977. Social comparison and interpersonal attraction: The case for dissimilarity. *Social comparison processes: Theoretical and empirical perspectives*, 69, p.101
- Metzger, M.J., Wilson, C., Pure, R.A. and Zhao, B.Y., 2011. Invisible Interactions: What Latent Social Interaction Can. *Networked Sociability and Individualism: Technology for Personal and Professional Relationships: Technology for Personal and Professional Relationships*, p.79.
- Metzl, J.M., 2004. Voyeur nation? Changing definitions of voyeurism, 1950–2004. *Harvard review of psychiatry*, 12(2), pp.127-131.
- Mick DG, Demoss M. 1990. Self-Gifts: Phenomenological Insights from Four Contexts. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 17 :322-332.
- Miles MB, Huberman AM.1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis (2nd Edn)*, Sage: Thousand Oaks, California.
- Mills, M. and Blossfeld, H.P., 2003. Globalisation, uncertainty and changes in early life courses. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, 6(2), pp.188-218.
- Miller R K, Washington K. 2009. "Chapter 28: Millennial Consumers." In *Consumer Behavior*: 208-211.
- Miller RK & Associates. 2007. "Chapter 13: Millennial Consumers." In *Consumer Behavior*: 83-94. Richard K. Miller & Associates, 2007. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost [accessed 1 April 2011].
- Mitchell JC. 1977. "The Logic and Methods of Social Enquiry". *Introducing Sociology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Penguin. Harmondsworth : 73-121.
- Mittal B. 2006. I, me, and mine - how products become consumers' extended selves. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 5 (6): 550-562.
- Moreau, A., Laconi, S., Delfour, M. and Chabrol, H., 2015. Psychopathological profiles of adolescent and young adult problematic Facebook users. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 44, pp.64-69.
- Moschis, G.P., 1981. Patterns of consumer learning. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 9(1), pp.110-126.
- Moustakas, C., 1994. *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage.
- Muise, A., Christofides, E. and Desmarais, S., 2009. More information than you ever wanted: Does Facebook bring out the green-eyed monster of jealousy?. *CyberPsychology & behavior*, 12(4), pp.441-444.
- Mulvey, L., 1975. Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), pp.6-18.
- Murray JB. 2002. "The Politics of Consumption: A Re-Inquiry on Thompson and Haytko's (1997) 'Speaking of Fashion'". *Journal of Consumer Research* 29 (3): 427-40
- Munar, A.M., 2010. Digital exhibitionism: The age of exposure. *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, 2(3), pp.401-422.
- Munson JM, Spivey WA. 1980. Assessing Self-Concept. *Advances in Consumer Research*. 7: 598-603.
- Myers, K.K. and Sadaghiani, K., 2010. Millennials in the workplace: A communication perspective on millennials' organizational relationships and performance. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(2), pp.225-238.
- Nayak, A.N.O.O.P., 2003. Race, place and globalisation: youth cultures in a changing world Berg. *New York*.
- Noble SM, Haytko DL, Phillips J. 2009. What drives college-age generation Y consumers? *Journal of Business Research* 62 (6): 617-628.

- Nonnecke, B. and Preece, J., 2001. Why lurkers lurk. *AMCIS 2001 Proceedings*, p.294.
- Nuttall P. 2009. Insiders, regulars and tourists: exploring selves and music consumption in adolescence. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 8 (4): 211-224.
- Oakley A. 1974. *The Sociology of Housework*. Martin Robertson. London.
- Oblinger, D., 2003. Boomers gen-xers millennials. *EDUCAUSE review*, 500(4), pp.37-47.
- O'Connor P. 2006. Young People's Constructions of the Self: Late Modern Elements and Gender Differences. *Sociology*. 40(1): 107-124.
- Odom, W., Zimmerman, J. and Forlizzi, J., 2011, May. Teenagers and their virtual possessions: design opportunities and issues. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human Factors in computing systems* (pp. 1491-1500). ACM.
- OFCOM 2011 [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0026/28484/uk\\_cmr\\_2011\\_final.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0026/28484/uk_cmr_2011_final.pdf) [accessed on 20 April 2017]
- Ofcom, 2015 Key social media statistics from Ofcom's Communications Market Report <https://econsultancy.com/blog/66824-key-social-media-statistics-from-ofcom-s-communications-market-report/> [accessed on 13 April 2017]
- O'Hara, Kenton, and Barry Brown, eds. *Consuming music together: social and collaborative aspects of music consumption technologies*. Vol. 35. Springer Science & Business Media, 2006.
- Oldenburg, R., 1999. *The great good place: Cafes, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community*. Da Capo Press.
- ONS. 2011a. Internet access - households and individuals, 2011. Office for National Statistics. Available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit2/internet-access---households-and-individuals/2011/stb-internet-access-2011.html> [accessed on 25 January 2012].
- ONS. 2011b. Ethnic and National Identity in England and Wales: 2011 Office for National Statistics. Available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandnationalidentityinenglandandwales/2012-12-11> [accessed on 20 April 2017]
- ONS. 2015a. Birth by parents' characteristics in England and Wales: 2015 Office for National Statistics. [accessed on 27 May 2017]
- ONS. 2015b. English Life Tables No 17: 2010-2012 Office for National Statistics. [accessed on 27 May 2017]
- ONS. 2016. Births in England and Wales: 2015 Office for National Statistics. [accessed on 27 May 2017]
- Ouwerkerk, J.W. and Johnson, B.K., 2016. Motives for Online Friending and Following: The Dark Side of Social Network Site Connections. *Social Media+ Society*, 2(3), p.2056305116664219.
- Palfrey, J.G. and Gasser, U., 2008. *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives*. Basic Books.
- Papacharissi, Z. and Mendelson, A.L., 2007. An exploratory study of reality appeal: Uses and gratifications of reality TV shows. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 51(2), pp.355-370.
- Papadopoulos, I. and Scanlon, K., 2002. The use of audio diaries in a study with visually impaired people. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 96(6), pp.456-459.
- Patchin, J.W. and Hinduja, S., 2010. Changes in adolescent online social networking behaviors from 2006 to 2009. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(6), pp.1818-1821.
- Pathe, M.; Mullen, P. E. (1997). "The impact of stalkers on their victims". *The British Journal of Psychiatry* **170**: 12–17.

- Pempek, T.A., Yermolayeva, Y.A. and Calvert, S.L., 2009. College students' social networking experiences on Facebook. *Journal of applied developmental psychology*, 30(3), pp.227-238.
- Peter, J. and Valkenburg, P.M., 2011. Adolescents' online privacy: Toward a developmental perspective. In *Privacy online* (pp. 221-234). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Pew. 2009. The Pew Research Center's internet and American life project. Available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data-for-Teens/Whos-Online.aspx> [accessed on 30 January 2012].
- Pew. 2010. The Pew Research Center. A Portrait of Generation Next – Confident. Connected. Open to Change. Available at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf> [accessed on 20th April 2017]
- Piacentini M, Mailer G. 2004. Symbolic consumption in teenagers' clothing choices. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 3 (3): 251-262.
- Powell C. 2007. Generation Yapper. *Marketing Magazine* 112 (23): 14.
- Prensky, M., 2001. Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1. *On the horizon*, 9(5), pp.1-6.
- Przybylski, A.K., Weinstein, N., Ryan, R.M. and Rigby, C.S., 2009. Having to versus wanting to play: Background and consequences of harmonious versus obsessive engagement in video games. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(5), pp.485-492.
- Putnam, R.D., 2000. Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. In *Culture and Politics* (pp. 223-234). Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Raines, C., 2002. Managing millennials. *Connecting Generations: The Sourcebook*, 16.
- Rettberg, J.W., 2009. 'Freshly Generated for You, and Barack Obama' How Social Media Represent Your Life. *European Journal of Communication*, 24(4), pp.451-466.
- Ridley, M., 2012. Internet On, Inhibitions Off: Why We Tell All. *Wall Street Journal*.
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C.M. and Ormston, R. eds., 2013. *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. Sage.
- Roberts, J.A. and Manolis, C., 2000. Baby boomers and busters: an exploratory investigation of attitudes toward marketing, advertising and consumerism. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 17(6), pp.481-497.
- Robson C. 2002. *Real World Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxford. Blackwell.
- Rosa, H., 2013. *Social acceleration: A new theory of modernity*. Columbia University Press.
- Rose, R.L. and Wood, S.L., 2005. Paradox and the consumption of authenticity through reality television. *Journal of consumer research*, 32(2), pp.284-296.
- Rosenberg M. 1979. *Conceiving the Self*. Basic Books: New York.
- Rosenberg, J. and Egbert, N., 2011. Online impression management: Personality traits and concerns for secondary goals as predictors of self-presentation tactics on Facebook. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(1), pp.1-18.
- Rosenthal-Stott, H. E., Dicks, R. E., & Fielding, L. S. (2015). The Valence of Self-Generated (Status Updates) and Other-Generated (Wall-Posts) Information Determines Impression Formation on Facebook. *PLoS one*, 10(6), e0125064.

