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Mothers' Experiences of Social Media: Its Impact on Children and the Home

Abe van Hatch

A Report Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of

Arts (Psychology) (Honours), Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science,

Edith Cowan University.

Submitted October, 2014

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Mothers' Experiences of Social Media: Its Impact on Children and the Home.

Abstract

With the prevalence and accessibility of social media within the last 15 years it has become possible for children to have constant access to their friends and social networks. It is relatively unknown what impact adopting social media has on children and how mothers interpret this. There are gaps in the literature investigating the pervasive effects of modern technology and what meaning mothers ascribe to their children using social media as a method of connecting with the world. The present research aims to explore this phenomenon by investigating the experiences of mothers who have children that have recently adopted social media. It also examines how mothers are interpreting the impact of this phenomenon on themselves and their family. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight mothers who had a child between the age of nine and fourteen who were participating in any form social media communication. Using an interpretative phenomenological approach, three main themes were identified: (1) Identity construction and ecological transitions, (2) pressure, resistance and conformity and (3) lack of self-efficacy. The study indicates that mothers ascribe social media adoption to be a significant event in their child's psychosocial development, and requires a concerted effort from them in order to protect their children from potential risks. Additionally, the findings suggest that mothers experienced pressure to conform to the technology, despite being aware that their child may not be balancing their social media use with other important commitments. The study adds to a growing body of literature on social media's qualitative impact. It guides future research to investigate parenting strategies and specific aspects of this phenomenon such as identity construction and the impact on academic potential.

Researcher: Abe van Hatch

Supervisor: Dr. Bronwyn Harman

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Mothers' Experiences of Social Media: Its Impact on Children and the Home.

Prior to the permeation of social media over the last 15 years, extant research focused on unilateral entertainment and technology such as how the television became a part of the household and for some, transitioned from the living room to the bedroom (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Past studies focused on the leisure being a community activity to becoming a technology and media-driven, individual activity (Livingstone, 2007). Over the past 15 years social networking sites and smart phones have become an integrated part of daily life. With the availability and acceptance of these products, research is limited and it is not yet entirely clear what impacts exist on individuals and society. There are numerous studies emerging about the behavioural change and the observable spike in smart phone use. For example, studies have shown that the increase of smart phone users in public spaces are at a higher risk of accidents when walking in public and whilst driving (David, Kim, Brickman, Ran, & Curtis, 2014; Nasar, Hecht, & Wener, 2008).

It is evident that social media has immensely impacted real world interaction, yet there is minimal discussion and empirical research investigating the phenomenon. Opinions are strong both for and against the use of internet technology and its pervasive effect on society. In a recent 'TED talk' (technology, entertainment and design conference) Psychologist Sherry Turkle describes the way computers have 'taken over' and how although we are connected, we are 'alone together'. Turkle's (2012) concern is echoed by many who are alarmed that humanity has been profoundly impacted by the social media revolution, one aspect of this is the effect is the central feature of society; the family.

There are universal patterns and cultural forces that guide child development both biologically and socio-emotionally. In the industrialised world there has been a trend over the last century for puberty to begin earlier than it did historically. These patterns are guided by external forces such as advances in nutrition, health research and the effects of globalisation

(Arnet, 2003; Brofenbrenner, 1994). Although the time when a child transitions to adolescence is traditionally a time where parents feel challenged, the challenges have been influenced by the cultural forces, which have been diverse from decade to decade.

Throughout the 20th century parents were raising children who experienced the transition to adolescence through various cultural phenomenon that were mostly expressed through lifestyle and entertainment choices. These were guided by macro-systemic events such as the world wars, the cold war and economic fluctuations such as the great depression. Music, fashion, art and socio-political positions were in a state of constant change and for the early part of the century the modernist ideology was a pervasive cultural force (Thacker, 2006). More recently, with the beginning of the digital age and the respective development of social media there is sharp contrast between the last century and the modern way of life. Originally, social media was considered another passing trend, a subculture like the music and fashion trends. By the year 2010 it was evident that the industrialised world was adopting social media and digital technology as a new way of life (Qualman, 2012).

Sociologists have proposed that social media is the biggest socio-cultural and economic shift since the industrial revolution (Bussert, 2010; Qualman, 2012; Smith, 2009). It was over 13 years before the television had more than 50 million users yet within the first nine months, the social networking site Facebook had more than 100 million users (Qualman, 2012). As a result of the accelerated pace of cultural change, children and adolescence find themselves in a culture that is very different to what their parents grew up in. Globalisation and the influence of social media have had an impact at every level of society.

History of Social Media

In the late 1990's the first social networking website 'sixdegrees' was launched. As a new concept sixdegrees was highly successful and incited an eruption of web-based networking sites that were similar in format and purpose. In 2002 the website 'Friendster'

commenced and had over three million users in its first year. Young people and the early adopters promptly shifted their attention to 'MySpace', which was marketed as younger, counter-cultural and accentuated the notion that one can have an online profile to perpetuate their self-image (Mullally, 2011). MySpace experienced exponential growth, surpassing Google online traffic in 2006 however this was short lived and by 2007 'Facebook' was gaining 200, 000 new users a day, with over 50 million users in total.

Throughout the last decade hand-held devices such as the BlackBerry became increasingly more advanced and affordable. Apple released the first touch screen device the iPhone in 2007 and the first Android device, the HTC Dream was released in 2008. With the development of smart phone technology and improvement and accessibility of the internet, social media and smart phone usage has become synonymous (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Smart phones are mobile phones that possess additional functions to personal digital assistant devices (PDA's) and mobile phones. Some common examples of smart phones are the Apple iPhone, Google Android, and Blackberry (Gill, Kamath, & Gill, 2012).

What is Social Media?

The definition of social media and its many uses should first be explained within the context of the present report because of its broad application (Huang, 2014). It has been compared to "chat in a restaurant", a culture that is virtually constructed by "pervasive, interconnected, and diversified media systems" (Castells, 1996, p. 2). Mayfield (2007) adds that social media is defined as new kinds of internet media that share the characteristics of participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness. Although some technology and media experts make a distinction between social networking sites and social media, for the purpose of this paper the terms will elide together as 'social media'.

The social part of social media is where it departs from traditional media and incorporates an aspect of social interaction (Murthy, 2012). In the present research, this social

interaction is more of interest than broadcasting media like blogging where there is less of an interactive outcome. There are hybrid sites like Twitter that have a social interaction component such as the ability to comment on 'tweets' or 'retweet' (or forward) to the user's Twitter followers. It is easy to assume a 'tweet', status update or post is not as effective in connecting oneself to another, however some sociologists contend that online communication is an effective communication tool that perhaps has made society more connected (Shirky, 2010). In the present report, social media consists of the broad variety of ways one can communicate via a digital device by either using internet applications or the mobile network (texting).

Impacts of Social Media on Children and Adolescents

Existing literature acknowledges there is a positive role for social media such as developing relationships with people who share similar interests, enhancement of creative self-expression, educational benefits (online tools that promote collaboration and learning) and social justice initiatives such as fundraising (O'Keeffe & Clark-Pearson, 2011). There is also evidence to suggest that social media acts as a conduit to assist marginalised populations to connect with the world (Peck, 2008). Access to social media is arguably a powerful educational and organisational tool that has been adopted by schools and workplaces to enhance learning and productivity.

Conversely there is a growing body of literature that suggests access to excessive information and peer networks is linked to maladaptive social and psychological development as well as physical disturbances (Oakes, 2009; O'Keefe & Clark-Pearson, 2011; Sloviter, 2011). With the amount of online daily social interaction young people now experience later childhood and early adolescence has new challenges. Young people are inclined to experimentation, peer pressure and are less developed in their self-regulatory behaviours (O'Keefe & Clark-Pearson, 2011). Existing literature suggests some of the negative

behaviours and consequences of social media are cyber bullying, sexting, internet addiction, sleep deprivation, eye-sight issues and exposure to indecent content (Federal Communications Commission, 2009; Sloviter, 2011). Furthermore there has been evidence to suggest there is a link between using the internet and depression and social anxiety (Selfhout et al., 2009). This phenomenon has been described as "Facebook depression" (D'Amato et al., 2012).

