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**THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN WHITE INFORMAL  
SETTLEMENTS**

by

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## Abstract

Little is known and understood about social media and social capital in urban informal settlements. Moreover, white informal settlements are anomalous in South Africa – hidden and understudied in a country where wealth distribution is skewed in favour of the minority white population. Limited information is available on these impoverished white communities. In fact, even their physical locations mostly remain officially undocumented. This does not suggest or imply, however, that the residents of white informal settlements are silent or disconnected from the world outside their immediate communities. This study addresses a void in the body of knowledge available on social media and social capital in white informal settlements in South Africa.

This doctoral study explores the role and impact of social media in five white informal settlements in Gauteng – South Africa’s financial capital and most densely populated province. Through in-depth interviews, the researcher learned that Facebook and WhatsApp are enormously popular among the study’s participants. They use these platforms to connect with others (some who are previously known to them and others who are part of shared-interest groups), for emotional support, for important information about their immediate environment, and, perhaps most remarkably, to survive. Facebook itself has emerged as a powerful fundraising tool for participants bridging a divide between themselves, who are in need, and those who are willing and able to donate and provide aid (“sponsors”). In this regard, Facebook and WhatsApp groups have rendered themselves essential platforms to source food, clothing, furniture and other necessities.

In this context especially, this study concentrates on social capital – the link between social capital and poverty, the networks of impoverished people, and the role social media plays in facilitating and supporting both bridging (loose ties) and bonding (close ties) social capital. This study argues that the majority of participants, who are severely impoverished, have access to social media, albeit sometimes intermittent, and that they are able to use social media platforms to enhance their social capital and to leverage the networks and relationships they have built online. The study therefore challenges overarching assumptions about “the poor” and their perceived inability to engage meaningfully on social media platforms.

This study contributes to existing literature in highlighting the social media practices of understudied marginalised communities. It also explores the uniqueness of each participant's social media behaviour, underscoring the access participants have to social media platforms, and the tangible and practical usefulness of Facebook and WhatsApp in these informal settlements. The researcher further proposes a guideline that can be applied in other informal settlements – one in which social media is used successfully and effectively to meet the immediate needs of impoverished individuals and communities.

Being a qualitative study, the findings cannot be generalised to include other impoverished communities and informal settlements, but the researcher believes it lays the groundwork for future studies in this field. Much can be learned and the information utilised if other informal settlements are researched with regard to their social media engagements. If more studies address the potential of social media in alleviating poverty, an important step will have been taken towards improving the lives of the most marginalised and vulnerable.



## Informal settlement terminology

The camp ( <i>Die kamp</i> )	Among participants, the most common name for their informal settlement is “the camp”, or colloquially referred to as a “squatter camp”. By the participants of this study, the term “the camp” does not seem to be seen as derogatory but rather a description of where they live.
The farm ( <i>Die plaas</i> )	Another name for Filadelfia Ark and Endicott informal settlements. Since these informal settlements are located on farms, residents often refer to them as “the farm”.
The park ( <i>Die park</i> )	Another name for Sonheuwel, an informal settlement that used to be a holiday caravan park. For this reason, some Sonheuwel participants still refer to it as “the park”.
The dam ( <i>Die dam</i> )	Another name for Coronation Caravan Park, located near a large dam on the same premises.
Munsieville and Pango Camp	Pango Camp is part of the larger Munsieville township. Participants use the names Pango Camp and Munsieville interchangeably – both terms refer to the place they live in.
Sponsors	Participants often use the term “sponsors” to refer to individuals or charity organisations that donate food, clothes, furniture or other products and necessities.
The inside	Participants in this study tend to distinguish between the area where they live, and the surrounding suburbs, city, province and country. The term “the inside” refers to everything that occurs within their specific informal settlement.
The outside	This refers to everything outside the informal settlement. Even the smallholdings next to their settlement would be considered “the outside”.
Oom	Residents in these informal settlements call any older man “oom” [uncle], generally as a sign of respect.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Media and the poor