- Ross, L.D., Amabile, T.M. and Steinmetz, J.L., 1977. Social roles, social control, and biases in social-perception processes. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 35(7), pp.485-494.
- Sadler Jr. WA. 1969. *Existence and Love: A New Approach in Existential Phenomenology*. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York.
- Sánchez Abril, P., Levin, A. and Del Riego, A., 2012. Blurred boundaries: Social media privacy and the twenty-first-century employee. *American Business Law Journal*, 49(1), pp.63-124.
- Saren M. 2007. To have is to be? A critique of self-creation through consumption. *The Marketing Review*. 7(4): 343-354.
- Saren, M., 2007. Marketing is everything: the view from the street. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 25(1), pp.11-16.
- Sartre J-P. 1943. *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Ontology*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Saunders, M.N. and Lewis, P., 2012. *Doing research in business & management: An essential guide to planning your project*. Pearson.
- Saunders M, Lewis P, Thornhill A. 2007. *Research Methods for Business Students*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Prentice Hall. London.
- Schau, H.J. and Gilly, M.C., 2003. We are what we post? Self-presentation in personal web space. *Journal of consumer research*, 30(3), pp.385-404.
- Schewe, C.D., Meredith, G.E. and Noble, S.M., 2000. Defining moments: Segmenting by cohorts. *Marketing Management*, 9(3), p.48.
- Schewe, C.D. and Noble, S.M., 2000. Market segmentation by cohorts: the value and validity of cohorts in America and abroad. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 16(1-3), pp.129-142.
- Schouten J, McAlexander J. 1995. "Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers". *Journal of Consumer Research*. 22(1): 43-61
- Schutz A. 1967. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Northwestern University Press. Evanston.
- Schwarz, O., 2010. On friendship, boobs and the logic of the catalogue: Online self-portraits as a means for the exchange of capital. *Convergence*, 16(2), pp.163-183.
- Scopelliti I. 2016. Empathy Gaps in Sharing Self-Relevant Content. *Digital Consumption Symposium*, CASS Business School, 21 October 2016
- Scott, G.G. and Ravenscroft, K., 2017. Bragging on Facebook: The Interaction of Content Source and Focus in Online Impression Formation. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 20(1), pp.58-63.
- Shaw, M. and Carr-Hill, R., 1991. Mass media and attitudes to the Gulf War in Britain. *The Electronic Journal of Communication*, 2(2).
- Shelton, A.K. and Skalski, P., 2014. Blinded by the light: Illuminating the dark side of social network use through content analysis. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 33, pp.339-348.
- Sherry JF. 1991. "Postmodern Alternatives: The Interpretive Turn in Consumer Research" in TC Robertson and HH Kassarian. *Handbook of Consumer Research*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall. : 548-591.
- Siibak, A., 2010. Constructing masculinity on a social networking site The case-study of visual self-presentations of young men on the profile images of SNS Rate. *Young*, 18(4), pp.403-425.
- Silverman, E.K., 1990. Clifford Geertz: towards a more "thick" understanding' *Reading Material Culture: Structuralism, Hermeneutics and Post-Structuralism*, ed C.Tilley, Basil Blackwell, Oxford

- Sirgy MJ. 1982. "Self-Concept in Consumer Behaviour: A Critical Review". *Journal of Consumer Research*. 9: 287-300
- Smith AD. 1992. National identity and the idea of European unity. *International Affairs* 6: 55-76.
- Smock, A.D., Ellison, N.B., Lampe, C. and Wohn, D.Y., 2011. Facebook as a toolkit: A uses and gratification approach to unbundling feature use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(6), pp.2322-2329.
- Spears, R. and Lea, M., 1992. *Social influence and the influence of the 'social' in computer-mediated communication*. Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Spears, R and Lea, M., 1994. Panacea or panopticon? The hidden power in computer-mediated communication. *Communication Research*, 21(4), pp.427-459.
- Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., Ormston, R., O'Connor, W. and Barnard, M., 2013. AND PROCESSES. *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, p.269.
- Spero, I. and Stone, M., 2004. Agents of change: how young consumers are changing the world of marketing. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 7(2), pp.153-159.
- Spinelli, C.F., 2010. Social media: no 'friend' of personal privacy. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 1(2), pp.59-69.
- Stamatakis, E., Wardle, J. and Cole, T.J., 2010. Childhood obesity and overweight prevalence trends in England: evidence for growing socioeconomic disparities. *International journal of obesity*, 34(1), pp.41-47.
- Steinkuehler, C.A. and Williams, D., 2006. Where everybody knows your (screen) name: Online games as "third places". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(4), pp.885-909.
- Strathern, M., 1994. "Forward: The Mirror of Technology," in *Consuming Technologies in Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, ed. R. Silverstone and E Hirsch, London: Routledge, vii-xiii
- Stefanone, M.A., Lackaff, D. and Rosen, D., 2010. The relationship between traditional mass media and "social media": Reality television as a model for social network site behavior. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 54(3), pp.508-525.
- Strauss, C.L., 1966. *Savage mind*. University of Chicago.
- Suler, J., 2004. The online disinhibition effect. *Cyberpsychology & behavior*, 7(3), pp.321-326.
- Taylor, S.E. and Brown, J.D., 1988. Illusion and well-being: a social psychological perspective on mental health. *Psychological bulletin*, 103(2), p.193.
- Tapscott, D., 1998. *The rise of the Net generation: Growing up digital*.
- Tapscott, D., 2008. *Grown up digital: How the net generation is changing your world HC*. McGraw-Hill.
- Tapscott, D., 2009. *Grown up digital* (Vol. 361). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Taylor, P., Kochhar, R., D'Veira Cohn, J.S.P., Velasco, G., Motel, S. and Patten, E., 2011. Fighting poverty in a tough economy, Americans move in with their relatives. *Pew Social & Demographic Trends*. Pew Research Center. Washington DC <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2011/10/Multigenerational-Households-Final1.pdf>.
- Taylor, S.E. and Lobel, M., 1989. Social comparison activity under threat: downward evaluation and upward contacts. *Psychological review*, 96(4), p.569.
- Telegraph, 2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/6542812/British-youth-unemployment-hits-record-high.html> [accessed on 27 May 2017]

- Telegraph, 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/jobs/youth-unemployment-competition/9653113/Youth-unemployment-the-big-issue-for-the-worlds-economy.html> [accessed on 27 May 2017]
- Tesser, A., 1988. Toward a self-evaluation maintenance model of social behavior. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 21, pp.181-227.
- Thornton, D.A. and Arrowood, A.J., 1966. Self-evaluation, self-enhancement, and the locus of social comparison. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 1, pp.40-48.
- Thompson JB. 1995. *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Polity: Cambridge, UK.
- Thompson CJ. 1996. "Caring Consumers: Gendered Consumption Meanings and the Juggling Lifestyle". *Journal of Consumer Research*. 22(4): 388-407.
- Thompson CJ, and Haytko DL. 1997. Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 24 : 15-42
- Thompson CJ, Locander WB, Pollio HR. 1989. Putting Consumer Experience Back into Consumer Research: The Philosophy and Method of Existential-Phenomenology. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 16 : 133-146.
- Thompson CJ, Locander WB, Pollio HR. 1990. The Lived Meaning of Free Choice: An Existential-Phenomenology Description of Everyday Consumer Experiences of Contemporary Married Women. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 17 : 346-361.
- Thompson CJ, Tambyah SK. 1999. "Trying to Be Cosmopolitan". *Journal of Consumer Research*. 26(3): 214-241.
- Thompson, E.R., 2008. Development and Validation of an International English Big-Five Mini-Markers. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 45 (6): 542–8. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2008.06.013.
- Tinson, J., 2009. *Conducting research with children and adolescents*. Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers.
- Tokunaga, R.S., 2011. Social networking site or social surveillance site? Understanding the use of interpersonal electronic surveillance in romantic relationships. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(2), pp.705-713.
- Tong, S.T., Van Der Heide, B., Langwell, L. and Walther, J.B., 2008. Too much of a good thing? The relationship between number of friends and interpersonal impressions on Facebook. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(3), pp.531-549.
- Tufekci, Z., 2008. Grooming, gossip, Facebook and MySpace: What can we learn about these sites from those who won't assimilate?. *Information, Communication & Society*, 11(4), pp.544-564.
- Twenge, J.M., Konrath, S., Foster, J.D., Keith Campbell, W. and Bushman, B.J., 2008. Egos inflating over time: a cross-temporal meta-analysis of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. *Journal of personality*, 76(4), pp.875-902.
- Üstüner, T. and Holt, D.B., 2007. Dominated consumer acculturation: The social construction of poor migrant women's consumer identity projects in a Turkish squatter. *Journal of consumer research*, 34(1), pp.41-56.
- Utz, S., 2010. Show me your friends and I will tell you what type of person you are: How one's profile, number of friends, and type of friends influence impression formation on social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 15(2), pp.314-335.
- Utz, S. and Beukeboom, C.J., 2011. The role of social network sites in romantic relationships: Effects on jealousy and relationship happiness. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 16(4), pp.511-527.
- Valenzuela, S., Park, N. and Kee, K.F., 2009. Is there social capital in a social network site?: Facebook use and college students' life satisfaction, trust, and participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14(4), pp.875-901.

