

**STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF RACIAL PREJUDICE AND  
DISCRIMINATION ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

by

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**DECLARATION**

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Signature: 

Date: November 2018

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## ABSTRACT

The present study set out to enhance the understanding of racial prejudice and discrimination on social networking websites or 'sites' from the perspective of university students. The research focused on discovering the perceived determinant factors of online racial prejudice and discrimination, as well as the impact social networking sites have on such behaviour. A qualitative research design was selected, which utilised the grounded theory method to explore and describe the experiences and perceptions of the eight participants recruited by means of purposive sampling. The aim of the study was achieved through individual semi-structured interviews and a concept definition questionnaire as data collection tools. The findings were compared to major extant theories and literature to determine whether existing explanations for the occurrence of this online behaviour is sufficient to account for this phenomenon. Using an iterative process of thematic analysis, the findings revealed several perceived factors that contribute to this behaviour.

It was found that social networking site users, in all their psychological, psychosocial and cognitive attributes, are the primary source for this behaviour. Moreover, online racial prejudice and discrimination is initiated by the use of these platforms and their facilitative features, which has a perceived negative impact on social and racial relations. Grounded in the research data, an explanatory theory was formulated of individuals' perceived behaviour on social networking sites, specifically pertaining to racial prejudice and discrimination, as well as to how this negatively manifests and causes racial division in society.

**Keywords:** discrimination, Internet, online behaviour, racial prejudice, social networking sites

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Introduction

To date, there have been few, if any, studies that adopt a grounded theory approach to analysing social media's influence on racial prejudice and discrimination, more especially within the South African context. In applying this method, the researcher endeavoured to interpret the experiences and perceptions of those who share online social platforms with both the perpetrators and targets of racial prejudice and discrimination. The aim of the present research was to explore perceptions concerning the source of online racial prejudice and discrimination, as well social networking websites' (social networking sites) perceived role in enabling this behaviour.

This chapter begins by explicating the contextual milieu that framed the present study. Race, racism, prejudice and discrimination are explored thereafter race related issues on the Internet will be discussed, as well as social media and SNSs' role in prejudice and discrimination. The problem statement or rationale for the present study is presented, after which an explanation of the research focus is provided. Finally, various definitions and concepts on race and race-related phenomena are provided to set the basis for later interpretations of these concepts.

#### Context of the Research

**Race and discrimination.** *"It is certainly not the case that an act being racially discriminatory suffices to make it racist"* (Matthew, 2017, p. 908).

South Africa's instatement of Apartheid served as institutionalised discrimination in relation to race, which sought to order society explicitly and systematically according to racial categories (Seekings, 2008). *Race* is considered a controversial word (Jakubowicz, 2012). Matthew (2017, p. 885) maintains that "few issues are as emotionally explosive as issues of race". It is used to define individuals or groups characterised by physical criteria, as opposed to ethnicity, which is defined per cultural criteria or geographical area (Tynes, Reynolds &

Greenfield, 2004). Race is also understood as a social construction (Matthew, 2017). Jakubowicz (2012) uses the term in reference to social beliefs about differences, rather than scientifically valid categories that distinguish human groups and individuals. Seekings (2008) believes that since the end of Apartheid, a renewed interest into the research of racial identities, attitudes and behaviour in South Africa has emerged. Moreover, South Africa remains racialised and many individual- and groups' social reality is still defined by race, which is evident in the expression of negative views about other racial groups. The influence of race remains ever present in contemporary South Africa and this is largely due to a deep-rooted and enduring consciousness of race in society (Seekings, 2008).

Gong, Xu, and Takeuchi (2017) cites racial and ethnic identity as a type of group identity that is founded on the perception that group members share similar physical traits as well as a common heritage. South Africans generally adopt identities according to perceived class (such as working class, middle class, poor), religion (for example, Christian or Muslim) and ethnicity (for example, Xhosa or Afrikaans) (Seekings, 2008). Though race may serve as a significant aspect in identities and culture, racial categories represent different things to different people. Jansen van Rensburg (2000) explains how most South Africans assume race(s) as real and natural categories and as a result, are inclined to use them as organising principles for their lives. Attitudes expressed through racism, understood by most as an ideology that becomes active through racial discrimination, stem from beliefs about race (Jakubowicz, 2012). This excludes people or groups, making them outcasts on the basis of ascriptive features (Rajagopal & Bojin, 2002).

Guerin (2003) explains how despite several efforts to end or reduce racial discrimination, current research suggests that all types of racism are still present. Both racism and racial discrimination is pervasive, and effects all factions. Although there is an earnest movement to transcend racial divisions of the past, the deep-rootedness of 'race-thinking' persists (Seekings, 2008). For many, the thought of racial discrimination evokes images of explicit, direct hostility expressed toward members of a disadvantaged racial group (National Research Council, 2004).

Some maintain that “our ability to categorize individuals into meaningful social groups, then to use whatever information we associate with the group to guide impressions about, and behaviour toward those individuals, greatly facilitates our ability to make sense of the people around us” (Ito, Willadsen-Jensen & Correll, 2007, p. 401). Bobo and Fox (2003) suggest that race, racism, and discrimination are, most significantly, bases and mechanisms of hierarchical differentiation that shape the ordering of social relations. According to Seekings (2008) research conducted in South Africa shows that people categorise themselves according to perceptions of how they are perceived by others. Moreover, results from the South African Social Attitudes Survey conducted in 2003, revealed that large minorities of every racial group appraised members of their own racial group as racist. This survey further demonstrated a common belief amongst black Africans that the majority of white people are racist, whilst white and coloured individuals, predominantly, felt that most black African people were racist (Seekings, 2008). It is argued that these attitudes are not necessarily linked to racial discrimination in terms of condemning judgements, but rather a subtler discrimination of social preferences. Most South Africans readily view others in term of their race and it remains relevant in South Africa, not as a lingering manifestation of racism, but primarily for cultural reasons. Differentiation intersects discrimination when two groups clash about the appropriateness and justifiability of the division and the underlying categorisation (Seekings, 2008). Still, Mummendey and Otten (2003) suggest that differentiation does not necessarily imply discrimination. Social differentiation is seen as a necessity as it is required source for orientating oneself and making decisions in day-to-day life. Discrimination, however, is problematic as it involves differentiation between individuals because of their group membership, which can be unjust.

Individuals' beliefs about other groups' racial attitudes seems to be linked to their perceived experiences of racial discrimination (Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone & Zimmerman, 2003). International research has demonstrated that individuals, whom strongly identified with race, were more likely to attribute an ambiguous discriminatory experience to race, as opposed to individuals

for whom race was a less central component of identity (Sellers et al., 2003). For example, Gong et al. (2017) indicate that even when exposed to equal unfair treatment, individuals may perceive it as discriminatory conduct whilst others may not deem it negative and ignore it, feeling undeterred or indifferent. Such differences are considered as resulting from varying social positions and identities (Gong et al., 2017).

Many individuals fail to notice instances of racial discrimination and prejudice, and while the effects are often hidden and delayed, there are still negative consequences (Guerin, 2003). Perceived discrimination is considered a significant psychosocial stressor with major educational, economic, political and other implications (Gong et al., 2017). Individual experiences of racial discrimination have been shown to affect health. For example, self-report levels of experienced discrimination and the experience of frequent frustrating social interactions of a racial nature (micro-aggressions) have been linked to hypertension (McKenzie, 2002). Van Dijk (2012) views racial prejudice and discrimination as a product of ethnic domination, occurring within separate but concomitant dimensions. The social dimension consists of common social practices of discrimination against ethnically dissimilar groups, such as exclusion from, or unequal distribution of, social resources or human rights. Secondly, the cognitive dimension serves as the motivation and legitimisation of such discriminatory practices through ethnic beliefs, stereotypes, prejudices, and ideologies. Such is the case where outgroups are equated to the ingroup which has appointed itself as superior and negatively represents the outgroup as different, deviant, or threatening (Van Dijk, 2012).

The above being emphasised, it is necessary to further differentiate internal mental processes such as stereotyping and prejudice, as opposed to the action or behaviour of discrimination (Glaser & Khan, 2004). Glaser and Khan (2004) indicated that mental processes, inclusive of individual psychological attitudes, can be divided into affective, cognitive and behavioural components. Prejudice represents the affective component, stereotyping the cognitive component, and discrimination the behavioural component (Khan, Spencer & Glaser, 2013).

Prejudice stems from a negative attitude, in contrast with discrimination, which is behaving negatively toward another individual (Tynes et al., 2004). Both concepts are pertinent for the sake of the current research and to provide context for the framing of this study.

According to Ito et al. (2007) people encode social category information automatically, especially information that is frequently used and socially emphasised such as race, gender and age. Moreover, stereotypes and prejudice can easily be activated by such social category information. Stereotypes, as a cognitive process, are beliefs or thoughts about particular groups which are to some extent informed by social, political and economic factors that determine the social standing of racial and ethnic groups (West & Thakore, 2013). Familiarity with stereotypes leads to their automatic activation, thus, people are prone to be influenced by stereotypes (Amodio et al., 2007). Prejudice is determined by an emotional state or feeling toward such a group, and is commonly governed by stereotypes. West and Thakore (2013) explain that social interactions are often guided by these mental processes, which may, or may not result in discriminatory behaviour. Tynes et al. (2004) noted that possessing negative attitudes does not ensure that those attitudes will be acted upon, as correlations between attitudes and behaviours have been relatively unconvincing. However, Glaser and Khan (2004) suggest that explicit expressions of prejudice can result in persistent yet unintended forms of discrimination. Even so, regardless of whether incidents of discrimination are real and true, perceptions of everyday discrimination are important as it can have psychological consequences (Gong et al., 2017).

Scholars spanning the social sciences and humanities wrestle with the complex and often contested meanings of race, racism, and discrimination (Bobo & Fox, 2003). Within the context of the present study, it is important to discuss what exactly constitutes racial discrimination in its many forms. Matthew (2017) highlights that foremost, discrimination involves differential treatment. Racial discrimination comprises discriminating between, against, or in favour of individuals because of their racial identity. Hence, even differential treatment that is motivated by racial favouritism is considered discrimination. It is suggested that a distinction be made between

*racial* discrimination and *racist* discrimination. An incident can be racially discriminatory without involving racist beliefs about, or negative attitudes towards a group. Though non-racist racial discrimination may still be regarded as wrongful and unjust, it is different from *racist* discrimination (Matthew, 2017).

Panel members of the National Research Council (2004) outlined four types of racial discrimination. The first form of discrimination is that which is intentional and explicit, and described by Allport (1954) as progressive stages by which individuals behave negatively towards those from another racial group. It includes acts such as verbal antagonism, avoidance, segregation, physical attack and even extermination (National Research Council, 2004). As individuals learn by doing, each step serves as an antecedent for the next. Research findings demonstrate verbal abuse and nonverbal rejection as reliable indicators of discrimination. By creating a hostile social environment, these actions disadvantage the targets of such behaviour (National Research Council, 2004).

The second major form of racial discrimination is considered subtle, unconscious and even automatic (National Research Council, 2004). Attitudes, emotions, motivations and beliefs may operate in either an automatic or a more controlled manner to induce racially-biased behaviour (Amodio, Devine & Harmon-Jones, 2007). As noted previously, prejudiced attitudes that stem from the overt beliefs of the past are still retained in today's more developed society. Although prejudicial attitudes do not necessarily result in adverse discriminatory behaviour, the endurance of these attitudes can result in unconscious and subtle forms of racial discrimination (National Research Council, 2004). Subtle prejudice can take the form of unconscious beliefs and associations that fashion ingroup members' attitudes and behaviours toward outgroup members. Even those who report low prejudice, may exhibit a pattern of automatic race bias (Amodio et al., 2007). Subsequently, ingroup members unconsciously and by default categorise outgroup members on the basis of race, gender or age. These automatic reactions to outgroup members reflect unconscious prejudice, and when manifested non-verbally or resulting in racial avoidance,

is considered discrimination (National Research Council, 2004). Mummendey and Otten (2003) explain this as ‘ambivalent’ discrimination where negative beliefs and feelings about outgroups are unavoidable, even when individuals subscribe to principles of social equality and fairness and attempt to deter discrimination. This is the result of individuals’ being socialised in a society where stereotypes and prejudice against certain groups are predated. Such programmed responses may also lead to automatic forms of stereotype-confirming behaviour (National Research Council, 2004).

Thirdly, the National Research Council (2004) explains that statistical discrimination and profiling typically involves adverse consequences for members of a disadvantaged racial group. This takes place, for example, when an individual or organisation accepts perceived group characteristics as applicable to all and draws on overall beliefs about a group to make decisions about an individual from that group. Finally, there are organisational and institutional processes which have been affected by the past and which tend to reflect the same biases as those who operate within them. Although not necessarily attributable to individual cognitive responses, these processes can be discriminatory when they lead to differential racial treatment or produce differential racial outcomes (National Research Council, 2004).

The two latter forms of discrimination will not be explored fully in this chapter, as it is not a primary focus of the present study. According to Mummendey and Otten (2003, p.122) it is the “intentional and fully reflected decision to treat ingroup and outgroup differently that is of particular interest when looking for antecedents of explicit derogation, rejection, and aversive treatment of outgroups”. Perpetrators of racial discrimination might differentiate between categories and groups deliberately and be able to account for it. They may apply criteria for distinction which they consider justified and based on social norms. In this case, outgroups are perceived as being distinct and less deserving of equal treatment. As a result, the individual will discriminate and behave negatively toward these groups or will support others in doing so (Mummendey & Otten, 2003).

Nayar (2010) believes that cultural factors such as race are integral to the function, shape and use of technology. Since the Internet's inception, promoters of racial animosity have been active web users (Jakubowicz, 2017). Online forms of racial discrimination may resemble traditional discrimination and occur on SNSs, chat rooms, discussion boards or web pages (Tynes, Rose, Hiss, Umaña-Taylor, Mitchell, & Williams, 2016). Glaser and Khan (2004) are of the opinion that discrimination experienced online can be regarded as more harmful than in an offline context. Tynes et. al (2016) define online racial discrimination as "denigrating or excluding individuals or groups on the basis of race through the use of symbols, voice, video, images, text, and graphic representations" (p.2).

Racial prejudice and discrimination on the Internet will be reviewed next, together with how these actions typically manifest in the online environment.

**Race and the Internet.** *"There is ample evidence in the literature that denigration of visibility and race in the broader popular culture and traditional media have been carried over to the new technology of the World Wide Web"* (Rajagopal & Bojin, 2002, para. 5).

Amongst other modern media technology, the Internet has become popular, mainly for its ability to host content production and consumption, thereby widening opportunities for communication and interaction (Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014). However, at the rate and extent Internet use has spread, it has become a dominating means of communication and connection. The abundant and accessible nature of the Internet makes it prone to aberrant use, therefore, placing its users at risk (Diomidous, Chardalias, Magita, Koutonias, Panagiotopoulou & Mantas, 2016). Therefore, a need has surfaced to explore the physical and mental impact of this technology on its users (Diomidous et al., 2016).

Many assume that race relations have improved over the years, however, many of the social norms and ills such as racial stereotyping and discrimination found in society today have been carried over and covertly reproduced in the online world (Tynes et. al, 2016; West & Thakore, 2013). Bonfadelli (2017) discussed various post-communicative effects of digital media on



cognitive (such as knowledge acquisition and framing), affective (for example, stereotypes), and social (such as identity formation) levels, but also in the domains of attitudes (for example, prejudices) and behaviour (such as discrimination). These effects are promoted, reinforced, and mediated by interpersonal communication, traditional mass media and also by the Internet (Bonfadelli, 2017).

An imbalance or divide exists between races online. According to Nayar (2010, p.15) cyberspace is a “raced” medium. The Internet remains segregated within its users’ interactions, and although Internet communities are channels for establishing and sustaining racial and ethnic solidarity, it also has a role in the exclusion of others (West & Thakore, 2013). This is especially concerning for South African internet users. National discourse on this issue has been considerable over the past few years (Janse van Rensburg, 2011). The Internet is not a race neutral or colour-blind space, in fact, the online world is structured by race, influencing behaviour and determining which spaces users visit and avoid (Kilvington & Price, 2017). West and Thakore (2013) suggest that both the active and passive use of online spaces form and sustain racial boundaries, and that this can be understood through examining virtual communities.

**Prejudice, discrimination and social media.** Social media has fundamentally changed the nature of communication, using mobile and web-based applications and technologies to construct interactive platforms where users can generate, modify and share content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). These attributes have granted users a voice and allowed for expanded social participation (Sadleir & De Beer, 2014).

Despite the convenience and numerous advantages afforded by SNSs, the negative aspects of such social technology lacks academic attention (Saridakis, Benson, Ezingard & Tennakoon, 2016). boyd and Ellison (2007) indicate that research relating to SNS use in schools, universities, libraries and by scholars, have mostly centred around exploring the implications of SNSs and have “focused on impression management and friendship performance, networks and network structure, online/offline connections, and privacy issues” (p. 219).

Scholars who have reservations about social media's role with regards to gender, race, and sexual orientation, have found SNS sites useful in studying the development and expression of attitudes and social norms, including prejudice (Khan et al., 2013; Nakagawa & Arzubiaga, 2014). For example, research has revealed how individuals use Facebook's features, including the public wall, to both express their own beliefs and monitor their friends' posts and actions (Khan et al., 2013).

Khan, et al. (2013) have deliberated whether the Internet can inform research about prejudice and discrimination in modern-day society. This is, however, potentially difficult as people's felt and expressed prejudice often exceeds their discriminatory capacity (Glaser and Khan, 2004). Two compelling arguments have been commonly debated amongst scholars, namely that the Internet has the possibility to decrease discriminatory effects, but also to increase expressions of prejudice (Khan, Spencer & Glaser, 2013).

The Internet's basic format often safeguards users and reduces discrimination because of digitised communication and the ability of potential targets to remain anonymous and conceal group-identifying or social category cues (Glaser & Khan, 2004; Khan et al., 2013). Distinct new networks are created online as a means of escape from pervasive discrimination, where stigmatised group members are more likely to receive equitable treatment (Glaser & Khan, 2004). For instance, ethnic and racial minorities may use Facebook in an unencumbered manner to vividly express their social identities, which may receive negative reactions or be undervalued in broader society (Khan et al., 2013).

According to Amichai-Hamburger and Hayat (2013) the Internet as an online learning environment is structured to enable users to learn how to transfer communication and social skills from the online to real offline face-to-face interactions. For example, it has been revealed that in the case of minority groups, individuals find their online group and after gradually building confidence through their interaction with like-minded others, they feel able enough to face the offline world and disclose their tendency. Thus, moving from an online to offline context is

possible. The protective environment and sense of security provided by the properties of SNS services, including the ability to control the degree of information revealed and the ease with which it is possible to find like-minded individuals, is likely to have a positive effect on online relationships. Moreover, social media chats and forums may aid those who, due to their introverted or neurotic personalities, experience great difficulty in forming social contacts (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013).

Many discussions concerning social media have focused on the subject of racism, privilege and inequality being prevalent on these platforms (Petray & Collin, 2017). Designed primarily to facilitate conversations among individuals and groups, social media contributes toward content and perspectives about race which is typically absent from broader societal discussion (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Nakagawa & Arzubiaga, 2014). It can initially be perceived as a forum for light, funny, and humorous posts, but it also allows users to discuss serious and complicated issues and to identify as members of a community (Petray & Collin, 2017). Research into a particular ethnic group's use of Internet services has revealed that social media facilitates participation in political discussions, thereby deepening a sense of belonging to an ethnic group through a shared experience of unjust treatment (Grant, 2017). Social media provides a means to challenge frameworks of racial archetypes and stereotypes that exist in discourse and provides a context to offer counter-narratives and expose cases of racism. Through internet media, people can identify how media production and consumption reflects and shapes societal attitudes and constructions of race (Nakagawa & Arzubiaga, 2014).

Individuals mobilising for action make use of social media (Wallace, 2016). Social media as a space where solidarities might be formed and reinforced, does not only promote dialogue and raise-consciousness on these matters, but also facilitates activism and social movements (Nayar, 2010; Petray & Collin, 2017). According to Nayar (2010) the Internet has been increasingly used as a medium of communication, propaganda, and political mobilisation by social movements, such as environmental awareness, anti-racism, homosexual rights and women's empowerment.

SNSs such as Facebook can be utilised to facilitate social protests and to organise groups standing against prejudice and discrimination, or in response to specific polarising racial incidents (Khan et al., 2013). Despite such amplified online participation, research has established a minimal degree of overall offline activism, civic engagement and sustained social change (Khan et al., 2013; Petray & Collin, 2017).

A further premise upheld by scholars is that the nature and properties of the online environment may produce a damaging effect with respect to prejudice and discrimination. For example, Glaser and Khan (2004) have suggested that prejudice is more likely to be expressed overtly on the Internet and that anonymity may actually encourage prejudicial expressions. Amongst the most damaging accounts of prejudice online are the messages spread by extremists (Khan et al., 2013). In promoting hate-groups, recruiting membership and disseminating racist rhetoric, extremists are likely increasing prejudice in and across societies (Glaser & Khan, 2004). Racism is increasingly supported by the properties of social media platforms (McCosker & Johns, 2014). Members of racist groups, for example, often use anonymous email accounts to harass and threaten minority group members (Glaser & Khan, 2004). Though many users might feel that Facebook is a safe domain for social identity expression, it may result in increased offline discrimination (Khan et al., 2013). Kietzmann et al. (2011) have highlighted the implications of the different functions of social media and networking, including the extent to which SNS users expose their identity online through disclosing names, age, gender, profession, location and group memberships. Making individuals' social categories more 'nonymous', as opposed to anonymous, can increase the potential for discrimination (Khan et al., 2013).

Online discourse mediums may further intensify harassment instead of lessening it (Glaser & Khan, 2004). Sadleir and De Beer (2014) have raised concerns about the rise of instances in which social media has incited users to exercise their voice to articulate hurtful and offensive messages. Differences in the frequency and content of a conversation can have major implications (Kietzmann et al., 2011). For example, Twitter, which was launched in 2006 as a microblogging

service that has a short 140-character limit for each message (called a 'tweet'), may encourage spontaneous and potentially less thought-out responses by its users, which makes prejudicial expressions more likely in this format (Khan et al., 2013). Individuals can post content of their own ideas, statements and/or actions, often revealing highly personal thoughts in this very open public forum (Khan et al., 2013). Online message posts, photos or videos have the potential to go 'viral' and be viewed globally by millions of users (Khan et al., 2013). This has the potential to dramatically expand attitudes of intolerance.

Concerning discrimination between race, nationality, or even gender, there is an implicit belief among web users that group differences are real and reasonable (Khan et al., 2013). SNSs can attract homogeneous populations, therefore, some groups use these sites to segregate themselves by nationality, age, educational level, or other factors that typically fragment society (boyd & Ellison, 2007). While SNSs are generally designed to be accessible, some sites are intentionally designed for identity-driven categories such as ethnic, religious, sexual orientation or political groups (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). At a glance, a social network may suggest that more connections are made where degrees of separation between individuals are reduced, however, social media platforms are centred on existing relationship maintenance, not expansion (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

A large amount of user connections made on SNSs consists of people with whom a real-life connection is already established, therefore, sharing a user's demographics such as education level, income, location, and ethnic and cultural background (Knight, 2018). SNSs have come under criticism as scholars explain that excess diversity of viewpoints make it easier for like-minded users to form "echo chambers" (Sunstein, 2001, p.17) where beliefs of one group are reiterated, as a consequence, isolating users from opposing perspectives (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). boyd and Ellison (2007) emphasised that SNSs are structured as personal, egocentric networks. Perhaps in parallel, these sites have the potential to act as ethnocentric networks.

The origin, nature and possible reinforcing factors that maintain and even perpetuate these socially detrimental online interactions will be explored further in the next chapter, *Literature Review*.

### **Problem Statement and Rationale**

When the Internet was first established, it was initially suggested that due to the possibilities created by its virtual environment, individuals would be able to escape from the boundaries of race and racism (Daniels, 2012). However, it is emerging that the Internet perhaps does not provide a refuge from the constraints of race or racism. While the Internet has become an important tool for enhancing and expanding communication, commerce and education, it has also become a tool for spreading hatred, advocating violence and for denying groups basic human rights (Dutton, Mock & Ellbogen, 2001).

As with any public medium, the Internet can be used for multiple purposes and agendas. According to McGreal (2013) social media provides individuals with an outlet to express their opinions on any subject they like, including highly controversial topics. As a result, it is not uncommon for individuals to express negative opinions about different ethnic groups, including racist memes and rants. Facebook is associated with a culture of shallow information-processing that might facilitate the uncritical acceptance of problematic social attitudes, such as racism. One study in particular found that individuals who spend a great deal of time on Facebook are more likely to agree with racist messages posted by another user, compared to those who spend less time on the site (McGreal, 2013).

Khan, Spencer and Glaser (2013) describe the Internet as an influential, potent, and far-reaching medium. The Internet has been adopted as an innovative vehicle for social science research, particularly in the field of racial prejudice and discrimination, using it to investigate more general principles of intergroup bias (Glaser & Khan, 2004). However, according to Daniels (2012) race or racism on the Internet has not been extensively researched. Almost no prior research has attempted to explain the impact of the Internet and SNSs on racial prejudice and

discrimination. It is important to fill this research gap since it expands upon the scope of existing literature and theory, developing an understanding SNSs' role in facilitating racially prejudice attitudes and resulting discriminatory behaviour. According to Pumper, Yaeger and Moreno (2013) little is known about the potential SNSs could have in resource-limited countries, such as South Africa, due to lack of general research in the area.

SNSs are immensely popular and constitute a major way that time is spent on the Internet (Askew & Coovert, 2013). A report compiled by QWERTY Digital (2017) indicates that South Africa has a total population of 55.21 million people and of that percentage, 28.6 million (52%) people utilise the Internet in some format (QWERTY Digital, 2017). Over two-thirds of white South Africans have internet access (69.1%), as opposed to just 47.7% of black, 48.1% Indian, and 45,8% coloured users (Goldstuck, 2017). Fifteen million South African Internet users make use of social media platforms, with a 27% penetration rate of the total population (QWERTY Digital, 2017). Social media is readily used at least once per day by over 40% of South Africans, predominantly through mobile phones (QWERTY Digital, 2017). Out of the various SNS platforms accessed, Facebook is the most utilised, followed by YouTube. Twitter sees adoption from just over 25% of the population, on par with Instagram (QWERTY Digital, 2017). These figures highlight the importance of reviewing existing research concerning race-relations on the Internet and expanding on such research within the South African context.

In view of South Africa's long-standing history of racial discrimination, racism is considered a well-researched concept, however, it remains a significant shared dilemma amongst South African citizens (BusinessTech, 2016). An enduring racial tension persists in South Africa and is particularly apparent on the Internet amongst social media users. Over the past years, online racism has amplified rapidly on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Du Preez, 2016; McKenzie, 2016). According to Matthews (2017) *"the advent of social media has further complicated the country's attempts to address discrimination, deeply entrenched in our society by institutionalised discrimination as a defining feature of Apartheid"* (para. 5).

The current study is regarded as both topical and relevant considering the present racial climate in South Africa. The central aim of the research was to explore and describe the perceptions and subjective experiences of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs by the research participants, including perceptions about other users' behaviour, as well as SNSs role in facilitating this. The focus on the origin and impact of online prejudice and discrimination addresses issues such as social justice, inequality, culture, national identity and social cohesion. The present research looked to ultimately inform advancements in social cohesion in the midst of ongoing dynamic change in the country and to contribute toward social progress in South Africa.

### **Concept Definitions**

The following definitions are not considered absolute but were nonetheless used to inform the rhetoric and serve as the basis for the literature to follow.

**Bias:** the action of unfairly supporting or opposing a particular person or belief, because of personal opinions influencing judgement (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016.).

**Cyber-bullying:** repeated aggressive behaviours where the sender intends to harm the receiver through an existing power imbalance, and by using electronic means of communication (Garett, Lord & Young, 2016).

**Cyber-racism:** the phenomenon of internet racism expressed through racist websites, photos videos, comments and messages on social networks (Diomidous et al., 2016).

**Discrimination:** behaviour that advantages or disadvantages individuals merely based on their group membership (Fiske, 2013).

**Ethnicity:** refers to groups of individuals sharing common and distinctive, national, religious, linguistic or cultural heritage (Nittle, 2016).

**Ethnocentrism:** refers to an attitude expressing the belief that one's own ethnic group or culture is superior to other ethnic groups or cultures, and that one's cultural standards can be applied universally (Hooghe, 2008).



**Hate speech:** any prohibited behaviour, writing, or display which may incite violence or prejudicial action against or by a protected individual or group, or because it offends or intimidates the protected individual or group (Pilane, 2016).

**Prejudice:** an unjustified or incorrect attitude (usually negative) towards an individual based solely on the individual's membership of a social group (McLeod, 2008).

**Race:** human population distinguished as a more or less distinct group by genetically inherited physical characteristics (Nittle, 2016).

**Racism:** the belief that characteristics and abilities can be attributed to individuals simply on the basis of their race or that some racial groups are superior to others (Shah, 2010). Therefore, implying discrimination that is based on an individual's race.

**Racist:** individual(s) who holds the belief that one race is superior to another and that 'lesser' races should not be treated equally (Patrick, 2015).

**Stereotype:** beliefs that characterise individuals based merely on their group membership (Fiske, 2013).

**Social media or Social networking site (SNS):** these terms are used interchangeably (Sadleir & De Beer, 2014). Social media refers to established groups of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014). SNSs are online communication channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Websites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram that are dedicated to forums, microblogging and social networking are among the different types of social media (Rouse, 2015).

### **Outline of the Present Treatise**

The structure of the remainder of the treatise is as follows:

Chapter 2, *Literature Review*, provides an overview of current research and literature relating to aggressive behaviour, as well as prejudiced and/or discriminatory behaviour online. This includes motivational aspects to such behaviour and attributes of the online environment that facilitate it.

Chapter 3, *Theoretical Acknowledgments*, presents a synopsis of the major theories across various disciplines in the social sciences as well as media and communication studies that influence online prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour at either an individual- or group level.

Chapter 4, *Research Methodology*, provides an explanation of the research methodology that was utilised to conduct the research study, that is, the grounded theory method. The chapter includes aspects such as the research paradigm and design, data collection, research procedure, data analysis and ethical considerations.

Chapter 5, *Findings and Discussion*, provides extracts from the data collection process in order to elucidate how the newly developed theory or model, was formed through the constant comparison of themes, categories and concepts. Moreover, 'the grounded' theory is described and explained through comparison with appropriate existing theories.

Chapter 6, *Conclusion*, contains the conclusion and evaluation of the present study. The limitations of the study are discussed and suggestions for future research are suggested. The practical and theoretical contributions made by the present research study are summarised in the concluding remarks.

The next chapter will present relevant literature and research that was consulted to aid in a comprehensive understanding of the topic under study.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

Traditional grounded theory emphasises that an empirical study always precedes an extensive literature review in order to avoid interpreting gathered data through earlier perspectives (Bryant, 2017). This distance is considered important as prior knowledge of other research may influence the researcher's engagement with the data. Nevertheless, this is arguably unachievable as working within the discipline of psychology, the researcher was to some extent already familiar with major theories in the field (Willig, 2013). It is crucial that grounded theory method (GTM) researchers acknowledge prior familiarity with existing literature. Some proponents of GTM propose adopting a critical stance toward earlier theories which requires the researcher to incorporate existing concepts into the narrative. Charmaz (2006) suggests treating extant concepts as problematic and then looking for the extent to which their characteristics are lived and understood, not as given in textbooks. In fact, completing a thorough and focused literature review can strengthen an argument, and the research's overall credibility. This often requires going across fields and disciplines.