Symbolic Interactionism

According to symbolic interactionist epistemology, humans act based on the meaning they ascribe to something (Morrione, Thomas, Farberman, & Harvey, 1981). Through the acquisition of shared meaning (socialisation) one develops a sense of self, and their identity is reflected back to them by the social interaction and the feedback they receive from others (Blumer, 1981). The role of communication is especially vital in the development of an individual's identity and in the modern digital age, it is possible for this to occur through social media. Individuals are creating meaning about the world and themselves through their everyday interactions, which is particularly important for adolescents, as they are seeking information about their identity (Denzin, 2004). Symbolic interactionism suggests that the sense of self is not inherent nor fixed but rather gained from the perception of society's evaluation. It proposes that there is a complex interpretative process that moulds the meanings people ascribe to the world and this is shaped by the 'circuit of culture' (du Gay, 1997).

The cultural circuit ideology suggests that meaning making is a fluid and continual process with no pre-ordained end point, it is especially relevant to this study because as du Gay (1997) proposes, meaning is particularly shaped by the mass media, which influences culture and the norms of society, eventually filtering down each ecological system until it influences micro-cultures such as a school or family (Brofenbrenner, 2005).

Identity Construction

Social media is a new form of presenting oneself and pronouncing an identity. From a sociological perspective when someone posts a photo, a status update or comment it is self-production, a way of creating an image (Murthy, 2012). The status update is a unique phrase and suggests that firstly people can share what 'status' they are experiencing and secondly that it is an update, which implies one would often or regularly do this (Morris, Teevan & Panovich, 2010). Users of social media update their status at different intervals, for some it can become a routine part of daily life. Although a regular status update might be seemingly menial such as "It's Monday, I need coffee" or a photo of what one is wearing with the hashtag 'OOTD' (outfit of the day), these trivial communications are 'pregnant' with meaning (Bauman, 2000). Updating one's status can become a meaningful part of constructing one's identity and the status update that appears to be banal is actually somebody saying "I exist" (Bordieu, 1984; Murthy, 2012). It is a confirmation to the user's followers or friends that they are active in the universe and it is a self-affirming and self-inventing action (Bauman, 2000; Gackenbach, 2011). For young social media users, the status update has become a meaningful aspect of their identity.

The process of constructing one's identity and furthermore the individual's maintenance of this identity is especially dynamic when considering the way social media acts as an identity construction tool for children and adolescents. The notion of using one's social media profile as a new way to perpetuate an identity and self-image is a new phenomenon and relatively under reported (Mullally, 2011). It follows on from the interactionist ideology that identity is versatile and can be constructed and reconstructed. Social media users utilise their profile image, comments and interests to represent themselves, reflecting the view that identity is not stable or singular, but rather shifts and changes based on context (Hall, 1997; Mullally, 2011). It is important to understand mothers' experience in this process because the

young social media users have become increasingly fixated on digital device-mediated identity construction and maintain their 'image' online (Gackenbach, 2007).

The concept of an avatar (an online version of yourself) has expanded to people creating their image based on their social media profile. Western consumer cultures are rooted in image, brand building and competition and it has been proposed that this process diverts people's attention away from the 'inner-self' as the foundation for decision-making and identity development, to focus more on the 'image' or 'brand' they want to be identified as (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Vansteenkiste, 2005).

It is evident that utilising social media either to communicate or receive feedback is an interactive process of self-reflection. There are adaptive types of self-reflection and more maladaptive types of self-rumination, the latter being characterised by brooding which is defined as unproductive, passive and repetitive focus on the self. Studies have demonstrated that self-rumination has a similar cognitive process to worry; they both are difficult to dismiss and interfere with everyday functioning (Watkins, Moulds, & Mackintosh, 2005). As a result of social media being a tool for identity development social psychologists have suggested that individuals become 'stuck' in the exploration process, finding the plethora of options debilitating, making it difficult for a person to arrive at an identity commitment (Schwartz et al., 2005). A parent's role is to assist their child in managing their identity development and support them to form a positive self-concept.

Ecological Systems Theory

The interactions between the child, the parents/guardian, and the wider community and world are encapsulated by the ecological systems theory (Brofenbrenner, 1979). Continuing with the idea that meaning is constructed through interaction, ecological systems theory posits that the interaction between a person and their environment is an influence of lasting change on a child's development. Brofenbrenner (1979) argued that a person's

development is profoundly influenced by events occurring in settings in which the individual is not present, such as the interactions between systems. In the present research, technology and its perceived impact on the family culture is likely then to be an indicator of the type of micro culture a family experiences, however it is also an indication of interaction between the family and technology as a societal phenomenon.

Whenever a child enters a new stage that signifies developmental significance they are experiencing an 'ecological transition' (Brofenbrenner, 1979). Ecological transitions are the shifts in roles or context that signifies the child learning, growing or adapting to a new situation such as the arrival of a new sibling, graduating primary school and entering high school or finding a job (Brofenbrenner, 1979). With the pervasiveness or social media and the change in human behaviour there is precedence to suggest that the early stages of a child adopting social media is an ecological transition. This is an important distinction because with any ecological transition there are consequences as a result of the change in roles of behaviour such as how they act and what they do, which incites change in how a person thinks and feels (Brofenbrenner, 1979). Furthermore the shift does not only affect the developing person but the other people in their life, especially the immediate family.

In order to understand the development of a child, one must include the entire ecological system that the child belongs to. Ecological systems theory proposes that there are five socially organised subsystems that influence, aid and promote human development (Brofenbrenner, 1994). These are the:

- Microsystem; Structures, institutions and groups that have a direct impact on the child's development. Examples of these are family, school, religious institutions and peers.
- Mesosystem: This system is the interconnections between the microsystems such as the interactions between parents and teachers.

- Exosystem: The exosystem has an indirect effect on the child, because the

    influence from the exosystem usually impacts the child as it "trickles" down

    through other people in the child's life. An example of this could be the

    government budget, which can have a profound effect on some family's

    finances and indirectly have an effect on the child.

- Macrosystem: Describes the culture and context in which individuals live.

- Chronosystem: Bronfenbrenner (2005) added this social system in 2005 to

    describe the effect of generational and societal changes.

The modeling, attention, attachment and provision of a child's needs are determined

by the entire system and filtered down to the microsystem and are especially influenced by

the family the child belongs to. If someone is showing the child appropriate ways to behave,

talking and reading with them, providing materials for them to play and learn with these are

the 'proximal processes' and referred to as the 'primary engines of human development'

(Brofenbrenner, 2005). What children value and the knowledge they acquire is a result of the

interactions between the entire ecological system, it is a 'web of meaningful social

relationships' (Dockett & Perry (2003). The ecological model is a suitable theory guiding an

interpretation of the present research project because it provides a framework that organises

the complex dynamics and relationships of all of the stakeholders, the family and individual

and how it relates to social media phenomena (Hayes, 2004).

The way social media is perceived by a mother is important to focus on because a

mother's subjective experience shapes the reality for their family culture. This concept,

although challenging to empirically measure, has implications for practitioners because it

considers the subjective experience as an antecedent for the adaptive or maladaptive

environment. For example, a positive family culture can filter the potential harms associated

with technology and utilise it to their advantage.

Limitations

The research acknowledges its limitation to one-on-one interviews and consideration of conducting focus groups to include both fathers and the children themselves. Semi-structured interviews were preferred over focus groups because it simplified the data analysis process and reduced the likelihood of peer influence. Conversely, focus groups can assist participants to draw upon each other's themes, which may assist the researcher to uncover themes that may be missed in one-on-one interviews. The challenge of measuring a social phenomenon is that they most commonly occur in a natural context. Conducting a focus group or laboratory experiment would likely skew or invalidate the findings. With the lack of research available, developing a sound methodology was a challenge.

The sample was skewed towards participants with daughters. Although this created consistency in the data, the findings are primarily an indication about how mothers with daughters ascribe meaning to social media. The two participants with boys were represented in the data and findings, however it would have been beneficial to have an equal representation of gender in the sample.