- Valkenburg, P.M. and Peter, J., 2007. Online communication and adolescent well-being: Testing the stimulation versus the displacement hypothesis. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), pp.1169-1182.
- Valkenburg, P.M., Peter, J. and Schouten, A.P., 2006. Friend networking sites and their relationship to adolescents' well-being and social self-esteem. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 9(5), pp.584-590.
- Valkenburg, P.M., Schouten, A.P. and Peter, J., 2005. Adolescents' identity experiments on the Internet. *New media & society*, 7(3), pp.383-402.
- Van Kaam, A., 1966. Application of the phenomenological method. *AL van Kaam, Existential foundations of psychology*, pp.294-329.
- Viswanath, B., Mislove, A., Cha, M. and Gummadi, K.P., 2009, August. On the evolution of user interaction in facebook. In *Proceedings of the 2nd ACM workshop on Online social networks* (pp. 37-42). ACM.
- Walker, D. and Vul, E., 2014. Hierarchical encoding makes individuals in a group seem more attractive. *Psychological Science*, 25(1), pp.230-235.
- Wallendorf, M. and Belk, R.W., 1989. Assessing trustworthiness in naturalistic consumer research. *SV-Interpretive consumer research*.
- Walther, J.B., 1993. Impression development in computer-mediated interaction. *Western Journal of Communication (includes Communication Reports)*, 57(4), pp.381-398.
- Walther, J.B., 1996. Computer-mediated communication: Impersonal, interpersonal, and hyperpersonal interaction. *Communication research*, 23(1), pp.3-43.
- Walther, J.B., 1997. Group and interpersonal effects in international computer-mediated collaboration. *Human Communication Research*, 23(3), pp.342-369.
- Walther, J.B., 2007. Selective self-presentation in computer-mediated communication: Hyperpersonal dimensions of technology, language, and cognition. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23(5), pp.2538-2557.
- Walther, J.B. and Burgoon, J.K., 1992. Relational communication in computer-mediated interaction. *Human communication research*, 19(1), pp.50-88.
- Walther, J.B. and Parks, M.R., 2002. Cues filtered out, cues filtered in. *Handbook of interpersonal communication*, 3, pp.529-563.
- Walther, J.B., Van Der Heide, B., Kim, S.Y., Westerman, D. and Tong, S.T., 2008. The role of friends' appearance and behavior on evaluations of individuals on Facebook: Are we known by the company we keep?. *Human communication research*, 34(1), pp.28-49.
- Walther, J.B., Van Der Heide, B., Hamel, L.M. and Shulman, H.C., 2009. Self-generated versus other-generated statements and impressions in computer-mediated communication: A test of warranting theory using Facebook. *Communication research*, 36(2), pp.229-253.
- Wang, S.S., Moon, S.I., Kwon, K.H., Evans, C.A. and Stefanone, M.A., 2010. Face off: Implications of visual cues on initiating friendship on Facebook. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(2), pp.226-234.
- Wang, S.S., 2015. To unfriend or not: exploring factors affecting users in keeping friends on Facebook and the implications on mediated voyeurism. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 25(5), pp.465-485.
- Waters, S. and Ackerman, J., 2011. Exploring privacy management on Facebook: Motivations and perceived consequences of voluntary disclosure. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(1), pp.101-115.
- Weber, M., 1962. Basic Concepts in Sociology. Translated and with an introduction by HP Secher. *New York: Philosophical Library*.

- Weber, M., 1968. *On charisma and institution building*. University of Chicago Press.
- Wheeler, L., 1991. A brief history of social comparison theory.
- Wheeler, L., Martin, R. and Suls, J., 1997. The proxy model of social comparison for self-assessment of ability. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 1(1), pp.54-61.
- Wheeler, L., Shaver, K.G., Jones, R.A., Goethals, G.R., Cooper, J., Robinson, J.E., Gruder, C.L. and Butzine, K.W., 1969. Factors determining choice of a comparison other. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 5(2), pp.219-232.
- White, J.B., Langer, E.J., Yariv, L. and Welch, J.C., 2006. Frequent social comparisons and destructive emotions and behaviors: The dark side of social comparisons. *Journal of Adult Development*, 13(1), pp.36-44.
- Wilcox, K. and Stephen, A.T., 2013. Are close friends the enemy? Online social networks, self-esteem, and self-control. *Journal of Consumer research*, 40(1), pp.90-103.
- Wills, T.A., 1981. Downward comparison principles in social psychology. *Psychological bulletin*, 90(2), p.245.
- Wills, T.A., 1983. Social comparison in coping and help-seeking. *New directions in helping*, 2, pp.109-141.
- Wilson, R.E., Gosling, S.D. and Graham, L.T., 2012. A review of Facebook research in the social sciences. *Perspectives on psychological science*, 7(3), pp.203-220.
- Wolburg JM, Pokrywczynski J. 2001. A psychographic analysis of generation Y college Students. *Journal of Advertising Research* 41 (5): 33-52.
- Wolff, K.H., 1984. Surrender-and-catch and phenomenology. *Human Studies*, 7(1-4), pp.191-210.
- World Youth Report, 2003. The Global Situation of Young People  
<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/worldyouthreport.pdf> [accessed on 8 May 2017]
- Wortham, Jenna. "Feel like a wallflower? Maybe it's your Facebook wall." *New York Times* 10 (2011).
- Wood, J.V., 1989. Theory and research concerning social comparisons of personal attributes. *Psychological bulletin*, 106(2), p.231.
- Wood, J.V., 1996. What is social comparison and how should we study it?. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22(5), pp.520-537.
- Wood, J.V., Taylor, S.E. and Lichtman, R.R., 1985. Social comparison in adjustment to breast cancer. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 49(5), p.1169.
- Villi, M., 2012. Social curation in audience communities: UDC (user-distributed content) in the networked media ecosystem. *Participations: The International Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 9(2), pp.614-632.
- Viswanath, B., Mislove, A., Cha, M. and Gummadi, K.P., 2009, August. On the evolution of user interaction in facebook. In *Proceedings of the 2nd ACM workshop on Online social networks* (pp. 37-42). ACM.
- Yang, K. and Jolly, L.D., 2008. Age cohort analysis in adoption of mobile data services: gen Xers versus baby boomers. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 25(5), pp.272-280.
- YouGov, 2016. <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/06/27/how-britain-voted/> [accessed on 28 May 2017]
- Zhao, S., Grasmuck, S. and Martin, J., 2008. Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships. *Computers in human behavior*, 24(5), pp.1816-1836.
- Zimmerman, D.H. and Wieder, D.L., 1977. The diary: diary-interview method. *Urban life*, 5(4), pp.479-498.



Zuckerman, E.W. and Jost, J.T., 2001. What makes you think you're so popular? Self-evaluation maintenance and the subjective side of the "friendship paradox". *Social Psychology Quarterly*, pp.207-223.

Zywica, J. and Danowski, J., 2008. The faces of Facebookers: Investigating social enhancement and social compensation hypotheses; predicting Facebook™ and offline popularity from sociability and self-esteem, and mapping the meanings of popularity with semantic networks. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14(1), pp.1-34.

# Appendices

## Appendix 2.1. Self-Presentation Tactics (Lee et al, 1999)

### Assertive Self-Presentation Tactics

**Ingratiation:** Actions performed to get others to like the actor, so that the actor can gain some advantage from them. Ingratiation may take the form of self-enhancing communication, flattery, opinion conformity and doing favours or giving gifts

**Intimidation:** Actions that have the intent to project an identity of the actor as someone who is powerful and dangerous. Intimidation tactics are used to induce fear in a target person

**Supplication:** An actor projects himself or herself as weak and displays dependence to solicit help from a target person

**Entitlement:** Claims by an actor of responsibility and credit for positive achievements

**Enhancement:** An actor persuades others that the outcomes of his or her behaviour are more positive than they might have originally believed

**Basking:** An actor associates self with another person or group who is perceived positively by others, or asserts the worth of a group to which he is positively linked

**Blasting:** A behaviour presenting the actor as morally worthy and as having integrity. By using this tactic, an actor may elicit respect, imitation or admiration from others.