In light of the above, this chapter provides a broad review of literature on racial discrimination in Internet studies in the domains of prejudice and discrimination on social media and online social networking sites. Internet users' behaviour will be explored, and a synopsis will be provided on the nature of cyberspace, together with the structure of the Internet, organisation of virtual communities and SNS features that affect users' online behaviour. This will be achieved within general categories of disinhibitory and opportunity aspects that emerge on the Internet and SNSs. The impact of language and various problems encountered in online communication will also be discussed as a plausible contributory factor in discriminatory behaviour. Determinant and causative factors of online behaviour on SNSs will be reviewed, including motivational origins and aggressive conduct as an overlapping behaviour.

While this discussion will not be definitive, it will hopefully serve as a useful framework in which to understand the background and context of the present research study.

**The Internet and Behaviour.** *“The Internet is a powerful tool in our hands, but if it is not used properly can put someone in a very risky situation”* (Diomidous et al., 2016, p. 67).

While the Internet broadens opportunities for connection, it also provides opportunities for deeper and narrowed infiltration into user content and private psychological spaces (Malamuth, Linz & Weber, 2013). Amichai-Hamburger and Hayat (2013) describe several interrelated psychological components that are distinguishable online from those of the offline world. For instance, the anonymous, spontaneous, impersonal, and disinhibited quality of Internet-based communication has been criticised for the overt expressions and negative attitudes found online (Glaser & Khan, 2004). Factors such as self-awareness and perception about audience size are also influential attributes the internet extends its users (Wallace, 2016).

Sadleir and De Beer (2014) believe that sharing thoughts, feelings, spontaneous remarks, inappropriate jokes etcetera has become a trend as Web 2.0 and social media have altered the social conditions in which this content is published. As a result, it has become necessary to develop processes for dealing with offensive online material (Martin, McCann, Morales & Williams, 2013). The Internet can also facilitate illegal behaviour, even implicating users' personal safety (Diomidous et al., 2016). Some accredit it as a foremost medium to spread hate, as hate speech seemingly thrives in online news comment sections, community forums and social media (Kilvington & Price, 2017; Martin et al., 2013). Whether direct or indirect, such as spreading fabrications in the form of destructive messages, repeated online posts, or offensive trolling and violent threats, this sort of online harassment inflicts substantial emotional and psychological harm on its victims (Malamuth et al., 2013; Sadleir & De Beer, 2014).

**Aggressive behaviour.** As mentioned before, aggression, the same as discrimination, is not an attitude, motive, or emotion but rather a behaviour directed toward another (Malamuth et al., 2013). Discrimination is not always intended maliciously, just as proactive aggression is also

planned, thoughtful, instrumental, typically premeditated, unemotional, and primarily motivated by a goal other than harm, such as to gain something tangible. Though harm may be intended, it is a by-product or means to a calculated end goal (Allen & Anderson, 2017). This is accepted as true when concerning institutionalised racial discrimination. Reactive aggression is known as hostile, affective, angry, impulsive and retaliatory, always occurring in response to some provocation, and is typically impulsive. It includes feelings of anger, and is motivated primarily by a desire to harm someone (Allen & Anderson, 2017). Discrimination can understandably be reactive, automatic and even habitual if certain pre-existing beliefs and prejudices are held, as beliefs are of fundamental importance in determining behaviour (Jones, 2002). Limayem, Hirt, and Cheung (2007) describe habit as a state of automaticity where users tend to automatically accomplish certain tasks or behaviours; this should not be likened with frequency of occurrence, but rather a distinct psychological construct. Several social-psychological models have been proposed to account for the regulation of automatically activated race-biased tendencies. These models posit accounts of stereotype inhibition and response control, which will be established toward the end of the current chapter (Amodio et al., 2007). Internet users perhaps engage aggressively with others online, or create and distribute content considered aggressive, to reach a desired outcome or as a reaction to being provoked. The question remains: do internet users discriminate against other users in response to perceived provocation, or to reach a desired outcome?

Discrimination is “consistent with and driven by emotional action tendencies” (Mummendey & Otten, 2003, p.124). The function of emotion in discrimination is discussed by Mummendey and Otten (2003). According to them, an aversive event is the experience of category-based threat which is caused either by an intergroup conflict or the interpretation of the outgroup’s actions or intentions. Such an experience is likely to draw out hostility and emotions such as anger and contempt followed by associated behavioural tendencies to attack, aggress or retaliate against the source of aversion. Moreover, avoidant behaviour is caused by the emotions

of fear and disgust. This usually occurs when the opponent's conduct is perceived as illegitimate or norm-violating and is usually met with subjectively justified retaliation.

As discussed in Allen and Anderson (2017), aggression can be direct, indirect or displaced. In direct aggression the victim is present, whereas in indirect aggression the victim is absent. Insulting a person to their face is direct verbal aggression whereas spreading rumours behind their back is indirect verbal aggression. Displaced aggression occurs when an individual aggresses against an innocent substitute target who is innocent but behaves in a manner that triggers the aggression with some, usually minor offense. Displaced aggression often occurs when the target is unavailable (e.g., not physically present), when the target is an intangible entity (e.g., heat, noise), or when the potential aggressor fears retaliation (e.g., being fired or physically harmed) from the primary instigating target.

According to Wallace (2016) there is a popular belief that the Internet is laden with instances of aggression because of the nature of its environment. She also highlights that online experiences of frustration are likely to bring out an aggressive response in users. An example of this is the endless interruptions that impede people as they try to accomplish a task using a computer. Aversive online stimulus can be interpreted ambiguously. Once angered or frustrated, users' have diminished ability to reflect on an event rationally and stimuli that would under different circumstances be viewed neutrally, are more likely to be interpreted negatively. Moreover, as perceptions are often distorted online, if a user is sufficiently primed toward an aggressive response almost anything could trigger aggression.

A common assumption that catharsis has positive benefits for an individual has been used to justify the airing of anger online. This has even given rise to 'ranting' websites, though, research demonstrates the contrary where behaving aggressively increases aggressive tendencies, rather than reducing them.

Features of the online environment or cyberspace play a significant role in enabling online aggression, particularly verbal aggression (Wallace, 2016). As seen in online terrorist group

activities, these features are employed alongside calculated and stealthily crafted pacifistic rhetoric which deceive audiences of their true purpose (Malamuth et al., 2013). For example, terrorist websites suggest ways in which to take action by soliciting donations, protesting and disseminating messages which are less evident than explicitly advocating for violence. Such messages are designed to elicit sympathy among selected segments of the population.

Prejudiced beliefs coupled with biased behaviour against another can often produce unfair discrimination. This is certainly true concerning marginalised social categories such as race or ethnicity. It is possible that, with or without racist ideas, discrimination can elicit aggression and hostility directed toward an individual. That being said, one should also consider what drives an individual to engage in such inimical behaviour. The underlying aims and intentions that motivates users to behave in a prejudiced and discriminatory manner will now be discussed.

**Motivation and behaviour.** Social psychology broadly emphasises situational determinants of behaviour and how mental processes influence social behaviour (Khan et al., 2013). Human behaviour cannot be fully explicated by either a strictly biological or a strictly social-psychological approach. Although human beings (and therefore human behaviour) are inherently social, a purely social level of analysis may ignore or misrepresent other important underpinnings that mediate human action (Bartholow & Dickter, 2007). In this section, both cognitive and social processes involved in determining discriminatory behaviour will be discussed. This includes the distal factors of personality, human biology and environmental influences that effect motivation to engage in this behaviour.

According to Dhir, Kaur, and Rajala (2018), scholars have emphasised an urgent need to investigate user intentions to create and share content on SNSs. Wallace (2016) has stressed that the purpose of users visiting or inhabiting different Internet environments is perhaps the most important mediator of behaviour online.

West and Thakore (2013) point out a variety of reasons users participate and engage in online forums such as information seeking, problem solving, professional obligations and social

contact. A study which investigated social media practices at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (now named Nelson Mandela University) indicated that the main reason for students registering and joining SNSs was for social purposes, with entertainment cited as the major reason for SNS use (Mohamed, 2011).

Malamuth et al. (2013) explain that Internet users seek out and respond to media content differently according to individual predispositions and social relationships, for example. Furthermore, exposure to content that is in line with existing tendencies may reinforce certain behaviours in users. Human behaviour is governed by a balance between elements of nature (biology) and nurture (learning experiences), although socialisation by other humans, as well as personal learning are considered predominant in guiding behaviour (Flohr, 1987). Ultimately, social behaviour is a result of combined mental, social, and situational factors, moreover, it is important to consider bidirectional interactive influences (Flohr, 1987).

According to Al-Qeisi (2009) motivation must be considered from a multidimensional perspective, examining both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as amotivation (behaviour is neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated) which retains a crucial role in individuals' psychological processes. He refers to the hierarchical model of motivation, which posits that motivation exists in all individuals at global, contextual and situational levels. It is the result of either social factors and environmental conditions, which leads to important behavioural, cognitive, and affective consequences. The motivational model was later adapted to examine individuals' use of technology. It was found that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are key drivers of individuals' behaviours when operating technology. Extrinsically-motivated behaviours are engaged in as means to some compensation, whereas intrinsically-motivated behaviours include the type of behaviours an individual might engage in for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from performing them without the expectation of material rewards. Extrinsic motivation to use technology is supported by expected or anticipated reward, provided that the technology is perceived as useful in achieving these goals. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation to use technology



concerns the perceived enjoyment of using the technology regardless of the performance outcome that might be obtained (Al-Qeisi, 2009). Motivation is also involved in prejudice, for example, some people are internally motivated to respond without prejudice, therefore they inhibit race biases primarily for personal reasons. Others are externally motivated, hence they inhibit bias primarily to avoid social disapproval (Amodio et al., 2007).

A recent study conducted by Dhir et al. (2018) used a model investigating the role of habit, hedonic motivation, facilitating conditions, social influence, effort expectancy, performance expectancy, social presence, social status and self-efficacy in influencing SNS user intentions. These, along with other research findings suggest that both habit and hedonic motivation have a significant and direct influence on users' intentions to use features of SNSs. Likewise, there is a possibility that habit and hedonic motivation is partly responsible for SNS users' discriminatory behaviour.

**Biology.** *“Early perceptual aspects of social categorisation are relatively obligatory, driven more by the properties of the individual being perceived than by the goals and intentions of the perceiver”* (Ito, Willadsen-Jensen & Correll, 2007, p. 409).

The biological perspective assumes that all living beings are biologically adapted to solve their problems for survival. According to Flohr (1987), to survive, species make use of genetic programming, a combination of innate maturation stages with environmental stimuli, imitation of their kind, and their own primary experience.

Social and cognitive neuroscience has employed a range of psychophysiological measures such as brain imaging techniques to explore which brain structures and neural systems underlie social cognitive processes (Bartholow & Dickter, 2007). This implicates behaviour regulation and intergroup responses, conflict-monitoring processes, perception and racial bias control, memory structures, social category information and stereotype activation. There is potential for such techniques to explore associations between social and biological approaches to understanding social-psychological phenomena. Perhaps biological dispositions can account for the racial

stereotyping, bias, and discrimination found on SNSs. Much of the research and literature consulted (Bartholow & Dickter, 2007; Ito et al., 2007; Lieberman, 2007) substantiates that biological compositions do play a significant role in discriminatory behaviour.

Despite the impact of biological elements, Flohr (1987) stressed that overt behaviour is predominantly influenced by the characteristics of society and the physical environment. Hence, biological aspects will not be elaborated upon in this discussion.

**Personality.** It is thought that personality structures affect how users choose, interpret and execute different activities that are offered online (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013). Research has demonstrated that social media platforms can be an effective outlet for accurate and positive self-expression of personality traits (Orehek & Human, 2017). The relationship between extraversion and social media use is particularly important among the young adult cohort. Correa, Hinsley, and Gil de Zúñiga (2010) found that extraversion and openness to experiences are positively related to social media use. Moreover, it was revealed that extraverted men and women were both likely to be more frequent users of social media tools, however, only the men with greater degrees of emotional instability were more regular users.

Wallace (2016) alludes to a general rise in traits of narcissism among the younger generation compared with previous generations, and cite issues such as parenting styles, celebrity culture, the self-esteem movement and the Internet, as contributors to this trend. She also considers whether SNSs promote narcissism or rather attract narcissists who can take advantage of its unique features (Wallace, 2016).

Researchers have singled out several personality traits that appear to act as leading components in influencing users' behaviour on the Internet such as sensation-seeking, locus of control, extraversion, openness to experience, neuroticism, need for closure, need for cognition and attachment style (Amichai-Hamburger, 2013).

According to Lieberman (2007) extraversion and neuroticism yield different influences on how social information is processed either automatically or more controlled. Across several

studies, extraverts with greater working memory efficiency than introverts, were better able to handle multiple social-interaction goals simultaneously. Whereas, trait anxiety (a construct similar to neuroticism) has been associated with diminished working-memory efficiency and greater automatic detection of threats and conflict (Lieberman, 2007).

Finally, individuals who engage in hate speech have been identified as possessing a link with different personality traits, including attributes of narcissism, psychopathy and machiavellianism, which is the enjoyment gained from manipulating the behaviour of others (Jakubowicz, 2017).

**Environment.** Where socialisation and learning is concerned, Van Dijk (1986) comments that socialisation discourse is rarely about ethnicity, although it may concern other outgroups in terms of gender, class, religion or occupation. He ascribes racial discrimination as resulting from an ideologically framed system of ethnic prejudices which are ultimately acquired. This is achieved by social learning through observation, imitation and participation in social interaction, including an inferential framework that features rationalisations such as “everybody does it” (Van Dijk, 1986, p. 202). While youth acquire ethnic or racial proto-schemata based on discourse and what they are exposed to, as adults, individuals need further information in order to interpret the present ethnic situation.

Tynes et al., (2004) are of the opinion that the persistence of racially problematic attitudes is perhaps because much of the youth are still reared in racially segregated environments and do not have enough opportunities to develop friendships with people from other racial groups. This leaves much of their education about various racial groups to the media and academic environments (Tynes et al., 2004).

The question presented is: if an Internet user is inclined toward aggression and discriminatory behaviour, what social factors and environmental conditions contribute toward racially intolerant treatment of others online? What is it about the virtual environment of SNSs

that enables this behaviour? In the next section, disinhibitory and facilitative features of online platforms, as well as those that leave users to become unprotected targets will be explored.

**Determinants of online prejudice and discrimination.** The Internet offers a relatively new environment for interactions and much is learned from examining its effects from a psychological standpoint (Wallace, 2016). The Internet's unique attributes of communication can activate and shape various psychological mechanisms (Malamuth et al., 2013). In this section, the Internet, its structure and function, and the social psychology of aggression will be explored. Literature on aggression and aggressive behaviour will be drawn upon as a comparable basis in which to discuss discriminatory behaviour. This is considered significant as, stated earlier, racial micro-aggressions arise during online interaction.

Wallace (2016) attributes the unique communicative features of the online environment to facilitating and possibly prolonging the impact of aggressive online behaviour. Scholars focusing on the causes of aggressive behaviours have emphasised that it is essential to consider the role of multiple interactive factors, such as those creating the motivation to commit aggression, those reducing internal and external inhibitions that might prevent acting out of the behaviour, and those factors providing the opportunity for the act to occur (Malamuth et al., 2013). This resonates with Finkelhor's (1999) conceptual model in determining how sexual abuse occurs. Although the intention here is not to equate the course of online racially discriminatory behaviour with the manifestation of sexually violent behaviour, discrimination is still a behaviour committed against other individuals. With this being said, the model could provide a framework for this discussion of online behaviour, and considers four *preconditions* that could facilitate or make online perpetration possible (Finkelhor, 1999). Firstly, the perpetrator must be motivated. This is usually a combination of having some particular emotional need fulfilled, the ability to receive satisfaction or stimulation from targeting the victim, and the obstacles of having their needs of perpetration met in a more conventional way (Finkelhor, 1999). Secondly, the perpetrator must overcome internal inhibitions toward the behaviour, such as cognitive dissonance, moral

principles or rationalisations that minimise the seriousness of the conduct. Thirdly, the perpetrator must overcome external barriers to the behaviour such as the supervision and protection of the target. Finally, the target must be unable to defend him- or herself from the behaviour (e.g. resistance to the behaviour or the ability to escape) (Finkelhor, 1999).

The disinhibitory, facilitative and unprotected conditions within online interactions will be examined in the literature to follow. These occur concomitantly and interactively with users' motivation to commit certain behaviours (Malamuth et al., 2013).

*Disinhibitory qualities.* “The liberating potential of technology often reveals an unfortunate fact of human nature: when given the opportunity to hide behind a veneer of anonymity, and removed from the consequences of our actions, we somehow find licence within ourselves to behave in a manner entirely contrary to what we know about acceptable social behaviour” (Sadleir & De Beer, p.12, 2014).

The following aspects focus on features of the Internet and SNS environment that reduce internal inhibitions.

*Online disinhibition.* The online disinhibition effect is a phenomenon where some individuals self-disclose or act out more frequently or intensely than they would offline. This is due to factors that interact with each other such as dissociative anonymity, invisibility, dissociative imagination, and minimisation of authority (Suler, 2004). Such disinhibition makes people less self-conscious, and online, people have less restraint in how they express themselves, even in socially undesirable ways (Glaser and Khan, 2004). *Anonymity, together with the efficiency and unbounded nature of Internet-based communication has led to a rise in less inhibited behaviour (Glaser & Khan, 2004; Malamuth et. al, 2013). However, recent research points to a decline in online anonymity, and as social media encourages and requires users to present more real aspects of their selves online, interaction has become less impersonal (Khan et al., 2013).*

*Anonymity.* Anonymity is considered a central characteristic of the Internet, which in terms of communication distinguishes it from other channels. It is commonly accepted that the disinhibiting disguise extended by anonymity is largely responsible for facilitating prejudice and discriminatory behaviour on the Internet (Khan et al., 2013). Anonymity allows users to either conceal or reveal their physical form as chosen, which for some can be a liberating experience. This is because individuals' outer appearance is regarded as a contributing factor to how they are perceived (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013). Wallace (2016) describes two components of anonymity in cyberspace, the first, the lack of *identifiability*, which is considered a more significant contributor to disinhibited behaviour online than compared to simply being nameless. The second is *visibility*, where in contrast to face-to-face interaction, users are more likely to abandon typical social norms as they can choose not to make use of photos, videos, etc., therefore perceiving themselves as invisible.

Disinhibition is considered a product of anonymity. When coupled with absent social cues, self-awareness is reduced which leads to a state of deindividuation, where individuals are less likely to abide by social norms because of a lack of perceived individual identity (Malamuth et al., 2013; Segovia & Bailenson, 2013).

Malamuth et al. (2013) have also classified two types of online anonymity. Technical anonymity refers to the exclusion of all meaningful identifying information (i.e. one's name or depicting photograph) from Internet communications. Social anonymity occurs when, due to a shortage of cues to attribute an identity, an individual perceives him- or herself or others as unidentifiable (Malamuth et al., 2013).

*Identity formation and manipulation.* The Internet can emancipate individuals from the "normative persona mask" they wear in their real-life interactions (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013, p. 7). Its features create a supportive environment which may enable users to explore and experiment with different aspects of their identity, helping users reach their deepest level of individuality (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013). *Disembodiment* is concomitant to the

experience of anonymity on the Internet. It refers to the transcendence of physical constraints in cyberspace, therefore going beyond limitations that one would otherwise face in the real world (Zwart, 2016). According to Zwart (2016) there are two perspectives on disembodiment, firstly, that human life is abolished and dissolved into streams of letters, symbols and digital data sets and, in so doing, emptying the essence of an individuals' social self. An alternative view is that digitalising one's individuality through online disembodiment unlocks the capacity to re-personalise and individualise the self through a process of close and intense self-monitoring, thereby discovering and embracing different aspects of oneself (Zwart, 2016).

Identity manipulation comprises overlapping concepts such as anonymity, identity misrepresentation and identity replacement. A false and misleading impression created about one's identity is considered as identity misrepresentation, whereas identity replacement occurs when one misrepresents oneself as another individual, even assuming a completely fictitious identity and therefore, substituting another's identity as one's own (Segovia & Bailenson, 2013). Scholars have argued that although cyber-identities are transient, established categories of ethnicity persist online (Grant, 2017). According to Nayar (2010) minority groups exclusively benefit from disembodiment, transcendence and adopting alternate and fluid identities. He considers whether the disempowered, and the marginalised are too, capable of transcending the underlying matrix of race, community, and gender (Nayar, 2010). Social media platforms offer tools that allow users to manage membership (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Users maintain personal profiles and access profiles of others, hereby networking and making connections with preferred friends (Mohamed, 2011). Perceived online exclusivity encourages disinhibition (Kilvington & Price, 2017). Although overt racism has declined in public spaces, feelings of privacy, anonymity, and invisibility online has shifted expressions of racism from behind closed doors to be projected frontstage (Kilvington & Price, 2017). The potential to modify identities through digital media communication has both liberating and destructive consequences, and it poses challenges that need to be addressed (Segovia & Bailenson, 2013).

*Impression management.* Nayar (2010) remarks that cyberspace consists of reconstituted, simulated, immaterial copies of the real, and consequently, uncertainty exists about the authenticity of how users portray themselves online. In support of this, it has been argued that people present themselves tactfully in a way that is deemed context-appropriate (Wallace, 2016).

Impression management is a key factor in the presentation of the self online, to the degree that online expressions reflect more idealised versions of a user instead of an impartial and factual presentation (Khan et al., 2013). In cyberspace, this includes managing self-presentations, revealing evidence to create certain impressions, and evaluating presented cues to help form impressions of other people (Wallace, 2016). Self-presentation refers to any type of social interaction that is controlled for the purpose of influencing others' impressions. This can either be done with the objective of influencing others to receive rewards, such as positive impressions, or by establishing an image that is consistent with one's personal identity (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Self-presentation is accomplished through self-disclosure where users consciously or unconsciously reveal personal information, (e.g., thoughts, feelings, likes, dislikes) that is consistent with the image one would like to give (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For example, Wallace (2016) refers to users who market themselves and create online personas by publishing specific information publicly (i.e. photos, interests, social network participation, occupations, performances etc.).

In the absence of concrete information online, users are left to interpret the available visible cues to form impressions (Askew & Coover, 2013). Cues can have informational value, about a message source's credibility for instance, and allow individuals to form instant impressions of another's personal characteristics (Van Der Heide & Schumaker, 2013).

As users form perceptions of other users based on the cues presented, users can intentionally construct specific cues in order to gain a following online. Hence, individuals may present themselves online as either more or less prejudiced than what they factually are. These users literally 'give the wrong impression'.



Wallace (2016) adds that a profile photo, number and attractiveness of friends, and content posted on a profile by friends lead to audience impressions. Even personality can be determined through such cues. For example, extraversion can be judged by the number of friends a user has and by photos that show the profile owner with friends as opposed to alone. An important note is that online impressions can become extreme, even leading to users applying stereotypes and cognitive shortcuts (Wallace, 2016). Such assumptions may leave users with a network of online acquaintances who are perceived as sharing similar values and ideals, yet with who the user would never associate themselves with in reality. Individuals might behave contrarily to how they do in their day-to-day lives in order to align with a certain group's view and with the aim of integrating into a group. This relates to group belonging and collective behaviour which will be explored in the next chapter. Therefore, users who are typically not prejudiced towards others may be socially influenced by online acquaintances toward more discriminatory behaviour (Wallace, 2016).

*Perceived privacy.* Privacy is also associated with users' ability to control impressions and manage social contexts (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Khan et. al (2013) highlight perceptions of privacy on the Internet with regard to deindividuation, where users believe that they are unlikely to be individually identified as they are merely one individual among the multitude on the Internet. It is as though the presence of many others masks users' expressions of prejudice as messages that are more private and hidden. They point out that as one would write in a personal journal, users feel that they are private authors.

Perceived privacy on social media "mimics some of the characteristics of being backstage and users may feel hidden, protected, safe, and empowered" (Kilvington & Price, 2017, p. 4). SNSs grant more self-disclosure than content communities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In agreement, Sadleir and De Beer (2014) maintain that the Internet is promoting a culture of over-sharing as more people are using social media to document their lives.

**Opportunity aspects.** It has been alleged that the Internet “*lacks a superego that filters the monsters emerging from the lower depths*” (Simon Wiesenthal Center & Snider Social Action Institute, 2008, p. 9).

The opportunity to engage in certain online behaviour occurs through the facilitative features of the Internet and SNS environment that reduces external inhibitions, thereby making it uncomplicated for users to follow through with aversive conduct.

**Access.** The Internet is far-reaching and interactive, and therefore a particularly engaging social communication device (Malamuth et al., 2013). Cyberspace can be entered using an array of mobile digital devices, meaning that the Internet accompanies its users wherever they are and is experienced as being omnipresent (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013). To some extent, users live their lives online which has changed the balance between how offline and online lives are perceived (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013). As stated by Malamuth et al. (2013), on the Internet, aggression can conceivably become more widespread and easier to accomplish as its popular use has resulted in increased opportunities for aggression. The Internet provides extensive access and exposure to content that is not ordinarily accessible in typical social environments. As it is always ‘on’, the Internet has proven to be an excellent teaching tool for aggression as it increases the likelihood of exposure to cognitive scripts and emotions that can potentially groom users towards hostility. The Internet offers a connected network of information and resources, accessed easily through hypertext links that can lead users to wander into unsolicited dimensions of content. Users can quickly build exposure to prejudiced information where content can be pursued with greater depth and specialisation (Malamuth et al., 2013). Such exposure is problematic because even if absolute prejudiced attitudes do not exist initially, research amply supports the notion that the activation of one thought may spread to other related thoughts and feelings.

The combination of inexpensive, instantaneous global access that is generally unmonitored and difficult to avoid has drawn extremists of every kind and extended their reach (Simon

Wiesenthal Center & Snider Social Action Institute, 2008). Diomidous et al. (2016) mention that among many disconcerting issues users face on this continuously evolving platform is the exposure to propaganda and racist ideas. In terms of extreme political views, research has established a link between agreeing with extreme views online and being shown more of this extreme content (Knight, 2018). Due to systematic algorithms that are in place online, if this type of content is liked or otherwise interacted with, users may be presented with more of this kind of content. This is alarming as extremist groups' radicalisation can be increased considerably (Knight, 2018).

*Distance.* Internet users communicate in less self-monitored or regulated ways and individuals with manipulated online identities are perceived as disinhibited and less accountable for their actions (Khan et al., 2013; Segovia & Bailenson, 2013). With boundaries between service users, producers and providers distorted on the Internet, it has become ever more challenging to identify and hold an individual liable for creating discriminatory content, a company for hosting this content, or others for sharing it (Martin et al., 2013). This may be due to the remoteness of victim to perpetrator (Malamuth et al., 2013). Online users are far away from physical harm and find comfort in the supposed anonymity afforded by a username (Sadleir & De Beer, 2014). Targets are unseen, there are no consequences in terms of the victim's reactions, there is no ability for the victim to retaliate and the victim can be easily dehumanised (Malamuth et al., 2013). Sadleir and De Beer (2014) assert that "with technology as a barrier between ourselves and the rest of the world, free from having to experience human emotion, judgement and reaction, we find the liberty to be a more open and honest version of ourselves" (p. 11). When a SNS user abuses another, the target is out of sight, and victims' physical expressions are unobserved, meaning the aggressor is unaware of the harm being caused (Kilvington & Price, 2017). Wallace (2016) adds that when a victim is unable to retaliate immediately or with actual physical action, the aggressor may be further incited.

Research focusing on online aggression has centred on the sequences of written exchanges about discussion topics, beginning with disagreement and becoming more intense and often involving character attacks and foul language (i.e. flames) (Malamuth et al., 2013).

Wallace (2016) explains that when individuals are provoked by insults that target their character, competence, or physical appearance, the natural response to such real or imagined insults is to retaliate “in kind” (p. 107). Although individuals typically choose a method and severity that is perceived as comparable to the offender’s actions, others escalate the exchange to more serious, detailed arguments that deeply embed verbal aggression and thinly veiled character attacks. In online exchanges, users can over-retaliate and rather than acknowledging an overreaction and exaggerated response, they rationalise their actions and revise their interpretation of the scenario. In this case, users cling to a belief that offenders and the offending incident were worse than they were (Wallace, 2016). According to Malamuth et al. (2013) this occurs because people usually do not engage in wrongful conduct unless they have justified the rightness of their actions or disassociated themselves from the consequences of their actions. Moreover, moral disengagement takes place whereby the transgressive conduct is cognitively restructured into either a non-threatening or well-meaning act by using mechanisms of moral justification, sanitising euphemistic language, and advantageous comparison. Internet users may activate psychological restructuring processes to justify a moral construct, such as “advantageous comparison, disavowal of a sense of personal agency by diffusion or displacement of responsibility, disregarding or minimizing the injurious effects of one’s actions, attribution of blame to, and dehumanization of targets” (Malamuth et al., 2013, p. 133).

Nakagawa and Arzubiaga (2014) refer to online racial micro-aggressions that occur as everyday verbal, behavioural and environmental instances, conveying hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to a person or group of a certain race. These offences are not always intended maliciously but instead to gain status or attention that will reinforce a sense of group identification and membership. When this takes place, there are many common and well-

known strategies to avoid potential consequences of what is said. Guerin (2003) refers to misleading communications, for instance, hedges and mitigators, but also in some contexts, more strategic forms such as distancing, using abstract or general language forms, reported speech, excuses, politeness, and using ambiguity. He provides examples of each of the above where individuals try to lessen the impact of their “reprehensible statements” through (1) hedges (‘It probably was an Asian driver, perhaps’); (2) distancing (‘I’m not a racist, but...’); (3) quotation (‘I heard from someone that...’); and through (4) ‘joking’” (Guerin, 2003, p. 37).

In this section, conditions that contribute to discriminatory and aggressive behaviour on the Internet have been explored. This includes extensive social connections that can cause altered self-awareness and ultimately induce less inhibited behaviour. In addition, there are various opportunities presented to commit such behaviours on SNS platforms. Discrimination and antagonistic behaviour on the Internet have been established as a longstanding issue. An important question is: why is this still such a persistent problem? In the following section, aspects of SNS platforms that enable and sustain these negative online interactions will be discussed.

***Perpetuating factors.*** These points include features of the Internet and SNS environment which leave users vulnerable and at risk, while negative interactions remain undeterred.

***Unmonitored and unregulated content.*** In addition to the issue of legitimacy of online content circulated, is that this content is for the most part unmonitored (Malamuth et al., 2013). Although the Internet is valuable for disseminating information between users, it does not discriminate against the information it carries (Martin et al., 2013). Torrents of false information ensues unrestricted as there are poor administrative controls, editorial functions and even internal inhibitions (Simon Wiesenthal Center & Snider Social Action Institute, 2008). The decentralisation of the Internet defies regulation and as a distributed network, it is not only very difficult to monitor or censor content, but the relatively ‘democratic’ unregulated characteristics of the Internet enables content that would otherwise be strongly discouraged (Malamuth et al., 2013). SNSs seem to encourage users to upload and maintain content and almost gives users

unrestricted control over such content without interference from the providers (Marx, 2011). For example, Facebook has a tool for users to decide which ‘friends’ and acquaintances have access to view shared pictures, messages, news articles and other user activities (Stewart, 2018). This serves as one of the devices that have led users to believe that they have complete control over their content on Facebook (Stewart, 2018). Due to these offered privacy tools and settings available on some SNSs, users are under the impression that online interactions and content viewed is devoid of the social costs associated with viewing socially unapproved or deviant material (Malamuth et al., 2013). However there is a delicate balance in sharing identities and protecting privacy when users select social media tools (Kietzmann et al., 2011). It is widely accepted that, although users willingly share their identities on SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter, they are still concerned with what happens to their personal information. In an effort to protect their privacy, SNS users have developed identity strategies, such as a real or virtual identity, that link different identities to the context of the platform used (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Ethnic and racial identities on Facebook are personal, pronounced and highly detailed, though, the degree to which certain minorities freely and strongly express their identities online, leave them vulnerable to discrimination (Khan et al., 2013).