Rationale

Studies investigating social media phenomenon are accumulating however the majority of these investigate the impact of early developmental exposure to interactive media or focus solely on cyber safety and parenting intervention (Pearce, Cross, Monks, Waters, & Falconer, 2011). Evidently, there is a lack of research investigating what meaning mothers ascribe to their child's social media usage and what developmental, social and relational phenomenon occurs in the home and wider community. The intent of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how social media can influence children's development, parenting strategies and the inter-family relations. It is anticipated that this research will assist in

evaluating the experiences of the mothers and the phenomena that they ascribe to their child's use of social media.

The study will inform and shed light into how social media can have a profound impact on adolescent development, parenting approaches and family dynamics as a child is exposed to social media. It may also introduce new discussions on the concept of how identity construction, the home and a sense of family are changing with the access to social media. The research might also explore the generation gap and how mothers' interpret the changing landscape of the world as a product of the digital age.

The distinction between texting and other forms of social media communication is not crucial in the present study, although the interview was guided more towards internet based social media applications, participants were invited to share their experiences of a child texting also. The act of using a digital device to connect and communicate is the phenomenon of interest.

The research aims to create a greater dialogue about the changing nature of the family system due to the rise of social media. In addition, the study intends to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the mothers and the phenomena that they ascribe to their child's use of social media. How do mothers interpret the changing landscape of the world as a product of the digital age?

Research Questions

1.) What part does social media play in a child's life and what does this mean to the mothers?

2.) What impact does social media or receiving a smart device have on children?

3.) Does social media have any effect on the home environment?

Research Design

Methodology

The research aims to learn about participants from a 'clean slate' by understanding their lived experiences inductively (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). To achieve this, the researcher adopted an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA stems from social constructionist epistemology, which is closely related to symbolic interactionism (Weigert, Teitge, & Teitge, 1986). Both constructionists and interpretivists are focused on the process of how meaning is created, negotiated, sustained and adjusted (Schwandt, 2003). They both attempt to understand the world from the perspective of the world through the lived experience of those who are within it.

In order for the researcher to provide a rich and textural description of participants lived experiences, phenomenology focuses on how things appear through real, lived experience. The attempt to understand meaning from a 'clean slate' was first proposed by Husserl when describing that phenomenology is a return to 'things themselves' (Denzin, 2004). IPA is particularly favorable in qualitative studies because the methodology emphasises openness to experience and has the capacity to genuinely value subjective concepts (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). Informed by symbolic interactionism, interpretative phenomenology explores the pre-existing social and interpersonal processes and how this guides the way one interacts with their environment and community. Through this process, subjective meaning, based upon objective observations is created and interpreted (Ashworth, 2008). This process is not rigid, as each interaction can influence and extend meanings depending on the social context one is immersed in (Ashworth, 2008).

The aim of IPA is to investigate in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social environment. The axis of this premise is exploring the meaning ascribed to particular experiences the participants hold. In the present research this is exploring the

meaning mothers ascribe to their children's use of social media. IPA was adopted to assist the research to rigorously investigate idiosyncratic experiences and gather rich information (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). It is important that participants are treated as the experts of their experiences so that the researcher can gain an 'insider's perspective' (Reid et al, 2005).

IPA is a suitable approach when trying to gather information on people's perceptions of specific situations and how they are making sense of their psychosocial world because it engages and explores the meanings people ascribe to their subjective experiences (Smith, Osborn, & Flowers, 1997). Previous knowledge of the research topic may have impacted the data and interpretations however the researcher was attentive of the interpretative rigour and minimised bias in the analysis (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Furthermore, to increase rigour a reflexive position throughout the entire research process was employed. Reflexivity observes the influence of the researcher and how their history and perspectives may have had an impact (Finlay, 2002). The data analysis process had a high degree of reflexivity because there are potential biases inherent to the researcher that may have had an influence on how the themes were grouped. Furthermore reflexivity in the interpretation process assisted in ascertaining a high level of reliability and validity in the analyses (Elliott, Fishcer, & Rennie, 1999).

In addition to social constructionist and symbolic interactionist epistemologies, interpretative phenomenology applies characteristics of hermeneutics. It considers the latent or hidden context that the researcher incorporates into their interpretation (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). IPA acknowledges and embraces that interpretations of phenomenon are filtered through the researcher's schema (Larkin et al., 2006). Interpretations should be reflexively guided through a process of checking and re-checking one's assumptions (Watt, 2007). The combination of the researcher's context and the participants' experiences broadens the scope of the phenomenon of interest (Butler, 1988; Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). The present research features a two-stage interpretation process or a double hermeneutic. The

participants were attempting to make sense of their own experiences (as mothers of children using social media) and furthermore the researcher is attempting to make sense of the participants' responses as they make sense of their world (Smith, Osborn, & Flowers, 1997).

Guided by principles of interpretative phenomenology, the present study aims to explore participants' subjective accounts of how they themselves make sense of their experiences of parenting a child who is adopting social media for the first time and what meaning they ascribe to this. It explores if social media has had any effect on their child, parenting practices and the developmental, social and relational phenomenon occurs. The present research analyses the course of action that occurs when the mother first makes a device or social networking site permissible to their child (Denzin, 2004). The meaning mothers ascribe to this phenomenon arises from their social interactions with their children and furthermore their community and networks.

Participants

Eight participants were recruited for the study using a snowball sampling method because the research was attempting to understand the phenomenon whilst it was current and meaningful to the participants. Interpretative phenomenological research most commonly attempts to find a homogenous sample (Smith et al, 1997). Participants were contacted by phone, email and postal services to be invited to participate. The data gathering process consisted of semi-structured in-depth interviews of eight mothers who have one or more children between nine and fourteen years old who have engaged in social media or digital device communication. The eight participants averaged 41.25 years of age and the children of interest averaged 12.27 years of age. There were two boys and eight girls who fit the age criteria which mothers drew their experiences from.

Materials

The research utilised a semi-structured interview format (Appendix A). Five open-ended questions were asked with specific prompts as triggers to assist in gathering rich and subjective information. To adhere to the Edith Cowan University Ethics committee guidelines a full disclosure of information stance was taken. Participants were given an information letter (Appendix B) and consent form (Appendix C) prior to the interview and informed that they would be given absolute and unconditional rights to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. A digital audio recorder recorded the interview and note-taking equipment (a pen and notebook) was at hand to take notes during the interview. The researcher also maintained a digitally recorded journal to assist in processing initial reactions, thoughts and reflections throughout the data gathering and analysis.

Procedures

After the Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee granted approval to conduct the research project, a full disclosure information letter was sent to prospective participants (Appendix B) requesting their participation in the research with instructions to contact the researcher if they were willing to participate. Upon agreeing to participate, a time and place for the interview convenient to the participant was agreed upon, and a consent form (Appendix C) was sent, which was to be signed at the commencement of the interview.

After obtaining informed consent, the interview proceeded using a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix A). The interview began with simple, non-threatening demographic questions to gain basic information and rapport. The interviews took place in all but one of the participants' living rooms, the latter at a participant's workplace. Participants were advised that their partners and children's responses would not be transcribed or analysed, this was so that the sample would remain homogenous and purely from a mothers perspective. The participants were aware of the sensitive nature of the interview and ensured that their children were occupied or playing with siblings if they were at home.

To allow for confidentiality, interviews were one-on-one (Liamputtong, 2009). The interviewer was responsible for ensuring the interviewee felt acquainted with the research methodology and at ease with the situation. The interviewer informed the participants of the confidentiality of all responses and added that participation is voluntary and participants can refrain from answering questions or withdraw from the research at any time without any obligation to maintain involvement. As mentioned, interviews were electronically recorded to allow for follow up transcribing. Participants agreed to this in the consent letter. The interviews lasted between 29 and 72 minutes.