### Defensive Self-Presentation Tactics

**Excuses:** Verbal statements denying responsibility for negative events

**Justifications:** Providing overriding reasons for negative behaviour as justified, but accepting responsibility for it

**Disclaimers:** Expressions offering explanations before predicaments occur

**Self-handicapping:** The production of an obstacle to success with the intention of preventing observers from making dispositional inferences about one's failure

**Apologies:** a confession of responsibility for a harm done to others or negative events and expressions of remorse and guilt.

## Appendix 5.1 Diary Guide

Many thanks for taking part in this research study.

Please keep a spoken diary of your activities on Facebook over the next two weeks.

### Reminders of what to record:

1. Date and times when you logon /off to Facebook
2. Activities that you participate in and what you look at whilst on Facebook
3. Changes that you make to your status/profile and why?
4. Responses that you get from others about your postings/profile updates
5. Whether these are positive or negative and how they make you feel?
6. What you think about other people's profiles and posting updates
7. Any feedback you give to others and what you really think
8. Any links between what goes on online and what goes on offline (say at school)?
9. Anything else that you think might be relevant?

You will be provided with a dictaphone and spare batteries to record your diary and I will contact you after one week to check that you are OK. If you have any questions in between then please contact me via [email](#) or Tel: xxxxxxx.

### Debrief Interview Guide

1. How did you find keeping a spoken diary?
2. How often on average did you go on Facebook and did you always remember to record your activity?
3. What are the main things that you like about going on Facebook?
4. Are there any things that you don't like about it?
5. Did any issues come up that you weren't sure how to deal with?
6. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about?

## **Appendix 5.2. Diary Participant Information and Informed Consent**

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The main purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of UK teenagers increasing use of Social Media (SM). We are specifically interested in teen activity and postings in SM, the type of feedback that is given and received to/from others; how it makes our participants feel and how it affects their on-going SM activity. The research will form part of a PhD study and academic research activity at Coventry University.

### **What will it involve?**

If you agree to take part you will be asked to participate in an interview to discuss your SM activity. We are looking for a commentary of your activities, feelings and responses whilst online.

The kind of details that we are interested in are listed below:

1. Activities that you participate in and what you look at whilst on SM
2. Changes that you make to your profile/status and why?
3. Responses that you get from others about your postings/profile updates
4. Whether these are positive or negative and how they make you feel?
5. What you think about other people's profiles and updates
6. Any feedback you give to others and what you really think
7. Any links between what goes on online and what goes on offline (say at school)?
8. Anything else that you think might be relevant?

All data will be treated as strictly confidential and identities will be anonymised by use of codes and pseudonyms. In addition, with your permission, the researcher would like to monitor your Facebook activity (as a FB "friend") during the study period to add further depth to the diary data. The researcher will be removed as a friend as soon as the study period finishes. Please note that this access is not mandatory and you can still take part in the study without permitting this access.

You are under no obligation to take part in this study and are free to withdraw from the study at any time during the study period and for a month afterwards by contacting the researcher.

## How will the data be used?

Any data/results from the study may be used in academic conference papers, academic journal articles, as Internet articles or in printed or broadcast media articles. However, names or identities will not be revealed. All data, tapes and transcripts will be stored securely under code names and will be destroyed when the analysis is complete (data will be kept for a maximum of 6 years). Participants will be given the opportunity to validate their contribution prior to any publication.

## What are the benefits for me?

You will gain an insight to research methods used by academics and will have contributed to an important research study which will improve understanding of teenage consumption habits.

### Further Questions/Concerns?

If you have any further questions I will be pleased to answer them in person now or at any time during the study via email [j.doster@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:j.doster@coventry.ac.uk). If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant/parent or feel that you/your child has been placed at risk you can contact my PhD supervisor Professor Pauline Maclaran via [Pauline.Maclaran@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:Pauline.Maclaran@rhul.ac.uk).

### Declaration

We confirm that we have read the above information and that the nature, demands and risks of the study have been explained to us. We have also been informed of the benefits that the participant will receive for participating in this study.

We knowingly assume the risks involved and understand that we may withdraw our consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty and without having to give any reason.

We give our permission for the researcher to record participants' interview and to monitor the participants profile activity online during the two week study period by adding the researcher as a "friend". At the end of the two weeks we will delete the researcher as a "friend" and understand that the researcher will also delete the participant as a "friend".

Participants Name : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Participants Signature : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Parents/Responsible Adults Name : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Parents/Responsible Adults Signature : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Researchers Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**For Researchers Use Only**

Participants Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Participants Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Diary : \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5.3 In-Depth Interview Questions

### Motivations, Habits and Rituals?

- What are the main things that you like about Facebook?
- About how often do you go on – daily, weekly etc... and how long for each time?
- Do you have a regular routine when you go on?
- What do you think are the main motivations for you to go on it?
- What are the main things that you use on FB – status, photos, games, live chat (1:1 or more?)
- Any times when you wouldn't want to be seen on FB?

### Self-Presentation Strategies

- Status – how often do you update? What type of things do you post?
- What kind of responses do you get from others? How do you feel about that?
- Photos – do you post many? What of?
- Profile photos – what it is like at the moment? How often do you update?
- Do you think that FB/social media has initiated new styles/types of photos?
- Do you ever associate yourself with any particular brands? Celebrities?
- How important is your personal information page – hobbies, interests, likes/dislikes?
- Are you conscious of trying to portray any particular image?
- Do you ever make things up?
- Are there any things that you wouldn't reveal about yourself on FB?

### Interpretation of Others

- Do you ever look new people that you meet up on FB to see what they are like?
- Can you tell what other people are like from their activities on FB?
- How do you figure that out?
- FB stalking?
- Do you think that people who are strong at a particular subject show it more on FB?

### Preparing for University?

- Have you been looking at your fellow students in preparation for going to uni?
- How have you been making judgements about what they are like?
- What sort of cues do you look for?
- Is this helping you feel less nervous about going to uni?

### Interactions and differences between FB and real life?

- How many FB friends do you have? How do you decide whether to accept new friends or not? Do you ever delete friends?
- How many do you interact with regularly



- Any issues managing different audiences? (parents?)
- Are people any different on FB than in real life?
- If so – how are they different?
- How much interaction goes on between what’s on Facebook and what goes on in real life?
- Do you comment on other people’s postings much? Ever correct others postings?
- Do you ever find anything that others post inappropriate/annoying/embarrassing?(frape?)
- What about photos that friends post of you? Delete?
- Anything different in style of communications? Acronyms? Smiley faces/emoticons?

### **Do you think there are any differences between boys and girls?**

- If so – how? What?

### **Marketing on Facebook**

- What kind of function do you think adverts and brands have on Facebook?
- In terms of brands do you ever see people talking about shops, clothing brands, anything

### **Other Social Networks**

- Do you ever use any other social networks?
- How do they differ?
- Why do you like them?

### **Privacy**

- How much of your personal life would you consider is acceptable to post on FB?
- Photos? Personal details – age, where you live/work/school?
- Activities – holidays, relationships?
- Where would you draw the line between private and public?

### **Reality TV**

- Do you watch much TV? What kind? News, Fiction, documentary, education, other
- Do you ever watch reality TV – things like TOWIE, Made in Chelsea, X Factor and Big Brother?
- If so what do you like about them?
- Do you ever see any link between RTV and FB?

### **Is there anything else you would like to tell me about?**

## Appendix 5.4. Letter to Sixth Form College

Leigh Doster  
Coventry University  
Priory Street  
Coventry  
CV1 5FB  
Email: xxxxx  
Tel: xxxxx

Dear Mr xxxxxxx

### **Re: Social Media Research**

As we discussed recently I am currently conducting academic research for my PhD into teenage use of social media with a specific focus on how it affects their identity construction. This particular study focuses on teen use of Facebook. I have attached an outline of my research questions and a summary of some of the research that I have already presented at conferences on this topic for your information.

My methodology involves one-to-one interviews and two week media diaries with teenagers (16-18 years) and I would like your permission to approach students at XXXX Sixth Form for this purpose. Their participation would of course be on a voluntary basis and I have been offering £10 high street vouchers as a small incentive for completing the diaries and interviews. My target is to interview around 40 young people overall and I have interviewed 15 thus far, so would be looking for a further 25 with an approximately equal gender spread.