Multipurpose dominant SNSs such as Facebook has been statistically shown to have a significant effect on victimisation in relation to usage. Hence, some believe that the Internet does not produce new aggressors but rather equips those who are already aggressive offline to victimise groups in cyberspace (Malamuth et al., 2013). In addition to victimisation, compromised security of user identities and privacy can lead to a lack of accountability among users, and enable off-topic and off-colour comments (Kietzmann et al., 2011). These findings have practical implications for the SNS industry in that the onus of users’ online safety and data security should not only fall on users (Saridakis et al., 2016). Kietzmann et al. (2011) suggest that the need for filtering on social media is paramount, given the immense traffic and the amount of noise it

generates daily. Fellow Internet users are not the only implicated parties with regards to privacy issues.

Facebook's co-founder and CEO, Mark Zuckerberg has recently come under criticism due to allegations of misusing and exploiting vast amounts of private user data (Kuchler, 2018). More specifically, Facebook collects data from users, even when they are not logged onto the Facebook website or mobile device application. According to Kuchler (2018) Facebook users are tracked on the Internet for a number of reasons such as for advertisers, to inform newsfeed rankings, and for security reasons. After interrogations from the United States of America's lawmakers in Congress, users have been assured that the SNS will handle user data more securely and protect users' privacy and personal information (Kuchler, 2018).

As to the degree to which content can or should be distributed, Kietzmann et al. (2011) explain that YouTube, for example, prompts users to 'flag' inappropriate content, and employ a host of individuals who screen and remove content that is in violation of the terms of use (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Proprietary social media platforms are pressured to compromise on interests of mass participation and freedom of use for more regulated and moderated platforms (McCosker & Johns, 2014). One of the greatest challenges on the Internet is how to apply and enforce existing laws against hate speech and offensive content online (Reed, 2009). Controlling cyber hate speech is caught in between values of freedom of expression and freedom from hate and vilification (Jakubowicz, 2012). Marx (2011) stresses that expressions which merely offend portions of the community does not equate to hate speech, and a distinction should be drawn between expressions that offend, and expressions which cause or are likely to result in actual harm. Aiming to regulate misuse, state introduced cyber-safety and digital citizenship policies are pressing SNS services to remove content deemed offensive and to commit to more socially inclusive policies (McCosker & Johns, 2014). For example, Grant (2017) explains that in China, critical online posts and other forms of political speech are constrained by a 'rules consciousness,' an implicit knowledge of what sorts of statements the authorities will tolerate, that contravenes

limits of political participation and protest. This resounds with principles of digital citizenship where membership and participation in an online society is seen in relation to the Internet's potential to facilitate this and benefit society as a whole (McCosker & Johns, 2014). It is conceptualised as acts of expression, sharing and exchange that incorporates political, ethical, cultural and aesthetic qualities of a wide variety of forms of engagement (McCosker & Johns, 2014). Incidents of provocation, passionate, malicious or aggressive expression and exchange, even if interpreted as intense or aberrant misuse of SNSs, are included in digital civic participation. McCosker and Johns (2014) assert that the regulation of social media content will risk the potential for these forums to facilitate "counter- or anti-racist publics through acts that are often equally passionate and vitriolic in tone" (p. 68).

Facebook's *newsfeed* page consists of content that is assembled by an algorithm that attempt to enhance the amount of user engagement by only presenting content which is gauged as more probable to being liked and responded to (Knight, 2018). This algorithm becomes efficient at predicting preferred content as a user engages and responds more, either through engaging or ignoring (Knight, 2018). According to Knight (2018) Facebook's algorithm is also capable of detecting which users one is likely to engage with and then narrows the network to people whose worldview aligns with yours (Knight, 2018). Ultimately, an echo chamber is formed where users are exposed to pre-determined and ultimately insular connections and content (Knight, 2018).

*Legitimacy.* Technology changes the way people form interpersonal judgments of a message sender's credibility (Van Der Heide & Schumaker, 2013). The perceived legitimacy of online media content is another concept implicating the Internet in its connection to prejudice and discrimination (Khan et al., 2013).

Khan et al. (2013) explain that Internet-based mediums capitalise on the perception that information published, in most forms, is deemed legitimate. Despite a lack of evidence supporting this perception, some believe that written text is more intentional and thought-out than spoken words. This ultimately provides credibility to published thoughts and attitudes without verifying



the writers' credentials or identity. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) explain how content can be relayed among users with no significant third-party filtering, fact-checking, or editorial judgment. Moreover, 'fake news' refers to false news stories and articles, including intentionally fabricated news articles, that are intentionally and verifiably false and which misleads readers. This is problematic as many people obtain their news from social media. Popular fake news stories are more widely shared on Facebook than popular mainstream news stories, and many of those who see fake news stories report that they believe them (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Khan et. al (2013) suggest that viewing non-traditional online sources as credible, such as blogs for example, is associated with higher racial prejudice beliefs. This is perhaps true, as these sources are more likely to contain content supporting prejudiced individuals' beliefs, which in social psychology is referred to as confirmation bias, where prejudiced individuals tend to search for information that confirms pre-existing beliefs (Khan et al., 2013).

*Amplification and permanency.* Mohamed (2011) identified two characteristics that change traditional word-of-mouth exchange in the online world, namely, the availability of personal content that is uploaded online, and the rate of connecting to an unfamiliar individual. Internet users may post thoughts, feelings, or reactions that they later would rather have removed (Khan et al., 2013). The informal and instantaneous creation and delivery of internet content causes users to convey ordinarily unwelcome and explicit views (Khan et al., 2013; Kilvington & Price, 2017). A unique aspect of online discourse on SNSs are the interactions surrounding shared content that is found in emotionally charged comment streams (Nakagawa & Arzubiaga, 2014). When it comes to exchanging, distributing, and receiving online content, Wallace (2016) explains that a user can inexpensively and with remarkable speed reach myriads of others through social media, and this is especially so with regards to targeted hurtful comments that are re-posted or 're-tweeted'.

Content intended for one particular audience, even if initially sent privately, can unintentionally 'go viral', causing an explosion in audience size and obtaining millions of shares,

views, hits and comments (Nakagawa & Arzubiaga, 2014; Wallace, 2016). This often occurs in real-time and as a response to present world events (Khan et al., 2013). These responses and comments also illustrate how online content reproduces, perpetuates, and draws on broad racist stereotypes for example, in 2017 a Facebook post made by a South African, named 'Joburger' online, aimed to unite users across all races and quickly gained traction with more than 17 000 comments, and more than 13 000 shares (Nakagawa & Arzubiaga, 2014; Nkanjeni , 2017).

The reason for content being virally distributed is often obscure. Nakagawa and Arzubiaga (2014) suggest that content widely condemned as racist can perhaps reflect accepted, yet unspoken, opinions about race. Viral videos sometimes cross over into mainstream media, generating additional attention and discussion about the use of social media. Hendrickson (2013) discussed findings of research on online media statistics which determined that content on the internet diffuses according to the nature of the event (for example, content that is produced and distributed following major events that receive national news coverage). Expected events drive significant volume on social media because internet users anticipate and plan to comment, observe, mock and scrutinise. Unexpected events such as the spontaneous actions by social movements, for example, result in abrupt spikes in volume. On Twitter, these peaks may reach tens of thousands of related tweets per minute within five minutes of an event. Social data volume around unexpected events usually grows rapidly until the networks for related users are saturated with the information (Hendrickson, 2013).

Permanence of the content on the web is another aspect that provides clues about SNS users. Although social media offers features and tools for more control, or rather, perceived control, Sadleir and De Beer (2014) highlighted that content in digital format has the potential to evade ownership. Individuals who express prejudicial thoughts or material online may never be able to undo these actions, even if these views are no longer held (Khan et al., 2013). Content that is temporarily posted or later removed by the owner can be captured using multimedia materials and used to victimise someone (for example, the use of mobile devices' screenshot feature)

(Wallace, 2016). Senders with hidden identities may use written or audio-verbal messages to hurt or humiliate (Malamuth et al., 2013). Embarrassing or incriminating multimedia content can be found with ease using search tools to locate harmful images that would have faded long ago in people's memories (Wallace, 2016). One cannot predict who will view content or whether the intent and context behind it will be understood, and the label of 'racist' can haunt a user for many years (Sadleir & De Beer, 2014). Such was the case for Penny Sparrow, a South African woman who in 2016 posted a racially derogative comment on social media and as a result is still in 'hiding' (Wicks, 2017).

This chapter has revealed that the facilitative features of SNSs provide the conditions needed to express prejudice and to engage in racially discriminatory interactions. These platforms could ultimately be enabling, facilitating and perpetuating acts of racial discrimination. The next key discussion point concerns the implication of language and communication aspects that are distorted on SNSs and as a result, the context is lost as messages are littered with instances of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. This has the potential to significantly transform how online social interactions are experienced.

*Language and online communication. "Individual social media postings are ripe to be plucked from the conversation of which they form part. In doing so, all context is lost, and words and pictures have the potential to take on a whole new meaning" (Sadleir & De Beer, 2014, p.10).*

Language is another potential accomplice of online discriminatory behaviour. Language constructs our world and identities, giving our otherwise limited communications qualitative accent and depth (Bhui, 2002). Language is not merely a tool for the communication of facts between people, but rather the most prominent mechanism available to establish and advertise social identities (Lippi-Green, 2012). Social psychologists have been urged to be more cognisant of the role language plays in social behaviour (Krauss & Chiu, 2013). The point of this discussion is not to enlist linguistic anthropology and discourse analysis, but to highlight the impact of language on racial prejudice and discrimination. Inherent communicative problems and language

barriers that may be exacerbated online, in conjunction with both individual thoughts, perceptions and behaviours and features of the online environment, could serve as a formula for online malice disputes. These will be unpacked below.

Language is the primary agent for the transmission of cultural knowledge and the primary means by which one gains access to the contents of others' minds (Krauss & Chiu, 2013). Most phenomena that are considered key in social psychology has to do with language, including attitude change, social perception, personal identity, social interaction, intergroup bias and stereotyping and attribution (Krauss & Chiu, 2013). Across a range of online communication, race takes on a linguistic form (Tynes et. al, 2016). Linguistic research into online language is growing rapidly, and the actual medium is an important variable (Wallace, 2016). Language use also plays a role in upholding social identity and maintaining intergroup distinction (Krauss & Chiu, 2013). In group interaction, norms and role patterns determine communication processes. Schramm and Roberts (1971) explain that individuals value and defend the norms and beliefs of the groups they value, therefore it is only natural that when communication reaches a point of threatening group membership, the norms and roles of the group are recalled, and communication is checked against them. As a system of powerful symbols, language offers a rich repertoire of verbal terms and grammatical forms. In addition, language gives rise to a range of connotative, evaluative meanings, such that any utterance conveys to some extent acceptance or rejection, approach or avoidance (Fiedler & Schmid, 2003). Language can subtly induce beliefs and expectations in people. For example, rhetorical devices can have fairly strong influences on communication partners, as they typically go unnoticed and evade conscious control (Fiedler & Schmid, 2003).

“Language forces people to step into the shoes of their predecessors and even walk a bit in the direction they took” (Fiedler & Schmid, 2003, p.275). Language contributes to stereotype persistence, as opposed to stereotype formation, or change. This has been established in individuals who, through language use in their communications, repeat stereotypes, biases and prejudices held by preceding generations. Stereotyping not only involves attributing certain

dispositions, but also discriminates between different persons or groups. Thus, language not only serves an important function in the attribution paradigm but also in the categorisation paradigm (Fiedler & Schmid, 2003).

According to Van Dijk (2012) socially positioned text and talk is a vital social practice. Discourse is the core interface between the social and cognitive dimensions of racism. Discrimination can ensue as the dominant language in any society presents as a dominant force for the propagation of views held by the linguistically dominant group (Bhui, 2002). Hence, it becomes important to consider the complexion of communication within racial discourse. The basic function of most communication is relating people to each other or to groups (Schramm & Roberts, 1971). Within the system of racism, just like other discriminatory practices, discourse may be used to problematise, marginalise, exclude, or even limit the human rights of ethnic out-groups (Van Dijk, 2012). Guerin (2003) illustrates functions of language commonly discussed with reference to prejudicial and racist talk:

People argue for stereotypic views of others, present prejudicial and racist propaganda, explain and justify discriminatory or inequitable practices as based on facts, present views that purport to be their beliefs, and present cogent reasons and arguments as to why certain differences are genetic and cannot be changed (p.33).

This can occur either by direct discriminatory discourse in interaction with those considered racially or ethnically different, or indirectly, by writing or speaking negatively about the such individuals or groups (Van Dijk, 2012).

In communication, each participant receives and sends messages, encodes and decodes messages, then interprets them. There are many dimensions of language which are not subject to conscious or direct control and in communication the message is at some point removed from either the sender or receiver (Lippi-Green, 2012; Schramm & Roberts, 1971). Latent content may be more significant than when it is expressed, and the meaning attached to language and communication is “more than a dictionary definition; it is both cognitive and emotional,

connotative as well as denotative” (Schramm & Roberts, 1971, p.30). Meaning read into language, symbols and signs, is dependent on individual experiences with language, referents, and frames of reference by which individuals represent their account of usable experiences (Schramm & Roberts, 1971). For example, the word *race* as a construct in language, has several referents and indicates different things to different individuals and groups.

“Virtually every utterance of language reflects a choice for this utterance, and against others” (Fiedler & Schmid, 2003, p. 261). Lippi-Green (2012) explains how depending on the goal, people can choose to be polite or obtuse, to use forms of address which will flatter or insult, to use gender-neutral language or language that is inflammatory, as well as consciously use vocabulary that is easily understood or purposefully misleads.

Guerin (2003) poses different functions of language use and how these functions might result in racist or discriminatory talk. Language is used to influence people to do something, and to gain and regulate relationships. More specifically, people use language to get people to believe or say things, to keep them entertained, to have them like us, and to regulate status and reputation within groups. Schramm and Roberts (1971) pose additional objectives in communication such as to inform, teach or instruct, please or entertain, propose or persuade. Through language, people can be persuaded to believe something or to say that they believe it. According to Guerin (2003) some things are communicated as factual in order to convince people to construct things in a certain way. In persuasive communication, language can be used to incite racial violence in others, threaten punishments and exclusion, but advises not to disregard the social context and conditions for this language to have an effect. Therefore, there must be power, resources and a group in place for this type of influence to succeed. He also explains that language is used to justify current social inequalities and legitimise actions that cannot be influenced otherwise, to change community rule and laws if it cannot be refuted, and to socially construct images and impressions (Guerin, 2003).

*Context and rhetoric.* According to Cohen (2017) media are often consumed socially, yet until recently research has mostly focused on how individuals respond to media content in non-social contexts. Social contexts of media use include social experiences, particularly those linked to social status, relationships, social norms, social identity, and the social presence of mediated others. Contemporary insights illustrate the ways in which the social contexts of media use can affect how users perceive and experience media content. For example, entertainment experiences can be enhanced when co-viewers enact normative social roles (Cohen, 2017).

Language permeates social life (Krauss & Chiu, 2013). Guerin (2003) underlines the function of language in maintaining and regulating relationships and outlines a conversational model of language-use-in-social-context which emphasises conversations where statements function to maintain groups and relationships rather than purposely promote ideas. Scholars in psychology interested in discourse and conversational analyses have been criticised for not emphasising these functions enough. It has been suggested that strategies, such as keeping the listeners attention, having the listener like you or not dislike you, and regulating the status or order within the group or community, add context to how social relationships are maintained and regulated. Guerin (2003) listed relationship maintenance ‘talk’ that is referred to in many social sciences such as “ritual talk, affinity-seeking talk, social approval-seeking, phatic communication, collaborative talk, affiliation talk, solidarity talk, immediacy talk, verbal sociability, message-extrinsic communication, and cathartic talk” (p. 35). He added language that is used to distract or keep a listener’s attention such as “narrative forms of talk, repetition, ritual talk, medical misadventures, complaining, rumours, urban legends, sick jokes, gossip, talk about sex and intimate relationships, ‘mind’ games, controversy talk, and other forms of entertainment” (Guerin, 2003, p. 35)

Language use directly accompanies social context and situation, such as the style of speech, or language register, which changes depending on the chosen verbal output and recipient (Wallace, 2016). Some research suggests that individuals engage in racial discrimination in order

to receive attention (Manfred, 2012). Guerin (2003) explains that in many social contexts, being able to keep an individual's attention can result in liking, therefore there is an overlap with attention-getting talk. But more importantly, the properties of racist or prejudiced talk, like the properties of rumours and 'sick disaster jokes', are advantageous in maintaining and regulating social relationships. For instance, in many conditions, the more extreme a joke or racist statement is, the more status and group regulation can be gained. Prohibited and politically incorrect topics can have a scandalous power to them and be even more useful in terms of the social functions of language. Therefore, many racist discussions are possibly made in the context of having fun, making jokes, getting attention or status in a relationship (Guerin, 2003).

The cumulative effect of misusing attention and status gained from making 'minor' racist social comments, even in humorous conversation, might cause far more harm than a smaller number of people who are openly and hostilely racist. Ultimately, the argument as Guerin (2003) also points out, is that racist comments are not always made to persecute minority groups, or to convince a listener that views held about such minorities are correct.

*Ambiguity and miscommunication.* Different interpretations of words and the meaning attached to them may result in miscommunication and misunderstanding, which produces offense or unintentional discrimination. Lippi-Green (2012) points out that the purpose of writing systems in language, is to convey decontextualised information, yet, people expect written language to span time and space, in a social vacuum, without the aid of paralinguistic features (vocal cues) and often without any shared context. With these considerable demands of written text and photos or images, it is only foreseeable that miscommunication will occur. One of the most inherent problems with communications made over social media is the potential of online posts being misconstrued. Wallace (2016) explains that people tend to be overconfident about the clarity of the communication made online, when in fact these are often ambiguous and easily misinterpreted. For example, ambiguity in text-based communication is caused by absent non-verbal and paralinguistic cues that normally accompany and clarify a message (Wallace, 2016).



Information that is typically conveyed in traditional face-to-face contexts or even audio-only communication, such as tone and volume, as well as communicator characteristics such as age, size, gender, race/ethnicity, or physical stigma is lacking in text-based cyber interactions (Glaser & Khan, 2004). Krauss and Chiu (2013) list other coverbal behaviours which typically provide information about changes in a message sender's internal state and affect including gestures, head nods, change of posture, facial expressions, gaze and eye contact. Often aggressive and emotionally charged language is used in posts (Tynes et al., 2004). Sadleir and De Beer (2014) noted that missing tonal nuances can suddenly escalate a frivolous and off-the-cuff comment to something more threatening, offensive and even unlawful. Attempts at sarcasm fall short, creating confusion for overconfident senders and irritation for recipients (Wallace, 2016). The drive toward efficiency in online communication has prompted users to come up with innovative linguistic strategies that produce a register for online dialogue (Wallace, 2016). Misinterpretation occurs from those who employ abbreviations and shortcuts in online chatting in an attempt to adapt to the constraints of the medium.

The interpretation of a message and the intention behind it is based on one's own experiences of interactions and the unequal relationship between members of an interaction is sometimes unconscious (UW-Madison, 2009). Cultural and social differences in assumptions, interpretations, and attitudes may lead to misunderstanding and power. Different cultural conventions produce variations in manners of speaking, which can be perceived as disparities in behaviour and attitudes (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009). Differences in unwritten norms will also arise (Wallace, 2016). This can result in negative stereotyping, often reflecting ethnocentrism and discrimination by the dominant member (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009). Linguistic discrimination occurs when, for example, differences in language accent, style, conventions and conversational assumptions may lead to the perception that the other person is not listening, valuing or taking the speaker seriously. Cultural differences, time zones and language barriers can all lead to coordination problems and misunderstandings (Wallace, 2016).

*Internet rules and laws.* “Communication can be described as a game with rules, roles, and goals” (Fiedler & Schmid, 2003, p. 275). Internet rules and laws referred to here comprise of unspoken guidelines and trends in online communication that are widely recognised and commonly observed in online discussions.

*Trolling.* People who deliberately disrupt online communities by starting arguments or sow discord with deceptive, aggressive, inflammatory, insulting or vile comments are considered Internet trolls (Schwartzaug, 2008; Wallace, 2016). *Troll* is an informal term for individuals who “post inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community, such as a forum, chat room, or blog, with the primary intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or of otherwise disrupting normal on-topic discussion” (Moreau, 2016).

*Flaming.* A disagreement which gets more heated and eventually results in character attacks and foul language, a flame war (Wallace, 2016).

*Fisking.* An internet term that refers to the selection of evidence solely in order to reinforce preconceptions and prejudices (Pryce-Jones, 2003).

*Association fallacy.* In public discourse, the most common phrase associated with this fallacy is ‘guilt by association’ which describes the false notion that any relationship between two individuals implies agreement of those individuals on all things (Haber, 2016).

*Eristic argument.* Blount, Millard, and Weal (2014) found that there is an abundance of eristic arguments on the social web in which there is no clear goal and the participants are not trying to come to a resolution but are quarrelling with the aim of being seen to win, either in the eyes of their opponent or, more usually, in the eyes of the spectators.

*Poe’s law.* This refers to online parodies of extremist views that are indistinguishable from sincere expressions of extreme views, unless there are unmistakable cues that one is being ironic or sarcastic, many parodies are not only likely to be interpreted and mistaken as earnest contributions, they will, in fact, be identical to sincere expressions of the view (Aikin, 2009).

*Pommer's law.* This occurs when a person's mind is changed by reading information on the internet; often the nature of this change is from having no opinion to having a wrong opinion. Ultimately, no matter how incorrect, one well-written argument on the Internet can influence many (Jericho, 2013).

*Dunning-Kruger effect.* A form of cognitive bias in which poor performers in many social and intellectual domains seem largely unaware of just how deficient their expertise is (Dunning, 2011). Not only do they fail to recognize their incompetence, they are also likely to feel confident that they are competent.

## **Conclusion**

As an environment of mass connection and social access, the Internet has proved instrumental in creating vast social and personal opportunities. Yet problematically, it seems that it has also become a precarious tool used to convey acquired prejudices and antagonise those who are judged as racially different. In this chapter, social and psychological processes related to aggressive tendencies was discussed. It was proposed that these processes correspond with those found in discriminatory behaviour. Next, the Internet's impact on behaviour as well as user motivations and causative factors for discriminatory behaviour was explored. This included the underlying biological, social-environmental and personality aspects of behaviour. There are several features of the Internet's virtual environment and SNS platforms that create the experience of disinhibition in users. As a consequence, users conduct themselves contrarily to how they would in their real lives. The Internet's capacity to enable and facilitate discriminatory behaviour was discussed within a framework of motivational and opportunity aspects. Subsequently, factors that disseminate and ultimately perpetuate online racial discrimination were reviewed. It was emphasised how the course of communication changes on the Internet such as context and linguistic features that are usually detectable in real interactions. Finally, it was suggested that perhaps the loss of palpable verbal communication cues through reliance on impersonal multimedia is responsible for misconstrued information and misdirected hostility.

In the chapter to follow, existing theoretical insights and models that may prove useful in understanding online acts of racial prejudice and discrimination will be presented. This will facilitate the process of later establishing a new conceptualisation of these online behaviour occurrences.

## Chapter 3

### Theoretical Acknowledgements

#### Introduction

This chapter will begin by elucidating the purpose for the inclusion of extant psychological and sociological theories, specifically pertaining to the use of such theories in Grounded Theory research. Environmental or ‘nurture’ aspects of behaviour and motivation will be explored in an attempt to understand online behaviour. This will be achieved by reviewing existing theories that purport to illustrate (1) how individuals’ attitudes and beliefs are formed, (2) group dynamics and social influences, and finally, (3) collective behaviour and action. Relevant social processes in online groups and interactions will be integrated into this synopsis.

#### Theoretical Framework and Grounded Theory

*“The abundance of incidents of derogation, rejection, and hostility against outgroups across time and societies demonstrates that ample justifications must be available”* (Mummendey & Otten, p. 127).

Theoretical frameworks differ in grounded theory from traditional research, as theories are not used to deduce specific hypotheses before data-gathering (Charmaz, 2006). Existing literature is not used as a theoretical framework, but rather as data to be used by the analytic strategies of the research (Ramalho, Adams, Huggard & Hoare, 2015). At later stages of GTM research, the researcher is required to substantiate the categories and concepts extracted by taking these findings back to the literature (Bryant, 2017).

*“Give earlier works their due”* (Charmaz, 2006, p. 166). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) find that analysing data through a psychological lens and interpreting it with the applicability of extant psychological concepts and theories is helpful to clarify the understanding of research problems. This route protects researchers from myopia or psychological reductionism whereby human

behaviour or cognitive processes are over-simplified and does not identify why behaviours occur (McLeod, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

This study focused on individuals' perceptions and how participants made sense of online behaviour. The result was emerging theoretical insights that will later be compared to existing theories. The aim is to situate the data gathered against current knowledge rather than using such knowledge for developing hypotheses. Thereby, the developed theory becomes a hypothesis.

**Theoretical acknowledgements.** Distal determinants of behaviour have been discussed in terms of the role bias and prejudice plays in online behaviour, including aggressive behaviour. Nonetheless, there is a difference between the reasoning that substantiates beliefs and attitudes, and the reasoning that encourages engaging in discriminatory behaviour. It is vital to examine how individuals validate, or attribute discriminatory behaviour on SNSs.

The question can be raised: how can one account for intentional racial outgroup derogation? Perhaps to discriminate on the basis of race is something that is passed down inter-generationally. For example, Mummendey and Otten (2003) refer to 'traditional' beliefs which suggest that the actions of perpetrators of racial discrimination might be the result of traditional thinking and therefore a normalised aspect of society. From a macro-social context, people might experience threat to their group status, both economically and with respect to their values and belief systems when in situations of instability and major social change. This will be discussed shortly. Finally, in addition to situation-specific experiences, people might differ individually in terms of a generalised experience of negative inter-dependence and threat from outgroups (Mummendey & Otten, 2003). This can result in the tendency to react against these outgroups in a hostile manner. For example, personality constructs have been proposed in the previous chapter to explain individuals' variances concerning racial outgroup hostility and rejection.

In this section, there are a number of existing social-psychological, sociological, information technology, and media and communication theories included that can be used to hypothesise racial prejudice and discrimination online. With regards to the applicability of these

theories in the South African context, consideration must be taken concerning the purpose and relevance of theories developed outside of one country (i.e. Western culture) to explain phenomena from a different one (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012b). This is not an exhaustive account of existing theories although most major theories that are commonly featured in media and cyber studies are introduced.

*Macro-level theories.* According to Mummendey and Otten (2003) the unequal or negative treatment of another group does not suggest an incident of social discrimination, on the contrary, it might be recognised as ultimately functional, or as legitimised by different needs or different inputs on behalf of the differentiated groups. The following macro-level theories pertain to the context of global, institutional and societal influences on groups and individuals (Barkan, 2012).

*Functionalism.* This perspective assumes that racial and ethnic inequalities serves an important function, for instance, according to Little and McGivern (2003) the close ties of ethnic and racial membership can be seen to serve some positive functions even if they lead to the formation of ethnic and racial factions. Such close ties promote group cohesion, which can have economic and political benefits, as well as provide cultural familiarity and emotional support for individuals who may otherwise feel alienated by or discriminated against by the dominant society.

*Conflict theory.* Looking at the current growing inequalities of wealth and income, conflict theory involves social stratification and inequality between socioeconomic classes where groups of people are divided by differences in wealth and power (Little & McGivern, 2003). People endure exploitation and alienation as the capitalist and privileged middle-class maintain economic control while the working-class struggles to survive (Little & McGivern, 2003). This theory supposes that people discriminate against other racial groups due to opposing socioeconomic interests which maintain disparity. *Realistic group conflict theory* suggests that competition for access to limited resources leads to conflict between groups (Zarate, Garcia, Garza & Hitlan, 2004). As groups compete with other groups for limited resources, they learn to view the

subordinate or out-group as the competition, which leads to prejudice. The original realistic group conflict theory has been expanded to include the mere perception of conflict (Zarate et al., 2004)

Mainstream research has focused mainly on the structural manifestations of race, racism, and discrimination. However, according to Bobo and Fox (2003) the micro-social processes embedded in these structural analyses, which are essentially social psychological phenomena, are still largely unaddressed. At a micro-level of analysis, the focus is on the social dynamics of intimate, person to person interactions. Micro-level theories also concern a specific set of individuals such as conversational partners and friendship groups (Little & McGivern, 2003). Meso-level theories examine how group, intergroup and intragroup or interpersonal processes impact on behaviour and will be the focus of the next section (Blackstone, 2012).

***Individual-level theories.*** Social-psychological approaches view racial prejudice as resulting from individual psychological and cognitive processes (Quillian, 1995). These individual-level theories assert that prejudiced attitudes, stereotypes and beliefs are formed through socialisation and what individuals are exposed to and therefore forms part of one's identity. It can also be applied as a rationale to behaviour that is acquired through learning.

***Social constructivism.*** Closely associated with other contemporary theories such as Social Cognitive Theory, social constructivism is a theory of learning and knowledge acquisition. According to Kim (2010) social constructivism emphasises the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge. Social constructivists suppose reality as constructed through human activity and social invention. Similarly, knowledge is a human product which is socially and culturally constructed and whereby meaning is created through interactions. Learning as a social process takes place within the self, whilst behaviours are simultaneously shaped by external forces. Social constructivism accepts that knowledge, meaning, and understanding of the world can be addressed from both personal and collective perspectives (Kim, 2010). People are part of the constructed environment, including social relationships, and



the environment in part constitutes an individual. Therefore, if the environment and social relationships among group members change, the tasks of each individual also change.

*Symbolic interactionism.* This theory claims that facts are based on and directed by symbols (Aksan, Kısac, Aydın & Demirbuken, 2009). Symbolic interaction observes meaning as emerging from the reciprocal interaction of individuals in the social environment with other individuals and focuses on which symbols and meanings emerge from the interaction between people (Aksan et al., 2009). It asserts that race and ethnicity provide powerful sources of identity and that symbols of race, not race itself, are what lead to racism (Little & McGivern, 2003). Bearing this in mind, representations of racial inequality and oppression online may influence racial commentary and debate. According to Robinson (2007) behaviour is a result of ‘socialised’ online selves, the self is the product of interaction and therefore, the self-concept is constructed from others’ views of us. Symbolic interactionism assumes that in creating online identities, users do not seek to transcend most aspects of their offline selves. Rather, users bring into being bodies, personas and personalities framed according to the same categories that exist in the offline world.