The interviews started with the invitation for the participants to share their own experiences with social media. The interviews concluded with an invitation to add anything the participant felt was important. Probing questions were asked throughout the interviews to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and clarify meanings. As Husserl's (1936) views have influenced IPA, the appraisal and questioning of one's beliefs is fundamental and in order to understand one's actions it is imperative to investigate the cognitions that guide these (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). This approach allows for the interviewer and participant to engage in dialogue that deviates from the interview schedule and enquire further into the participants responses (Smith et al., 1997). Examples of the probing questions are "When you use the word 'weird', can you tell me more about what you mean by that?" and "You described that it was a stressful time, what feelings did you experience?" (Finlay, 2002; Smith et al., 1997). Participants were informed of the semi-structured approach to the interview and advised to freely answer the questions in their own manner and timing. Interpretative phenomenological research recognises that the researcher is inseparable from the question design through to the interpretation process. Interviews were digitally recorded for later transcription.

Reliability and Validity

Digital recordings aided exploration of the researcher's own interpretations and understanding of the mothers' experiences and any impact this may have had on analysis. Recordings were listened to and transcribed verbatim by the researcher so that there was increased familiarity and continuity in each stage of the analysis, adding to the interpretative rigour (Watt, 2007).

Although the interviewer possessed prior knowledge of two participants, the interview schedule consistently guided each interview. The interviewer maintained that it was to be a 'formal' meeting and that confidentiality would be maintained. Furthermore the interviewer explained that participants' responses should be impartial and not assume the researcher would have any prior knowledge. To further add to the interpretative rigour, member checking was utilised to ensure there was consistency between the researcher and participant.

The researcher maintained a strict analysis regime between each interview schedule to ensure there was a consistent approach to interpreting the phenomena (Bondas-Salonen, 1998). Prevalent themes that displayed 'keyness' to the research questions were given more attention (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research supervisor assisted in triangulation of the data by reviewing the interview extracts and 'raw' themes before they were condensed and named. This allowed for assumption checking, consideration of different perspectives and greater reliability of theme clustering.

Analysis

The commitment to analysing the interview transcripts with integrity and depth is a distinctive characteristic employed by IPA research methods (Smith et al, 1997). To increase interpretive rigour the research followed a thematic analysis procedure guided by the interpretative phenomenology assumptions to organise and describe the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis proceeded to seek out the patterns in the data, giving participants experiences primacy over opinions or anecdotal stories (Holloway & Todres, 2003). The

analysis focused more on people's everyday experiences of their child's social media usage and how meanings were constructed (McLeod, 2001). A reflexive analysis approach was especially present throughout the transcribing and theme clustering process. The reflexive stance in the analysis assisted to promote rich insight through examining personal responses and interpersonal dynamics openly and transparently (Smith et al., 1997).

The researcher transcribed the data throughout the interviewing stage in order to reflect and improve on interviewing techniques. Notes were made after interviews and during transcription if the interviewer noticed areas for improvement in the interviewing technique and if there was better probing questions that would extract rich data in the following interviews. To fully immerse in the data the audio recordings were listened to several times and 'time stamped' where participants responded or if there was a particularly noticeable comment. Transcribed data were read once before any analyses were conducted, initial interpretations were written down and potential patterns highlighted.

The following readings of the transcripts intentionally explored the data for thematic clusters. Each reading considered the explicit meaning of the participants and if clarification was needed the time stamped recordings were on hand for member checking and/or reflexive analysis. At the completion of transcribing each interview, participants were invited to member check their interview transcripts and have a follow up phone call to discuss the theme clusters. Participants made no changes to their responses and were agreeable with the theme clusters. This process supports the validity of the research findings.

Mind maps were utilised to analyse codes and cluster themes into the overarching or meta-themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The meta-themes appeared when the coding of data showed substantial similarities within and between the different participants' transcripts. The researcher kept a journal on hand and reflected on the nature of the codes and whether there was any patterns or overlap between themes. Pertinent quotes were drawn from

the data to give evidence for the patterns. The themes were then subject to a process of being named and renamed, in order to accurately reflect participants' experiences.

It is important to note that despite identifying several themes the researcher also aimed gain a rich thematic description of the entire data set. A rich overall description is maintained throughout the present report, partially because of the lack of research into this phenomenon and additionally because the research aims to describe the phenomenon at both the macro and micro level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The symbolic interactionist approach to research is concerned with the sociocultural conditions that have affected the individual as they give an account of their experience. Although individual psychologies were considered, the present research especially focuses on the contextual and structural conditions that qualified the individual accounts.

The findings and interpretations section presents the results of the thematic patterns and compares findings to extant literature and theory to add to the level of theoretical rigour (Reid et al, 2005; Smith et al., 1997). To protect anonymity of the participants, all identifying information was removed.

Findings and Interpretations

Three major themes were identified in the interview data. Within these themes, there were ten contributing patterns or subthemes, as shown in Table 1. The findings relating to these themes and subthemes are presented herein, including relevant quotes from the interviews to support findings and interpretations. These findings are discussed in light of the existing literature.

Table 1.

Themes and Subthemes of Meanings Mother's Ascribe to the Child's Social Media Use.

Themes	Subthemes
Identity Construction and Ecological Transitions	Fast-track to Adolescence
	A Healthy Identity for My Child
	Seeking Private Interactions
Pressure, Resistance and Conformity	A Necessary Risk
	To be a Good and 'Normal' Parent
	Mature Content and Interaction
Lack of Self-Efficacy	Dependency and Anxiety
	What Would a Child be Doing Otherwise?
	Effect on Schoolwork
	Effective Multitasking or a Distraction

Identity Construction and Ecological Transitions

Ecological transitions occur as a result of the change in a person's role or the setting, or both the role and setting (Brofenbrenner, 1979). As a child engages in social media it is interpreted to be a new era in family life and the child's development because there is a change in the role of the child. The interaction between their ecological system; their family, their peers, their school and the wider landscape of society changes significantly when the child begins using the digital device for social media (Becker, B & Mark, G, 1999). It has a ripple effect throughout each of the systems as it permeates the way one interacts, recreates and utilises the technology. The era of social media, as described by the mothers is a new stage for the child, the parent and the family culture. The mothers interpret the experience as

though the child is entering a new phase of life. All of the participants viewed the experience as something significant, not as a minimal event:

It was when they got the iPhones two years ago when it all changed.

Things are changing because when we used to go away on holidays, it used to be just the family and now she's just an hour's drive away but she's still texting her friends and organising movie dates and that kind of thing and I don't have a problem with that it's just different, it's just changed.

Fast-track to Adolescence. The following statements from mothers express that their child's dramatic use of social media has changed the way the child behaves. They attribute social media to accelerating their child's transition to adolescence. Some of the behaviours surprised the mothers; children were either posting or communicating via their digital device in ways that the mother had not expected. The participants expressed concern that the child's exposure and participation in more mature social media communication was normalising more adult behaviours and 'speeding up' their childhood.

He's 12, he's not an adult but he acts like one and he is like one. So maybe I have to start treating him like one?

There's nothing really awful on there but at the beginning it was all a bit more mature for what he was. Just the photos and going off to parties and my son was only 12, some of them are 13 but yeah going off to parties and talking what they got up to and you know I just though whoa, my little boy what's all this happening kind of thing?