Access to information and platforms to voice opinions is regarded as a basic human right as 1) it has the potential to facilitate a greater social understanding of marginalised and disenfranchised groups, and 2) it may open doors to opportunities for vulnerable groups (Cañizález, 2011: 50; Tacchi, 2008: 12). The mass media has traditionally been seen as fulfilling this function – in part, at least. The mass media, however, is driven by several factors which determine what is broadcast, how, and to whom (Dionne Jr, 2008: 15). Not all audiences can or will relate to media content in the same way. The poor - not to suggest that people who suffer from economic poverty should be grouped or classed as the same (Krishna, 2009: 948) - are seldom considered the target audience for mass media publications and broadcasts (Kim, Carvalho & Davis, 2010: 564). Their struggles are hardly highlighted, and the cause of their poverty is often attributed to their own wrongdoing (Dorey, 2010: 334).

Social media has emerged as an accessible platform to discern what information a person chooses to be privy to (Alhabash & Ma, 2017: 7; Pariser, 2011: 66). The advent of social media seemed to have the potential to democratise the media, shifting some power away from the media elite and gatekeepers to ordinary people (Awan & Gauntlett, 2013: 125). It has also helped lend a voice to those living on the fringes of society (Tshivhase, 2015:374). As a result, social media is considered an impactful tool in the lives of many – including the socio-economically disadvantaged (Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015: 302-304). However, the initial understanding that social media will be the panacea for access to information and opportunities for voice was short-lived, as the situation is much more complex. This document delves into these arguments to position this study within the scholarly debates about the relationship between poverty in informal settlements and social media.

### 1.1.1 Mass media and coverage of poverty

The media often holds a structural bias against the poor since they are seen as an unviable market in terms of economic value (Harper, 2014: 83-97; Media Development, 2008: 16-17; Dionne Jr, 2008: 15). In fact, generally speaking, poverty receives infrequent and superficial attention in the global media (Lacerda, 2015: 74; Robinson et al., 2009: 7). In other words, the dilemmas and challenges that affect impoverished individuals and communities are not as frequently mediated, as these tend to conflict with what is considered to be important by those who can pay to consume news media (Robinson et al., 2009: 7; Dionne Jr, 2008: 15; Media Development, 2008: 16-17; McKendrick et al., Scott & Dobbie, 2008: 31; Kim et al., 2010: 564). The result is that the voices of those affected by and living in poverty are thus not as present in media reports; and this renders the public's understanding of poverty perpetually limited (Lacerda, 2015: 91; Robinson et al., 2009: 7; Tacchi & Kiran, 2008: 32).

In addition to reporting less on poverty and related issues, generally speaking, the global media tend to be marked by a default to clichés, generalisations, repetitive rhetoric and stereotypes, which, in turn, frame poverty in a specific way (McKendrick et al., 2008: 31). This results in the broader society being misinformed, under-informed or uninformed about poverty and, as a result, assigning labels to individuals, groups and communities ravaged by it (Robinson et al., 2009: 5; Van Gorp, Blow & Van de Velde, 2005: 1-36). In this vein, the media plays a crucial role in portraying the poor as “not like us” (Garland, 2015: 5; Harper, 2014: 83-97). Reports may even go as far as to suggest that “they” are “lazy, incompetent, useless and ill-disciplined” (Garland, 2015: 5, 6, 9; Harper, 2014: 83-97). On the other hand, poverty is depicted in its most aggressive and extreme form to appeal to sensation and shock for commercial reasons – what has been termed the practice of pornography of poverty (Van Schagen, 2015: 64). These media representations do not in any way address the structural causes of poverty, which, in terms of progress, only lead to “rediscovering the poor over and over again” (Moss, 1987: 54).

Having said this, local empirical research suggests that in South Africa, people affected by poverty tend not to be blamed for their circumstances nor are they stereotyped in the media as much as in many other parts of the world (Chiumbu et al., 2016: 14). In fact, they are often depicted as victims, and the causes of their poverty are indicated as structural (Chiumbu et al., 2016: 14). However, the contextualisation of poverty in South Africa could benefit from an even deeper media focus, and the media should encourage and invite discourse and debate around poverty and what it entails (Chiumbu et al., 2016: 14).