In terms of timing I am happy to be guided by you, so as to fit in with the school and the students' timetables and commitments to avoid pre-exam periods or other busy times. Ideally I would like to complete the primary research by around July/August 2012 so I can be reasonably flexible. I am CRB checked but it would be really helpful if I was able to conduct the interviews somewhere on school premises as this would be less threatening for the students given that they do not know me and beneficial for ethical approval? I am aware that students often have free periods on Wednesday afternoons, so if that was a convenient time then I could schedule the interviews over a period of several weeks in that slot?

Finally, as we discussed I would be more than happy to give guest talks to your students. I am a Principal Lecturer in Marketing and Consumer Behaviour at Coventry University and have taught research methods for the last five years. Therefore in addition to reflecting on my own research experiences, I could provide an insight to specific areas of research methods, marketing or consumer behaviour to fit in with the students' syllabi.

Many thanks for your time and I hope that we can work out a mutually beneficial working partnership.

Yours sincerely

Leigh Doster  
Associate Head of Marketing and Advertising  
Attachments: Participant Information

## Do you use Facebook?

**Would you like to take part in an exciting research project about teenage use of social media?**

### What is the research about?

This study aims to gain a greater understanding of teenage use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

### Who can participate?

Any teenager over 16 years of age, male or female and a mixture of ethnicities in order to gain a cross-section of views.

### What will it involve?

Being interviewed (at school) for 45 mins to 1 hour about your use of social media. We are interested in the following things:

- Your activities on FB
- Status postings
- Your perceptions of other teens on FB
- Interactions between online and offline activities.

### How do I sign up for this?

Give your name to Mr MacKinnon and we will arrange convenient times for interviews over the new few weeks or so.

Produced by Leigh Doster, Principal Lecturer at Coventry University

## Appendix 5.6 Participant Profiles

Name, Gender, Age	Personality	Usage/Involvement SM	Interests	Social Hierarchy position	Notes
<b>Adam</b> Male, 18	Reserved, few proximal friends, humorous, guards privacy, low NFP	Medium involvement, sporadic usage, posts infrequently, feels guilty <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Music	Low	
<b>Alice</b> Female, 17	Extrovert, volatile, High NFP, High vanity, humorous	High involvement, High usage, (addiction), prioritises over other activities <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Boys, gossip	Mid/High	
<b>Ameet</b> Male, 18	Extrovert, sociable, Medium NFP, respectful, pacifier, assertive, independent, principled, organiser, religious, family oriented	High involvement, high usage, always connected via phone, push notifications, prioritises over other activities, feels guilty <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Organising events, charity committees, religious events	Mid	Strict Muslim, asserts religious beliefs, constrained by cultural practices, conflict between peer environment and family expectations
<b>Andrew</b> Male, 19	Extrovert, loud, sociable, volatile, controversial, judgmental/bitchoy, High NFP, unsympathetic, bullying, impulsive, high vanity, aspires to be cool	High involvement (addiction), High usage, prioritises over other activities <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook Twitter	Girls, gossip, socialising, reality TV, festivals	Mid	
<b>Annabel</b> Female, 17	Extrovert, bitchy, gossipier, confident	Medium involvement, sporadic usage, posts	Gossip	Mid/High	

		infrequently <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook			
<b>Brad</b> Male, 17	Reserved, medium vanity, medium NFP, self-deprecating, non-confrontational, non-attention seeking, genuine, guards privacy	Medium involvement, sporadic usage, posts infrequently, feels guilty  <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Football, Foo Fighters, Films, Actors – Sean Bean	Mid	
<b>Cameron</b> Male, 17	Extrovert, humorous, popular, confident, medium NFP, role relaxed,	Low involvement, Low usage, posts infrequently, prioritises other activities <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Jokes, games, news, The Beatles, Biffy Clyro,	Mid/High	
<b>Claire</b> Female, 18	Confident, studious, serious, mature, assertive, adaptive, professional, guards privacy, genuine, principled, low NFP, family oriented	Low involvement, Low usage, posts infrequently, prioritises other activities <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Young Enterprise Group, online revision website, education, modelling, long distance family, criminal profiling	Mid	
<b>Elizabeth</b> Female, 19	Reserved, high NFP, medium vanity, self-deprecating, generous minded, lacks confidence, humorous	Medium involvement, regular light usage, posts infrequently, prioritises other activities <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Going out with friends, nightclubs	Mid	
<b>Elliot</b> Male, 16	Humorous, no vanity, low NFP, well behaved	Low involvement, Low usage, posts infrequently, prioritises	Charities, PS3, Boxing, music, TV, artists, comedians,	Low	

		other activities <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	online poker		
<b>Elysha</b> Female, 17	High vanity, high NFP, guards privacy, positive	Medium involvement, regular light usage, always connected via phone, posts infrequently <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook Twitter Tumblr	Horse, horse competitions, Friends, Reality TV, Follow celebrities	Mid/High	
<b>Emma</b> Female, 17	Reserved, High vanity, family oriented, positive, high NFP, attention-seeking, lacks confidence, non-academic, guards privacy	Medium involvement, regular light usage, always connected via phone, posts infrequently, messaging mainly <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook Instagram	Games, Music, lyrics, cute cats, parties, Hollyoaks, Crime programmes, documentaries, Spongebob, Reality TV	Mid	
<b>Fiona</b> Female, 18	Extrovert, confident, humorous, sociable, gregarious, high NFP, adventurous, dismissive, controversial, aspires to be cool	High involvement, high usage, always connected, talks on chat <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook WhatsApp	Going out with friends, nightclubs, gossip	High	
<b>Frances</b> Female, 17	Introverted, lacks confidence, thoughtful, reflective reserved, medium NFP, avoids spotlight	High involvement, high usage, always connected, background, other activities concurrently	Photographs, videos, parties, films, music, TV, newspaper apps	Low	

		<b>Platforms used</b> Facebook Twitter			
<b>Gary</b> Male, 18	Introverted, lacks confidence, family oriented, thoughtful, philosophical, reflective, low vanity, avoids spotlight, quietly judgemental, intellectual	High involvement, high usage  <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook Devian Art	Music, groups, girls, concerts, quotes, DC comics, art,	Low	
<b>Harriot</b> Female, 17	Reserved, family oriented, guards privacy, cautious, studious, confident, independent, low NFP, mature, assertive, avoids spotlight, role relaxed	Low involvement, low usage, rarely posts  <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Family, photography, classic cars and rallies, homework, PT job	Low	
<b>Julian</b> Male, 16	High NFP, respectful, reserved, lacks confidence, easy going	Medium involvement, medium usage, other activities concurrently		Mid	
<b>Katherine</b> Female, 17	Angry, isolated, lacks proximal friends, critical, resentful, jealous, low NFP?, aggressive/assertive?, 'weirdly' humorous, low vanity	Medium involvement, medium usage, background, rarely posts <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook Twitter	Gigs, boyfriend, TV, PlayStation, online games, current affairs, Reality TV	Low	
<b>Kezia</b> Female, 17	Extrovert, sociable, bubbly, high vanity, positive, optimistic, popular, open, generous-minded, popular, high NFP, humorous, family oriented, confident,	High involvement, high usage, prioritises over other activities  <b>Platforms used</b>	Gossip, Photography, Reality TV, boyfriend, friends, socialising	Mid/High	

	thoughtful, guards security	Facebook Twitter			
<b>Lily</b> Female, 18	Medium NFP, reserved, genuine, confident, assertive, respectful	High involvement, high usage, always connected, push notifications, posts sometimes <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Going out with friends, music, concerts, boyfriend	Mid/High	
<b>Nellie</b> Female, 17	Extrovert, chatty, positive, sweet, celebrity obsessed, medium NFP, guards privacy, well-behaved	Medium involvement, sporadic usage <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook Twitter	Celebrities, One Direction, boys, homework, fashion, Reality TV, Soaps, Children's TV/ films	Mid/Low	
<b>Rachel</b> Female, 17	Extrovert, sociable, high NFP, family oriented, humorous, positive, high vanity, open, thoughtful, genuine, confident	High involvement, high usage, habit, always connected, prioritises over other activities (e.g. socialising) <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook Twitter Instagram	Going out, photos	Mid/High	
<b>Saskia</b> Female, 17	Extrovert, bubbly, sociable, humorous, high NFP, self-deprecating, lacks confidence, high vanity, avoids spotlight, guards privacy	High involvement, high usage, always connected via phone, checks several times/day <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Online games, photography, gossip, Reality TV	Mid/High	



		Twitter Tumblr			
<b>Serena</b> Female, 16	Confident, mature, genuine, guards privacy, low NFP, humorous, role relaxed, independent, assertive, disconnected (culturally) from proximal friends	Medium involvement, medium usage, never posts  <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Music, quotations, Martin Luther King, Reality TV	Mid/Low	Half Indian background, feels disconnected from proximal friends both culturally and class wise.
<b>Simon</b> Male, 18	Extrovert, sociable, low NFP, role relaxed, humorous, popular, confident, judgmental, genuine, assertive	Medium involvement, medium usage, was addicted – withdrew and controls use now  <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook	Rugby, music, bands, artists, TV (Gavin & Stacey)	Mid/high	
<b>Stephen</b> Male, 17	Extrovert, loud, popular, sociable, role relaxed, confident, genuine, low vanity, principled, independent, assertive, respectful, humorous, energetic, likes to be centre of attention, family oriented	High involvement, high usage, always connected, push notifications  <b>Platforms used</b> Facebook Skype Omeagle	Girls, drama, rugby, charities, parties, socialising with friends, games, concerts, TV – Celebrity Juice, Take me Out, Sun, Sex and Suspicious Parents, Waterloo Road, Misfits, In-Betweeners	High	

## **Appendix 5.7 Interview Participants Information and Informed Consent**

### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The main purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of UK teenagers increasing use of Social Media (SM). We are specifically interested in teen activity and postings in Facebook (FB); the type of feedback that is given and received to/from others; how it makes our participants feel and how it affects their on-going SM activity. The research will form part of a PhD study and academic research activity at Coventry University.