A Healthy Identity. Social networking sites are a tangible, visual way to display ones identity, receive instant feedback and reassess based on the responses. Social media traverses with important tasks of adolescent psychosocial development, specifically peer membership, friendship quality and identity development (Spies & Margolin, 2014). Research has shown that there is a link between one's self-perception and the amount of followers or friends one has on their various social media profiles (Livingstone, 2008). Logically, if someone is excluded or treated poorly online there is potential for self-esteem deficits. As a result of social media being a tool for identity development psychologists have suggested that individuals become 'stuck' in the exploration process, finding the plethora of options

debilitating, making it difficult for a person to arrive at an identity commitment (Schwartz et al., 2005). A parent's role is to assist their child in identity formation. By guiding and supporting their children's social media behaviours the parent is playing a key role in assisting identity development. The participants reported feeling pressured but also because they did not want their child to be 'weird'. Underlying this idea is the notion that participants want their child to develop a healthy identity and that by not permitting social media they may be threatening this. Participants interpreted social media as an essential risk, yet a tool their child can utilise to connect with others and be included in their peers' social groups thus limiting the adverse alternative of being excluded. This was reflected by the some of the participants who recognised that their children are using social media to maintain their friendships and explore their identity;

> *Letting her be the person that she's going to be, not trying to get in the way of that. There is a generation gap in there, I like how she's unique and doing different things, I think things like that are to be applauded, I don't think that everybody should just follow the crowd at all. (*In relation to her daughter posting photos on Instagram*)*

> *They all seem to copy each other when they're doing these 'selfies'. At one point they were doing the Miley Cyrus tongue to the side, next minute you're seeing all these profile pictures with the tongue to the side, you know they do follow each other…I think its acceptance, they all just want to be accepted and liked. I think that's the biggest of all, they want to be liked . . . they get the likes or the comments, the girls are actually really nice to each other, oh you look so hot and you're so pretty. I'm sure that makes her feel good when she gets all those comments, when she gets 60 likes I'm sure that gives her a confidence boost but as I say to her you shouldn't have to do that to get that acceptance.*

Seeking Interaction and Privacy. Participants described that there were observable changes taking place in their child's choice of entertainment and the way their child spent significantly more time in the bedroom or in a private space. Children displayed a preference for interactive play/entertainment rather than the unilateral play styles such as watching cartoons or playing a game console. Policy makers and the like have voiced their concern about the impact social media and online communications, especially when consumed in

private (Heung & Leung, 2011). The participants indicated that there was a noticeable change in their children's attitude as they explicitly seek private digital social interaction;

> *Part of me wonders if she's being manipulative because she doesn't want us to encroach on her privacy because otherwise we're weird but hey, that doesn't affect me that much.*

> *I don't know if it's a hormonal, or just an exertion of her desire for independence and privacy, or is it as a result of feeling more independent and having more privacy because she's having conversations.*

An additional pattern of themes showed that participants were surprised and/or disapproving when their child explicitly requested privacy when communicating on their digital device. The mothers interpreted the shift in the child's behaviour as their child finding a new way to play and relax, rather than viewing it as a child socialising. This finding reinforces extant research that individuals use the internet related technology for pleasure-seeking or to escape (Wellman & Gulia, 1997). One participant draws a comparison between the television as a form of relaxation and using a digital device;

> *I just think that's what he does to relax, that's what he enjoys and then he'll get in his bed at night and he's always got headphones on with the iPad.*

Pressure, Resistance and Conformity.

It is evident in the western industrialised world that social media has firmly established itself as an essential technology, yet as a relatively new trend there unknowns as to what liberties and boundaries should be afforded to its use. Young people are the "digital natives" who have been alive since the transition to smart phones and social media, the "digital immigrants" are everyone else who has lived through the transition. As individuals, families, schools, and organisations adopt the digital technology it is perceived to be natural and useful. This can be attributed in part to digital natives embracing the technology and what the media broadcasts. Advertising companies have been successful at dressing up technology as natural so that "nature and history are confused at every turn" (Barthe, 1957). The series of iPhone advertisements series called 'everyday' is a pertinent example of this. It elicits an

emotional response as the audience sees the user on Face Time smiling, blowing a kiss or laughing. It conveys the message that communication is natural and pleasant through the Apple device. It is this grand narrative advocating the ordinariness of social media that participants have felt resistant to, yet in the present research still eventually and reluctantly conformed (Denzin, 2004).

The majority of the participants reported experiencing pressure to adopt digital technology or social media for their child. There were instances whereby the participant's reported being compliant in allowing social media or purchasing a digital device. This compliance differs from conformity in that the mothers publically conceded to social media yet privately disagreed, maintaining a level of skepticism about the technology's benefits. A discrepancy between the public and private self can create friction and as the self strives for internal consistency or dissonance (Festinger, 1962). The pressure participants felt was not a pressure their children had influenced but rather from a chronosystem level that social media had 'diffused' into their immediate lives uninhibited. Diffusion theory is the theory of why any innovation (idea, object or practice) is communicated and distributed to the members of a social system (Hagerstrand, 1967). It can be influenced by any number of factors however internet technology diffusion is largely attributed to economic or market factors and globalisation (Milner, 2006).

It has been shown that diffusion progresses in a homogenous pattern, beginning in its place of origin with the innovators, it will experience slow growth until over time a rapid period of adoption occurs and the innovation proliferates exponentially (Pred, 1977). Participants reported feeling pressured by the trend and not equipped to safely control the technology. Furthermore, half of the participants' children attended schools that required the child use an iPad. From the time the participant conceded and bought the device they reported feeling stressed and concerned;

> *There was an immense amount of pressure on me to allow her to be connected and I really resented it. The pressure to let my year 10-year-old be connected to the internet, immense amount and I fought it for the whole year but then I had to relent, and find a way that I could back out gracefully.*

> *There is all this pressure on him to get on Facebook. I would've let him get on just to fit in, because it was; "What? You're not on Facebook, why aren't you?" There's a lot of that going on.*

There is a complex interpretative process guided by the 'cultural circuit' that moulds the way people perceive the world and indeed social media. As du Gay (1997) proposed, meaning is particularly shaped by the mass media and can influence the cultural patterns of society and filter down to microsystem cultures. We know from Asch's research (1956) that there is pressure to conform because being counter-cultural is undesirable to humans because it exposes one to rejection and isolation. Conforming to mass media and social norms is usually favoured above one's own convictions despite the feeling of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962). This pressure to conform reveals that not only were the participants concerned about their child forming a healthy identity, they are also concerned about how they are perceived by their peers and wider system. The participants indicate that other parents had embraced the technology earlier and that it made them question their ideological position;

> *She was the last person in her class, to get the iPod, she was the last because I was very resistant to opening up this world.*

> *Pressure, immense pressure. We've got the power and we should be able to say no. I think of it as I've got the power, I can say no, but when I found out, I asked the more conservative parents has your child got this device and they all said yes and I realised I was an outlier and you don't want your child to be singled out because they are the only person that isn't on social media.*

Some participants expressed that their family was counter-cultural, that although there was pressure from social influences to conform they had 'carved out a niche' for their family and their children had accepted that their family was different to the mainstream.

> *I know we're in the minority. We could spoil our kids, because we could probably afford to do it. For her birthday, I feel embarrassed saying it. She got an iPhone 3 and*

> *it was a second hand one from a friend. She went from a 'manky' HTC to an iPhone 3 and all her friends laughed. They think it's hilarious that she got it for her birthday. I said to her "If you went to a less fortunate high school they wouldn't be laughing. Maybe I'll put you there and then you won't be laughed at". I told her she could get the latest one when I do. It used to feel tougher than it is but we've carved out a niche for ourselves as the weird parents who give their kids old phones.*

Participants expressed their apprehension and indicated that they would have been better off without social media in their home. For some participants it was because prior to social media they could limit and control whom their child was being influenced by. The participants felt as though they had lost some control of their child. They said:

> *Not only is it complex, it is scary and I'm kind of new at this, the realm of influence has changed and it's just all a bit scary, so I'm feeling a bit scared.*

> *It concerns me that 'Jane' could be finding things on there that she shouldn't know about.*

> *We wouldn't have some of these problems that we're having as parents, they get in the way and they do influence your kids.*

A necessary risk. The theme of uncertainty and being unprepared for social media emerged as participants showed that they had permitted social media but had not expected there to be as many challenges in controlling its use. The participants balance the protective versus risk factors, as though social media is a risk to mitigate but an essential risk because they did not want their child to miss out and/or be socially isolated. In each environment a child participates in such as the family, school, community and wider culture there are elements that can assist to improve a child's outcome or place them at risk of adversity (Brofenbrenner, 1994).

All of the participants had developed protective factors to safeguard their children from the particular harms and most of them expressed their desire to learn more about the technology. This can be attributed to participants ascribing the importance of social media for their child above the risks and fears they felt. They described that they were uncertain about the efficacy of their protective methods, whether they were adequate or too extreme.