*Social learning theory.* The premise here is that social situations represent an opportunity for learning and that behaviour occurs through both direct experiential learning and observational learning. The traditional theory examines additional aspects of learning behaviours, through modelling, imitation, classical conditioning and reinforcement (Bandura, 1971). According to Allen and Anderson (2017), social learning theory serves as an appropriate explanation for the acquisition and performance of aggressive behaviours. It accepts that an individual, particularly during early development, is likely to behave aggressively if they have previously observed another person being rewarded for that same aggressive act. Social learning does not merely involve learning by imitating another, but also involves forming cognitive inferences about what is observed which can lead to changes in the beliefs and expectations that guide future social behaviour (Allen & Anderson, 2017).

*Self-interest theory.* Fein and Spencer (1997) highlight how individuals' self-concepts are defined and refined by the people around them. Many manifestations of prejudice stem, in part, from the motivation to maintain a feeling of self-worth and self-integrity. Hence, a perceived threat to one's self-image may lead people to engage in prejudiced evaluations of others (Fein & Spencer, 1997). Correspondingly, self-interest theory postulates that individuals develop negative affects and rigid stereotypes toward individuals with whom they are in competition and conflict. This occurs because individuals are seen to develop prejudices that further their own self-interest (Quillian, 1995).

*Social cognitive theory.* Social cognitive theory (SCT) stemmed from social learning theory (Al-Qeisi, 2009). SCT posits that there exists reciprocal causation among individuals, their behaviour, and their environment. Behaviour as an observable act is largely determined by the expected outcomes of behaviour, which are formed by direct experience or mediated by vicarious reinforcement observed through others (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). It is argued that a person's behaviour is mediated between stimulus and response that is partially shaped and controlled by the influences of social network (i.e., social systems) and the person's cognition (e.g., expectations, beliefs etc.) (Chiu, Hsu & Wang, 2006). Basic tenets of this theory emphasise learning through the effects of one's actions. The explanation mechanism contains the connection between a stimulus and a response and through reward and punishment systems (Al-Qeisi, 2009). Core to SCT theory is self-efficacy where one judges one's own ability to organise and execute a certain behaviour, and outcome expectations, which is an evaluation of the expected consequence a behaviour will yield (Chiu et al., 2006).

*Rational choice theory.* The crux of this theory is that individuals act to maximise perceived advantages in a given situation and likewise, to reduce disadvantages. If they decide that benefits outweigh disadvantages, they will initiate the interaction or continue it if it is already under way (Barkan, 2012). Mason (1984) outlined the basis of rational choice theory in his research paper on collective racial violence. According to this theory, racial discrimination is a result of an

individual's decision whether or not to engage in such socially unaccepted behaviour. In weighing up this decision the individual evaluates the risk of harm as well as apprehension for liability, with all of the associated costs (Mason, 1984).

*Racial formation theory.* Racial formation is the social process through which the meaning of race and racial categories are established (Cole, 2015). It looks at how social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and how they are in turn shaped by racial meanings (Omi & Winant, 1994). The theory focuses on how racial categories are represented and given meaning in imagery, media, language, ideas and everyday common sense (Cole, 2015). As a result, a *culture of prejudice* refers to prejudice that is embedded in one's culture (Little & McGivern, 2003). It explains that individuals are socialised with images of stereotypes and casual expressions of racism and prejudice. Due to both social influences and media, individuals are continuously exposed to racism and therefore it becomes difficult to distinguish between these influences and the individual's own thought processes (Little & McGivern, 2003).

*Frustration–aggression theory.* The original formulation of this theory characterises aggressive behaviour as a product of the experience of frustration and that frustration always results in some form of aggression (Breuer & Elson, 2017). This hypothesis defines frustration as an event, rather than an affective state. As highlighted in Chapter 2's literature review, online experiences of frustration can be anticipated to bring out an aggressive response in users.

*General aggression model.* Emerging from aspects of social cognitive and social learning theories, this model considers the role of social, cognitive, personality, developmental and biological factors on aggression. Allen and Anderson (2017) detail that proximate processes of the model explain how personal and contextual factors influence cognitions, feelings, and arousal, which successively affect appraisal and decision processes, which then influences aggressive or non-aggressive behavioural outcomes. Each cycle of these processes serves as a learning trial that affects the development and accessibility of aggressive knowledge structures (Allen & Anderson,

2017). Therefore, the learning that takes place is influenced by the interaction of a person (for example, attitudes, goals, emotions, traits) and situational variables, such as the use of the Internet. These learning encounters influence both the subsequent internal state of the person (their arousal, emotions and cognitions) and their appraisal of the environment and thus subsequent decisions and behaviour (Malamuth et al., 2013).

***Group-level theories.*** In this final section, social processes will be outlined in terms of social groupings, their significance, and how such alliances guide patterns of relations between different groups. This includes the labelling and social learning of group categories, beliefs, and related activities. Moreover, these elements are expressed through interactions and behaviour that emerge from, reinforce, reorganise, or come to transform social categorisations (Bobo & Fox, 2003). These are considered proximal factors in influencing online activities and behaviour as they are more directly related to initiating discriminatory behaviour as opposed to the stereotypical beliefs and prejudiced attitudes that supplements it.

It has been asserted that all human interactions are social in one way or another (Guerin, 2003). Therefore, the fundamental importance of social relationships, social networks and communities in people's lives is key to understanding online interactions (Guerin, 2003). Group membership improves self-esteem and feelings of validation through broadening the variety of groups to which one belongs (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013). The Internet is a primary vehicle used by many to connect to their core group members who they relate to based on main identity categorisation, such as nationality or religion (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013). For example, Grant (2017) found that social media allows perceived discrimination and harassment to be represented, distributed and debated upon online within cyber-communities. Malamuth et al. (2013) explains that personal identity can be fostered online by identifying with others and through social support received from others with whom you share interests on the Internet. This is made possible by the Internet's highly sheltered and uninterrupted environment which allows users to easily locate details of the different specialised groups and those who share views on

various topics (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013). Regardless of actual interactions taking place, the Internet can, through group membership in social networks, for example, create the impression that others share the same interests (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013; Malamuth et al., 2013).

Although the Internet facilitates connections between like-minded individuals, the immense variety of identities and interests found online leads users to explore other, less dominant aspects of personality and interests (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013). Access to multitudes of images and ideas related to the sought content fosters the impression of social backing and exposure to such content can have potentially disinhibiting effects (Malamuth et al., 2013). It is therefore conceivable that online environments, which change individuals' own behaviour and self-perceptions, can impact the formation of attitudes and conduct offline (Van Der Heide & Schumaker, 2013).

Another element that seems to make group decisions more extreme than their individual counterparts is social comparison (Wallace, 2016). Social connections experienced online significantly influence online behaviour. Van Der Heide and Schumaker (2013) explain that these connections sway users to conduct themselves in a manner that is attitudinally aligned towards achieving relational goals. However, this predisposes users to inadvertently change their own attitudes in the process. On group dynamics, Wallace (2016) explains that individuals comply either to avoid rejection or earn the group's praise, however, this sort of conformity is termed compliance as it does not implicate beliefs or attitudes. Attributable to group belonging, people conform to identify with a group and feel similar to its members. Generally, individuals demonstrate little to no conformity when responses are privately submitted rather than speaking, or typing it publicly. Online, people reveal personal information and disclose intimate details because, as Wallace (2016) explains, users are unable to compare their opinions to others or exhibit their own tendency to conform to the group norm when others' thoughts are unknown. People also conform as they rely on others for information to guide their behaviour, especially in

ambiguous or confusing situations. Group cohesion is maintained by its members and a group member will either subtly or abrasively, publicly or with a private message, remind other participants about unacceptable group behaviour. Reproaches for violating group norms online can range from mild corrections to a malicious attack on the transgressor. Therefore, group dynamics online can lead to aggression and the formation of subgroups. Adopting an 'us' versus 'them' dynamic is another concerning aspect of virtual network groups (Wallace, 2016). Specific theories relating to group collective behaviour will be discussed in the following section.

*Social identity theory (SIT)*. In the classic social psychological view, both SIT and SCT are 'cognitive' as they assume that understanding how individuals perceive, define and make sense of the world and themselves will explain and predict behaviour (Turner & Reynolds, 2003).

As mentioned earlier, individuals seek to identify with online groups and define themselves by social identities. The central premise of social identity theory is that the in-group will discriminate against and search for negative aspects of an outgroup in order to enhance the ingroup self-image (McLeod, 2008). Therefore, individuals within social groups, through belonging and solidarity, aim to achieve positive self-esteem and self-enhancement through ingroup favouritism and discrimination of outgroups (Treppe, 2006). Perhaps online discrimination occurs as a by-product of negligible ingroup bias. Mummendey and Otten (2003) refer to this as 'mindless ingroup favouritism'.

The Internet is more than a tool for extremism and confrontational action. Over a decade ago, Brunsting and Postmes (2002) predicted a rise in the number of online actions that are not primarily confrontational but rather persuasive or pressurising. Gino, Ayal, and Ariely (2009) refer to different ways in which a person's behaviour can change from observing others' underhanded behaviour. Within the context of online interactions, such a dynamic could impact upon countless individuals' cyber-activities. When witnessing unethical or deviant types of behaviour, individuals may change their own estimate of the probability of being caught for this behaviour. In terms of moral disengagement or cognitive dissonance that occurs, Gino et al.

(2009) debates the differentiation in perceived ethicality at the time one is considering a particular behaviour. Categorising a particular behaviour is not straightforward and people often categorise their own actions in positive terms, avoiding negative updating of their moral self-image.

Observing others' unjust behaviours also potentially changes one's understanding of the social norms related to the unethical behaviour. This is dependent on the degree to which the individual identifies with others, hence, when the identification is strong, the behaviour of others will have a greater effect on the observers' norms (Gino et al., 2009).

According to Van Der Heide and Schumaker (2013) factors such as source, message and medium credibility can affect how influential a message is on the Internet. Users can determine the strength of a persuasive message, as well as the credibility of the message's sender, for example, through the expertise and status of the source or message sender. This is significant because the Internet is used as a resource for many important contexts.

Internet users make use of cognitive heuristics, meaning they use mental 'shortcuts' to make adaptive choices which also shortens decision-making time (Ho & Bodoff, 2003; Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). A type of information that is of heuristic value to message recipients is self-disclosure behaviours, for example, people make decisions based on the popularity "what is popular is good" heuristic (Askew & Covert, 2013; Van Der Heide & Schumaker, 2013). This is in line with research that has demonstrated a correlation between users who were perceived as influential in a social network and their size, density and central position in the network (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Some researchers have maintained that the characteristics of an influential user (such as credibility and status) should have no effect on the persuasiveness of a message as interpersonal heuristic cues cannot be readily transmitted through online communication. However, others have emphasised that heuristic message processing occurs online where individuals focus on information that allows for efficient judgements and consequent decisions (Van Der Heide & Schumaker, 2013). This will be discussed below.

*Social information processing theory (SIP)*. Social interactions are increasingly technologically mediated (Biocca, Harms & Burgoon, 2003). This theory is based on principles in cognition and interpersonal relationship development which assumes that those who engage in online communication are driven to form social relationships through impressions gained from textually conveyed information (Walther, 1996). SIP argues that interpersonal information can accumulate when people interact using text-based communication media and that impressions can form when individuals have enough time to interact and anticipate future interactions with their communication partner (Van Der Heide & Schumaker, 2013).

*Social presence theory*. This theory focuses on technologically-mediated social interactions and the social cues that are successfully conveyed in online content (Biocca, Harms & Burgoon, 2003). Social presence is determined by digital representations of bodily cues which users depend on to determine psychological states of others (Biocca et al., 2008; Kehrwald, 2008). Thus, technology mediates, either successfully or ineffectively, those social cues typically found in physical world interactions. As a result of low social presence, users may perceive others as ‘less human’ and therefore feel disinhibited in terms of their actions towards others. This may explain the incidence of racially hostile behaviours found online.

Media richness theory as well as dual-processing models of persuasion such as the Heuristic-systematic and Elaboration-likelihood models, have been suggested by scholars to account for how Internet users process and respond to social information online in terms of opinion change and persuasion (Balaji & Chakrabarti, 2010; Biocca et al., 2003; Eid & Al-Jabri, 2016; Heatherington & Coyne, 2014; Ho & Bodoff, 2014; Kehrwald, 2008; Saat & Selamat, 2014; Van Der Heide & Schumaker, 2013; Xu, 2017). However, the details of these models will not be elaborated upon in this chapter as they are not believed pertinent to the purpose of this chapter.

*Social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE)*. A classical paradox concerning the Internet is that “a socially isolating medium can reinforce social unity” (Brunsting & Postmes,



2002, p. 528). SIDE is observed when users' anonymity results in deindividuation and therefore increases the level of an individual's conformity to their social identity as opposed to their individual identity.

Internet users depend on technological representations of bodily cues (such as facial expressions and gestures) (Biocca et al., 2008; Kehrwald, 2008). SIDE infers that there is a lack of individuating cues in online interactions that normally distinguish and define people. According to Kim and Park (2011), with little non-verbal information available for users to make sense of each other, how users define themselves online through group membership becomes more significant, as well as acceptance of group norms. When such individuating cue-limited interactions occur online, any presented cues can be magnified as a principal characteristic of a person. Therefore, information such as a user's race or gender will be centred upon as a heuristic and individuals may respond to another user based upon assumptions and stereotypes about certain race or gender groups. When social identity and group membership are increasingly stressed above individual differences, depersonalisation and deindividuation occurs (Kim & Park, 2011).

In a sense, SIDE involves aspects of both SIT and SIP (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002). Due to the lack of individuating cues in the online environment, users may resort to stereotyping and making assumptions about others. Resulting from prominent social and group identification with a particular racial group. For example, users may 'gang up' and senselessly discriminate against another user as there are a lack of identifying cues to categorise a user by.

It has been determined that technology and online communication can have a profound impact on social identity and user behaviour. Online group dynamics have been discussed in terms of group identity, persuasion and influence. The next matter discussed considers how group immersion gives rise to collective action against perceived racial out-groups.

*Collective behaviour and action.* “Existing social psychological perspectives tend to overlook the fact that public expressions of racial, ethnic or national prejudice normally constitute collaborative accomplishments, the product of joint action between a number of individuals” (Condor, 2006, p.1).

Research continues to explore the benefits and the tribulations that online social and communication media brings to group discussions (Amichai-Burger, 2013). There is evidence that a very strong sense of group cohesion— of ‘groupness’ does emerge regularly (Wallace, 2016). Collective behaviour is relatively spontaneous and unstructured behaviour by large numbers of individuals acting with or being influenced by other individuals (Barkan, 2012). These behaviours are socially influenced within, between and against groups.

*Value-added theory.* The premise of value-added theory is that behaviour results from accumulated tension when conditions exist such as structural strain which refers to societal issues that cause individuals to be angry and frustrated; *generalised beliefs* are individuals reasoning for why conditions are experienced unfavourably, *precipitating factors* or sudden events such as racist posts on social media then initiate the collective behaviour (Barkan, 2012). The final condition is a *lack of social control* where collective behaviour is more likely to occur if potential participants do not expect to deal with negative consequences for that behaviour (Barkan, 2012). This is a likely scenario on SNSs as it has been suggested that online, users are able to evade accountability and distance themselves from the consequences of their actions.

*Social facilitation.* This theory suggests that individuals behave differently when there is someone else observing or in close proximity to them than when isolated. It has been found that the presence of another person can facilitate or inhibit task performance (S.J. Park, 2006). Social facilitation is generally seen as inducing performance enhancement on a simple or well-learned task, and performance impairment on a complex or novel task. Park (2006) revealed that virtual humans do produce the social facilitation effect online, which is important as the presence of masses online may cause individuals to behave contrarily to how they conduct themselves in real

life. Social facilitation studies also regard the role of the perceived mediator or authority figure in monitoring and regulating online activities. For example, Tynes et al. (2004) found that when chatroom users are aware of an authority figure who can enforce rules and that there are consequences for their actions, they change the nature of their communication. This suggests that it may be the presence or absence of particular social actors within social networks that delimits behaviour.

*Group polarisation.* Research in social psychology suggests that the phenomenon of group polarisation may be partly responsible for the extremism so often observed on the Internet (Wallace, 2016). Group polarisation illustrates how individuals move toward a more extreme point in the direction to which the group's members were originally inclined (Sunstein, 2001). It suggests that when individuals, who already share similar opinions and attitudes as pre-existing tendencies, engage in discussion with each other, their ideas will remain the same, however, more enhanced and extreme as a result of their ingroup interactions (Sunstein, 2001; Wallace, 2016). Consequently, witnessing discriminatory remarks online may perhaps impact on the user's own attitudes and beliefs, ultimately escalating racially prejudiced attitudes and online commentary. Wallace (2016) adds that on the Internet, people may seek out the opinion of those considered like-minded rather exposing themselves to divergent viewpoints. *Risky shift* can occur when discussing an issue, where the inclinations of individuals within a group are intensified toward one of the extremes, pulling the group toward one of the poles (Wallace, 2016).

Research has found that Internet chatrooms can encourage *groupthink* within cohesive groups which increase the likelihood of agreement among participants. This process could encourage users to agree with and express cultural ideologies and prejudicial beliefs (Khan et al., 2013).

*Contagion theory.* Guadagno, Rempala, Murphy, and Okdie (2013) affirm that contagion involves the rapid spread of influential information among people. This theory is mentioned as the rapidity with which people can spread information online enhances contagion. Emotional

contagion, the transfer of emotion between individuals, can influence group dynamics through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotional states and behavioural attitudes (Barsade, 2002). It occurs through a quick, fleeting process of automatic, continuous, synchronous nonverbal mimicry and feedback (Barsade, 2002). When one is embedded within an existing network of likeminded individuals (e.g., online political organisations) this contagion can spur appropriate behavioural responses by a mass of people (Guadagno et al., 2013).

*Collective narcissism.* Although not necessarily alluding to an individual's personality structure, collective narcissism occurs in group contexts as a belief in the exaggerated greatness of one's own group and expectation of receiving validation (Golec de Zavala, Peker, Guerra & Baran, 2016). Previous research has shown that collective narcissism, unlike positive in-group identification, is linked to retaliatory vicarious intergroup hostility after an in-group is overtly criticised or has undermined those outside of the group (Golec de Zavala et al., 2016). This response online is conceivable (as discussed earlier) and defensive over-retaliation can occur when provoked or if group membership or even norms are threatened.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to familiarise the reader with current literature and theoretical developments pertaining to Internet behaviour, particularly aggressive and/or discriminatory behaviour. Major macro-level theories in the social sciences were introduced, followed by meso- or mid-level theories pertaining to individual attitudes and belief formation, group dynamics, persuasion and social influence, and finally, collective behaviour and action. These extant theories will be drawn upon in later chapters and will be compared with the research findings. The next chapter provides an overview of the methodological design that underpinned the current study.

## Chapter 4

### Research Methodology

#### Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of the aims of the study, followed by an outline of the methodology and research design that was used in this research. A discussion of the study design is included, drawing on constructivist grounded theory methods to gather, analyse and synthesise data. A detailed description of the research design and the assumptions upon which this choice is based is provided, explicating the interpretative paradigm applied in this study. The following section provides information relating to the participants, sampling procedure and recruitment strategies, and the research procedure utilised in this study. Data collection tools are described, and the technique of data analysis and verification that were executed are included and discussed. A discussion of the research procedure used is presented. Lastly, ethical considerations that governed this research study are outlined.

#### Primary Aims of the Research

Grounded theory method (GTM) is aimed at discovery as opposed to construction (Willig, 2013). According to Bryant (2017), GTM does not involve a clear and precise research question as there is no need for any deductive hypotheses or a preliminary starting point. GTM research should be approached with an open mind, raising generic questions as the data is examined. Gradually, the aim is to develop increasingly powerful abstractions that can encapsulate significant aspects of the detailed data. Bryant (2017) suggests forming a series of generic questions that guide the data collection process.

The above being said, the primary aim of the research was to explore and describe the subjective experiences of racial prejudice discrimination on SNSs by the research participants. This included the participants' perceptions about other users' behaviour and SNSs role in facilitating racial prejudice discrimination. In examining individuals' online activities and

behaviour, transcendental phenomenology traditionally posits that perceptions can be comparatively infused with ideas and judgements (Willig, 2013). This was considered key in exploring the origin of racially prejudiced and discriminating content online.

The following set of questions guided the exploration process:

- How do individuals generally understand and define the various concepts of race, prejudice, racism and racial discrimination?
- How do individuals' experience negative racial comments that are found on SNSs, in relation to their use of these platforms?
- How do individuals view SNS users' rationale or motivation for posting racially prejudiced, stereotypical, discriminating or other offensive content on these platforms?
- How do individuals process and responded to such content on SNS forums?
- How are SNSs perceived in terms of their impact on racial prejudice and discrimination?

Ultimately, the secondary goal of the present study was to discern whether racially prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour that occur on SNSs are explicable in terms of existing theories within the social and behavioural sciences, as well as media and communication studies, or, whether this phenomena necessitates new explanatory theory.

### **Research Design**

This research was structured within a qualitative research design. Qualitative research exercises thorough analysis of complex social structures and makes use of interpretive approaches to reconstruct meaning from individuals' subjective statements (Peters, 2014). Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2016) posit that the focus of qualitative research is on how individuals think and act in their everyday lives. Added, is the exploration of meaning individuals attach to things, and in turn, the overall meaningfulness of the research.

In qualitative research, settings and people are viewed holistically, thus individuals, settings, or groups are not reduced to variables. The belief is that all perspectives are worthy of

study and that there is something to be learned in all settings and groups. Finally, they refer to qualitative research as an inductive craft (Taylor et al., 2016).

**Paradigm.** In a research context, the term *paradigm* describes a system of ideas or a world view used by researchers to create knowledge (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). The researcher's epistemological (what and how can one know reality and knowledge?), ontological (what is the form and nature of reality?) and methodological (how does one go about acquiring knowledge?) stance to the research was from the constructivist-interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Guba, 1990; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). According to Chilisa and Kawulich (2012) constructivism and interpretivism are related concepts that both address understanding the world as others experience it. Thus, the constructivist/interpretive researcher tends to rely upon the participants' views of the situation being studied (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

An interpretive perspective involves the connections and relationships a person sees between particular events, phenomena, and beliefs (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005). The underpinning assumptions of the interpretive paradigm, according to Nieuwenhuis (2015) is that social life is a distinctively human product, and multiple social realities exist due to varying human experience. Thus, the human mind is the source or origin of meaning, where common sense provides insight into social realities. Naturalistic interpretive inquiry concerns the discovery of how people make sense of their social worlds as human life can be understood only from within. Lastly, human behaviour is context bound and variable, affected by knowledge of the social world. Therefore, the social world does not 'exist' independently of human knowledge (Nieuwenhuis, 2015). Goulding (1998) explains that despite the numerous misconceptions regarding the philosophical underpinning and application of grounded theory, the method owes much to the interpretivist movement. The constructivist-interpretive paradigm determines that multiple socially constructed realities exist, therefore, reality needs to be interpreted (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Crotty, 1998).

According to Bartholow and Dickter (2007) “person perception research has a deep and important history in social psychology, involving important topics such as stereotyping, causal attribution, impression formation” and others (p. 379). In looking at perceptions, human thought and mental operations underlying social behaviour, this study considers a conceptual model of human thought that involves input (perception), information processing (cognition), and output (behaviour) (Bartholow & Dickter, 2007). The general framework of this study sought to explore and describe phenomena perceived and experienced by its participants, which is the main purpose of constructivist-interpretive research, aiming to understand and describe human nature (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). Human experiences are understood through descriptions provided by the individuals involved in the research, called *lived experiences* (Nieswiadomy, 2012).

The philosophical underpinnings of the constructivist-interpretive paradigm are informed mainly by hermeneutics and phenomenology (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). Although there are trivial differences between phenomenology and grounded theory in that grounded theory allows for multiple data sources, whereas with phenomenological studies, the words of the informants are often considered the only valid source of data. Moreover, phenomenological findings are generally contextualised within existential frameworks, while in grounded theory, the developing theory directs the researcher to the literature which best informs, explains and contextualises the findings (Goulding, 1998).

Phenomenological research is concerned with producing ‘thick’ descriptions of subjective accounts and interpretations of participants’ experiences and perspectives within their natural settings (Gray, 2014). Aspects of phenomenological research that were applicable to this study was that such research involves the quality and texture of experience, capturing participants’ feelings, thoughts and perceptions which constitute their experience (Willig, 2013). Interpretative phenomenology aims to gain a better understanding of the nature and quality of phenomena as they present themselves. However, this form of phenomenology does not separate description and



interpretation, but rather relies on insights from the hermeneutic tradition, arguing that all description constitutes a form of interpretation.

**Method.** The methodological stable of this study employed the grounded theory method (GTM). GTM involves systematic and flexible guidelines for collecting and analysing qualitative data in order to form theories that are 'grounded' in data (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory aims to develop new, context-specific theories through discovery as opposed to construction (Willig, 2013). The constant comparative method of GTM is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting (but not provisionally testing) many categories, properties, and hypotheses about general problems (Bryant, 2017). Therefore, GTM is considered inductive research. The underlying principle of this method is to generate new theory from data, as opposed to testing existing theory (Birks & Mills, 2015). The hypotheses are instead the emerging outcome of the research analysis (Bryant, 2017; Thomas, 2006). The presentation of grounded theory research findings should contain a description of theory that includes core themes (Thomas, 2006). Bryant (2017) cites Charmaz (2006) who explained that theory is newly constructed rather than providing a description or application of current theories. An opportunity is presented to develop higher levels of theories and insights by processing and studying data in this manner (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012a). Substantive and formal theories are distinguished by the area of sociological study, such as substantive or empirical, or the latter being formal or conceptual (Bryant, 2017). In essence, the present study was designed to establish a substantive theoretical interpretation of an issue in a particular area rather than a formal grounded theory of a generic process that pertains to all groups. That is, the results of the analysis primarily offer rich, theoretical insight into the online behaviour of SNS users, and while these findings may be relevant to other areas of group study, this is not guaranteed in the analysis (McNamee, Peterson & Peña, 2010).

GTM presents a research process that involves identifying, refining and integrating categories of themes in order to make sense of the data (Willig, 2013). It finally provides an explanatory framework which may facilitate the understanding of particular phenomena (Willig,

2013). The exploratory design of the present study was iterative which implies that data collection and research questions are adjusted according to what was learned (Mack et al., 2005). Upon each series of new data that was gathered, the suitability of new concepts to the emerging theory were determined. Thereby, the research ‘problem’ was formed and eventually refined by the data as it was arranged through the discovery of new categories and concepts. This will be expounded upon further later in this chapter.

Grounded theory initially identifies the phenomenon to be studied, thereafter the research question becomes progressively focused throughout the research process (Willig, 2013). It allows the researcher to expand or revise existing theory, as exemplified in the present study, which planned to explore and describe a trend that can either be explained by existing sociological and psychological theories or that may necessitate a new explanatory theory. In GTM the researcher generates an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, a theory, that explains some action, interaction, or process (McCaslin & Scott, 2003).

According to McNamee, Peterson, and Peña (2010) grounded theorists arrive at discovery that is informed by prevailing theories and literature, as outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, but is primarily anchored in the data itself. This method may also be applied to examine how individuals or groups explain their statements and actions (Charmaz, 2006). GTM concerns analysis as an interpreter of a scene and not as an authority that defines it (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The present study reflects a grounded theory perspective which considers “issues such as those shaping the research process, the roles, social locations, perspectives of the researcher, the production of data, and the dialectical relations between sensitizing concepts and induction” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p.50). Charmaz (2014, p. 15) summarises the fundamental principles of GTM, stating that grounded theorists: (1) Conduct data collection and analysis simultaneously in an iterative process; (2) Analyse actions and processes rather than themes and structure; (3) Use comparative methods; (4) Draw on data (such as narratives and descriptions) in service of developing new conceptual categories; (5) Develop inductive abstract analytic categories through

systematic data analysis; (6) Emphasise theory construction rather than description or application of current theories; (7) Engage in theoretical sampling; (8) Search for variation in the studied categories or process; and (9) Pursue developing a category rather than covering a specific empirical topic.

The present study was designed to establish an applicable and coherent theoretical interpretation of the participants' experiences and perceptions of online racial prejudice and discrimination and was viewed in the context of the sample and population. The goal was to produce an in-depth examination and description of certain phenomena, rather than to generate a theory to be generalised for the entire population (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012a).

### **Participants and Sampling**

Non-probability, purposive sampling was employed to recruit research participants. With the research aim in mind, this began from sampling in order of those participants who first responded to the researcher's recruitment request. The Nelson Mandela University student population was easily accessible to the researcher and the sample of students were selected through the use of screening criteria.

Participants were chosen according to certain pre-selected criteria which were most relevant to the study. This was determined through a participant information form and questionnaire (Appendix E). The specific criteria included age, subscription to- and frequency of use of social networking websites. Pumper, Yaeger and Moreno (2013) noted that young adults make up the highest percentage of SNS users. Other research concurs that social networking internet sites are extensively used by young adolescents and adults (Diomidous et al., 2016). A comprehensive study of digital, social and mobile usage around the world revealed that the 20-29 year range were the dominant age group of Facebook users in South Africa, followed by the 30-39 year age group (Kemp, 2016). It is well established that Facebook is the most popular social network in South Africa, therefore the age group of this study was chosen to be 18 – 35 years (Snyman, 2016). A 2011 study revealed that Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University students typically accessed

SNSs more than five times a day, while a large percentage indicated that they logged in once a day (Mohamed, 2011). The average daily use of social media via any device among South Africans is 2 hours and 43 minutes (Kemp, 2016). However, the sampling criteria applied in this study was one or more hours of SNS use per day in order to broaden the scope of inclusion.

Participants was selected to participate in the study according to the following criteria:

- Currently a registered student at the Nelson Mandela University,
- Between the ages of 18-35,
- Able to fluently speak and understand English,
- Currently subscribed to two or more social networking websites,
- Spending one hour or more per day engaging on these websites.

It was also essential that participants were willing to openly discuss and provide detailed accounts of their online social activities and experiences. Participants were asked to complete a biographical form, including details regarding personal and social history. This facilitated a holistic interpretation of the data gathered and which allowed for a fuller and richer description of the participants and their perceptions within their individual contexts. According to Charmaz (2014) rich data includes that which reveals participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions, as well as the contexts and structures of their lives.

Theoretical sampling refers to “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.45). This sampling technique was applied and data was collected according to provisional themes that emerge from initial data collection (Bryant, 2017; Willig, 2013).

This sampling method involves verifying emerging theoretical insights against existing ones by sampling incidents that may challenge or elaborate developing evidence (Willig, 2013). Purposive sample sizes are determined on the basis of theoretical saturation, where new data analysis returns codes that only fit in existing categories (Birks & Mills, 2015; Mack et al., 2005).

The final sample size was determined on the basis of theoretical saturation where no new categories in the data can be identified (Mack et al., 2005). As in the case of this study, purposive sampling is most successful when data review and analysis are done in conjunction with data collection (Mack et al., 2005). Hence, this was an appropriate sampling approach for GTM.

### **Research Procedure**

To conduct the study, the researcher obtained the required permission from the Nelson Mandela University's Faculty Post Graduate Studies Committee (FPGSC), the University's Research Ethics Committee (Appendix A) as well as the University's Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement (Appendix B). After approval was granted, the researcher commenced with the preliminary phase of producing data collection tools within the survey research approach (Bryant, 2017). This included a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix F) that closely articulated with the research aims and guiding questions, and which consisted of focused open-ended questions, as well as additional probing questions. This method is considered by Mack et al. (2005) as an appropriately flexible and iterative style of eliciting and categorising responses to questions in in-depth interviews. The other instrument used for data collection was a participant information form (Appendix E) that provided information about the participants' personal, social and family history. This form also included a brief questionnaire regarding various definitions and concepts such as race, racism, racial prejudice and discrimination.