### **What will it involve?**

If you agree to take part you will be asked to participate in a (45 minute to 1 hour) interview to discuss your SM activity. We are looking for a commentary of your activities, feelings and responses whilst online.

The kind of details that we are interested in are listed below:

1. Activities that you participate in and what you look at whilst on SM
2. Changes that you make to your profile/status and why?
3. Responses that you get from others about your postings/profile updates
4. Whether these are positive or negative and how they make you feel?
5. What you think about other people's profiles and updates
6. Any feedback you give to others and what you really think
7. Any links between what goes on online and what goes on offline (say at school)?
8. Anything else that you think might be relevant?

All data will be treated as strictly confidential and identities will be anonymised by use of codes and pseudonyms. In addition, with your permission, the researcher would like to monitor your FB activity (as a FB "friend") during the study period to add further depth to the diary data. The researcher will be removed as a friend as soon as the study period finishes. Please note that this access is not mandatory and you can still take part in the study without permitting this access.

You are under no obligation to take part in this study and are free to withdraw from the study at any time during the study period and for a month afterwards by contacting the researcher.

## How will the data be used?

Any data/results from the study may be used in academic conference papers, academic journal articles, as Internet articles or in printed or broadcast media articles. However, names or identities will not be revealed. All data, tapes and transcripts will be stored securely under code names and will be destroyed when the analysis is complete (data will be kept for a maximum of 6 years). Participants will be given the opportunity to validate their contribution prior to any publication.

## What are the benefits for me?

You will gain an insight to research methods used by academics and will have contributed to an important research study which will improve understanding of teenage consumption habits.

### Further Questions/Concerns?

If you have any further questions I will be pleased to answer them in person now or at any time during the study via email [l.doster@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:l.doster@coventry.ac.uk). If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant/parent or feel that you/your child has been placed at risk you can contact my PhD supervisor Professor Pauline Maclaran via [Pauline.MacLaran@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:Pauline.MacLaran@rhul.ac.uk).

### Declaration

We confirm that we have read the above information and that the nature, demands and risks of the study have been explained to us. We have also been informed of the benefits that the participant will receive for participating in this study.

We knowingly assume the risks involved and understand that we may withdraw our consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty and without having to give any reason.

We give our permission for the researcher to record participants' interview and to monitor the participants profile activity online during the two week study period by adding the researcher as a "friend". At the end of the two weeks we will delete the researcher as a "friend" and understand that the researcher will also delete the participant as a "friend".

Participants Name : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Participants Signature : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Parents/Responsible Adults Name : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Parents/Responsible Adults Signature : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Researchers Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

---

### For Researchers Use Only

Participants Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Participants Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Diary : \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5.8 Participants Facebook Observational Data

Name	General Facts	Status examples	Interests/hobbies	Photos	Notes
<b>Alice</b> Female, 17  <b>Self Statements</b> "Ohh wild at heart!"	<b>No of friends:</b> 372 <b>Status Freq:</b> 1/week <b>No of Photos posted:</b> 65 <b>Tot no photos of self:</b> 498 <b>Profile photo:</b> Her alone posing <b>Average Likes:</b> 4-5	"I'm a dead giraffe" "Nothing better than a slightly moist blue waffle in the morning" Rude sexual statuses Indirect status against someone	Nightclubs Fan of "I will never cheat in a relationship" Isle of Wight Festival	Photos with friends partying – partly exposed Lots of photos with boys	
<b>Ameet</b> Male, 18  <b>Self Statements</b> "All I need is one life, one try, one breath, I'm one man, what I stand for speaks for itself, they don't understand or wanna see me on top, too egotistical!"	<b>No of friends:</b> 562 <b>Status Freq:</b> 3/week <b>No of Photos posted:</b> 6 <b>Tot no photos of self:</b> ? <b>Profile photo:</b> Him and friend at charity event <b>Average Likes:</b> 15-20	"So getting shipped back to Pakistan after tomorrow's results" "Well done to everyone who performed tonight – Big Love"	Nightclubs/bars Music Politics – Obama and Martin Luther King Disney films Inbetweeners Manchester United Sporting role models (black)		Ethnicity is important to him Alert to racism Some boy banter but doesn't initiate it Always thanking people Likes to organise charity events Popular with girls
<b>Andrew</b> Male, 19  <b>Self Statements</b> "I think I was a bit of a bellend last night sorry everyone"	<b>No of friends:</b> 469 <b>Status Freq:</b> Rare <b>No of Photos posted:</b> 5 <b>Tot no photos of self:</b> ? <b>Profile photo:</b> Him with male friend – drinks in hand <b>Average Likes:</b> 0-82	"Has anyone got XXX (girl) number – gagging for it" "Still pulling rice pudding out my hair" "I hate you" "I wish I could just be a LAD!"	Socialising Nightclubs/pubs Athletic group – running Liverpool FC Coldplay/The Enemy The Inbetweeners Lad Bible	Photos with girls Photos half dressed – sunburnt - moonies Boys drinking games Photos with teachers	Posts statuses making fun of self Posts statuses making fun of others Extrovert – quite happy

<p><b>Annabel</b> Female, 17</p> <p><b>Self Statements</b> “I’m the one who screams the loudest, the one who says what no one dares, the one that wears no make up, the one who doesn’t care! Cus I have my fam, friends and boyfriend and that’s all that really matters!”</p>	<p><b>No of friends:</b> 374 <b>Status Freq:</b> rare <b>No of Photos posted in 2 wks:</b> none <b>Tot no photos of self:</b> 344 <b>Profile photo:</b> With her girlfriend (selfie)</p>	<p>‘If only I had a magic wand’  ‘How to get through revision – EAT!’</p>	<p>Joke fan clubs – ‘Smiling for ages oh wait its on video’ Sends wishes/angels Nightclubs - Gatecrasher Parties Men</p>	<p>Lots of group photos with friends but none posted by her</p>	<p>Doesn’t initiate posts but responds to others Posts on others statuses Interacts with friends and sister</p>
<p><b>Cameron</b> Male, 17</p>	<p><b>No of friends:</b> 401 <b>Status Freq:</b> 1/day <b>No of Photos posted:</b> none <b>Tot no photos of self:</b> ? <b>Profile photo:</b> Him standing on a hill – arms out (funny) <b>Average Likes:</b> 7-8</p>	<p>“Curry and beer pong with the wolf pack” “Funniest quote of the week bumholes are for pooing and pooing only” “Just got an offer from a uni I didn’t apply for saying I’ve got an offer?!?! I’m that damn amazing!!”</p>	<p>Partying Drinking Beer pong Fancy dress Camping Sponsored leg wax</p>	<p>Photos of him and friends messing about</p>	<p>Lots of banter with boys and girls Likes to make fun of friends</p>
<p><b>Elizabeth</b> Female, 19</p>	<p><b>No of friends:</b> 246 <b>Status Freq:</b> 1/ 2 weeks <b>No of Photos posted:</b> 3 <b>Tot no photos of self:</b> ? <b>Profile photo:</b> With a girlfriend – smiling</p>	<p>“Has eaten too many mini eggs” “Lying in the garden soaking up sunshine” “Ahhh not happy stressed out”</p>	<p>Skiing/surfing Festivals Theme park Nightclubs Harry Potter Art</p>	<p>Photos with her close friends or family Photos with her sister</p>	<p>Low usage</p>