Ecological systems theory uses the example of a three-legged stool to convey that the stability and health of a relationship is threatened if one of the three legs in a triadic relationship is disruptive and off balance. The principle applies to the relationship between settings such as school and home. If there are imbalances and a lack of harmony between the systems, there may be friction created. As the findings suggest in the present study, participants reported that social media was at the centre of tension and frustration in the home. This may have been a result of the imbalance between relationships in their ecological system. Participants were experiencing an imbalance between the school, other parents and the culture they had within their home. Their own views on parenting for example may have been challenged by the way their peers chose to deal with the phenomenon with their children. Their position may also have contradicted their children's and the school policy for example, creating an inner tension or cognitive dissonance, causing the participant to question their own position. Many participants reported that they were not sure how to balance social media as an educational tool versus it being a relational or networking tool, which was causing friction in the home.

Participants indicate that they were aware of the friction that limiting social media usage was creating in their parent-child relationship;

> *I create rules and she's really unhappy about it. So that creates a new level of tension because she's dark with me, because 'I'm trying to ruin her social life'.*

> *She was going "you're kidding 8.30pm that is so early!" and I'm like "Fine I'll take it off you then, that's the other alternative."*

> *I sometimes think I'm over stepping and she gets all dark with me and she's unhappy with me and then I feel little intimidated, like she's going to jump down my throat if I ask who she's texting but then I think hang on, I'm the mum, she's 12! So that's where it gets a little bit scary as well, because you're trying to assert your parental rights and obligations and you get a lot of resistance.*

These participants were making the effort not to be over controlling and let their children take risks;

> *Nothing bad has come from it, but until something bad happens I'll just keep going, I believe in taking risks and being yourself…It's about not over controlling, letting her be the person that she's going to be, not trying to get in the way of that. There is a generation gap in there, I like how she's unique and doing different things, I think things like that are to be applauded.*

> *I've just kind of had to adjust some of my not so much my expectations but just some of my, how I thought it was all going to go, you know that balance of trying to be cool and still have control. Trying not to freak out, but still have trust.*

This mother had conceded to the fact that their child will find a way to access social media with or without their permission. She decided that the most effective strategy was to allow her child access with the assertion that she must have all access too.

> *She's going to do it so why not let her do it and say that you can be on it but I need to have full access, I need your password, I need to be on it of I want to and that's just how its been.*

To be a Good and Normal Parent. Participants reported that despite any reservations they had about digital devices, there was often a compelling reason to comply. These reasons include a child who has a health condition (diabetes) and needs to be contactable at all times or a child who rides a bus home around dusk. Half of the participants reported that their child's school required that children have an iPad. From the viewpoint of John Locke a person's actions reveal their thoughts and behaviour carries a greater weight than words, it is a more accurate reflection of what people are communicating (Nock, 2008). This raises the question then, what are the mothers communicating by permitting social media?

As self-determination theory states humans are motivated by extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Extrinsic motivations are material and intrinsic motivations are relational or related to personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2009). Participant's permitted social media despite the challenges and pressures. They were intrinsically motivated towards being a good mother, being accepted by their peers and attempting to support their child to develop a healthy identity. There were some participants who reported that without social media their child would be at risk of social isolation. Participants were concerned that their child would be left

out of social events (organised through sites like Facebook) and furthermore that they or their child would be considered 'weird'. The participants below illustrate their self-comparison to other parents and show their desire to balance not being overly controlling with following their concerns.

> *I think a couple of her friends do certain things, like are on certain things and I think their parents aren't bothered so she thinks I shouldn't be bothered but that's not the case.*

> *We said "you know it's just too hard, I'm just going to take the phone off you and 'Jane' said "I won't have any friends if you take the phone off me. I won't be invited to stuff". My husband said "if your friends won't be your friends just because you don't have a phone or cant text they're not good friends" and she just reiterated that she won't have friends and won't be invited to stuff because people invite each other to stuff over text and that kind of thing and then I felt that pull. I don't want to cause you know social isolation.*

> *I don't want them to think 'my parents are weird'*

Despite the reasons for complying with the usage of a device, all of the participants interviewed reported feeling pressured, some "extremely" pressured, to purchase a digital device or allow access to social media. It is this tension that perpetuated the anxiety and stress they felt about the phenomena. Feelings of anxiety are common among parents because they desire for their child to perform, to go beyond surviving and thrive (Grolnick & Seal, 2008). There is societal pressure to have kids who excel in their performance, which produces stress and anxiety in the parent. This sense of comparison to the other families was a theme throughout the data. Participants stated they conformed when they realised they were behind the 'norm', that most other parents in their system had already allowed access to the technology.

Mature content and interactions. Some of the participants had concerns that their children were either participating or being exposed to mature themes. The participants described that their children were being exposed to things they couldn't always filter or censor. Most of the concerns were about the things other people's children and their child's

older peers at school might be posting online. The things the participants mentioned in the

interviews were indecent content such as violent or pornographic material but there were also

concerns over the conversations, photos or videos the children are engaging in without a

moderator.

> *She's still really a kid, she loves mum, loves dad, loves spending time with us, throwing a ball around. She's still a kid, but obviously this kid, like all kids are being exposed to things, some of which we don't know about. It concerns me that 'Jane' could be finding things on there that she shouldn't know about.*

> *It's a bit of a scary feeling when you're feeling that there are all these other influences that you haven't vetted yet, because these friends that she communicates with, their at a new school, I don't know them, I don't know their family, she's you know, getting friendly with a boy that and I just didn't think this would happen so soon.*

These two mothers were especially concerned with the nature of the photos their

children had posted. The meaning they ascribed to these was that they were inappropriate for

the child's age but the child was naïve to the risk or meaning of the photo. As a result of the

concern for the nature of the photo being posted, the second participant did not support the

child's behaviour and used a strong authoritative parenting strategy to control it;

> *They just want to grow up too fast. I think that's what it is and they're not thinking straight but even a photo in your bathers is innocent but it's not, well other people won't find it like that so that part of it I don't like. I think it takes their innocence away a little bit.*

> *I was on her Facebook the other night and she changed the profile photo. There was a photo of her and you know, chest out, duck face stupid thing and that was the first time she's put a photo like that and I made her take it down.*

Almost all of the participants felt entitled and comfortable looking at their child's

messages and 'chat' conversations yet only four of the participants had done so. The

responses below refer to the discomfort participants felt when seeing the intimacy and mature

nature of some of the communications on the child's digital device. The participants were

unaware that their child was capable or wanting to take part in mature conversations;

> *Sometimes I do feel a little shocked. It appears she is a lot older than what I think when I see her do things like this.*

> *One area that's made me feel a bit uneasy is some kids communicate at a deeper level over written text and I don't know if this is normal or abnormal or just the way it is. I've noticed that 'Jane' was having a deep conversation with someone over message.*

> *Just the things she puts down, like where she's at, it just seems like somebody that's older, would think like that or do that.*

Lack of Self-Efficacy

Australian epidemiological data has shown that adolescents spend five hours per day on electronic media technology (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2008). Social media activity has a formative ecological influence on adolescents particularly if it is replacing other important functions. Participants reported some of the benefits of social media such as the ability to learn and network with many different people and opportunities for self-expression and creativity. These were minimal in comparison to the potentially unconstructive effects reported throughout the data such as the impact it could have on the child's sleep and therefore their academic potential and physical development. This is consistent with extant literature suggesting social media may have a negative impact on adolescents' sleep quality and sleep patterns (King, Delfabbro, Zwaans & Kaptsis, 2014; Punamäki, Wallenius, Nygård, Saarni & Rimpelä, 2007). Furthermore, there is evidence in extant research to suggest that children and adolescents who take digital devices in their bedroom are more likely to report later bed times, shorter sleep duration, increased latency in falling asleep and decreased memory and concentration (BaHammam, Saeed, Al-Faris, & Shaikh, 2006; King et al., 2014). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* included Internet addiction disorder as the first disorder of its kind to be recognised (4th ed., American Psychiatric Association, 1994). It was defined as a behavioural addiction with six core characteristics; salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict and relapse (4th ed., American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Lack of self-control itself and the addictive nature of social media and digital devices was frequently reported by the participants. The participants frequently said that their concern

about the excessive amount of time spent on the device and how this impacted upon 'other things' their child should or could be doing. Some of the participants indicated that if they had not intervened by setting clear social media boundaries, that their child may develop pathological social media habits. Participants also had experienced changes in their child's digital device etiquette and attributed this to a dependency and anxiety their child felt when separated from the device. Themes of the child needing to learn self-control, boundaries, social-norms and respect when using the device were frequent throughout the data. Some of the participants had attempted to teach their children web-literacy such as ensuring politeness or consistency in what they say and how they talk online and in person. Some participants mentioned that there were clashes in opinion on social media etiquette because the child sees their parents as a digital immigrant and that social norms have changed. The majority of the participants have developed structures in their homes to manage their child's usage, without such measures some of the children would sleep less and spend excessive amounts of time on their device.