However, recent research has shown that many people in South Africa that live in poverty have access to social media, despite the high data costs. The nature of social media platforms potentially allows for greater control over the information that a user is exposed to. It also provides a relatively inexpensive podium from which to air one's views and opinions – an opportunity to have a voice, and to not be silenced by organisations dictating or prescribing a narrative. This raises questions around poverty and social media access, activities, usage and views. In addition, considering how offensive media portrayals can be to people affected by financial and social hardships, it raises questions about the relationship between social media and people living in poverty.

#### 1.1.2 Poverty and social media

The existing literature reveals that, generally speaking, social media users engage with social media platforms to connect with others, kill time, entertain themselves, commemorate and share meaningful events, and form online communities (Quinn, 2016: 61; Hallikainen, 2015: 12; Awan & Gauntlett, 2013: 125). In addition, different platforms have different audiences and focus groups. Facebook especially, is often used as a source of news and information for users whilst most social media platforms are used as voice expressive platforms (Pariser, 2011: 66; Choi, 2016: 817). On Facebook specifically, there tends to be a high level of trust and affinity associated with content that is distributed by friends, contacts and network groups as opposed to what a foreign media office and editor choose to divulge (Pariser, 2011: 66; Choi, 2016: 817). In this way, social media users feel that they have autonomy and control over what they are exposed to as they receive information via sources that they know and deem credible (Pariser, 2011: 66; Choi, 2016: 817; Dawson, 2018: 2).

Social media users employ the social media not only to obtain information but also as platforms of self-expression. Social media offers a voice platform to essentially anyone that has access to the internet. Aided by a degree of distance and anonymity, social media users can share their views and opinions openly without direct physical negative repercussions, physical humiliation or physical shame (Awan & Gauntlett, 2013: 122; Tufekci, 2010: 5). The level of self-expression with which a person can engage and contribute in the public sphere seems to be an enormously attractive aspect of social media (Burger, 2015: 264; Gabriel, 2014: 104; Livingstone, 2008: 394). However, social media is not the panacea to not having a voice, as it structurally limits participation by those who do not have access to social media (for various reasons, such as the cost of devices or data, language barriers, social conventions, etc.), and moreover, cybercrime, cyberbullying, cyber-shaming and the like are also found on social media.

However, research by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2016: 1) suggests that most economically disadvantaged individuals do have access to the internet and social media, albeit intermittently. However, inequality still exists on levels beyond access. Where higher socio-economic individuals tend to use the internet and social media for news and information, lower-income users engage with social media predominantly to chat online (Kumar, 2014: 1122; OECD, 2016: 1). This points to social media being a crucial platform to facilitate connections and interaction for lower socio-economic individuals (Viswanath et al., 2013: 202). Much of the value of the said social media engagements to a disadvantaged user is that social media enables them to bypass their social class, status, economic background and education (Kumar, 2014: 1130). As a result, however, these connections predominantly remain virtual and online – the only safe place where low-income users feel free to escape their social boundaries (Kumar, 2014: 1134).

The top-down approach of mass media organisations has created a bias towards largely negative poverty-related news themes. This has, in many ways, alienated those affected by poverty. Social media, on the other hand, is relatively easily accessible and enables a person to actively contribute to information they are exposed to. It also provides even the most marginalised with a platform from which the public sphere can be accessed. Further adding to the value of social media for those who

are impoverished is the opportunity it lends them to engage with others in a space that is free from the restrictions of class and socio-economic barriers – albeit only virtually.

## **1.2 Rationale and motivation for this study**

The relationship between the media and the poor, as well as the social media engagements of those who are financially disadvantaged have been explored. Considering the long and profound history of informal settlements in South Africa, not only white ones, but all informal settlements, it is concerning that minimal research focuses on the social media engagements of residents of such settlements. After all, informal settlements are an integral part of the South African landscape – as much as 8.4 percent of adults live in urban informal settlements (Statistics South Africa, 2008/2009: 7).