After completion of the interview schedule and participant information form and questionnaire, the researcher sent emails to all registered Nelson Mandela University students via the University's #MEMO email communication database. The email comprised of the information letter (Appendix C), which provided information about the study as well as details regarding participation, and requested potential participants to respond to the researcher upon interest to partake in the study. After making contact with potential candidates via email, the researcher selected the first eight participants who responded positively to the email and who met the inclusion criteria.

The researcher arranged to meet with each participant individually, which took place in an office within the Nelson Mandela University Psychology Department. This venue was deemed appropriate as it was accessible to the participant and the location ensured a discreet and confidential space. During this meeting, the researcher described the research context and aims, including ethical considerations and other applicable information about the research. The participants were also informed about the nature of the research and were assured that they could withdraw from the participation process at any given point. The researcher asked for each participant's permission to digitally record their responses during their interview session. Following this, written and informed consent (Appendix D) was acquired and any remaining questions and concerns were answered and clarified. The participants were notified that in order to maintain the objective integrity of the research, the researcher would not be performing the interviews personally, due to present knowledge that may sway the interview process. It was then explained that an appropriately skilled interviewer would assist the researcher in conducting the interviews.

The researcher also explained that a professional data transcriber would be employed to transcribe the interviews to text documents and that an independent data co-coder would be involved in the data analysis process. Each participant was asked to consent to this after they were guaranteed that any identifying information would be removed from the research documents and files and that their identity would remain anonymous throughout the process. During this session, the participants were given time to complete the participant information form and brief questionnaire (Appendix E). After meeting individually with the researcher, suitable arrangements were made with each participant for an interview session with the interviewer.

The researcher was present on the day of each participant's interview so as to introduce the participant to the interviewer and to uphold a suitable level of comfort in their participation experience. The interviewer commenced to interview the participants according to the interview schedule (Appendix F). It was taken into account that participants' responses were likely to affect

how and which questions were asked. Whilst serving merely as a predetermined guideline and therefore allowing for flexibility, the semi-structured questions ensured consistency between interviews and guided the process so as not to deviate too far from the subject matter (Mack et al., 2005). Interviews were conducted according to the schedule and were directed toward investigating the participants' experiences of online prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour on SNSs. Each interview session lasted approximately 35-45 minutes and was recorded using a digital voice recording device which allowed the interviewer to give the interview process full attention and maintain rapport with the participant. The voice recording files were stored on a Secure Digital (SD) card. Asking participants to recall and explain personal experiences of online racial prejudice and discrimination was potentially distressing and therefore each participant was informed that should they feel unsettled as a result of the interview, debriefing sessions would be made available upon their request.

The researcher emailed each participant after their interview to thank him or her for participating in the study and to give each individual the opportunity to provide feedback of their interview experience and in order to clarify any ambiguous data obtained.

A professional data transcriber was employed to assist in the transcription of the interviews, and the audio file from each interview was sent for verbatim transcription to a document for analysis. GTM offers combined implementation of coding, conceptualising, abstracting, and theorising (Bryant, 2017). Upon receiving each transcript, the researcher familiarised herself with the data and examined the participants' responses to code and categorise initial themes and categories. Each interview transcript was sequentially analysed and coded, and chronologically ordered. Theoretical sampling occurred in that the need for more data was determined after the analysis of each transcript, constantly comparing additional data to that already gathered and analysed (Charmaz, 2014).

In summary, the researcher classified the data into components and analysed the resulting sections in order to propose ways in which some of them might be related as clusters, themes or

patterns (Bryant, 2017). Sentence-by-sentence coding was initially carried out, after which section-by-section coding was implemented. The latter stages of analysis integrated the initial codes into higher-level analytic categories. Through the use of memos and coding notes as analysis tools, concepts and categories were gradually developed throughout the analysis, as the researcher progressively generated and theorised the data (Peters, 2014). As each new category was established, the researcher determined its suitability with the emerging theory. Simultaneously, an independent coder was tasked with 'externally' reviewing, co-coding and categorising the same data. The independent coder was deemed appropriately qualified for this task, with a PhD in Counselling Psychology as well as having considerable experience in qualitative research. Emerging concepts were compared to more incidents found, to produce new theoretical properties of the concepts. The data collection and analysis process continued until saturation of data was sufficient. The researcher's analysis was cross-checked and compared with the independent coder's findings.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Grounded theory is unlike most other research methods in that it merges the processes of data collection and analysis (Willig, 2013). Concurrent data generation or collection and analysis is achieved through constant comparative analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015). This will be explained more in depth later.

Grounded theory is compatible with a wide range of data collection techniques (Willig, 2013). As mentioned before, a questionnaire (Appendix E) developed by the researcher was used to collect biographical and contextual information about the participants to develop a thorough understanding of the participants' backgrounds, as well as their knowledge of relevant concepts. Grounded theory requires rich data which is detailed, focused, and comprehensive. Obtaining rich data means seeking 'thick' description, such as writing notes of observations made, collecting respondents' written personal accounts, or compiling detailed narratives in the form of transcribed interviews (Charmaz, 2014). When gathering grounded theory data, one can begin with asking:



*What's happening here? What are the basic social and social psychological processes?* (Charmaz, 2006). An interview schedule (Appendix F) consisting of question items related to the study's objectives was used to interview participants and comprised of open-ended questions. When exploring behavioural and social phenomena, the interview schedule was compiled taking into consideration the following points of investigation suggested by Charmaz (2006, p.20):

- From whose point of view is a given process fundamental? From whose view is it marginal?
- How do the observed social processes emerge? How do participants' actions construct them?
- Who exerts control over these processes? Under what conditions?
- What meanings do different participants attribute to the process? How do they talk about it? What do they emphasise? What do they leave out?
- How and when do their meanings and actions concerning the process change?

Questions that sensitise the researcher to a range of different participants' viewpoints, such as social and social psychological processes of power, control, structure, context, and the ways in which changes come about in the setting under investigation is suggested (Bryant, 2017; Charmaz, 2006). This was achieved through probing questions and thorough exploration of participants' responses.

In terms of format, in-depth interviews are well suited for sensitive topics, eliciting detailed responses about individual experiences, opinions and feelings, and are alert to subtle nuances and contradictions (Mack et al., 2005). However, the researcher's knowledge and awareness of current literature and existing explicatory theories posed the possibility of indirectly leading the line of questioning toward a particular direction during the interview. It was therefore deemed necessary to employ a third-party interviewer who held an impartial stance and would remain neutral when delivering the interview close to the set interview structure. The interviewer was deemed appropriately qualified to conduct the interviews on the researchers' behalf, and held training and

competency similar to that of the researcher, in terms of possessing a postgraduate psychology qualification and vast experience in psychological counselling. To prepare the interviewer beforehand, the research held a brief 'mock interview' where the interview schedule's questions were explained and clarified. The researcher urged the interviewer to attend to actions and processes as well as to the participants' words, specifying the context, scenes, and situations of action carefully (Charmaz, 2006). It was also advised that the interviewer take note of details such as who did what, as well as when, why and how it occurred. Charmaz (2006) advises identifying the conditions under which specific actions, intentions, and processes either emerge or are suppressed.

The one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each of the eight selected participants. The data was obtained on an interpersonal level in order to elicit rich, detailed, and first-person accounts of the participants' perceptions and phenomena under investigation. Interviewing, according to Charmaz (2006) should be a directed conversation permitting in-depth exploration of a particular topic with a person who has had the relevant experiences. This style of interviewing allows for the researcher and the participants to engage in real-time dialogue and gives enough flexibility for unexpected issues to arise which the researcher may investigate in more detail (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Data was collected under the assumption that participants' responses were accurate representations of their own perceptions. However, the interviewer consistently paraphrased participants' responses and reflected back her understanding of their statements in order to gain clarity and retain corresponding understanding of their meaning.

A digital recording device was used to ensure that participants' disclosed perceptions were accurately captured, with nothing omitted. The transcription of interviews is an important first step in the research process and the transcript should be "limited to the level of detail and accuracy that is necessary to answer the research question" (Peters, 2014, p. 12). A skilled data

transcriber was appointed to transcribe all audio data from the recorded interviews to a text document.

**Thematic analysis.** After the transcriptions were completed, data was analysed by means of thematic analysis, which involves recording or identifying passages of text that connects to a common theme or idea (Mountain, 2016). This allows the researcher to catalogue the data into categories and establish a framework of themes and concepts about it (Mountain, 2016). Thematic analyses can provide reasons for individuals' stated beliefs and attitudes since such analyses can identify and thematise the meanings assigned to social phenomena (Willig, 2013). This complemented the study as it explored differences in people's beliefs, attitudes and intentions. Generally, the researcher adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 87) phases of thematic analysis which consists of:

1. Familiarising yourself with the data: Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes: Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes: Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report: The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

**Coding.** According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) concepts are ideas contained in the data which are considered interpretations within the analysis. Coding involves developing concepts and categories and the subsequent allocation of corresponding codes to the data (Peters, 2014). Codes that are assigned to concepts may be revised, merged or discarded completely (Peters, 2014). Whilst the researcher incorporated Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis, the following flexible coding strategies, suggested by Charmaz (2014, p.125) were observed: "breaking the data up into their component parts or properties; defining the actions on which they rest; looking for tacit assumptions; explicating implicit actions and meanings; crystallizing the significance of the points; comparing data with data; and identifying gaps in the data".

In addition to the above, Bryant (2017, p. 89) highlighted the following key GTM data analysis procedures:

- Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis
- Constructing analytical codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses. In contrast to the type of hypotheses that are used to test already existing theories, the grounded theorist produces hypotheses from empirical data that can be tested by others;
- Using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis;
- Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis;
- Memo writing to elaborate categories, to specify their properties, to define the relationship between categories and identified gaps;
- Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness.

In light of the above, the following section provides a breakdown of the coding steps followed in the data analysis:

1. *Familiarising yourself with the data.* The researcher studied each participants' transcript, whilst simultaneously listening to the accompanying audio clip of the interview. This was carried out to 'read behind the lines' of the participants' responses and to identify any possible cues such as tonal nuances, pitch, volume and pauses, that may not have been clearly detected during the transcription process. Charmaz (2006) recommends finding the participants' taken-for-granted and hidden assumptions through revealed affect and actions. Specific words and phrases that the participant might have implied salient meaning to were also determined. For example, Participant 4 indicated during her interview that "people are *mean*" in the sense that people are mean by nature and not purely mean towards others in their behaviour.

It was decided upon that the input of an independent coder would offer another subjectivity and 'unclouded' perspective to the data analysis process. The assistance from an appropriately qualified and experienced independent coder with the coding, categorisation and analysis of data, also enhanced the credibility of the analysis procedure.

2. *Generating initial codes.* Initial open coding was done, which involved investigating, parting, and cataloguing significant events, actions and processes within the data by comparing participants' statements in each sentence (Bryant, 2017; Peters, 2014). Tentative labels or codes were then given to the developing low-level categories or phenomena that encapsulated portions of the raw data (verbatim extracts) (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This was not based on existing theories but rather on meaning that emerged from the data. As demonstrated in Table 1, *in vivo* coding and category labels were used, which was based on the participants' own terms and language so as not to contaminate the analysis with existing theoretical assumptions (Willig, 2013). For example, Participant 1 reported "Some people use it for their own interest... to greaten themselves" and "... making themselves feel better". In line with the participant's response, the researcher used the category label 'themselves' to represent concepts of self-interest. Participant 2 reported "the way I looked at Facebook, you know, about yourself" and as a result the label advanced into 'self'.

Table 1  
*Coded Extracts from Several Participants' Original Transcripts*

Extracts from original transcripts	Codes
<p>“To strike a <i>conversation...</i>”</p> <p>“It’s a great way to <i>interact</i> with other people...”</p> <p>“I have found that it is quite nice to <i>interact</i> with people...”</p> <p>“All social networks actually, being able to <i>contact</i> one another...”</p> <p>“...they are good to like <i>share and communicate</i> information... instead of back when people used to use letters and phone calls <i>to communicate</i>”</p> <p>“I need Facebook to <i>communicate</i> with you and we socialise”.</p>	<p>To interact and communicate</p>
<p>“It depends on the <i>audience...</i>”</p> <p>“It depends on the <i>following</i> you have”</p> <p>“They need an <i>audience...</i>”</p> <p>“The need for a response <i>from people...</i>”</p> <p>“They are people I want to discuss with... I choose the <i>audience</i>”.</p> <p>“To... catch the eye of <i>people’s</i> attention...”.</p>	<p>Audience</p>

3. *Searching for themes.* Focused coding was the second phase. The researcher decided upon which initial codes made the most analytic sense and used the most significant and frequent codes found earlier to filter through the data in a section-by-section fashion (Charmaz, 2014). After comparing the properties and dimensions of the emerging concepts, they were grouped and classified into categories, this is illustrated in Table 2 below. Data was simultaneously collected, analysed, and integrated, until the categories were saturated and each category or theme was described fully, in terms of its properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

GTM method is a comparative method (Bryant, 2017). This means comparing “data with data, data with category, category with category, and category to concept” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 607). Texts were examined a comparative study of incidents. According to Charmaz (2006) comparing incidents of the same order between data causes one to think analytically about them (Charmaz, 2014). Incidents are compared to the conceptualisation of earlier coded incidents which allowed for the researcher to identify properties of an emerging concept (Charmaz, 2014).

Table 2

*Emergent Themes and Categories Based on an Analysis of Participants’ Responses*

Main theme	Categories
Purpose and use of SNSs	To interact and communicate Relationship maintenance To become familiar/form new connections To monitor others’ activity Group membership Efficiency, speed, access Convenience and ease of accomplishing typical tasks Affordability No other means to contact others  Self-esteem Motivation Entertainment Means of escaping reality Self-expression Learning

	<p>News</p> <p>Informing/providing information</p> <p>To receive information</p> <p>To help others</p> <p>Awareness/to broaden perspectives</p> <p>Social activism/collective action</p> <p>Opportunistic mobilisation of people</p>
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4. *Reviewing themes.* Through axial coding, data that was fragmented during initial coding was reassembled and categories were linked to subcategories (Charmaz, 2014). As depicted in Table 3, relationships among designated codes were identified, forming connections between these categories, called themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These linkages between categories helped integrate the data into higher-order analytic categories or concepts.

Independent parallel coding took place where the researcher, as the initial coder, carried out an analysis and developed a set of categories that constituted the preliminary findings (Thomas, 2006). This occurred concurrently with a second independent coder, who without seeing the initial categories created a second set of categories from the raw text.

This second set of categories was then compared with the first set to establish the extent of overlap, subsequently merging the two sets into a combined set. This process is vital since when overlap between the categories is low, further analysis may be needed to develop a more robust set of categories. The researcher and independent coder both engaged in several rounds of coding, memo-writing, and analytical checks with one another, as well as with the research supervisors. A central goal was to fit the codes to the data and not to force the data to fit the codes (Charmaz, 2006).



Table 3

*Refinement Process for the Main Theme 'Purpose and use of SNSs', Demonstrating Multiple Sub-themes*

Main theme	Sub-themes
<p>Purpose and use of SNSs</p>	<p>Social contact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To interact and communicate</li> <li>- Relationship maintenance</li> <li>- To become familiar/form new connections</li> <li>- To monitor others' activity</li> <li>- Group membership</li> </ul> <p>To overcome typical barriers to social contact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Efficiency, speed, access</li> <li>- Convenience and ease of accomplishing typical tasks</li> <li>- Affordability</li> <li>- No other means to contact others</li> </ul> <p>Self-interest/fulfilling own needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-esteem</li> <li>- Motivation</li> <li>- Entertainment</li> <li>- Means of escaping reality</li> <li>- Self-expression</li> </ul> <p>Information value:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning</li> <li>- News</li> <li>- Informing/providing information</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To receive information</li> </ul> <p>To influence others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To help others</li> <li>- Awareness/to broaden perspectives</li> <li>- Social activism/collective action</li> <li>- Opportunistic mobilisation of people</li> </ul>
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5. *Defining and naming themes.* Selective coding entails advanced coding and theoretical integration (Birks & Mills, 2015). This step begins only after the researcher has identified a potential core variable within a theme (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The central variable that is incorporated within all data was further explored, establishing context within which categories were embedded (refer to Table 4). Transcripts were reread and data that related to a core theme was identified and selectively coded. The core concept or theme was the basis for final analysis which integrated and refined the emerging theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Table 4

*Further Refinement of Main Themes, Illustrating Labels Given to Each Themes and Corresponding Sub-themes*

Main themes	Sub-themes
Purpose and use of SNSs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social contact</li> <li>Self-interest/fulfilling own needs</li> <li>Informational value</li> <li>To influence others</li> </ul>

<p>Determinant factors/cause of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs</p>	<p>Users</p> <p>Psychological aspects</p> <p>Social psychological aspects</p> <p>Cognitions/beliefs</p> <p>Perceptions and appraisal of content</p> <p>Language use</p>
<p>User motivations/intentions for committing racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs</p>	<p>Entertainment value/humour</p> <p>To receive regard/attention</p> <p>Self-interest</p> <p>Social identity and group aspects</p>
<p>Overall impact and effect of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs</p>	<p>Positive</p> <p>Negative</p>

6. *Producing the report.* Theory is generated from the analysis after working through the stages of comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing up the theory (Bryant, 2017). This method of generating theory is a transformative process that retains earlier stages of analysis in operation for the continuous development of successive stages (Bryant, 2017). Some refer to theory that is generated as self-correcting, which means that as data are gathered, adjustments are made to the theory to allow for the interpretation of new data that are obtained (Nieswiadomy, 2012).

The researcher attempted to generate a theory or elements of theory from the insights gained during coding. This was done through comparative analysis, an analytic process that conceptualises and integrates data to form theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). With more analytic focus, data was revisited and different incidents were compared to each other so as to establish underlying uniformity and variation. Concepts were compared to each other and refined at

different conceptual levels. With no new categories identified through analysis, and no instances of variation of existing categories, the researcher concluded that theoretical saturation had been reached (Willig, 2013).

The below diagram serves as a summary of the analysis and coding procedures that were employed.

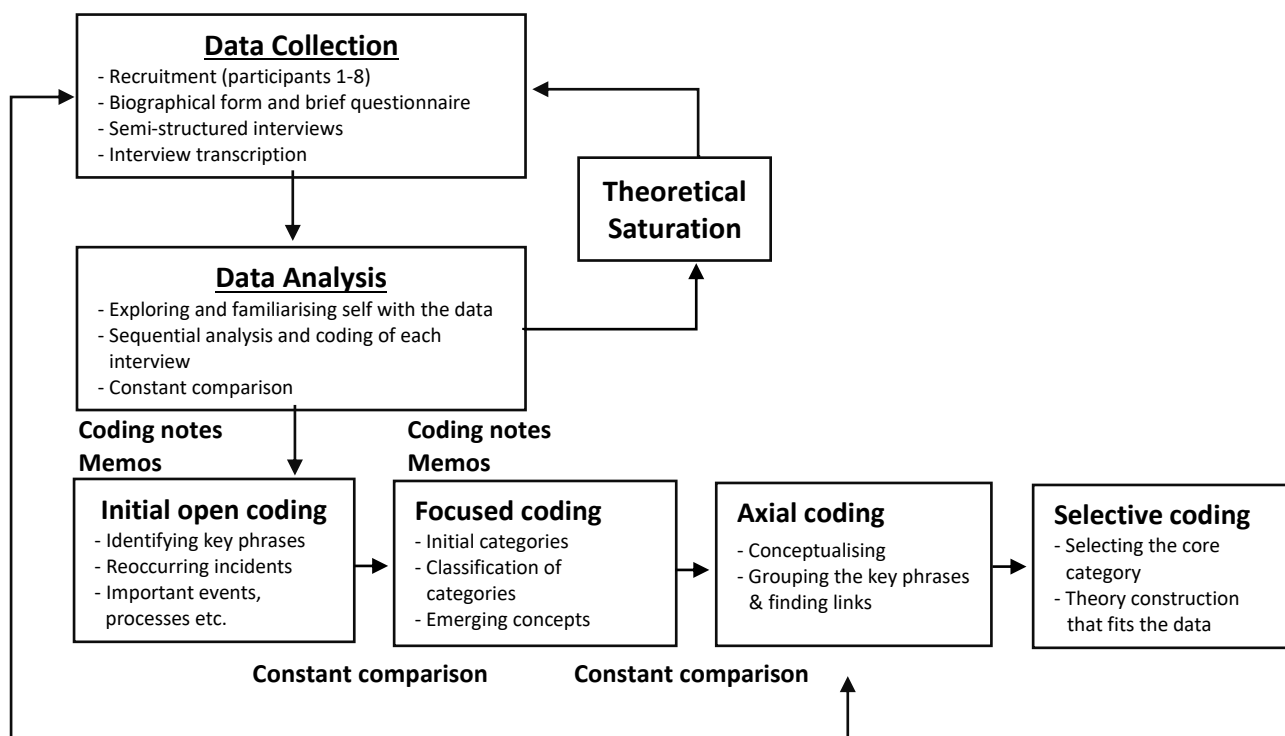


Figure 1: Data collection and analysis procedure, adapted from Acun and Yilmazer (2018)

As mentioned before, GTM characteristically requires that existing theory and literature is disregarded, however, leading grounded theorists have introduced ‘sensitising concepts’ that supports the deliberate use of previous theoretical knowledge in the analysis (Peters, 2014). This method adopts the position that making reference to existing literature throughout the research process “contributes to a better understanding of one’s own empirical work” (Peters, 2014, p. 14). Once concepts have been identified and their relationships specified, the researcher consults the literature to determine if any similar associations have already been uncovered (Nieswiadomy, 2012). Towards the end of the analysis, the concepts or theories developed from the empirical

data emerging from the present study were contrasted with existing theories mentioned in the *Theoretical Acknowledgements* chapter (Chapter 3).

### **Trustworthiness of Data**

Research validity and reliability cannot be addressed the same way in naturalistic work as with positivistic paradigms (Shenton, 2004). Following the conclusion of data analysis, Guba's four qualitative research criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) were adopted to evaluate the trustworthiness of the research findings (Shenton, 2004).

**Credibility.** This concerns truth value and establishes whether or not the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views (Anney, 2014). It also deals with the congruence of the research findings with reality. Credibility was applied by encouraging honesty and openness by the participants and by maintaining consistent rapport (Shenton, 2004). In the interviews, the interviewer probed for detailed data through iterative questioning. Qualitative researchers during the research processes are required to seek support from other professionals who are willing to provide scholarly guidance (Anney, 2014). Input from colleagues, peers and academics during the ethical permission stage allowed for constructive feedback and criticism which was welcomed as an opportunity to refine the study.

Adopting well-established qualitative research methods promotes confidence that the phenomena under investigation has been accurately recorded (Shenton, 2004). The researcher decided to employ the grounded theory method as it is an internationally renowned research design which was initially developed as a rigorous basis for conducting qualitative research (Birks & Mills, 2015; Bryant, 2017). The researcher consulted with an independent grounded theory scholar for guidance on the data collection and analysis process. Input from colleagues, peers and academics allowed for constructive feedback and criticism which was welcomed by the researcher as an opportunity to refine the present study's underpinning design. This took place during a

research proposal meeting where the researcher presented the present study to numerous professional academics prior to the implementation of the research plan.

The use of different sources of data from both the participant information form and research questionnaire as well as the interviews, as a form of triangulation, enhanced the quality of the data (Anney, 2014). This is considered an important aspect of credibility in qualitative research as supporting data, such as that obtained from documents, provide a background to and help explain the attitudes and behaviour of those providing the data (Shenton, 2004). According to Anney (2014) “member checks” screen data and interpretations for researcher bias as they are checked by the group from which data was obtained (p. 10). Participants were given the opportunity to verify their data before analysis took place when the interviewer probed for detailed explanations and clarification of their responses and to provide actual examples in order to confirm the meaning of the elicited data. Furthermore, researchers are expected to include the participants’ voices in the analysed data and emerging themes and interpretations (Anney, 2014). In the chapter to follow, extracts are gleaned from parts of the interviews to demonstrate the participants’ real perspectives and accounts of events. This means that analysed and interpreted data resonates with the participants’ interpretations of the phenomena.

“The immersion of inquirer into the participants’ world helps the researcher to understand the context of the study and minimise the distortions of information that might arise” (Anney, 2014, p. 8). The researcher spent a great deal of time on various social networking sites with the aim of understanding and placing herself in Internet and SNS culture. This way, early familiarity was developed with the online ‘world’ of the research participants.

**Transferability.** This aspect refers to the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to situations, for example, if other situations are similar to that described in this study, the findings may be related to other instances (Shenton, 2004). However, the findings of this study are not to be generalised to other populations but rather serve as an attempt to describe a particular sample’s experience. Nevertheless, ample background information was provided to establish the

study's context, and comparisons can be made as a detailed description of the phenomenon in question was included.

A thick or comprehensive description of each participants' social and biographical backgrounds was provided. Such detail allows for a comparison of one research context to others (Anney, 2014). This was also achieved through the use of purposive sampling of participants who met criteria based on the purpose of the study. Focused data is obtained in this manner as opposed to probability samplings methods, though not for generalisability, but rather to maximise the information to be uncovered from a few participants (Anney, 2014). This is where theoretical sampling added to the present study's applicability in that data was successively analysed according to saturation and need.

**Dependability.** This is related to reliability, where similar findings would be obtained if the study was to be repeated, in the same context, with the same methods, and with the same participants (Shenton, 2004). The procedures and stages of the study were reported in detail, thereby enabling future researchers to repeat the research process. Interview transcripts and documents used in the analysis have been safely stored in the University's Department of Psychology and will be kept for a period of five years, should the need for an inquiry or audit arise in the future. The consistency of the findings was determined by comparing the data with the research findings and interpretations, which was overseen by the research supervisors (Thomas, 2006). Finally, Shenton (2004) refers to the close ties between credibility and dependability, suggesting that in practice if credibility is soundly established, dependability is for the most part ensured.

**Confirmability.** Comparable with objectivity, confirmability determines the extent to which the research findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). The researcher was distanced from the data collection process in that a third-party interviewer was employed to conduct the interviews, thereby minimising the researcher's influence on the gathering of raw

data. The interviewer strived to maintain neutrality, adopting an impartial stance to the participants and their responses throughout the data collection process. Confirmability also speaks to the integrity of the research process and findings (Anney, 2014). A comprehensive description of the research methodology at the outset allows for scrutiny of the research findings. Limitations to the study which may have affected the findings are clearly stated in Chapter 6 of this research treatise. As a result, the researcher recognises the limitations regarding familiarity and experience in cyber and internet studies. Moreover, each participant was granted the opportunity to clarify or elaborate on any statements made in the interview, or to add further input relevant to the study.

Actual phrases and terms used by the participants during the interviews were used to label codes in early *in vivo* coding. As mentioned previously, the purpose of this is to control the biases of the researcher during the analysis and interpretation of the findings. Moreover, confirmability involves the degree to which the findings of the study can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Anney, 2014). Not only was the data analysis process closely guided by the research supervisors, but the researcher employed an experienced independent coder to code and categorise the data, cross-checking codes and thereby enhancing the consistency in the analyses (Thomas, 2006).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Researchers have an ethical responsibility to consider and protect the rights of participants who are involved in the study. As previously mentioned, the researcher adhered to the various institutional permission protocols as well as obtaining authorisation from the ethics committee before proceeding with the recruitment of participants for the study. As the research involved human research participants, ethical considerations were of paramount importance. The Belmont Report (1979) was fully considered as the foundation for ethical principles and guidelines for the practice of research (The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).



Informed consent was fundamental and participants were required to voluntarily consent to participate in the study (Appendix D), after being informed and briefed about the research and the requirements of participation. As part of the informed consent procedure, research participants were asked for permission to digitally record their responses during the interviews and prior to granting their consent, were informed about the involvement of the research supervisors, data transcriber and independent data coder with regards to the handling of data. An information letter (Appendix C) informing the participants about the necessary and relevant details regarding the nature of the study was provided to participants electronically. This letter included information regarding any risks and benefits resulting from the research study, and that withdrawal from the study at any given point was permitted as participation was of a voluntary (Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2006). During the initial meeting with the researcher, each participant was made aware in advance that the researcher would not be conducting the interviews herself and that a more objective interviewer would be carrying out the interviews. The reason for this decision was carefully explained to the participants.

Since perceptions and personal experiences were the crux of the study, all measures were put into place to protect the identity of the participants and confidentiality of information. After providing consent and meeting with the researcher, each participant was assigned a unique alphanumeric code to ensure confidentiality of identity. This decision was based on actual online methods where user names or 'IDs' are required to uniquely identify an individual within a social network (Facebook, 2018). Moreover, this was considered more neutral as assigning potentially racially 'misleading' pseudonyms may have influenced the reader's interpretation of the participants' statements according to their perceived racial category.

The researcher supervised and safeguarded all data gathered and at no time was the participants' names or identifying information recorded on the materials used in the data analysis. The data was only accessible to the researcher, research supervisors, assisting transcriber and independent data coder. Upon completion of analysis, the data was securely stored by the research

supervisor, which will be kept for a period of five years before destroying. Soft data was stored as password protected files on a SD card, and any hard copies were stored securely in a locked cabinet. For added data security and confidentiality purposes, the data transcriber and data coder were required to sign a written agreement (Appendix G), which specifies concrete measures for data protection and handling (UK Data Archive, n.d.).

The current study was also conducted in accordance with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2006) and the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2001) which outlines ethical principles for conducting medical research with human participants. Respect for the well-being of participants was prioritised, including the participants' ability to comprehend information and to make decisions in a conscious and deliberate way (Mack et al., 2005). Benevolence and non-maleficence served as a basis for how the researcher approached and structured the research procedures, the possibility of harm coming to participants was at all times taken into account. It is important to develop rapport with the participants and respect them as autonomous individuals. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) a brief 'warm-up' discussion may be necessary to reduce participants' tension, gain a degree of trust, and to prepare the participant to discuss more sensitive or personal issues (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). This was established and maintained throughout contact with the participants, with the aim of having participants feel comfortable and entrusting of the researcher's consideration of the sensitivity of the topic under study. Due to the sensitive nature of the information being elicited from participants, the researcher adopted an empathic stance to the participants and the interviewer employed interviewing skills such as active listening and posed questions that were free from judgement or presumptions. Considering the vulnerable position that the interview may have placed the participant in, if sensed that a participant was emotional or distressed in any way as a result of the interview process, the researcher offered a referral for a debriefing session following the interview. Such participants were also given the opportunity to be referred for counselling at Nelson Mandela University's various counselling service providers.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, the methods and procedures used in this study were presented with the aim of familiarising the reader with the methodology employed in the current study. The research approach and design were described in detail, followed by an explanation of the research participants, sampling procedures, data collection procedures and data analysis procedures. Finally, the ethical considerations relevant to this study were explicated.

The chapter to follow discusses the findings of the research.

## Chapter 5

### Findings and Discussion

#### Introduction

The following chapter presents the findings of this study. Firstly, the reader will be provided with a description of the research participants. Thereafter, the findings of the current study are discussed. The identified themes and subthemes will be discussed, with the aim of reflecting, as closely as possible, the words of the participants, in order to honour their narratives. The chapter concludes with a proposal of a new theoretical model, which is grounded in the current research study's findings.