	<b>Average Likes:</b> 4-5				
<b>Elliot</b> Male, 16  <b>Self Statements</b> “Really got to wonder why my heads feeling like it’s going to explode!”	<b>No of friends:</b> 245 <b>Status Freq:</b> 1-2/day <b>No of Photos posted:</b> 1 <b>Tot no photos of self:</b> ? <b>Profile photo:</b> John Legend album cover <b>Average Likes:</b> 0-1	“Feels absolutely destroyed some people are mental and dangerous” “I’m having a good week – good stuffs happening” “Feeling a bit low tonight” “Maths revision”	Football Fencing Basketball YouTube music videos		Posts about school work Posts emotional/depressing statuses which no one responds to Posts feelings/thoughts Younger brother makes fun of his spelling
<b>Fiona</b> Female, 18  <b>Self Statements</b> I’M 18 MOTHERFUCKERS!!!”	<b>No of friends:</b> 533 <b>Status Freq:</b> 2-3/day <b>No of Photos posted:</b> 4 <b>Tot no photos of self:</b> 3282 <b>Profile photo:</b> Her with a good looking boy <b>Average Likes:</b> 15	“Here I come London Town” “Get excited look at my fucking cake” “Oh dear so poor and so much I want to buy” “Is it wrong to be drunk at this time in the afternoon lol”	Nightclubs/pubs Drinking Music TV – Skins, Misfits Fancy dress	Lots of photos with her girlfriends before going out and whilst out Downing drinks Photos of cleavage Photos with boys Photos with cream on her face	Statuses in CAPS
<b>Julian</b> Male, 16  <b>Self Statements</b> “Chew it”	<b>No of friends:</b> 372 <b>Status Freq:</b> 1/week <b>No of Photos posted:</b> none <b>Tot no photos of self:</b> 387 <b>Profile photo:</b> Casual with 2 male friends	“Ever do something so uncool whilst you’re on your own that you are actually embarrassed by yourself?” “Which one of you can tell me the difference between an animagus and a werewolf?”	Posts Youtube videos Women Fans of surreal things: “Why are you late? The staircase moved. I had to come via the dungeons”	Photos of groups of friends – sledging, partying	Coded statuses not comprehensible to others

<p><b>Kezia</b> Female, 17</p> <p><b>Self Statements</b> “It doesn’t get better than this. I’m transfixed in this absolute bliss”</p>	<p><b>No of friends:</b> 639 <b>Status Freq:</b> 1/day <b>No of Photos posted in 2 wks:</b> 60 <b>Tot no photos self:</b> 2841 <b>Profile photo:</b> Dressed up with girlfriend <b>Average Likes:</b> 3-5</p>	<p>“Wow three surprises in one day!”</p>	<p>Films Going out with friends Family Dogs</p>	<p>Uploads lots of photos</p>	<p>Mentions boyfriend often Interacts with parents and family often Mostly happy statuses – describing her activities Humorous slant to posts</p>
<p><b>Lily</b> Female, 18</p> <p><b>Self Statements</b></p>	<p><b>No of friends:</b> 233 <b>Status Freq:</b> 1/ 2 days <b>No of Photos posted:</b> 60 <b>Tot no photos of self:</b> ? <b>Profile photo:</b> With her boyfriend <b>Average Likes:</b> 5</p>	<p>“Mmmm easter egg” “Sunburn” “Gag for day” “I HAVE UPLOADED PHOTOS! Now someone else can tag themmm”</p>	<p>Hockey Festivals Nightclubs Fancy dress</p>	<p>Photos of jelly beans Photos of cakes Photos out drinking with friends – pouting Photos with sister</p>	<p>Mentions boyfriend often</p>
<p><b>Simon</b> Male, 18</p> <p><b>Self Statements</b> “Being human is so good”</p>	<p><b>No of friends:</b> 564 <b>Status Freq:</b> 1/day <b>No of Photos posted:</b> 0 <b>Tot no photos of self:</b> ? <b>Profile photo:</b> Him and friend in beer pong costumes <b>Average Likes:</b> 3-5</p>	<p>“Instead of all sitting on your arses tonight get down to xxx School and watch xxx! It’s for charity and you’ll be helping towards a good cause! “First long drive without killing myself – we’ll call that a win” “Fuck yeah sweet and sour chicken balls”</p>	<p>Beer pong Music – Example TV - Skins</p>	<p>Photos of groups of friends – not taken or posted by him</p>	<p>Boy banter</p>

<p><b>Stephen</b> Male, 17</p> <p><b>Self Statements</b> “Just looked in the mirror and thought damn I look good, then realised it wasn’t a mirror it was a poster of Zac Efron!”</p>	<p><b>No of friends:</b> 861 <b>Status Freq:</b> 1/day <b>No of Photos posted:</b> 10 <b>Tot no photos of self: ?</b> <b>Profile photo:</b> Him with face painted with a girl <b>Average Likes:</b> 30+</p>	<p>“I GOT A CAR FOR MY BIRTHDAY!” “Just asked my barber for a Justin Bieber cut...the twat just shaved my pubes off!” “Whilst running some bird overtakes me...whilst pushing her fucking pram!”</p>	<p>Olympics – cycling, tennis Fancy dress YouTube videos Olly Murs</p>	<p>Photos of him in fancy dress Photo of him in front of Happy Birthday sign</p>	
---	---	--	--	--	--



## Appendix 5.9 Researcher Reflexivity

The initiation for this study came from observing my daughters intense consumption of SM. However in conducting the research it was important to acknowledge my position as ‘researcher’ and how that might influence my interactions with and interpretation of the data. Adopting a phenomenological approach, it was important to try to suspend these preconceptions to discover new meanings. In this section therefore I critically reflect on my own values, attitudes and perspectives with regards to teenagers, identity and social media itself plus my parental perspective.

I grew up in South East London in a mixed race family (English/Turkish). My teenage years were late 1970s early 1980s, a period of prolific teen sub-culture activity (punks, skinheads, mods, teds, rockers, new romantics, soul etc...). Membership of these social groups was expressed through stylistic props and artefacts: clothing, hairstyles and music. Moreover values, political ideals and symbols borrowed from historical groups were often incorporated as style icons into the melee of sub-culture social identity package. Some claim that difficult economic times, especially high youth unemployment, generated this proliferation of youth groups (Hebdige, 1979). From personal reflection whatever the underlying reasons, they emanated coolness and provided a sense of belonging, identity and social life. So whilst I was not suffering from deprivation, unemployment or substantially a victim of racism, I was a young person desperately trying to carve out an identity for myself. I was intensely preoccupied with impression management and desperate to be part of the latest cool trends and groups; to stand out, be noticed but also fit into a group.

Looking back, I belonged to several youth sub-cultures from the ages of 14 to 21 years using them to develop and channelled my transition to my adult identity. These experiences during my teens affected me profoundly; I look back on the period fondly. I was intelligent, extroverted, popular and high in the social hierarchy. My teen years were generally happy times albeit sprinkled with the occasional friendship issues and heartbreaks. Whereas when I was a teen the props such were tangible goods such as clothing, today’s teens have a much wider choice of strategies and symbolic resources, material and immaterial with which to present themselves. This backdrop together with my role as a mother of two teenage girls sparked my interest in researching millennial teen identity behaviours.

In conducting this research I inevitably found it easier to understand and resonate with the responses and feelings of those teens that were similar to myself or to my daughters in personality, values and so on. The teens whose characteristics and values differed took me longer to make sense of, it has to be acknowledge also that this may have influenced my ability to develop a rapport with some participants. Furthermore it may be that those participants, disclosed less to me than others who I connected with better. Moreover given my age and potential perception as an authority figure, it is likely that all of my teen participants were reticent to provide full disclosure of their experiences.

Aware of these issues I endeavoured to quickly gain participants confidence in interviews, establishing a rapport and developing trust through open questions and sharing my own experiences in SM. During the interviews I avoided expressing any kind of judgment to participant responses, prompting with additional probing questions whenever ‘new’ data emerged and documenting what was said in line with the phenomenological approach.

In terms of my role as a mother, I have to acknowledge that I did harbour concerns for teens' safety in SM and that these worries may have influenced my questions and or intonation in the interviews. In any qualitative research context the researcher plays a part in the analysis and interpretation process (Sherry, 1991). Since the collection period I have revisited my data several times, getting under the skin of all of my participants and teasing out their distinctive characteristics and over time my perspective has altered. I feel that I have now evolved a more rounded viewpoint on the phenomenon and my conceptualisation of teen stalker profiles emerged from this very pondering of diverse perspectives, practices and experiences (Sherry, 1991).