Pathological media use in adolescents is relatively under reported in the literature. It refers to pervasive and maladaptive use of digital media resulting in pathological and/or physical problems (King et al., 2014). A defining characteristic of pathological social media use is that it is not regulated or controlled by the user, which results in an interference from other tasks (King et al., 2014). Internet dependency studies have shown that people who meet dependency criteria between twice and ten times as much time using instant messaging technology and synchronous communication applications (Huang & Leung, 2011).

All of the participants had concerns about the effect the technology may have, and for each participant the concerns varied in strength and nature. For most of the participants the concern was difficult to describe and intangible. When probed further to clarify what the concerns were the theme was primarily about falling behind academically. The majority

reported that their child had either stayed up later than usual whilst using social media, experienced fatigue from a lack of sleep because of using social media, been increasingly interrupted by their smart device whilst doing homework or had been studying or reading less since adopting social media. A small group of participants reported that they felt concern that their child would develop a pathology without their parental input and control;

> *I understand the concern and I think that there is something wrong when you can't let go of something…I spoke to one mum recently who said her daughter sleeps with her phone in her clutches because she's just so addicted to it. My concern is, could a lack of discipline and an addiction to social media derail her where she would normally be able to go academically?*

> *So we said "We're taking the phone away, because you need to get back to giving yourself time to do all the things you want to do otherwise were going to start pulling the activities otherwise you're not going to cope.*

Dependency and Anxiety. Social information is intrinsically rewarding to people. At a biological level, research has shown that dopamine is released when positive interactions take place online, such as when someone receives a 'like' for one of their status updates or photos (Shapiro & Margolin, 2013). This can be 'addictive' for the user, and over time they seek increased social validation, meaning the person needs to spend more time on the application and post status updates more often. It becomes a form of virtual validation dependence, although this may be a function of personality type whereby social media is just another medium that a specific group of user's become validation dependent (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zúñiga, 2010). Social media assists people with a sense of belonging, one of mankind's basic human needs however although people are interacting it can also add to one's sense of isolation and disconnection if the feedback ones is seeking was not given. The research suggests that social media differentially relate to adolescents' social connectivity and identity development. The hyperpersonal model proposes that adolescents can be selective in their interactions and how they present themselves, which in turn alters the individuals' self perception as well as how others relate back to them (Walther, 2011).

The participants explained concerns that their children will become anxious from trying to balance academic level with the need to be a part of the online community. It is this pressure that children feel, to be a part of a constant online conversation yet maintain their grades and achievements that may be an antecedent to anxiety (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011). Extant literature suggests that social media usage has links to anxiety, especially pertaining to social comparison and body image (Bergstrom, Neighbors, & Malheim, 2009; Ditman & Howard, 2004). A recent study on a University sample found a correlation between social media use and symptoms of social anxiety and depression in students (Maldonado, 2014). However the direction of this correlation may be that anxious and worrisome individuals have a propensity to use social media more frequently than those who are emotionally stable (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zúñiga, 2010). The participants indicated their concerns for their child's mental health and social media dependency;

> *Say if were in the car, my son will grab my phone, he needs the internet, it's just about being on the internet. He'll just grab my phone and do whatever. If he's ever anxious, just give him the internet somehow and it will just quieten him down. The idea: "lets go shopping and then to the movies", he'd be really sad about that because he's not going to have the internet. He gets really bad separation anxiety from no internet.*

> *It certainly creates a dependency, I know for myself even if I leave my phone at home and I'm on the way and I forget it, and I'm like "oh crap"…but that generation, definitely dependent, the world revolves around social media.*

What Would a Child Be Doing Otherwise? A pattern in the thematic analysis showed that participants were concerned about the way social media had replaced other activities that they value for their child. The participants showed that their child should not spend so much time on the device and should be doing "something else". As a consequence of prioritising social media some of the participants reported that their child had become busy and expressed difficulties in balancing their schedule with school and other activities. The analysis found that participants' greatest concern were that their child may fall short of their

potential academically and otherwise (such as learning a skill like playing piano) because of social media.

> *We took her phone off her so after that first month, for a week because we said she'd changed. She wasn't reading, she used to love to read and she wasn't practicing the piano. Time, it's just time. Time was being sucked up by this thing.*

> *Within 2 weeks of having it we find her in the bedroom or somewhere on the smart phone just playing games when she should've been doing something else.*

Effect on School Work. With the beginning of the social networking lifestyle, their devices are viewed by the participants as distracting, particularly from homework. There has been evidence to suggest that social media negatively impacts academic performance (Lauren, Shapiro, & Margolin, 2013). It is proposed that there is a link between decreased and/or inefficient study time as a result of failure to multitask effectively (Huang & Leung, 2011). Conversely, a longitudinal study found that children from low-income families who used the internet more had higher scores on reading achievement tests and scored higher grades than children from the same demographic who had minimal internet use (Jackson, vo Eye, & Biocca, 2003). There has been contention that the internet does not aid learning. A survey of teachers found that 86% do not believe internet applications improve performance (Barber, 1997). None of the participants reported that their children had displayed academic difficulties as a result of social media despite their fears of distraction yet they indicated that there were concerns for some of their changes of habits (sleeping and study) and ability to be distracted;

> *Last year, at recess and lunch she'd just go to the library and read. She was a bit more academic. She still gets the same grades but she's becoming more like she wants friends more. So in her report now even it says she's more distracting. She gets some 'usuallys' (in her school report), where she was consistent before in behaviour, now it's gone to' usuallys', so I think she's becoming more social.*

> *They have to check in their iPads before they go to their room. That's me picking a battle because that'll effect them for school and their learning the next day because they haven't had a proper nights sleep.*

Another noteworthy thematic pattern was that many of the children attend schools that require iPads or similar devices. Participants reported there were challenges in managing the distractions inherent with the device, that because the school requires the device that they felt disempowered to make any changes;

> *We had to say you don't have your iPad there when you're doing your homework, but there's an amount of research they have to do for school (using the iPad).*

> *When I banned the phone they go on their laptops because they have to have a laptop for school and so I know they're chatting on their computers but I can't take that off them because they need it for school-work.*

> *It's hard to decipher whether its homework.*

Effective Multitasking or Distracting. Children and adolescents will 'surf' the internet, listen to music, play digital games and/or watch the television all at the same time (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). There has been little research investigating how social media and digital technology may affect information processing, comprehension, and communication behaviour. Extant literature on adolescent information processing ability has shown that the internet age generations have not developed superior attention-dividing capabilities (Bergen, 2005). Research has shown that the brain cannot parallel process multiple streams of information competently, regardless of contextual and evolutionary factors (Armstrong & Chung, 2000; Bergen, Grimes, & Potter, 2005). Learning and media multitasking is a new area of research, so far findings show that heavy internet media users report lower academic achievements (Armstrong & Chung, 2000; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010).