#### Description of the Participants

Table 5 presents a breakdown of the participants' descriptions, which were retrieved from the participant information form and research questionnaire (Appendix E). It is important to provide such details as these characteristics provide a contextual framework of the sample and for the interpretation of the research findings. Moreover, these aspects may influence the participants' perceptions of racial prejudice and discrimination, as well as their online experiences.

Participants were all Nelson Mandela University students, aged between 20 – 35 years and varying in terms of race, gender, home language and qualification. There was an even spread in terms of gender, with four female and four male participants. Concerning race, each participant indicated their racial category on the participant information form (Appendix E), which revealed that there were three white participants and five black participants. All participants were able to fluently converse in English, however, only half of the participants indicated English as their home language. Seven of the participants were undergraduate students studying towards their first degree or diploma, whilst one participant was at a post-graduate level, studying towards a Masters degree.

Table 5

*Demographic Information of the Participants*

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Race	Home language	Current qualification and level of education at University
P1	Female	21	White	English	BA Undergraduate
P2	Female	35	Black	English	MA Postgraduate
P3	Male	20	White	English	BSc Undergraduate
P4	Female	20	Black	Xhosa	BA Undergraduate
P5	Female	23	Black	Tsonga	BPsych Undergraduate
P6	Male	21	Black	Xhosa	BA Undergraduate
P7	Male	24	White	English	BEng Undergraduate
P8	Male	20	Black	Xhosa	NDip Undergraduate

Participants also ranged in terms of the SNS use, either by the types and number of SNSs they were subscribed to, or by the amount of time spent on these sites. Table 6 below illustrates these demographic markers. Facebook and YouTube were the most popular SNSs amongst all participant, followed by Instagram which seven of the participants were subscribed to. Twitter and LinkedIn captured half of the participants' membership, whilst Snapchat was an alternative SNS mentioned by two of the participants. The majority of the participants were spending on average two or more hours per day being active on these SNSs.

Table 6  
*Participants' Social Networking Site Use*

Participant ID	Current SNSs subscribed to						Daily time spent on SNSs (hours)
	Facebook	YouTube	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn	Other	
P1	✓	✓	✓			Snapchat	1 or more
P2	✓	✓		✓	✓	Medium Research-Gates Academia	2 or more
P3	✓	✓	✓		✓	Reddit	4-5
P4	✓	✓	✓			Pinterest Snapchat	2 or more
P5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		2 or more
P6	✓	✓	✓		✓	Skype	2 or more
P7	✓	✓	✓	✓		Online Gaming	2 or more
P8	✓	✓	✓	✓			6

The following section provides a description of the participants' awareness and understanding of the concepts relevant to the study.

**Participants' conceptualisations of relevant terminology.** One of the data collection tools employed in the present study was a concept definition questionnaire administered to participants which sought to gather their understanding and interpretation of the various terms associated with the current topic under study.

The aim of this task was to gain a rich and comprehensive understanding of the participants and their perceptions. It was considered important to gain such an understanding because firstly, each participant is unique, in many facets, and secondly, that the components of the phenomena which these terms represent are complex and therefore may not yield consistent descriptions. As suspected, the participants' conceptualisations of these terms revealed significant overlap between concepts.

Each description was succinctly analysed, while determining similarity and differences between explanations. These were then integrated and summarised with the assistance of the research supervisors. Among the eight participants, broad consensus emerged regarding their understanding of the ten concepts. The summaries, presented below, are not intended to be coherent or precise, but rather serve to provide a glimpse of each participants' understanding of these concepts.

**Bias.** Unfair discrimination, prejudiced, one-sidedness, slanted, unreasonable, impartial perceptions for or against others. Specifically focusing on race, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Such intolerance and clouding of judgement is often based upon predetermined beliefs, loyalty to one's own groups, life experiences, and a lack of empathy.

**Discrimination.** Unjust, unfair, intolerant, judgemental treatment of others on the grounds of race, age, gender, body size, intellectual capability and levels of emotional adjustment. As a result of limited information of others, this undermining of others and violation of their human rights has, as one consequence, the segregation of individuals.

**Ethnicity.** Belonging and prescribing to a social/cultural//racial group from which the individual originated from, that has a common national tradition.

**Hate speech.** Rude, offensive, insulting, judgemental, harmful (hurtful), demeaning, mocking, inappropriate, unfettered, inducing a sense of shame. Most often bound to race with the intention of evoking conflict and other negative outcomes on others.

**Prejudice.** Arrogant, unfounded, preconceived, prejudgement of ideas and opinions, not based on reason or actual experiences, but rather upon false assumptions. It suggests a type of functional fixedness.

**Race.** Major classification and divisions of humankind, based upon one's birth place and biogenetic makeup, and having distinct physical characteristics (specifically, pigmentation).

**Racism.** Prejudice, discrimination, judgement, antagonism directed towards someone of a different race, based on the oppressive belief that one's race is superior to another's.

**Racist.** Behaviour that oppresses, discriminates against, disregards, antagonises and categorises others, based upon their culture, ethnic group or pigmentation.

**Stereotype.** A widely held but fixed, preconceived, unfair, hackneyed, clichéd, conventional schema, image or idea of a particular type of person, culture, ethnic group, gender or body shape. Such labelling and overgeneralisation results in significantly negative impacts on others.

**Social networking sites / social media.** Websites, platforms and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Specifically used for communicating on a global stage, connecting with others, socialising and interacting, self-expression, marketing and business. In addition, the rapidity of the SNSs facilitates minimal turnaround times.

The section to follow focuses on the main themes and sub-themes identified from the research findings which will be comprehensively discussed.



**Thematic Development**

As depicted in Table 4 of the previous chapter, the initial merging of different codes into themes lead to the formation of four preliminary patterns namely; *Purpose and use of SNSs*, *Determinant factors/cause of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs*, *User motivations/intentions for committing racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs*, and *Overall impact and effect of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs*. After receiving the independent analysis from the second independent coder, the researcher met with the co-coder to discuss the findings and reach consensus where the categories, prolific themes and sub-themes from both analyses were integrated. The consequent themes and sub-themes that emerged were the result of information that was reported by three or more out of the eight participants.

Table 7  
*Main Themes and Sub-themes Identified*

Main theme	Sub-theme
Overall perception of SNSs	Positive or negative
	Ambivalent
Purpose and use of SNSs	Social contact
	Self-interest
Precipitating factors of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs	Psychological aspects
	Psychosocial aspects
	Cognitive aspects
Enabling factors of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs	Design
	Environment
Impact of SNSs on racial prejudice and discrimination	Positive
	Negative

The following section presents a synopsis of the major themes which encompasses the originating and enabling factors that contribute to racially-motivated prejudice and discrimination on SNSs.

**Theme 1: Overall experiences and perceptions of SNSs.** The first emerging theme highlighted the participants' general perceptions of SNSs, relative to their use and experiences of these sites.

**Positive or negative.** Some participants held decisive opinions of SNSs, either being positive or negative. Two participants held a primarily positive orientation towards SNSs, for example, P3 disclosed: *"I think they are good... I enjoy them"*. P8 shared this sentiment: *"I think they are awesome... They are very nice"*. Evidently, one participant reported a negative opinion of SNSs. For example, P4 explained: *"They are being misused. I deactivated my Twitter account because I just feel like Twitter is toxic"*.

**Ambivalent.** Four participants were ambivalent in their appraisal of SNSs and reported either mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about these sites. For example, P5 disclosed: *"I think they are all like great platforms... But it can also come with like negative effects obviously"*. P1 reported: *"They are a great platform when used correctly. It's great if its in the right hands"*. P8 stated: *"It is fifty-fifty... there can be pros and cons. It can be a good thing when used properly..."*. P8 revealed: *"They help us but at the very same time, they can be very... they can be a danger to our lives"*.

The above participants ambivalence suggested that depending on the use of SNSs, they can be either positive or negative platforms. This moves directly into the next theme.

**Theme 2: Purpose and use of SNSs.** The second theme that emerged is the purpose internet users 'sign-up' or create an account and subscribe to various SNSs, which includes the participants' reported uses of these sites. For instance, P1 stated: *"it all comes down to the using"*. Likewise, P2 explained that it depends on *"what you do with the entire network on social media sites... what you do with them"*. P6 agreed, saying: *"when it is used properly... and correctly, for*

*the right reasons*". This links to literature that suggests "the most important mediator of behaviour in these different Internet environments is the purpose of the people who visit or inhabit them" (Wallace, 2016, p17).

Within each sub-theme, both positive and negatives uses of SNSs are described. In commencing the discussion on SNS use, it is important to mention that multiple participants alluded to the misuse of SNSs.

Another consistent emerging pattern of responses was that participants perceived the use of SNSs as being contrary to what these sites were initially designed for, or in other words, that there is a pre-determined or intended purpose for these sites. For example, P4 reported: "*They are being misused for what they were probably created for*"; P5: "*What we are using social media for isn't what it was made for*"; P6: "*Trying to bring people back to understanding why we had social media in the first place... It is not a platform for bullying. It is not a platform for racism...*".

All of the participants described that users have different uses for SNSs which depend on the platform itself. For example, P8 indicated: "*Multiple purposes... It depends on what I am busy with*". The inference from this notion is that certain user activity and behaviours will be found on some SNSs, more than others, for example P2 reported: "*There are other types of social networking sites, like say the dating sites... you won't see any social bias or discrimination or race on there*".

**Social contact.** Social contact was one of the two major sub-themes. It consisted of several concepts which centred on connections with others, such as the maintenance of existing relationships. For example, P1 disclosed: "*I like to use it, um, to... keep close with my friends and family*". A second concept revealed in terms of SNS use for social contact was to become familiar with and to form new connections, for example, P6: "*... and strangers. I mean sometimes you just meet someone and maybe because you guys studied the same thing or you have similar interests, and then you start making new friends*"; to interact and communicate: "*I need Facebook to communicate with you and we socialise*"; to monitor others' activity: "*I am able to*

*actually see their pages and their progress and everything... Being able to contact one another, being able to see what we post, our lives and stuff”; and finally, group membership: “It allows people to have like small social circles that they feel that they are part of... You feel a part of this anonymous group of people that you have never met, you have never seen them”.*

Within the sub-theme social contact, another prominent concept arose, which revealed that SNSs aid in breaching barriers found in typical social contact and interaction. For example, P4 explained: *“One of the main reasons why I have social networks, is to be able to contact the people that I don’t have numbers of. I can be able to reach you, no matter where you are, internationally for that matter”*; and P5:

*...they are good to like share and communicate information for people from all over the world. I mean nowadays you can know what someone is doing in a matter of minutes or seconds. Instead of like back when people used to use letters and phone calls to communicate. And I think it is also a cheaper way to do those things.*

This was also identified by Hasler and Amichai-Hamburger (2013) who maintained that online, there are “ample opportunities for social interactions across geographical and time boundaries”, and that the Internet has “the ability to break down barriers” between individuals (p.220).

Some of the participants suggested that individuals use SNSs altruistically, to make a positive impact on others, for example, P1 mentioned: *“People use it to help others”*. P2 agreed with this sentiment: *“... to change the world or the people that they engage with in a positive light”*. She also described how she receives guidance from other users on SNSs:

*We struggle with a lot of stuff and some of the things that I struggle with... There are people that talk about them, not in a textbook kind of way, but they get their knowledge and advice from what they’ve gone through and how they like, progressed from something. So, I use Facebook for that.*

P6 also described a pro-social use of SNSs through broadening individuals' perspectives: *"I act like an advocate as such, of human feelings... And trying to maintain this peace and always trying to bring people back to understanding..."*.

P1 revealed that SNSs are used to create awareness: *"I think it creates awareness... so I think when it's in a positive light like awareness about and stuff, it helps"*. Lastly, P5 spoke of SNSs being used for community engagement:

*It is basically to engage the rest of the world, to basically show them what, what's going on in our country... social media makes it easy to expose those things. So, when the rest of the world is engaged in it, it is easier to counteract the problem rather than speaking face to face about the problem and nothing being done about it... So, umm, they have been able to expose that which is good, you know, so that the rest of the world can see.*

Several participants felt that SNSs are used in initiating social activism and creating needed social reform. For instance, P5 reported:

*There is a positive gain because with the (#) Fees Must Fall movement, it was a success, I think. Well ja (yes), education is kind of free now... So I think with it, with a lot of support from, you know, not only citizens from South Africa, but also people from across the world, it can help achieve a lot of things.*

**Self-interest.** The second major sub-theme emerging involves the use of SNSs for personal benefit or gain. For instance, P1 indicated: *"Some people use it for their own interests... or to 'greeten' themselves... Probably, also again, self-gratification"*. P2 raised a similar concept: *"I dropped the way I looked at Facebook about, you know, yourself... and tried to make it in general about other people"*. Within this sub-theme, several concepts were identified. Firstly, self-improvement, for example, P2 reported:

*I follow different things or different personalities of people that I you know I want to learn from, like self-development... Like my life right now is all about personal*

*development... my Facebook page like some of the things that I follow, um, it's to improve yourself.*

On a psychological front, P5 revealed: *"I use it to post a lot of pictures. Basically, that's to boost my self-esteem a bit..."*. In agreement, Amichai-Hamburger and Hyatt (2013) suggested that self-esteem moderates SNS use.

The efficiency and convenience of SNS use was also a popular concept amongst participants, for example, P1 revealed: *"I think it's just a faster, more instant way of getting more people's perspectives"*. In terms of accomplishing everyday tasks, P2 mentioned: *"I use LinkedIn for that, specifically, like my entire CV has to be there so that it's easy for me to apply for the job without, you know, tailoring it to, or writing up documents and stuff like that"*. Furthermore, P6 indicated:

*For work sometimes... because I think because sometimes you just need to write it down and instead of writing an email, you can maybe write a WhatsApp and that is faster... So it depends on what is convenient to the situation.*

Another concept linked to self-interest is entertainment. Participants conveyed that their SNS use was based on entertainment, for their own pleasure and even that SNS content served as a distraction. For instance, P3 stated: *"Just for normal entertainment, like T.V. Um, videos that may be like to my preference, um, just for relaxation pretty much... mostly, it is just relaxation and, um, things that are to my interest"*. P6 reported: *"I use it for entertainment, obviously... I concentrate on the jokes part... you know, sometimes you just need to debrief from the hectic schedules of your life and stuff"*.

Self-expression was a major concept that was repeatedly articulated by the participants. When describing why individuals engage on SNSs, P1 articulated: *"To state their opinion"*. Similarly, P2 mentioned: *"They're able to exert their, you know, their inner feelings"*. P3 reported: *"It provides another means to showcase what you are feeling"*. Lastly, P8 suggested that SNSs allows him *"to voice out how I feel"*.

Obtaining information and learning was an additional concept discovered within self-interest. Numerous participants revealed that learning and acquiring knowledge was a key reason for their SNS use. For example, P1 shared: *“I think that they are a great platform when used correctly, um, I mean I certainly learnt a lot from it... so I mean it’s broadened my knowledge”*. P3 conveyed: *“Some of the social media sites, there are learning parts to it”*. P2 also used SNSs as a learning opportunity:

*Facebook is quite interesting how, apart from news, you get to learn like... people share different videos and stuff like that... If I get to learn something at least each day I’m on Facebook, that’s a good day for me.*

Moreover, P5 indicated: *“they are all like great platforms as they are good to like share and communicate information for people from all over the world”*.

Staying ‘current’ appeared within the concept of obtaining information and learning. Participants indicated that they used SNSs in order to remain up-to-date with current affairs, for example, P1 disclosed: *“I like to use it, um to keep up to date with everything... I love reading about what’s going on in the world”*. P4 similarly stated: *“I also like the fact that social networks also show me what is happening around the world”*. Additionally, P5 reported:

*I use it to keep up with what’s going on around the world, whether it be news, sports, and other entertainment and, ja, I use it to download a lot of music, you know, basically keeping up with the trends.*

Many participants revealed that SNSs are used as a channel to provide information and influence others. In line with this, P2 explained:

*People that make those posts like self-development posts they want you know to help people have a purpose in life... just be, have an open mind to life and try to find your purpose and things like that. So this, the people that makes those posts want to see more of that in the world.*

P4 reported that she endeavours to influence others' understanding: *"I just make sure I try to get them to understand the facts"*. P5 confirmed that Internet users are influenced by SNS content: *"People are now referring to the Internet a lot... they are influenced a lot about what's on social media and the Internet"*. Lastly, P8 stated: *"I usually use it for motivation and sharing my journey with the world... Because I believe that my life can impact someone else around the world"*.

The emerging uses of SNSs stated in this section resemble the findings of a 2009 study which revealed four primary needs for participating in groups within Facebook, namely, socialising, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information (Park, Kee & Valenzuela).

An additional concept related to influencing others is using SNSs for social activism or collective action. For example, P1 reported: *"It's a great platform for social movements"*. Social activism in this context is not interpreted to originate from a selfless standpoint but rather to influence others according to one's personal values and beliefs. For instance, P3 described how individuals use SNSs opportunistically to access the masses and to protest:

*Say, in UCT (University of Cape Town) they will be like, well PE (Port Elizabeth) is protesting. So we are going to protest now about something, whatever small niggle issue that we may have had. Now is the chance to do it because we see other people are gaining a foothold towards something.*

P4 revealed that SNSs are used to assemble and influence others to collectively admonish an individual: *"You know, some people are obsessed with... getting people just to shout at you or something"*.

A few participants raised the concept of altruistic uses of SNSs, which proved to be a difficult concept to categorise. According to Batson and Powell (2003) a person that is motivated to increase another's welfare, would be pleased by attaining this desired goal. Therefore, this apparent altruism would arguably be a product of egoism and the motivation for hedonism. However, some scholars contend that any self-benefit experienced by an individual in helping



another may simply be an unintended consequence of reaching the ultimate goal of benefiting the other (Batson & Powell, 2003). Hence, influencing others, albeit in a positive manner, can be motivated by self-interest in that individuals, for example, experience personal fulfilment.

However, for the sake of this thematic analysis, altruism has been moved to the first sub-theme, that is, social contact, as it is more closely related to engaging with others in a pro-social manner than on the basis of self-interest (Ma & Chan, 2014).

During the refinement stages of data analysis, users' motivations to commit racially prejudiced behaviour or to discriminate against others on the basis of their race stood out in terms of its categories and concepts. These significantly echoed concepts discovered within SNS users' purpose and use of these platforms (Theme 2). Therefore, it is suggested that users' motivations or intentions for engaging in prejudiced or discriminatory behaviour on SNSs closely resembles their initial purpose of- or motivation for using SNSs. Individuals' drives or motivations are also considered determinant factors to a specific behaviour occurring and will therefore be discussed under the next theme.

**Theme 3: Precipitating factors of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs.** The third emerging theme concerns the cause of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs as well as the origins of this behaviour in SNS users. Some participants suggested that SNSs are the source, although it was subsequently recognised that the users of SNSs are the predominant determinant factor to this behaviour occurring. For example, P1 conveyed: *"It's just another platform because we've always been able to communicate with each other"*. P2 agreed with this sentiment:

*This is a platform and they only exist because we post stuff... If we were not posting stuff then I don't think there would be anything on there... on platforms like Facebook if we retrieved all our posts there wouldn't be anything on there for people to abuse so I am thinking these sites exist because we post and what we post matters depending on what you post the recipients will respond in a particular way.*

P3 reported that the positive uses of SNSs are sometimes exploited by individuals: *“So it can go from something that’s very good to something bad, just from people using it”*. Similarly, P4 expressed her concern as SNSs are *“being misused in a lot of ways”*.

It should be noted that participants were not explicitly asked about their personal role and involvement in producing incidences of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs, but rather that questions were aimed at exploring perceptions about others who generally commit this type of behaviour.

**Psychological aspects.** The first sub-theme within contributing factors of SNS users are the psychological aspects of the users. These were divided into categories which indicated personality traits, mental and emotional disturbance, and motivation. P1 alluded to an individual type: *“It depends on the type of person... It’s probably the people that... want to spread discord, or ja (yes), I think it’s a certain type of person”*. P2 referred to the internal nature of an individual: *“It comes from within and we can’t really change that”*.

More specifically, P2 also described traits that suggest rigidity and low openness to experience: *“... an unwillingness to learn or change”*. P4 added that: *“If a person believes this, they believe this and there’s no way you can change the way they feel about something... people believe what they believe”*. Participants revealed that a lack of empathy and compassion for others result in destructive online behaviour, for example, P5 stated: *“People just say anything they want to say and they don’t care who it affects and who it hurts... people don’t care who they hurt in the process or what they say”*. P6 confirmed this view: *“Not considering how that will make her feel. I don’t care as such... You know, on Facebook we don’t care. People don’t care. They don’t care about the person who they have written about”*. With regards to the role of personality, research has also revealed that personality traits directly influence prejudice and indirectly affect discrimination (where prejudice directly influences discrimination) (Case, Fishbein & Ritchey, 2006).

Emotional or mood disturbance was an additional category classified under psychological aspects of SNS users. For instance, P3 reported: *“There are posts that you can read and be like... that’s some sort of hate coming out. And often... because you know, that person, there is something not right upstairs”*. P6 indicated: *“Anyone can write, depending on the space they are in”*. He also described emotional turmoil: *“If you are going through something... because you are not happy about yourself”*. Lastly, P8 mentioned anger as a precipitating emotion: *“People are generally angry... harming that person, just because of anger”*. Impulsivity or a lack of self-regulation was suggested by P4: *“I just feel like we don’t watch the things we say”*. P6 concurred: *“I mean we are all opinionated but... you must measure your words”*.

As mentioned previously, motivational factors substantially overlapped the concepts discussed under Theme 2: Purpose and use of SNSs, specifically, the categories of social contact and self-interest. For instance, P3 described humour or entertainment as a user motivation: *“The people who create the posts or start this sort of thing happening, is normally people who actually... they find it purely, like comedic but it is not in like a harsh way”*. Likewise, P4 revealed: *“I feel like some people might do it without even noticing that maybe they are being racist... Maybe someone is trying to be funny, like these memes I am talking about”*. P6 agreed that: *“Some people just joke around online, maybe on Instagram... That is very entertaining sometimes, although sometimes it is bashing people”*.

To receive regard and attention from others was a repeated emerging category amongst participants. For instance, P4 reported: *“Just for the attention that comes with it maybe. You know, some people are obsessed with getting that type of attention...”*. P6 agreed:

*I might be lonely or I might be bored or seeking attention. Because ja (yes), we do have attention-seekers... in my opinion, people do things sometimes for attention... And for approval by people, for people to think you are smart.*

The notion of an ‘audience effect’ was conveyed by participants to explain why SNS users behave in accordance to the presence of others, for example, as reported by P1: *“it depends on the*

audience” and P2: “depends on the following you have”. P3 supported this premise and explained: “It is more to put out a hateful comment for as many people and to try and get as big of a reaction from that... Because they need an audience to do it”. Another example of this was offered by P4: “people are most likely to have these types of discriminations posted towards them because there’s a lot of followers, there’s a lot of people”.

Under self-interest or self-gain as a motivation, P3 explained: “There is some gain. So just for personal... like for the person who is posting”. P4, furthermore, added: “That somehow gives them that drive to... I don’t know how to explain it but some people are actually on some trip out there. People enjoy just putting other people through stuff on social media”. P6 shared this notion: “So they get a sense of fulfilment and they get to feel like they are bullies. They then tend to make another person feel horrible in order for them to – to feel... content with who they are”. Moreover, P8 confirmed self-interest as a motivating factor: “Oh yes, individualistic... I would say most benefits, most reasons why people do it is – is for that, for their own self-gain”. Within self-interest, P6 suggested that users are motivated to discriminate or display prejudiced behaviour in order to occupy time and for amusement:

*People who post negative stuff don’t have anything to do in their lives. They are not working and stuff like that. So as much as it is funny and rude, sometimes it is the case because I mean you are sitting in your room, doing nothing. So all you can think of, is bashing someone.*

Participants also raised ideas related to power and competition, for instance, P2 conveyed: “One of the motivations is they want to be like or better than one another”, and that “some of these people, they make posts maybe to get power over whoever they’re abusing or whoever they’re directing their comments to”. P1 described that “maybe belittling others is a way of making themselves feel better”. P8 stated: “It’s the mere fact of wanting to be superior... a person gains the – the power that is not real power”.

Several participants described that users are driven by a motivation to provoke and confront others, for example, P1 indicated: “...to start conflict, cause some people feed off that. P2 revealed: “People just post something to see if race will come up, yeah... that is a motivation for other people”. In addition, P6 mentioned: “The person who initiated there, intends to feel like- you know what, I got to her”. P8 explained that some users are “just out there to – to just dare people to see what people are going to do”.

In terms of aggressive or sadistic inclinations, P4 revealed that “there’s a lot of people just ensuring that something goes wrong with that person. That person says something and then we are ready to attack. ...we just always want to fight”. P2 suggested that SNS users post offensive racial responses “just to hurt the individual who has posted”. Lastly, P5 reported that individuals use SNSs in order “to demean people, to break people down... to have verbal wars against each other”.

Self-expression and the need to be heard was a major intersecting category between the cause of racial prejudice on SNSs and individuals’ use of these platforms. What this may suggest is prejudiced statements or comments on SNSs are the result of users’ motivation for self-expression and not necessarily intended to be prejudiced or to discriminatory. When discussing the reason SNS users post racially prejudiced or discriminatory content, P8 revealed: “Just as they are voicing... they, for one, think it is important to say”. P3 also explained: “Let’s say someone needs to express their feelings, but they don’t know how to express it in real life without feeling the consequences... they often find that it is a lot easier to express those feelings online”.

Similarly, P5 shared this opinion:

*I think the media itself is a place where people can just express themselves... Where people have felt like no one has been listening to them for a very long time and social media is the only place where they can get people’s attention and actually express themselves.*

**Cognitive aspects.** The second emerging sub-theme indicates that individuals' cognitions and beliefs are influential factors in racially prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour on SNSs.

Firstly, several participants highlighted various types of cognitive distortions. For example, P3 reported that users are prejudiced and discriminate because of "*difficulties they may be experiencing, in a distorted way*". Participants also suggested a form of myopia or dichotomous thinking in individuals, for instance, P2 stated: "*They tell me that person was racist and I'm like, I didn't even notice so what makes that being racist? Just because he talked to that person first and not me?*". P4 shared this sentiment: "*We just always want to say that what we believe is what it is. You know, polarised thinking*". She also described the concept of confirmation or negativity bias:

*Whatever you post is wrong. For some odd reason, they find the wrong in whatever you post... it is a very toxic place to be. You post something and there's immediately something wrong with that certain thing that you post... People don't pay attention to the good that people post and they pay attention to the negative things....*

P5 added: "*Sometimes people can just look into things way too deep for what it is... anything and everything that is being done to them that doesn't benefit them can be racist. So little things, petty things*".

Perceived victimisation or disadvantage was a significant perception that emerged amongst the majority of the participants. P3 explained that users "*may view everything as a personal attack on themselves*". P6 suggested: "*It seems as though people have a mentality of being victims. They always want to victimise themselves*". This was mirrored by P8: "*Your victim complex is 'oh poor me'... I have this and that underprivilege... that would be obviously a victim part*". Related to perceived victimisation is that some individuals feel that they are targets of scapegoating. For instance, P3 conveyed:

*...there's been a lot more targeting towards, umm, as a white male. Like that's been the target for all the countries. If you are a white male, you are going to be the centre*

*of a lot of judgement and saying- you are the wrong person, irrespective of what you have done or anything. You are – you are now the reason for all the problems.*

Likewise, P5 explained: *“They feel like... everything that’s going on is not their fault and that they shouldn’t be held responsible for what’s going on”*. P4 confirmed that this phenomenon does in fact occur online: *“...now whose fault is it that there’s only two black students...? and then they are like- no, it’s still white people”*.

Individuals’ level of sensitivity and tender-mindedness fell between individuals’ temperament and discernment as a causal factor. This perception was suggested by many participants as one which renders an individual vulnerable to appraising events on a personal basis, which ultimately perturbs some users. P4 reported: *“If you are going to take to heart everything that they say, you won’t be happy”*. P3 indicated: *“People who often are not, umm, let’s say, desensitised”*. P5 s suggested that some individuals have *“trained to block it out”*. In describing his own approach to dealing with provocative SNS content, P8 explained: *“I am a hard person to offend... I don’t feel myself, personally like ‘I am so offended’ because I don’t really care what people say to me”*. Tender-mindedness has previously been demonstrated to be one the most powerful single predictors of prejudice (Ekehammar & Akrami, 2007).

Many participants suggested that some individuals are preoccupied with race. P1 illustrated this when discussing the #FeesMustFall student fees movement:

*A lot of it came out as racially-based when it’s a completely different and separate issue and I just think it comes into everything where it doesn’t need to be... where it does not need to be brought into everything.*

P2 conveyed that a superficial or material fixation with race is something she has become alerted to:

*The ones that are talking about race, as in white and black... Those I don’t comment on. I don’t want to attach myself to that. I try to avoid that as much as I can cause I’m not going to stay here forever - like say in South Africa. Like it is common here that I*

*can see, everything is about race... It's not race like from where you're coming from, its just two colours: black and white and that, in my country, we don't feel it, we don't see it and I want to leave South Africa with a good light and you know... just that, we're just all people and not... I recognise that its there, but I don't want it to affect my judgement or have a bias on particular people and stuff like that.*

In explaining individuals' capacity to perceive situations involving race objectively, P4 stated:

*...this situation is not even... It was not even based on race but you guys just went there. You had to go there, you know. Sometimes we don't have to go there. We don't have to go to the racism card.*

P8 seemed to agree with this idea: *"As a matter of fact, even if it isn't racial, they will find a way to make it racial"*. Participants alluded to individuals' beliefs or mindsets as activating certain prejudiced or discriminatory behaviours. For instance, P1 mentioned: *"It's probably the people that believe them true"* and P8 concurred: *"People believe it. I don't believe that most people are just straight-forward facetious. I think they really believe it"*. P6 also indicated: *"People who are active on social media have that mentality that you know what... people are racist... People have preconceived ideas... you have this preconceived idea of the world. But, that's not how it exactly is"*. P2 referred to an ideology: *"You grow up thinking you are better than other people or you think these particular people are better than these others"*. P8 suggested moral justification that takes place which results in the acceptance of prejudiced behaviour: *"People believe it is justified racism... It is based on colour. Ja (yes), it is a prejudiced remark and they try to justify it, which bothers me"*.

Participants explained that users either make prejudiced statements or discriminate against others due to their own ignorance or incognisance. For example, P2 reported: *"Sometimes people post things that are out of utter ignorance... you know you just say something without, you know, knowing the background, knowing this, knowing that..."*. P4 considered the same position: *"The things we say... we don't have facts for them... it's that misinformation fact. So people might react"*



*different ways due to experiences, what facts they know about... ”. In terms of knowledge and comprehension, P5 reported: “without even like, umm, understanding what happened” and P6 similarly stated: “It is sometimes, because of lack of knowledge”. Moreover, P8 confirmed that ignorance is a cause of prejudiced statements: “...a lot of people just don’t know what they are saying. So I think they are just racially ignorant”. It has been established that individuals are inclined to have prejudiced attitudes towards people who are believed to be different from them, which may stem from an insufficient amount of knowledge about others, the product of ignorance and lack of information (Matusitz, 2012).*

Another cognitive process that may produce racial prejudice and discrimination was content appraisal. This included discrepancies in SNS users’ interpretation of context, intent and the actual content. For instance, P6 remarked: *“They don’t even have the context of why we were fighting. Then people will see that... But that is not the case”*.