## Appendix 6.1 Description of Facebook Resources and Terminology

Resource	Description
<b>Status</b> - Photo/Video - Check-in - Feeling/Activity - Tag friends	Mini-blog about what you are doing, how you are feeling, where you are and/or who you are with in the form of text narrative, photographic, location or other shared artefacts
<b>Newsfeed/Home Page</b>	Community newsfeed - can be arranged chronologically, most recent first or by top stories
<b>Profile/Wall</b>	Individual users profile containing personalised information, photographs, friends, interests and social interactions. Can be set to public, private or customised visibility
-Name	Mostly users' real names (nonymous); some nicknames/aliases used
-Timeline	Individual user's newsfeed arranged chronologically, most recent first
-Info pages	Categorised information about the individual – including work, education, location, contact details, family and relationships, life events, check-ins, interests, events, groups etc...
-Friends	Number and lists of friends, organised into mutual friends and people you may know
-Photos	Photographs organised into - user's photos; themed album groups and photos of the user (posted by others and <b>tagged</b> )
<b>Photos</b>	Photographs posted in various ways – sometimes <b>tagged</b> (named) so searchable, other times <b>untagged</b> .
-Profile	The main identifying photograph for the user - displayed prominently on their profile; a thumbnail identifier in social interactions and acting as a navigational link to the user's content
-Cover	A background photograph displayed on the user's profile
-Timeline	Photos relating to the user posted on the newsfeed by the user or others
-Albums	Sets of photos arranged by theme e.g. holiday, event
-Mobile uploads	Photos uploaded via mobile telephones –more impulsive, ad hoc and individual
-Tagged/Untagged	Tagged with users' names, so searchable and appearing on the communal newsfeed
<b>Messages</b>	Addressed messages to one or more recipients – publicly or privately
-Messenger	Private messages/conversations to one or more recipients – asynchronous or synchronous
-Posts	Public messages/conversations to individual recipients - asynchronous or synchronous
-Conversations	Multi-way messages
-Comments	Narrative comments added to others' statuses/posts
-Banter	Humorous, playful and friendly social interactions
-Likes	Non-narrative positive responses to others' statuses/posts (a digital 'thumbs-up')
-'Like' Whore/King Begg	Deliberately posting statuses to gain attention ('likes') from others
<b>Events</b>	Time-bounded events (public or private) that users have been invited to
<b>Groups</b>	Group discussion forums for themed interests and membership –public, closed or secret
<b>Apps</b>	Applications such as games, quizzes and challenges
<b>Relationship Status</b>	Indicates the user's relationship status e.g. single, married, divorced, in a relationship etc... appears on the <b>newsfeed</b> if updated
- FB Official	Declaration of the start of a new relationship via FB Relationship Status
- Friend Whore	Users who 'friend' anyone to maintain an expansive friendship network
- Unfriending	Deleting another user from your friendship network
<b>Indirect statuses</b>	Statuses with obscured meaning (often targeted at an unnamed adversary)
<b>Emotional statuses</b>	Sad statuses (often posted to invoke sympathy)
<b>Fraping</b>	FB 'rape' – hacking into another user's profile and posting embarrassing content
<b>Keyboard Warriors</b>	Users who conduct venomous arguments online, whilst remaining silent in RL
<b>Grammar Nazis</b>	Users who correct other users' grammar and spelling on SM
<b>Blocking</b>	Blocking all contact with a person and preventing another user from seeing your SM content
<b>Hiding/Unsubscribing</b>	Adjusting settings so that postings from specific users do not appear on your newsfeed
<b>Emojis</b>	small digital images used to express ideas or emotions

## Appendix 6.2 Millennials' Unwritten Rules for Facebook

Profile Photos	Best/Funniest	Solo/Group	Background	Update Frequency	Originator – Self/Other
	Profile photo most important representation of self Should be attractive or funny Girls prefer attractive; boys prefer funny	Both used but group favoured, shows that you are socially active, popular and less egotistical. Should include partner if in a relationship	Include an interesting background (e.g. landmarks) Include an interesting activity e.g. Major sporting event	Update after events/experiences Girls update more than boys Extroverts update more freq Not too often – suggest that you are narcissistic (~ every 3-4 mths)	Better if photos are taken by someone else But owner should always feature Be suspicious of those with no photo of self
Statuses	Topic – Major/Trivial	ActivityThoughts	Subject – Self/Other	Update Freq - timing	Deleting Statuses
	Should be justified, 'worthy of FB' Not mundane everyday things (put them on Twitter) Post humorous statuses – more likely to get a response Boys joke; Girls gossip King Begs aims to acquire 'likes'	Activity based better than thoughts, feelings or idea based Avoid emotional statuses Everyone exaggerates good times – e.g. socialising, drinking, hangovers Use full words/sentences/correct grammar/punctuation	Better if involves others – more opportunity for 'likes' – tag them in Indirect statuses are used to publicly but anonymously hit out at people you don't like	Avoid over-sharing- optimum ~ 2 times/week Extroverts update more freq Plan timings for when friends are online to maximise 'likes' Avoid Fri/Sat eves – look sad because not out with friends	Delete statuses if no one 'likes' or comments on it within 5 - 30 mins so you don't look unpopular Girls delete faster than boys
Photos	No of photos	Solo/Group/Activity	Editing	Tag/Untag/Delete	Originator – Self/Other
	Not too many (~500 max) Prune back every so often so that people don't get bored	Group favoured, shows that you are socially active, popular and less egotistical. Photos of social activities good – shows extroversion	Edit/ retake photos to enhance image Girls edit photos more than boys	Untag unflattering photos Girls openly ask others to delete 'Take the photo down' Boys don't ask publicly (pretend) to care less Tagged photos show the real person more accurately	Better if photos are taken by someone else
Check-Ins	Locations	Update Frequency			
	Should be worthwhile – concert venue, sport event, airport	Not too often people will get bored You don't want people to know where you are all the time			
Friends	No of friends	Accepting new friends	Adding new friends	Hide/Unfriend/Block	Parents/Managers
	400-500 optimum, more suggests they're not real friends, less suggests you're not very popular Popularity transfers from RL to FB	Check photos – recognise –accept Only accept people you've met Check mutual friends >10 accept Its rude not to accept people you know vaguely Boys more likely to accept a request from a girl than a boy	After meeting on hols/festivals People you fancy Search via friends' networks Add friends' new partners for gossip	Hide annoying friends from Newsfeed rather than unfriending Unfriending is drastic action – 'deleting them out of your life!' Block suspicious strangers from seeing any of your info/posts	Girls mostly accept Boys mostly do not accept Parents not permitted to comment Neither accept managers as friends
Information pages	Information	Updating	Checking others info		
	Can bend the truth a little Choose favourite music, films... selectively to give best impression	People don't update them much after initially joining FB	Check new acquaintances info for common interests Not considered accurate – often out of date		

<b>Likes/Comments</b>	<b>On Your Statuses</b>	<b>Close/Interm. friends</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Banter</b>	<b>Negative Comments</b>
	A sign of popularity Competitive – who can get the most 'likes'	Comment on others' more than posting own statuses Comment – only on close friends Likes only on Intermediate friends	Parents not permitted to comment (or 'like')	Banter with close friends publicly-demonstrates you're good friends Others not permitted to join in	Remove negative comments from your wall Ask friends to stick up for you
<b>Confidence/Inhibition</b>	<b>Statuses</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Private messaging</b>	<b>Arguing</b>	<b>Relationships</b>
	Disclose more online than F2F Boys more sexual and crude than girls and in RL	More confident/less inhibited in FB than F2F Correct others – Grammar Nazis	Shy teens more confident talking to people on private messenger than in RL	Keyboard Warriors say nasty things online but not F2F	Get to know girls/boys you fancy online first
<b>Private/Public</b>	<b>Relationships</b>	<b>Personal details</b>	<b>Break ups</b>	<b>Private moments</b>	<b>Private Messaging</b>
	Share Relationship status 'FB Official' Keep personal (love talk and sexual stuff) private	Make your profiles private (closed) Conceal address and tel no Don't meet strangers on your own – tell someone where you're going	Girls tend to hit back at boys publicly Better to keep personal business private	No toilet activities No nudity No sex	Use message groups for private conversations or photos 'In-box me babe'
<b>Consuming practices</b>	<b>Solo/Group</b>	<b>PC/Laptop/Phone/iPad</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Multi tasking</b>	<b>Rituals</b>
	Consume solo and in groups or side by side on phones	Use multiple devices – mostly phones – always connected Less tethered to PC/laptops	Check several times a day to ensure you don't miss out (FOMO)	Consume simultaneously with other activities: studying, watching TV, out socialising	Check friend request, notifications and messages – reply to messages Then check Newsfeed – see what others are doing Stalk subjects of interest
<b>Changing rules</b>	<b>SM Platform</b>	<b>Statuses</b>	<b>Photos</b>		
	No Bebo or MySpace – young kids	No song lyrics	No mirror selfies No six-packs		
<i>Gender differences</i>					