> *I'll think that she's texting you know and it's distracting, how can she focus? And how, a lot of adults can't focus because there so distracted by you know texting and social media, how can a child get that maturity?*

> *It affects her when she's studying, I can tell when she goes to her emails, she might smile or if I see her typing a lot, she's obviously typing back an email.*

Conclusion

The pervasive effect of social media has changed the way humans communicate and spend their time. In order to understand the effect on the family it is critical to understand how mothers ascribe meaning to their children's social media adoption. The present research investigated what meaning mothers ascribe to social media entering their child's life. The research was informed and guided by ecological systems theory, which proposes that the interaction between a child and the environment impacts upon their development (Brofenbrenner, 1979). It argues that a person's development can be positively or negatively influenced by events occurring in settings in which the individual is not always present, such as the interactions between systems. In the present research, social media was a catalyst for both positive and negative interactions, as perceived by participants. Participant's interpreted hand-held technology and social media applications as an accepted part of the macro system but as it diffused down to a micro system level, the research exposed a dissonance and pressure to conform. The feeling of dissonance and pressure indicated both that participants wanted to be accepted by their peers and that they desired to raise a healthy, well adjusted child. The dissonance surfaced when participants felt that the phenomenon was beyond their control because of the socio-cultural acceptance of the technology, which had 'trickled' down to directly impact upon them. This was especially experienced when participants felt unsure whether their child was using digital devices for academic purposes and whether they should be spending as much time as they were on their devices. Participants reported uncertainty about what level of control they should impose on their child. The findings suggest that participants ascribe social media to be a significant ecological transition in their child's psychosocial development. It showed that social media had an immediate effect on their child's behaviours, which was an ongoing point of concern for participants who still felt unprepared to 'parent' the technology. The pace of change and the speed of technology

adoption pressured participants to conform before they were ready. The findings indicated that participants conformed because they deemed it as a necessary risk, partially because they wanted their children to experience a 'normal' upbringing and not be subject to social isolation. However, the reasons for conforming were not entirely related to the child, participants experienced their own personal motivations, which were primarily related to participants wanting to be a 'good' mother as perceived by their peers and community.

Existing literature acknowledges social media can assist adolescents in their identity formation as they can connect more selectively with people who share similar interests, as well as present their image dynamically and interchangeably (O'Keeffe & Clark-Pearson, 2011). This is a new phenomenon and there is little research to suggest whether this is a constructive or detrimental process. In support of the extant literature, the present research indicated that participants interpreted that their children were using social media as an identity construction and exploration tool. Furthermore the research showed that some of the participants perceived there to be excessive use, which was a function of their child lacking self-efficacy. It is proposed that this may be a product of individuals become 'stuck' in the identity exploration process and experiencing difficulty arriving at an identity commitment (Schwartz et al., 2005). The findings suggest that the participants interpreted social media to be a benefit and not a barrier to their child's psychological, emotional and social development.

The research found that excessive access use of social media was impacting upon the children's sleeping patterns and use of time. The children who had changed habits and hobbies because of social media, had withdrawn from family life and began to seek privacy, a new behavior that had formed from when the child began using social media. Although the participants perceived social media to be a threat to their child's academic potential, the study reported no immediate change in academic performance. The findings showed that

participants have developed structures in their homes to manage their child's usage, without such measures some of the children would sleep less and spend excessive amounts of time on their device.

There is a lack of research investigating what meaning mothers ascribe to their child's social media usage and what developmental, social and relational phenomenon occurs in the child and parent's home and wider community. The present research contributes to this body of literature and guides future research questions and methodology. It is recommended that future research should investigate further the benefits and barriers to digital identity construction and empirically investigate if there are positive and negative impacts on academic and cognitive development. The implications as result of the present findings and future research guide school policy, parenting strategies for managing social media and health professionals to have evidence based practices when working with parents, children and the wider community to promote healthy social media behaviours.

In conclusion, the study indicates that mothers attribute social media to be a significant event in their child's identity construction and psychosocial development. The findings indicated that participants exerted a concerted effort in order to protect their children from the potential negative impact of social media. Furthermore, the research provides evidence to suggest that participants felt pressure to conform both by their own intrinsic motivation to be a 'normal', accepted mother and not be a barrier to their child's identity construction. This was despite participants being aware that their child does not have the self-efficacy to control social media use with other important commitments. The study contributes to the literature on technology and how it interacts and impacts on human behaviour. It guides and informs future research to further explore how social media impacts people at each level of their ecological system.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

1. Basic Demographic and Background Questions
      i. What are your age and your child/children's ages?

2. What has been you own experiences with social media (Facebook, Instagram, MySpace, Twitter, MSN etc)?
      i. Have you found it useful to your life?
      ii. In what ways do you utilize the application(s)?
      iii. Are you friends with your child on Facebook?
      iv. Why/Why not?

3. Can you share with me about your child's experiences with social media?
      i. When and why did your child decide to start a social media profile?
      ii. In what ways does he/she uses the application? (e.g to chat to friends, to see photos, to stay up to date)

4. Does social media have an impact on your child. What is the impact? Does it affect your child's relationship, sense of self etc?
      i. Can you see if any of the changes you've noticed have anything to do with social media? (behavioural, emotional, relational)
      ii. Tell me about whether you see Facebook as having an affect on your child's intelligence, language skills, communication ability?

5. Has there been any changes in the interactions you have had with your child since they opened social media account(s)? Can you tell me about them.
      i. Has your child starting behaving differently in any way? Dress style, choices of hobbies etc
      ii. Has there been any increase or decrease in the sense of bond you have with your child? Can you tell me about this?
      iii. Have there been any differences in the level of obedience to you since they opened Facebook? Can you tell me about this?

6. Does social media have any effect on your home environment? If so, what?

Appendix B: Information Letter

Mothers' Experiences of Social Media

Dear Participant,

My name is Abe and I am a 4th year Honours student studying Psychology at Edith Cowan University. As a part of my studies I am conducting a research project called 'Mothers' Experiences of Social Media'. I am interested in the way social media is experienced in the home especially when children first begin their social media profile (texting, instant messaging, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Google+, Vine, Ask.fm etc). There is very little research into this area particularly the link between social media and attachments, the family environment and child and adolescent development. In light of this I am seeking to research mothers with children approximately between the ages of 9 and 13 who have within the last 6 months opened an online social media account.

The way the research will be conducted is through approximately 60 minute interviews. The interviews will be informal and relaxed and a venue can be negotiated to a place that suits you. The main focus of the interview will be to explore your experience of your child starting their social media profile.

If you choose to participate in the study it is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at anytime without fear of judgment. There will be a digital recorder in the interviews and myself and my supervisor will have access to these recordings. Your name and any confidential information will be kept in the strictest confidence. Once the interview is transcribed your real name will not be disclosed and a pseudonym will be used instead. You will receive a copy of the interview questions before the interview and if any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable you are welcome to tell me to move on to the next question without fear of judgment.

If you have any queries you are most welcome to contact me or my supervisor (contact details are below). For an independent and confidential discussion you may also speak with the ECU ethics officer on (08) 6304 2170 or Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au.

Thank you for your consideration in being a participant in this research project.

Kind regards,

Abe van Hatch
Researcher, Honours Student
School of Psychology
ahvanhat@our.ecu.edu.au

Research Supervisor Contact Details
Dr Bronwyn Harman
School of Psychology
270 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup, 6027
(08) 6304 5021
b.harman@ecu.edu.au

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent Form

Mothers' Experiences of Social Media

1. I have been provided with and have read the information letter explaining this research to me and I understand the purpose of this study.

2. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers given.

3. I understand that participation requires me to take part in an interview and a brief follow-up discussion.

4. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential, known only to the researchers.

5. I give consent for the information gathered in the interview and any follow up interview to be used in the research and any future research.

6. I give consent for the interview to be digitally audio taped.

7. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw at any time without explanation or penalty.

If you have any further questions, please contact Abe at ahvanhat@our.ecu.edu.au or on 0422 395 653, or Bronwyn the research supervisor and Honours Coordinator at b.harman@ecu.edu.au or on 08 6304 5021.

I _____ freely agree to participate in this project.

_____   _____
        Participant signature   Date signed

_____   _____
        Researcher signature   Date received