Credulous appraisal of content was identified in participants’ responses, in that users accept content at a surface-level without insight or applying a deeper level of thinking. For example, P4 mentioned: *“People seem to just be seeing it here, not seeing the bigger picture...”*. Some participants described SNS users as gullible or impressionable, for instance, P2 reported: *“Everything that you see, you hear shouldn’t be the gospel truth... people just take it off (at) face value”*. P5 suggested that individuals form spontaneous assumptions: *“A lot of people jumped to ‘oh, must have been a racist thing’... When we see those things, we don’t even continue to ask or try to find out what happened before... the situation occurred”*. P6 revealed that users can act without reasoning: *“We tend to support preconceived points...we don’t know why we are even supporting it”*. On this, P8 added: *“On face value, it seems right and then they go with it...”*.

Inaccurate appraisal or misinterpretation of content was suggested as being instrumental in why individuals perceive content on SNSs as offensive. In terms of accurately discerning another user’s intent for producing ‘racial’ content, P2 indicated: *“Sometimes a post is very very innocent,*

*and very open-minded and positive... But the comments that follow that post... ”. P3 concurred by suggesting:*

*Some people may have problems with being able to identify that... for instance, I can start a racial track. But it is purely in a light-hearted manner and it could be very understood that it is not out to cause any harm.*

P3 also explained that: *“It could be just the comedic light-hearted, no hard feelings. It could be very seen that it is a joke. You need to understand it as a joke”*. P4 endorsed the concept of misconstrued content:

*They weren't seeing the main reason why that post was posted and what it meant... People don't understand that this is the reason why this was posted... A person might be joking about this, it might not even be about the sense of black and white people but for some odd reason, that person just mentioned 'black' or something like that, you know, but the person wasn't really, um, meaning it in a racial discrimination way. But for some people will just misread that maybe, and then it becomes an issue and then it offends them, you know... I would say this like this but actually mean this. But you will see it in another way.*

In addition, P6 reported: *“Innocent status updates from a white person or a black person becomes a fight because people don't understand the difference between these things”*.

Participants recognised that the nature of SNS content can be transformed when removed from the context. For example, P8 conveyed that a: *“person who was merely joking but joking in a way that they shouldn't have been joking... Obviously it is going to be taken in a very bad way and it actually turns into a racist remark”*. P3 shared this view: *“...from it being viewed a lot, often you have a lot of people with different mind-sets and opinions about things and then it could then start getting moulded or transformed”*.

The ambiguity of online content was also alluded to, for instance, P2 mentioned *“sometimes a post...doesn't 'scream' race”*. P3 explained that content can have unclear meaning:

*It is kind of like on that like fringe of the Internet where it is kind of light-hearted and also it starts getting to the – the more serious themes... with that sort of environment of the blurring of the line what could be comedy, there's often a lot of racial things that are often brought up, like stereotypes are often used, you know, with jokes.*

P4 suggested that there can be contrasting analyses of the same content: “*Someone else will see it as being racist, you know, but actually someone else might see it as being funny...*”.

Discrepancies between how individuals understand and classify race and race-related incidents was discussed by the participants. By clarifying the focus of the interviewer's question, P8 revealed that individuals have different interpretations of the word ‘race’: “*It depends by what you mean ‘racial’...*”. He then explained that individuals are unable to fully comprehend the subject of race: “*(Are people able to) understand them as in like fully grasp the entire topic? No*”.

Lastly, P8 added:

*I have heard people made ethnic, religious statements which I think can border racism. I mean if you... Like the whole Jew and Muslim thing. I mean you can be Jewish in your faith but Jewish is ethnic as well and you can be Muslim in your faith but you are Palestinian... But if you are Palestinian, you are considered Muslim.*

In terms of recognising and accurately identifying racially antagonistic encounters, P2 revealed:

*For some of us, it's not easy to recognize if someone is being racist. Whereas for other people you know they'll pick it up instinctively and say the other person was being racist. I honestly do not even know the indicators of when someone is being racist or not, unless they use the word: black and white.*

P6 shared this sentiment:

*I think there's still a lot to be done in terms of people understanding what is discrimination, what is prejudice, what is what... understanding the differences of this concept that I answered because sometimes it can be confusing. And that's the reason why sometimes... it is on social networking because you don't understand.*

*You mistake discrimination from something that is not discrimination... People must learn what these things mean.*

Furthermore, P8 highlighted that individuals are “*ignorant about what is racism and what isn't racism*”. He also queried: *I mean what do you declare as racism? So I mean that's the problem we have now. I think that's a local issue we have now... defining the lines, it is difficult*”.

**Psychosocial aspects.** Social factors impacting on individuals' behaviour and/or cognitive processes was clearly articulated by participants and which consequently formed a sub-theme. In terms of socialisation and nurture aspects, some participants spoke of early childhood experiences and learning that may play a significant role in producing prejudiced or discriminatory behaviours. For example, P2 reported:

*I think the way they were brought up... when you grow up thinking you are better than other people or you think these particular people are better than these others then yes it's the upbringing as well...also if they've had or if they are living a very bad life for them to think the way they think.*

P8 agreed with this concept: “*I have a belief that a person's childhood affects their future or their adulthood*”. P2 also considered that this behaviour is acquired throughout an individual's development: “*...it may be groomed... you grow up being around people who are discriminating against others so you learn all that... you've seen it as you've developed in life*”. Likewise, P3 stated: “*Racism is taught... to an extent*”.

Experiential learning was another suggestion from several participants. For instance, P4 revealed:

*...because you have your own personal past experience maybe, with an encounter with a person in a different race than you... past experiences might cause you to post such things*”. *I think depending on your own experiences as well, the way you react to it, is like very... It contributes. Like your past experiences contribute to the way you react.*

P5 concurred: *“due to the experiences, you know, that we have had”*, as well as P6: *“people who have lived the experience”*.

Group membership and social dynamics was commented on by most participants as a causative factor of racial prejudice and discrimination, as P6 revealed: *“I think sometimes it is a group thing”*. In addition, P2 explained: *“the community they’re in, or the friends they have... All those affect those people who make the negative comments about people. Social life, yeah like the social community they come from, the people they hang out with”*. She added that SNS content sometimes affects particular social groups: *“if they post something like [that] a particular group of people don't like, it seemingly effects a particular group of people. Those people respond negatively*. P3 illustrated peer influence in one of his responses:

*...it could be just following the standard of, umm, like the group that you would be interacting with. So if you had a group of friends who always swore or use swear words, you would tend to use swear words more often.*

P6 explained: *“Sometimes you do it because you want to fit in. And sometimes, I think it is because my friends are doing it so now let me do it. So it is peer pressure”*. He then added: *“... you tend to belong to a certain community”*.

With regards to social influence, learning concerned with observation and imitation of behaviour was raised, for example, P3 reported that some SNS users are *“mimicking the behaviours of others online”*. This was echoed by P4: *“...seeing that other people do it”*, and P5: *“So if I had Twitter and you know, I see what he is doing, so why can't I do it?”*. Furthermore, P6 added: *“... because if you see someone doing it, you are like- oh, so this is the trend”*. Similarly, social trends was also repeated amongst participants, for instance, P5 indicated: *“I use it to...you know, basically keeping up with the trends”*. This was also mentioned by P6:

*Because if you see someone doing it, you are like: Oh, so this is the trend because if you look at nowadays... We tend to want to be with the trend... so that you seem like*

*you are informed or you are, like you want to be in the era. You don't want to be left behind.*

Some participants referred to poor role models who set a negative example for others, for instance, P5 indicated: *"I don't think it is being used correctly. Like that's... That's not the image you are supposed to show us... influencing us to do stuff"*. P8 also expressed the importance of a role model: *"I need someone to look up to. I need someone who is going to mould me"*.

Several participants suggested that collective behaviour between individuals and groups give rise to racial prejudice and discrimination. For example, P5 stated: *"it takes a few people to defend, to – to get the other people to defend... it takes those few brave ones to actually bring the rest of us in"*. P1 shared this idea: *"A lot of people, if it's what they believe, then they either they're trying to get their people that believe the same things with them..."*. P7 explained that *"it is such a mob mentality"* when illustrating how his friends agree to prejudiced remarks, adding: *"Literally, someone says it... it seems right and then they go with it"*. Finally, P8 conveyed: *"You find that the black person will retaliate and now taking it to other black people"*.

Within this sub-theme, it became apparent that individuals generally identify and categorise themselves and others within and between racial groups. P8 evidently valued his racial heritage: *"I love being black, I am born black. I treasure my blackness"*. Generally, participants' use of the terms 'black' and 'white' highlighted this premise. For example, a simple quantitative analysis of participants' responses revealed that these two words were mentioned a total of 260 times. Furthermore, participants indicated that racial group membership is typical within South Africa with regards to social affiliations and individuals relate to others purely on the basis of their race. For example, P2 explained: *"...because I'm black and I'm African, so if I see comments made by a black person about... stereotyping another race, that affects me because I'm the same colour"*. P5 conveyed the same point: *"...because I am black, I am obviously going to feel, you know, like I am going to have an emotion towards it"*. Moreover, P6 alluded to the effortless nature of gaining allies online merely due to racial affiliation: *"It is very easy to discriminate because I mean if I*

*say something about white people, I know a lot of black people will be on my side because I am black”.*

Similarly, Walther (2013) suggests that the lack of perceived interindividual differences online, in conjunction with a sense of overarching similarity to another by belonging to a “supergroup” identity, may lead online group members to form exceptionally strong bonds to the group (p. 166).

The identification with and discrimination between racial groups served as a basis for the next category that emerged. Participants clearly indicated that racism and racial discrimination is a common group process on SNSs. P1 was taken aback when she realised: “...as to how negative people can be just based on race... they already don't like them just because of the colour of their skin”. P2 also revealed that online, individuals are “commenting or abusing an entire race”. Participants suggested that the incidence of racial prejudice and discrimination online is merely a reflection of racism and racial discrimination found in actual life. For instance, P5 stated: “...black people, you know, speaking down to white people, discriminating them because of their colour... I have seen white people basically treat black people like nonsense”. P8 added that behaviour towards others on the basis of their racial group is not purely one-sided: “...black people are actually more racist than white people... you also find white people who are very racist”. He concluded by saying: “People are racist... it's the people”. P3 supposed: “...if there is no racism expressed towards you, then you won't express it back”.

Two participants also alluded to ethnocentrism. P1 mentioned that individuals display these behaviours “so they probably feel better about their own race”. P8, similarly, explained that some may not be “very comfortable with black people in South Africa”.

The underlying causal or determinant factors that emerged from the data have been explained. The following theme focuses on factors that enable or facilitate racially prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour on SNSs.

**Theme 4: Enabling factors of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs.** Participants arrived at a consensus that SNSs do play a role in facilitating racial prejudice and discrimination. This formed the fourth theme, not as a primary causal influence but rather pertaining to the enabling of users' inclinations.

**Design.** Participants emphasised of the design and attributes of SNSs that afford users the means to commit racially prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour online. For example, P3 explained that *"once you are on it, it is kind of designed to be a little bit addictive"*. Another contributing attribute are the various tools and features available to users. Many participants explained that the ability to produce and expand on content was significant, for instance, the comments feature. P2 reported: *"...in most cases its not the posts, its the comments"* and was reiterated by P7: *"They are just there for the comments..."*. Likewise, P3 illustrated: *"... Then a comment will follow... So if you go now, type a comment, they are just going to type a comment back. It can just carry on. There's not going to be any resolution to it"*. Finally, P8 confirmed this idea: *"...because it is always the comments. It is never really the post"*. The comments have also been deemed by Wallace (2016) as a catalyst in online discord, for example: "if you mainly read news online, but occasionally glance at the comments, you might think that the Internet at large is overpopulated by people with mental disorders, bizarre ideas, and questionable motives and that normal folk had better tread very cautiously" (p.2).

The ability to edit and alter content was a related idea. P4 spoke about 'memes' which she described as *"pictures that are just edited by people"*. She then added: *"... there's been memes going around about white people saying this, black people saying this"*. P6 also revealed the possibility of altering content: *"...you can share it and then add your own on top and say 'ja (yes), someone finally said it' ... you know, those nasty comments"*.

In describing individuals who exercise racially prejudiced or discriminatory behaviour online, P4 suggested: *"It is likely to be people who usually engage with this type of content. And*



*who share, themselves, this type of content*". Hence, the ability to share and distribute racial content was raised as a potentially negative feature. P6 shared this sentiment:

*I think in terms of the racial theme, it plays a very huge role because of the 'share' button as well. It just has been introduced because if I see a racial thing and I like it, I can just share it and write my own comment. Another person can share on top of my sharing.... that's how it goes, it spreads wild then.*

P8 added that users who come across this content *"would probably post it on all social networks, tag as many people as they can tag in that very same post"*.

A final aspect of SNS features is that the ability to capture and preserve content is made possible. For example, P4 indicated: *"...someone else has screenshot it. So, it is going to follow you around"* and that she witnessed other users get offended as a result of a *"screen-grab"* of a post.

**Environment.** Participants alluded to the facilitative environment that is distinctive to SNS platforms. This resonates with research which has established that the environment in which humans behave can and does affect the way individuals behave. Under the right circumstances, almost any individual will behave uncharacteristically (Wallace, 2016). In terms of online 'circumstances' for such behaviour, Glaser and Khan (2004) suggest the anonymous, spontaneous, impersonal, and disinhibited quality of Internet-based communication.

The nature of the online environment allows for opportunities to express racial prejudice and discrimination and widespread exposure to others on this platform means that potential targets are accessible. An example was provided by P1: *"social media kind of opens up the platform, so it's never really a dialogue between two people if you comment on something it's for everyone"*. P2 suggested that users are sometimes vulnerable to threats on a global scale: *"You will get someone from a different country commenting in the worst way possible on a comment that was posted by someone say in Iceland"*. Moreover, P4 specifically suggested that targeting by groups can occur: *"As soon as majority of people agree with a certain thing about racism or anything*

*like that then automatically it doesn't protect you... from that type of experience". P5 explained that there is no protective buffer on SNSs: "...because there's no boundary, people are exposed to quite a lot of hate speech, racism...". She then added: "the fact that it is so easy to get access to a lot of people can get hurt from it".*

Pertaining to opportunity and access to others online, Malamuth, Linz and Weber (2013) similarly explain that the online environment provides instant connections and opportunity, however that these instant connections considerably increase the opportunity for exposure to aggression.

According to the participants, the higher the user's level of activity on these platforms, the more they are at risk of becoming targets of prejudice and discrimination. For example, P4 mentioned: *"If you aren't very active on these social networks, I don't think you are most likely to experience such... it is likely to be people who usually engage with this type of content".* This apparently includes the level of engagement with SNS content, as P4 conveyed that it is individuals *"who share, themselves, this type of content"* who are exposed. Moreover, P5 reported that popularity on these platforms renders users vulnerable: *"the people at the top that everyone is looking at... being at the top makes you the main target".* P5 also explained: *"we as people can also experience those things, I mean you can't run away from it...".*

P6 reinforced this idea, stating that the main targets of racial prejudice and discrimination are: *"people who are active on Facebook... who have many connections, who are following many pages... if you have like a large number of followers as well".*

Witnessing and being exposed to racially prejudiced content was consistently referred to in terms of a learning environment for this behaviour. For instance, P5 revealed: *"...it does, you know, kind of influence someone to want to get that because they see it on social media... they are influenced a lot about what's on social media and the Internet".* P3 repeated this idea in an example he provided:

*If you are on a social networking site... you will tend to use a lot more racial references in your posts then too because it is just the – it's the constant exposure to what is on that platform at that moment.*

Some participants mentioned that exposure to this content is almost unavoidable, for example, P7 stated: *"If you don't want to see it, don't go on it"*. P6 also revealed: *"you will come across things that you were not even supposed to see because you are just all over"*. Similarly, P5 indicated: *"...because people are exposed to a lot of explicit things on social media... basically, social media shows us like a lot of things with uncensored things"*.

Regarding both the nature of SNS environments and the features of these platforms, participants suggested that SNSs enhance exposure to unsolicited content, for example, P3 referred to an algorithm which automatically suggests content: *"on each of the social media's if you tend to subscribe to certain content, it will start suggesting and throwing you down more of a rabbit hole"*. Likewise, P2 added that when engaging with content on SNSs *"something similar may come up"*.

The nature of the social environment on SNSs brings about experiences of disinhibition among users. P8's thoughts on those who leave racist remarks on SNSs included:

*...I wouldn't say they are scared or anything to do physically, but I think they have some sort of respect when they are in the real world, when they are around people... But when people go on the social networks, they become totally different beings.*

The ability to remain anonymous or to alter one's identity emerged as a significant factor. For example, P5 reported: *"People don't have photos on social media. They say and do anything they want to"*. P6 concurred with this, adding:

*...because there's catfishing. A person who has a profile that's white and we think it is a white person would make a very bad comment about blacks... sometimes you can be speaking to an imposter or catfished profile... because the person was not the person they seemed to be.*

He then added: *“people must realise that behind every profile picture is a real human being that’s alive, that have feelings”*. In support of the above notion, P8 explained:

*On Facebook, you can meet someone who has a profile picture of a cat or a dog. You don’t really know what their face looks like and then these people tend to approach a girl and make as if they want to be their boyfriend or whatever and then in turn, they become – they turn out to be serial killers.*

An additional concept that produces disinhibition on SNSs is the absence of any consequences and repercussions for racially prejudiced or discriminatory behaviours. For example, P3 revealed: *“...without having some sort of repercussions on it. Even if there is a repercussion, it’s kind of like a slap on the hand because you can get around whatever the harshness of it”*. P4 agreed that users are often undeterred because *“nothing will happen to that person”*. She strongly felt that SNSs are responsible for prejudice and discrimination as they are uninvolved when such instances occur:

*The social networks really contribute to this like happening...because they don’t stop it. They don’t put a stop to it, you know. I feel like there should be something that you can actually do when such instances escalate... Until these social networks do something about it, until the social networks are able to control and contain these situations from happening because these situations escalate to a point that people start swearing at each other; people start fighting about it and everything else, you know. I feel like until that is controlled, racial prejudice and stereotyping will never, ever, ever stop.*

P5 indicated: *“...there’s not much consequences to it... They say and do anything they want to. And no one is going to do anything about it”*.

The absence of limitations and restrictions on these platforms empower users to behave callously, according to P5: *“there’s no filter in these things, therefore people can say anything”*.

She then added:

*Because there's no particular boundary as to what you can post, what you can say and what you cannot say and what you can't do, that's what makes, you know, the problem bigger I guess... Maybe if social media had boundaries, I think things would be way different.*

P6 suggested that due to the absence of regulation and monitoring, users feel unfettered in their behaviour: *"when we are online, no one is there to monitor what we do. No one is there to say- But you can't post that... It is you and your phone"*. This has been also been recognised by scholars who suggest that a lack of content regulation on the Internet may result in more extreme content than that found on other media (Malamuth et al., 2013).

**Theme 5: Impact of SNSs on racial prejudice and discrimination.** The majority of participants felt that SNSs considerably impact on racial prejudice and discrimination.

**Positive.** Some participants felt that SNSs do play a role in positively influencing the degree of racial prejudice and discrimination. The first idea was that SNSs create an awareness of the incidence of racial prejudice and discrimination. For example, P1 reported: *"I think it creates awareness of how many people are prejudicial... the awareness is generally created, like I really did not know how racist people are before joining social networking sites"*. She then detailed: *"If someone posts a negative comment about another race and someone else comments and gives them more enlightenment about it, that person might learn more or hold less prejudice"*.

P7 supported this opinion:

*I think that the racist issue will actually get better with online stuff because people express themselves and eventually I think people will see that they start looking stupid... and I think that the online community helps for that and especially, there's a lot of education online. I mean social media, there's education. There's podcasts where they talk about racism in an intellectual way and I think that's a huge benefit to people... they can engage and I think it improves.*

P5 explained that SNSs can be used as a platform to assist those who have been victims of racial prejudice and discrimination:

*I mean most victims feel helpless in the situation. It actually takes the comments of people and the videos going viral or the posts going viral, in order for them to get help... So most – most of the people being victimised, they don't really speak out afterwards. It takes... The view is basically to speak out for them.*

**Negative.** Most of the participants were in agreement that SNSs impact negatively on racial prejudice and discrimination. P2 outlined that *“it does impact mostly in a negative way... they can actually lead to, you know, devastating consequences”*. P4 agreed with this concept: *“...they have very strong impact on it... the impact is actually very negative instead of being positive”*.

Moreover, in support of this opinion, P6 revealed: *“I think it will impact negatively in real life now, when we are coming out from the social networking... So I think the impact is very bad”*.

P3 indicated that *“the reaction to something found online can have a real-world effect”*, whilst P5 conveyed: *“I think it... it promotes this stuff. It somehow promotes, you know, people to hate on each other, people to be racist, you know, towards each other...”*. With regards to the scale of impact that SNSs have on racial prejudice and discrimination, P2 suggested that sometimes the duration of the impact is not just temporary: *“...your day became bad just after reading someone's post or statement or whatever... I know it's going to affect me throughout the day...”*. P2 also revealed that the negative impact of this behaviour on SNSs are experienced in various areas of life: *“these do affect your emotions, they could affect your career, affect how you're doing your work or could affect your entire personality...”*.

Concerning psychological effects, P5 reported: *Psychologically, it does sort of influence someone... ”*. P6 shared this idea, saying: *“...they do harm people psychologically... it will come in the form of psychological abuse”*. Furthermore, P1 supported this opinion and added: *“...it's quite damaging I mean it must affect the self-confidence or someone... their own views of their own race or culture”*. It emerged that SNSs have the potential to invoke unpleasant emotions in

individuals. Many participants expressed that they experience anger, for example, P3 stated:

*“First reaction would definitely be some sort of anger... that anger may then linger on”.*

In addition, it was alluded to that individuals experience disappointment, a sense of despondency and hopelessness. As P4 explained: *“I was not angry and I felt very disappointed. That’s when I gave up... Because this is not going anywhere”*. P2 reiterated this concept, saying: *“...mostly I get angry, not at myself and not at the individual that has posted, but the fact that people still say certain things or do certain things”*. P3 revealed that one’s outlook and orientation to life can potentially change to *“being a little bit more not so happy about general things”*.

Finally, P5 divulged that SNSs can alter an individual’s core values and needs: *“Social media itself has created that thing of like making people want to be heard and want to be known for like saying certain things or doing certain things”*.

Pertaining to cognitions, such as perceptions and judgement, some participants revealed that the prevalence of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs have resulted in individuals being consumed or preoccupied with it, for instance, P2 mentioned: *“...you can really get caught up in it”*, which P8 concurred: *“I know, for example, people are caught in it in general”*. P2 also explained that *“if you're not careful with the stuff that people share and your judgement of life in general and everything, or other people, get clouded by what they see on Facebook”*.

Participants believed that individuals’ realities become distorted by their experiences on SNSs, which was introduced by P3: *“...it can end up throwing you down or noticing things that don’t actually occur in real life... So it could, umm, almost set up like a fake real world. So like what’s not actually happening”*. He also explained how users may over identify with- or introject others’ experiences:

*...it escalates the – the feelings of, let’s say you had a slight feeling that something is not going well because of, say, your skin colour or something, um, when you go on social media, that could be amplified because then you are seeing a much broader*

*scope of what other people may be experiencing and then you then take that feelings, that they have, onto yourself as well because you may share the same skin colour or gender. So I would say that like the social media amplifies whatever small feeling you may have. Even if it is a big feeling, you could feel that it is going to get a stronger feeling just from seeing other people of the same discrimination.*

Related to his sentiment, P7 suggested that SNSs amplify individuals' perceptions toward a heightened awareness of racial prejudice and discrimination. He explained:

*...now people are acting out, because I think it is just being exposed... more people hear it. It may stir up more. People will say more... it is seen more and I guess that people act more violently now because now people see it more. They think it is getting worse. Like I think the general public will say, you know, 'racism is getting worse so I have to be more active in what I do or I must be more active against this racism'. Maybe racial acts become more prevalent but the actual, I think the conviction of the people, it hasn't really.*

Participants felt that SNSs extend and increase the instances of racial prejudice and discrimination. P3 powerfully detailed:

*It's a catalyst... It just makes it spread faster, and affect more people... It's like a fan to a flame... it is like a virus spreading in your body that it starts off in one spot and that can spread through your body very quickly.*

Likewise, P1 indicated: "...it's negativity that spreads. I think it just still adds to it... just spreads the prejudice".

With regards to exposing others to cases of racial prejudice or discrimination, participants explained how distribution occurs across SNS platforms, for instance, P3 stated:

*If it is happening on one platform, often users will be on other platforms and then all it is carried through, everywhere. So you will see the same sort of racial hints or joke references going through different social media platforms.*



P5 corresponded with this notion, saying: *“what happens on Twitter doesn’t normally stay on Twitter. It can go onto other social media platforms”*.

The contribution of SNSs to the perpetuation of racial discrimination was raised by several participants. Specifically, P2 explained that users are enabled to *“make something continuous like their background... continuously carrying on generations and generations of being racist”*. P6 shared this sentiment and mentioned: *“Kids are growing up now. They have phones. They are on social media. So what are we instilling in the generation that’s coming if we, ourselves, are not using social media for the right reasons”*. P3 felt that: *“It is not going to end. Yes, it is not going to die out... I guess it is never going to stop”*.

It was revealed that SNSs may facilitate retaliation and escalation of racial conflict, as according to P2: *“They’re responding negatively... most cases they respond in a negative way, in an even worse way than the original post”*. P3 also suggested that users respond in this manner, stating that there many *“reverse posts”* where users *“reply with the exact same”*. He added that: *“if someone punches you, you want to punch them back...”*. P4 explained that racially prejudiced content on SNSs *“starts some sort of an argument... then it becomes a huge thing”*. P6 has too experienced this: *“I have seen it happen. They will respond to it in terms of being negative as well...”* and reported further: *“you are taking that thing and bringing it to reality and I think it will impact negatively in real life now, when we are coming out from the social networking”*.

P6 believes that *“this violent behaviour and anger on social media is escalating”*. This was a personal experience P8 who explained that when he witnesses racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs: *“I immediately wish that I had a licence for a gun or I owned a gun. I get so angry man”*. P6 feels that racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs can lead to actual violence, for example:

*...sometimes physically because it will come from the psychological abuse that happened there or the cyber-bullying that happened and then other people would want to be physical with that person... I think other people can't deal with it and they*

*can't just respond and let it go there. They take it a step further... some other people just can't deal with racial comments online and it becomes violent... it gets physical.*

P5 supported this opinion and revealed: *"Sometimes I have... I have witnessed people take matters into their own hands"*. He provided an example of this where a *"white man obviously ended up being knocked out by the black guy"* and explained that for users, this is *"basically taking matters into their own hands"*.

A final concept relating to the impact SNSs have is that they can promote racial and social division. In terms of this, P1 felt: *"...it is quite damaging and the person must feel ostracised I guess, yeah, from society"*. P3 suggested that *"the reaction to something found online can have a real-world effect that can cause someone to completely move a country, change their lifestyle, do a lot of things to ensure that they feel safe"*. In addition, P6 described how SNSs *"worsens the racism that's already there"* and that *"it worsens the imbalances of, umm, let me say, umm, what's the word – equality..."*. He also articulated how *"social media is bad because it's one of the tools that's making this racial divisions and putting us back as South Africans... social media do encourage racial divisions more"*. Finally, P5 added: *"...there's a lot, like a big separation on social media. I think that's where you actually witness the separation, um, between people in general, black people, white people"*.

Moreover, SNSs have the power to change societal norms, according to P5, for instance, he provided the example: *"...people are exposed to quite a lot of hate speech, racism, and now it is getting to the point where it is seen as okay to, I don't know, call a black person a 'kaffir' and you know"*.

In summary, the data encapsulated within each theme and corresponding subtheme revealed, firstly, that racial prejudice and discrimination found on SNSs primarily originate from the users of these platforms; this includes the psychological, psychosocial and cognitive influences that drive them. Secondly, these influences determine the way in which the SNSs are either used or misused. Furthermore, the misuse of these platforms to display racially prejudiced

and discriminatory behaviour is enabled by the environment and features of SNSs. Finally, it was revealed that this behaviour on SNSs, has a profound impact on racial relations in society.

The next section will concisely present some of the possible associations between the concepts discovered within the research findings and the extant theories mentioned in the *Theoretical Acknowledgements* chapter.

**Relationship Between the Research Findings and Existing Theories**

Numerous emerging categories and concepts were obtained from the participants’ responses which reflect much of what was found in the extant literature (refer to Chapters 2 and 3). To illustrate this, some examples have been selected from the participants’ interview transcripts and provided in Table 8 below. When singled-out, several individual and group-level theories and models can be applied to explain the categories raised by the participants and the aspects of these categories. However, as mentioned in the *Methodology* chapter of this study, the theory needs to fit the data and not in reverse, therefore only a few samples are included for demonstration purposes.

Table 8  
*Examples of Correlations Between Participants’ Statements and Current Theory*

Extract from the interview transcript(s)	Example of relevant theory
Individual level theories	
<i>It could be just following the standard of, umm, like the group that you would be interacting with... Mimicking their behaviour...</i>	Social learning theory
<i>I am like: you know what, I did not like the way you interacted with me. As a result, I lost my cool... So, I said that not because I meant it. I was angry.</i>	Frustration-aggression theory
<i>They're trying to get their people that believe the same things with them to strike a conversation or just to get attention and to start conflict, cause some people feed off that...</i>	Self-interest theory

<i>I think that the, the social planes that people are playing on, they chop and change them as they please...</i>	
<b>Group-level theories</b>	
<i>I know a lot of black people will be on my side, because I am black.</i>	Social information processing theory
<i>People don't have photos on social media. They say and do anything they want to... People must realise that behind every profile picture is a real human being that's alive, that have feelings...</i>	Social presence theory
<i>People try and get as big of a reaction from that... because they need an audience to do it.</i>	Social facilitation
<i>As soon as majority of people agree with a certain thing about racism or anything like that then automatically it doesn't protect you... We will have five hundred comments about the same thing.</i>	Group polarisation

According to the National Research Council (2004) to be able to measure the existence and extent of racial discrimination of a certain kind in a particular social domain, it is necessary to have a theory (concept or model) of how such discrimination might occur and what its effects might be.

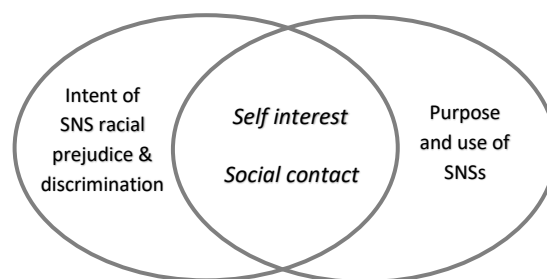
The secondary research aim was to determine whether there are existing theoretical insights that delineate the incidence of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs. From a holistic focus, no single theoretical framework suffices to explain the diverse factors of this online phenomenon. Therefore, it was determined that a new, multi-level or contextual theoretical formulation was necessary.

The next section expands on the theory developed from the current study and will provide details of how the data-driven theory was devised.

### The Social Networking Site Racial Division Model (SRM)

GTM prescribes that the development of a theory must be grounded in the research data. The Social Networking Site Racial Division Model or SRM was the theoretical model generated in this study, which was developed in line with the themes and sub-themes discussed in the above sections. The development of this model results from the current study's design and methodological approach, and its theoretical underpinnings are outlined and discussed in this section. Existing theories discussed in this section provide support for the submissions concerning racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs and the Social Networking Site Racial Division Model.

**Integration of SRM and established theories.** As demonstrated in the data presented previously, users' purpose for- and use of SNSs links with their motivations and the intentions they have to produce racially prejudiced or discriminatory behaviour. These two aspects unified, more clearly depicted in Figure 2 below, constitute the incentive component of this behaviour.



*Figure 2.* Configuration of SNS users' incentive for racially prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour

As illustrated in Figure 2, incentive consists of the users' need for social contact and self-interest or gain, which were the two most prominent sub-themes that emerged within both *Purpose and use of SNSs* and *Precipitating factors of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs- Psychological aspects*.

*Human motivation and the hierarchy of basic needs.* According to Moursund and Erskine (2004) the need to relate to others is undoubtedly ingrained in all humans; we are born as relationship-seeking and relationship-making beings.

Likewise, Maslow (1970) described the importance of belongingness and love needs in his work on human motivation. Maslow suggested that individuals are driven by a need for belonging or love, which is usually found within their families, friendships, membership and associations, and within the community. More directly, he stressed that:

He will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group or family, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal. He will want to attain such a place more than anything else in the world (1970, p. 43).

Moreover, Moursund and Erskine (2004) assume that if relational needs are not met, the consequence may manifest behaviourally as intolerance, frustration, anger and aggression.

Following the fulfilment of this need, Maslow (1970) proposed that self-esteem and the need to assure oneself of one's own worth as individuals becomes a prominent force. He termed this, "esteem needs" (p. 45). Furthermore, all individuals desire a secure and usually high-evaluation of themselves in order to maintain a sense of self-respect, esteem for self and for others. If this need is accomplished, usually through mastery and achievement, and gaining others' respect and regard, he or she will experience "feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy, of being useful and necessary in the world" (1970, p. 45).

Fein and Spencer (1997) assert that "a most striking testament to the social nature of the human psyche is the extent to which the self-concept - that which is the very essence of one's individuality - is integrally linked with interpersonal dynamics" (p. 31). Furthermore, Wallace (2016) affirms that "within social networks, we create our own groups with ourselves in the centre (2016, p. 57). The social contact need and self-interest need are symbiotic. It is within one's self-interest to belong to a group and defend this belonging to ensure that the social contact need is successfully met.

Although the concept of user incentive does not speak to all levels of Maslow's basic needs, it does accord with the needs for belongingness and love, and esteem, in terms of its social contact and self-interest aspects. The other basic needs suggested that are positioned fundamentally, are physiological and safety needs. However, as Maslow (1970) proposed, these needs must be met before the former needs can become the individual's focus.

With regards to how individual needs are achieved online, social contact and self-interest were established as notable motivating factors for both, the reason for individuals' use of SNSs and individuals' prejudiced or discriminatory behaviour. To deal with the absence of Maslow's additional basic needs that did not emerge in the research findings, the first assumption suggested is that if an individual possesses the means to access the Internet and social networking services, he or she will have minimally satisfied their essential physiological needs. Next, the individual must experience safety and a sense of security before prioritising the need for love and belonging. On the one hand, it is possible that any risk posed to safety is outweighed by the higher-level need of love and belonging. On the other hand, perhaps SNSs and the online environment serves as a perceived barrier between an individual and threat. For example, it has been established in the previous section that when using these platforms, individuals perceive there to be a lack of consequences for their actions and therefore experience disinhibition. It could be that SNSs creates perceived protection and induces an experience of safety and security in users.

The other need that is not accounted for is self-actualisation, which involves the desire for self-fulfilment, that is, the tendency for an individual to become actualised in what he potentially is (Maslow, 1970). The remaining question remains as to whether individuals are able to find their actualising potential in the online world. Perhaps individuals who resist involvement in racially prejudiced or discriminatory behaviour online have had these needs met in another context, or are actualised beyond the need for love, belonging and esteem, or find it through prosocial behaviours. Moreover, perhaps those who attain a level of self-actualisation do not use SNSs in the first place.

In conclusion, it is believed that the hierarchy of needs model, albeit arguably outdated, is applicable in supporting the concept of SNS user incentive.

***Ecological models of human development.*** Based on the relationship between various psychological ‘fields’, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological paradigm suggests that human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active and evolving individual and the persons, objects, and symbols in his or her immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

A similar theoretical conceptualisation, that is, the social-ecological model (SEM), was applied in a recent study which focused on screen time, namely, the heightened use of electronic devices amongst adolescents (Saqib, 2018). According to Saqib (2018) the SEM centres on the multifaceted and interactive effects of individual and environmental factors that determine behaviour. Furthermore, SEM alludes to multiple levels of influence on behaviour which interact across different levels.

Saqib (2018) explains that “the power of SEM goes beyond diagnosing the problem, the model is to inform the development of comprehensive intervention approaches that can systematically target mechanisms of change at several levels of influence” (p. 2). After careful consideration, it was determined that the SEM could serve as a structure for the incidence of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs.

In the present study, the extent or significance of one influence over another was not specifically determined, however, it was revealed that users are the primary source for this behaviour in a *user-use-SNS* sequence. The essence of the Social Networking Site Racial Division Model is depicted in Figure 3. As can be discerned, the SNS user and SNS platforms are positioned within the *physical world*, that is to say, the individual’s reality. This is similar to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological arrangement which establishes contexts that are each embedded within a broader system (1979).



In rendering the fundamentals of SEM, Kilanowski (2017) refers to the individual level that comprises of the characteristics of an individual that influence behaviour change, including knowledge, attitudes, behaviour, self-efficacy, developmental history, racial/ethnic identity, to name a few. This is comparable to the first aspect concerning the interactional systems that result in prejudice and discriminatory behaviour online, that is, the SNS user who is influenced by their intrapsychic or *internal world* which consists of psychological, psychosocial and cognitive attributes. The other pertinent SEM level is interpersonal, which involves more formal and informal social networks and social support systems that can impact on individual behaviours (Kilanowski, 2017). This is analogous to the SRM *online world*, which incorporates the Internet environment, SNSs and the racial prejudice and discrimination found on these platforms.

Finally, the physical world bears a similarity to the macro-system and public policy level in that it consists of the physical realm, society (the general public), social policy, political and economic systems which impact upon an individual (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Kilanowski, 2017).

The ecological model organises the contexts of development into levels of external influence that are categorised from the most personal level to the broadest levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). SRM does not prescribe a tiered arrangement, but rather stresses parallel and concurrent processes. In terms of the course and outcome of the above-mentioned actions, Figure 3 depicts pathways and the direction of impact within and between multi-layered systems.

In the proposed model, it is seen that an individual is driven by incentive, from his or her internal world to use SNSs. The use of these platforms within the online world, results in behaviour experienced as racially prejudiced and discriminatory. Ultimately, this event leads to an increase in racial division and societal racial discord.

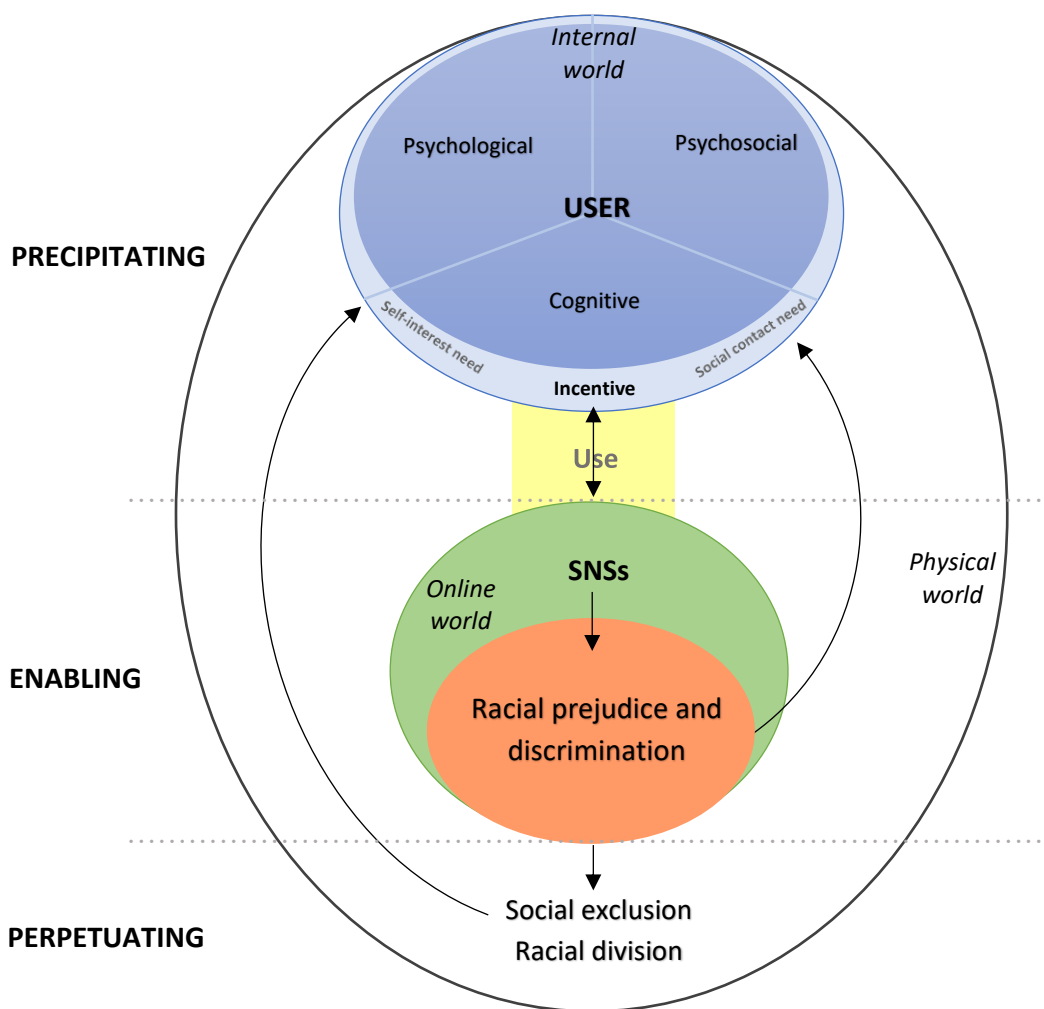


Figure 3. The Social Networking Site Racial Division Model

*Cycle of perpetuation.* Bias, prejudice and discrimination are unfortunate consequences of individuals’ drive to secure their position within a group, for the sake of relating and having social contact. Experiences of prejudice and discrimination on SNSs in conjunction with racial division and discord within society, can potentially impact negatively on individuals’ needs for social contact and self-interest or esteem. The product may potentially be perceived disparity and isolation from others as well as conflicted views of the self. When the internal worlds of individuals are disturbed, psychological, psychosocial and cognitive elements are implicated

which can enhance individuals' incentive to use SNSs in a manner that will satisfy their core needs.

The irony is, that in the quest to relate to others within the online world, individuals effectively enhance social division and sabotage the fulfilment of this need. This further intensifies the need for social contact.

The present research study revealed that no one solitary dynamic is able to justify the intricate causal factors of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs. There were numerous factors, influences and complex interactions that emerged from the data. Therefore, it was unlikely that a single theoretical position would be sufficient for clarifying the origin of this phenomenon. If such theory were to be developed, it would have to concurrently serve a number of bi-directional influences, across several dimensions.

It is suggested that this model be used to examine how dynamic, interactive relationships between different environmental systems impact on SNS users. It offers a framework that captures the many influential factors that impact upon racial prejudice and discrimination at various levels, and which may ultimately result in racial division.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presented the major themes and sub-themes of the research which revealed significant insights about individuals' attitudes and general perceptions to SNS platforms, precipitating factors of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs, the purpose and uses of SNSs, enabling factors of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNS, and finally, the impact of SNSs on racial prejudice and discrimination. As the authors of the findings, numerous quotes of the participants' narratives were offered which exemplified the themes that were presented.

A discussion was presented of and comparison between the newly developed theoretical model, namely, the SRM model, and existing theories relating to racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs. It is evident that some existing theories speak to different aspects of SRM (Figure 3). Furthermore, these findings contribute to the knowledge base of racial prejudice

and discrimination within the South African context. It may serve as a theoretical groundwork for recommendations that guide policy development which aims to monitor and regulate internet use.

The chapter to follow provides an executive summary of the research covering the researcher's personal reflections of the research process, a discussion of limitations of the current study along with recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

#### Introduction

This chapter concludes the current study by providing a summary of the main research findings, followed by a discussion of the conclusions reached. Strengths of the present study are highlighted, thereafter, the limitations of the current research will be presented with the aim of suggesting proposals for future research, which are provided as recommendations. Finally, the researcher's personal reflection of the research process completes the treatise.

#### Summary of the Findings

The present study aimed to explore and describe the experiences and perceptions of racial prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour on SNSs, as well as the perceived impact that SNSs bear on such behaviour. The findings of the research revealed that few participants only held positive or negative views of SNSs as the majority of participants felt ambivalent toward these online platforms. This ambivalence clearly indicated a caveat concerning SNSs and their role in racial prejudice and discrimination. Participants suggested that the function or intent of those who commit racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs, stem ultimately from either self-interest or for social contact as the primary motivations.

These findings emphasise the fundamental importance of individuals' need to identify with others; to relate, to connect and to belong. This need is considered integral to developing an understanding of the origin of why racial prejudice and discrimination occurs. Individuals primarily seek social contact online and to strengthen their position within their social group, which are a means of securing this identified need. Moreover, it was suggested that for individuals to act within their own self-interest is another fundamental need, not only for survival but also for the maintenance of individuals' self-concept. The two mentioned needs are believed to be interdependent, as fulfilling the former need serves the latter.

The findings also indicated that racial prejudice can result from individuals' cognitions and how experiences are appraised. This suggests that the occurrence of perceived racial prejudice and discrimination, together with the true underlying needs previously identified which motivate an individual, could result in either unintentional or intentional prejudice and discrimination. In addition, racial prejudice and discrimination are further influenced by individuals' psychological makeup, as well as psychosocial aspects within their lives. The interaction of these factors determines the way in which SNSs are ultimately used or misused.

SNSs supply both the environment as well as tools and features within its' design that facilitate or enable individuals' behaviour. Therefore, SNSs are not the main cause, but rather serve as a channel to commit racial prejudice and discrimination.

Some participants indicated that SNSs can be used to positively influence the incidence of racial prejudice and discrimination, through exposure and awareness concerning the gravity and prevalence of this dilemma. However, the vast majority of participants suggested that the impact of online racial prejudice and discrimination is negative, severe and tangible.

Finally, emerging from the current study was a new explanatory framework for the prevalence of racial prejudice and discrimination found on online platforms such as SNSs. Furthermore, it was suggested that between multi-layered environments or systems, a bi-directional and cyclical impact ultimately perpetuates this behaviour on SNSs and results in social division within society.

### **Limitations of the Study**

It is believed that limitations and shortfalls are possible within all forms of research (Willig, 2013). Firstly, it must be reiterated that the research findings are not considered applicable beyond the context wherein the data was generated. However, as stated in the *Methodology* chapter of the present treatise, the findings of the current study were not intended to be generalisable to other populations or contexts. Moreover, participants and their contextual factors were clearly described so that the reader would be able to assess the relevance and applicability of the findings.

It is supposed that a larger sample size could have incorporated more racial diversity among the participants, as participants identified themselves as either 'black' or 'white' in this study. Therefore, the findings should only be considered relevant to those within the racial/ethnic background of the participants.

Research that involves individuals' perceptions is "made difficult by participants' unwillingness or inability to divulge their true reactions to others, particularly on issues pertaining to out-group prejudice" (Bartholow & Dickter, 2007, p.386). It was established in this study that individuals strongly relate to and identify with their perceived racial group. Although the interviewer developed sound rapport with each participant, perhaps some participants felt that they could not be fully transparent with regards to disclosing their true beliefs and opinions. This being said, it is considered that a different outcome would have perhaps been obtained from the data collection process if the interviewer was of the same racial and/or ethnic background as the participant.

The most widely raised criticism of the grounded theory method concerns its epistemological roots, in that it does not clearly counteract reflexivity (Willig, 2013). Concerning reflexivity, it is acknowledged that the researcher has the ability to "influence and shape the research process, both as a person (personal reflexivity) and as a theorist/thinker (epistemological reflexivity)" (Willig, 2013, p.95). With regards to personal reflexivity, the researcher does not consider her own racial background a salient facet of her personal identity, therefore, it is supposed that the researcher possessed a sufficient capacity for the impartial analysis of the research findings. Moreover, the subjective influence was pre-empted by the utilisation of both an independent interviewer and an independent data coder. Concerning epistemological reflexivity, the research could have benefitted from a third independent coder from another discipline within the social sciences. This would have added perspective from another branch of knowledge rather than the sole interpretation from a psychological foundation.

### **Strengths of the Research Study**

Bhui (2002) explains that traditionally, research into prejudice and racism has sought an objective reason for prejudice which has resulted in promoting the very methodologies from which racist ideologies are justified. This was a key consideration following the recent drive towards ‘decolonised’ education as grounded theory develops theory which is grounded in the data (Council on Higher Education, 2017; Sayed, Motala & Hoffman, 2016). Many maintain that Western knowledge systems have been favoured, which include theoretical and empirical perspectives that are dominant in countries such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom (Sayed, Motala & Hoffman, 2016).

The decolonisation debate in South Africa considers postcolonial studies as an alternative which gives “voice and agency to the classes or groups in society on whom a dominant power exerts its hegemonic influence” (Council on Higher Education, 2017, p.6). Furthermore, Bobo and Fox (2003) explain: “our understanding of the dynamics of race, racism, and discrimination is enriched by studies that aim to bridge otherwise insular intellectual communities defined by narrowly focused problems, single methodologies, or particular theories of the middle range” (p. 327).

The inductive approach utilised in this study produced a new theoretical framework that is directly informed by context-relevant data. The Social Networking Site Racial Division Model was developed within the South African context, from South African participants’ perceptions and experiences, and which ultimately will contribute toward an African knowledge base. This is considered the most prominent strength of the research findings.

The present study emphasised the detrimental impact of online racial prejudice and discrimination on race relations. The significance of this topic lies in its relevance and applicability, as research within this area has the potential to improve the lives of South Africans.

According to Matthew (2017), the term, *racism* is opted for when individuals make disagreeable references about race. However, it was identified that such behaviour does not



exclusively result from racist ideologies, that is, the systematic categorisation of individuals into subordinate groupings that benefit some at the expense of others, but rather emerges in response to the core need for social contact and to connect with others. Guerin (2003) found that some interactions contain racist statements, not to actually promote racism, but rather to maintain social groups and relationships. The findings of the present study suggest that the perceived experience of racial prejudice and discrimination often results in retaliation, which contributes towards the cycle of perpetuation. Hence, it is critical that the research findings be disseminated in order to foster a different understanding and discourse of racially antagonistic behaviour. This is key in the drive toward social progress in South Africa and to finally advance toward an all-inclusive and interdependent society.

### **Future Recommendations**

The existing array of social media platforms extends to users a variety in scope and functionality, including the ability to form interactive online communities (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014). The present research study explored the experiences and perceptions of racial prejudice and discrimination on SNSs, inclusive of all SNSs. Participants indicated that SNS use differs according to the function and purpose of the use, for instance: *“I use Facebook for chatting... I use Instagram for uploading my pictures.. um, I use Twitter, Twitter is fun... YouTube: movies, music... YouTube has everything”*.

It is proposed that future research explore and compare the use and behavioural trends on different SNSs to determine which specific SNS tools and features are responsible for facilitating prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour.

The present research gathered information from the perspective of ‘third-party’ observers and did not specifically gather rich insights from either perpetrator or target. This decision was made as it was both ethically and practically problematic to require participants to divulge their personal role in either perpetrating or being on the receiving ‘end’ of racially prejudiced or

discriminating encounters. It is therefore suggested that future research examines the individual perspectives of both the perpetrator and target.

According to P3: *“Language is always transforming... the same as like the Internet is transforming with the way that things are happening”*. Scholars argue that language plays a central role in the construction of meaning and that research should focus on the ways in which such constructions are produced, how they change across cultures and history, and how they shape people’s experiences (Willig, 2013). The present research study revealed that the appraisal of content on SNSs determine whether incidents are interpreted as negative or offensive, which in turn, determined the perceived event of racial prejudice and discrimination. For example, P5 indicated:

*There’s a lot of culture and you know, um, yeah, there’s a history behind the word. So to some people that word means something, you know. They can’t just drop it. So there is a lot of complications to these things.*

Furthermore, P8 explained:

*They tell you, you are black and they swear and call the ‘kaffir’ word. It’s a word that used to be... I believe it means ‘non-believer’. They – they call you a ‘kaffir’. You get those people who are full-on racist but it is not much of them nowadays.*

It is recommended that, concerning the impact of language and misconstruing specific terminology, future studies should explore the extent to which language influences the interpretation of racially prejudiced incidents. This is considered important as language constructs individuals’ versions of reality (Willig, 2013).

According to attachment theory, the basis for social contact and how individuals relate to others is determined by one’s early attachment to a primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1978). Given that the present study identified that racial prejudice and discrimination is partly the result of seeking attention, regard, approval and validation emerging from the innate need for social contact, it

would be interesting for future research to explore the relationship between attachment injuries and such behaviour.

Related to the above concept of needs, it is proposed that future research explores whether individuals who successfully circumvent altercations on SNSs, or even those who pass up SNSs altogether, have perhaps achieved an adequate degree of actualisation in their lives. Such individuals possibly do not require SNSs as a platform for social contact and to experience social connection and belonging as their needs are adequately met in the offline context.

### **Personal Reflection of the Research Process**

The present study was a demanding undertaking and was intricate in ways I could not have prepared for from the outset. It was my first attempt at the grounded theory method which proved to be a significant learning curve in my development as a qualitative researcher. In terms of this method, the flexible and inductive design allowed for the adaptation of the exploration process to suit the inductive requirements. Moreover, crossing fields and disciplines in terms of the literature consulted has exposed me to a vast amount of knowledge on the subject of race, behaviour and online social media and networking services. From the research process, I gained an awareness and appreciation of the importance of race and racial groups to individuals' identities and sense of belonging.

As a result of utilising an independent interviewer during the data collection process, handling the data proved at times frustrating, as there was a sense of distance between myself and the data source. Furthermore, it is supposed that had the interviews been conducted by myself, more specific probing and exploration would have been possible. However, this would perhaps have compromised the neutrality of the interviews.

I was initially apprehensive about the present study's topic as it is a sensitive subject for many individuals and presented with many challenges. However, I feel that my perseverance and commitment to the research process was ultimately rewarding as the overall contribution of this study to the research field is potentially significant.

The reader is left with a final quote, from P6: *“This study, it is a very good study... As practitioners, you guys have a duty to psycho-educate the public in terms of what social networking really is”*.

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**Appendix A: Approval Letter from the Research Ethics Committee**

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**Ref: [H7-HEA-PSY-009 / Approval]**

**Contact person: Mrs U Spies**

28 August 2017

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Nelson Mandela University  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
South Campus

Dear Prof Howcroft

**YOUNG ADULTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**

PRP: Prof G Howcroft

PI: Ms C van Graan

Your above-entitled application served at the Research Ethics Committee (Human) for approval. The ethics clearance reference number is **H17-HEA-PSY-009** and is valid for three years. Please inform the REC-H, via your faculty representative, if any changes (particularly in the methodology) occur during this time. An annual affirmation to the effect that the protocols in use are still those for which approval was granted, will be required from you. You will be reminded timeously of this responsibility, and will receive the necessary documentation well in advance of any deadline.

We wish you well with the project.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Cilliers'.

**Prof C Cilliers**  
**Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee (Human)**

cc: Department of Research Capacity Development  
Faculty Officer: Health Sciences

**Appendix B: Permission Letter from the Institution**

Office of DVC Research & Engagement  
Room 1706, Main Building  
NMMU South Campus  
Tel. +27 (0)41 504 2016/7 Fax. +27 (0)41 504 9591  
Andrew.leitch@mandela.ac.za

31 May 2018

**(Institutional permission for conducting research)**  
**H17-HEA-PSY-009**

Dear Ms C van Graan

**TITLE: “Young Adults Perceptions of the Impact of Social Networking Sites on Racial Discrimination”.**

**I Professor Andrew Leitch, DVC: Research and Engagement** grant permission for the above mentioned study and will act in the capacity as gatekeeper for this institutional study.

SIGNATURE:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leitch", with a horizontal line underneath.

DATE:

31 May 2018



**Appendix C: Research Information Letter for Prospective Participants**

Faculty of Health Sciences  
Department of Psychology  
Nelson Mandela University (South Campus)  
Researcher: Ms Christelle van Graan  
E-mail: s211223301@mandela.ac.za  
Research Supervisor: Prof. Gregory Howcroft  
E-mail: Greg.howcroft@mandela.ac.za  
Tel: 0415044542

Dear Potential Participant

My name is Christelle van Graan and I am a Masters student in Counselling Psychology at the Nelson Mandela University. As part of my course, I am required to complete a research project. The title of my study is "*Young Adults' Perceptions of the Impact of Social Networking Sites on Racial Discrimination*" (ethics clearance reference number: H17-HEA-PSY-009). The study seeks to explore online racially motivated discrimination perceived by adult University students as well as students' understanding and beliefs about internet users' behaviour and social media's impact on racial discrimination in South Africa.

I am inviting you to participate in my research study; and if you provide me with permission, it would require the following from you:

1. The completion of a participant information form and brief questionnaire
2. One to two scheduled interview sessions with the researcher, each lasting approximately one hour
3. Willingness to openly discuss and provide a detailed account of relevant information regarding online activity and experiences

A consent form is attached to this letter. You are kindly requested to complete this form and return it to the researcher, if you are providing consent. You are welcome to contact the supervisor of the study, Professor Greg Howcroft, who will be able to provide you with further information and details if required.

Thank you kindly for your consideration.

Sincerely

Christelle van Graan  
(Researcher)

Prof. Greg Howcroft  
(Research Supervisor)

**Appendix D: Participant Consent Form**

I, the participant, was invited to participate in the research project titled: “Young Adults’ Perceptions of the Impact of Social Networking Sites on Racial Discrimination”, that is being undertaken by Christelle van Graan from the Nelson Mandela University’s Department of Psychology. I confirm the following:

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Student number: \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that if I participate in this research study, I must:

- Be a registered student at Nelson Mandela University
- Be between the ages of 18 – 35
- Be able to fluently speak and understand English
- Currently be subscribed or signed up to two or more social networking websites (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Be spending at least one hour or more per day engaging on these websites
- Be willing to openly discuss and provide a detailed account of relevant information regarding my online activity and experiences
- Complete the scheduled interview(s) with the researcher and administered questionnaire
- Supply information that is accurate and truthful according to my knowledge

I also understand that:

- I can stop the interview at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively
- This research project is not intended to benefit me personally
- My answers will be recorded using an audio recorder
- This consent form will not be linked to the research questionnaire, and that my answers will remain confidential



- Research findings will be published but that my name will remain anonymous and all the information I supply will be treated in strictest confidence
- Should I feel distressed in any manner as a result of the interview, I have the option to request a “debriefing” session with a counsellor

I hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above-mentioned project:

\_\_\_\_\_

*Full name of participant*                      *Signature of participant*

Signed at: \_\_\_\_\_ on: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Full name of witness*                      *Signature of witness*

Signed at: \_\_\_\_\_ on: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Participant Information Form and Research Questionnaire



This questionnaire is comprised of questions that are designed to better gain an understanding of your personal background and to determine your understanding and comprehension of certain concepts. The responses you supply are specific to your personal understanding and outlook, so there can be no incorrect answers. Due to the nature of the information being requested your identity will remain anonymous and your name will not be linked to any responses you provide in this questionnaire. Please answer each question honestly and as thoroughly as possible.

**Instructions:** Please answer all the questions by placing **X** in the appropriate box or writing in the space provided.

**1. Are you currently a registered student at the Nelson Mandela University?**

Yes

No

**2. What gender do you identify as?**

Male

Female

**3. Your age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**4. What race / ethnicity do you identify as?**

Asian

Black

Coloured

Indian

White

Other  \_\_\_\_\_ *(please specify)*

**5. Your home language:**

English  Afrikaans

isiXhosa  Other  \_\_\_\_\_ *(please specify)*

**6. Can you fluently speak and understand English?** Yes  No

**7. Your current level of studies / qualification:** \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Which social networking websites / social media sites are you currently subscribed to?**

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Youtube
- LinkedIn
- Other  \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)
- \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)

**9. How much time do you spend on these online websites/applications per day?**

- 1 hour or less
- More than 1 hour
- 2 or more hours
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. What is your understanding of the following terms?**

*Bias:*

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*Discrimination:*

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*Ethnicity:*

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*Racism:*

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*Racist:*

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*Stereotype:*

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*Social network site / social media:*

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This questionnaire was completed by \_\_\_\_\_ (*full name & surname*)

Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Participant Interview Schedule

- **How do you experience racially prejudiced, discriminating or negative racial posts or content that are posted on SNSs?**
  - How might other people experience these types of posts or content on SNSs?
  
- **In your opinion, why do some people make, post or share these types of posts or content on SNSs?**
  - What do you think motivates people to post such content on SNSs? Please elaborate... tell me more...
  
- **How do you, personally, process and react to these types of posts or content? Explore: What do you think? How do you feel? What do you do?**
  - How might other people process and react to these types of posts or content?
  
- **How do SNSs generally influence or impact on racism, racial prejudice and discrimination? Do you think there is an impact?**
  - Or: How is racism, racial prejudice and discrimination affected by SNSs?

### **Probes** (for example):

- How so?
- Explain what you mean by...
- Tell me more about...
- Please elaborate on...
- By that you mean... Is that correct?

**Appendix G: Data Transcriber and Independent Data Coder Confidentiality Agreement**

This research study (ethics clearance reference number: H17-HEA-PSY-009) titled: *Young Adults' Perceptions of the Impact of Social Networking Sites on Racial Discrimination* is being undertaken by Christelle van Graan, a Masters student in the Department of Psychology at Nelson Mandela University. The purpose of the research is to explore online racially motivated discrimination perceived by adult University students as well as students' understanding and beliefs about internet users' behaviour and social media's impact on racial discrimination in South Africa.

As the assisting data transcriber  or data coder  (please select applicable description) of this research, I understand that I will be hearing recordings of confidential interviews and/or be handling sensitive information on transcripts. The information on these recordings and transcripts have been revealed by interviewees who agreed to participate in this research on the condition that the interviews and their responses would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honour this confidentiality agreement.

I agree not to share any information on recordings or transcripts, about any party, with anyone except the Researcher of this project. Any violation of this and the terms detailed below would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I confirm that I will adhere to the agreement in full.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the content of the interviews or transcripts in any form or format (e.g., Audio files, SD cards, interview transcripts etc.) with anyone other than the Researcher.
2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., audio files, SD cards, interview transcripts etc.) secure while it is in my possession.
3. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g., audio files, SD cards, interview transcripts etc.) to the Researcher when I have completed the transcription or coding tasks.
4. After consulting with the Researcher, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Researcher (e.g., audio files, information stored on my computer hard drive).

Assisting data transcriber  independent data coder  (please select applicable description):

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(Print name)

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(Signature)

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(Date)

Researcher:

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(Print name)

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(Signature)

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(Date)