Even internationally, much of the internet and social media research available has been done in formal housing communities among the middle class and more affluent – not the poor in informal settlements. Having said this, a number of case studies in informal settlements have been noted in largely third world countries, such as the following examples. The digital leisure of the mobile internet in informal settlements in India (Rangaswamy & Arora, 2016: 611-626; Rangaswamy & Cutrell, 2013: 51); children's internet practices in informal settlements in New Delhi (Mitra & Rana, 2001: 221); virtual partner-seeking in informal settlements in Kolkata (Chakraborty, 2012: 197-216); Facebook romance and digital privacy of low-income users in Brazil and India (Arora & Scheiber, 2017: 408-422); the effect of introducing internet access and digital literacy in marginalised urban communities in Nairobi (Wamuyu, 2017: 117-142); community technology centres in the favelas of Brazil (Nemer, 2018: 461); mobile internet use among the youth in Kibera, an informal settlement in Nairobi (Kibere, 2016: 47-67); participatory content creation and collective intelligence in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro (Baroni, 2012: 125); the local content outputs of favela residents in Rio de Janeiro (Holmes, 2013: 137; Davis, 2015: 230); an exploratory study of non-Facebook users' perceptions of social media in rural Zambia (Wyche & Baumer, 2016: 1092), as well as online ganglands in the ghettos of Brussels (Hellemont, 2012: 165). This research is starting to carve out a study field investigating internet and social media activities in informal settlements, but more research needs to be undertaken in this area to form a comprehensive body of knowledge.



This is starting to happen at the local level, with a number of published case studies on internet and social media engagement in informal settlements. Examples of such studies are the following: exploring the differences in internet adoption and usage between historically advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Brown & Licker, 2003: 6-26), online media usage with mobile phones in impoverished communities (Kreutzer, 2009: 1-102), research in Hooggenoeg, a township in Grahamstown, arguing that mobile phones contribute to a sense of “stuckness” (Schoon, 2012: 690; Schoon & Strelitz, 2014: 25), children’s digital literacy practices in unequal settings (Lemphane & Prinsloo, 2014: 738-753), and the information society and digital divide in a South African context (Bornman, 2015: 264-278). To underline the scarcity of research in this area, Phokeer et al. (2016: 17-22) referred to their paper as “the first look at mobile internet use in township communities in South Africa”. These studies have been undertaken in predominantly black urban informal settlements.

As a result of colonialism and apartheid, socio-economic inequality in South Africa remains skewed in favour of the country’s white minority population (Meiring, Kannemeyer & Potgieter, 2018: 5-6; Ngwane, Yadavalli & Steffens, 2001: 201). Poverty persists and the polarised wealth distribution in South Africa has rendered it one of the most unequal countries in the world (The World Bank, 2018: 41-42). In other words, South Africa’s black population, the majority of the people, are mostly affected by poverty, diminished opportunities and a lack of vital resources (Meiring et al., 2018: 5-6). However, this is not to suggest that white poverty does not and has not existed in South Africa. White poverty was present in the country during the Great Depression between 1929 and 1939 (Romer, 2003: 1; Vosloo, 2011: 68). A considerable portion of the white population moved to the cities during this period where they lived in dire poverty (Wilson & Ramphele, 1989: ix). Research indicates that by 1930, out of two million white people, approximately 400,000 were living in impoverished circumstances (Klausen, 2001: 55). A housing system of slums or “squatter camps” - made up of tin structures and tents - developed with the discovery of gold in Johannesburg. It is estimated that a third of these slum dwellers were white (Parnell, 1992: 115). This was a great concern to the government at the time, who then implemented urgent policy changes that would secure racial residential segregation and a certain standard of living for white people (Parnell, 1992: 115).

Limited academic research has been conducted on white informal settlements in South Africa. For this reason, the researcher chose to engage in a study in these communities. Furthermore, the researcher can speak Afrikaans and had access to white informal settlements and willing participants.

An anthropology fieldwork blog by Russel-Jones (2015: 1-4) discusses his experiences while doing research in a white informal settlement in Pretoria called Sonskynhoekie. Sibanda (2018: 15-24) explored the concept of wounded citizenship among poor whites in Cocobana in East London, and Leal (2019: 1-18) focused on the news media consumption of Pango Camp residents. Kruger (2016: 46-57) did research at Coronation Caravan Park (also called King Edward Park) where she did an anthropology study on (dis)empowered whiteness and contradictory identities of white informal settlement dwellers. Schuermans and Visser (2005: 259-294) interviewed “poor whites” in Bloemfontein, often in search of shelter, to understand the link between white identity and a certain lifestyle expectation. Aside from the scarcity of research on the social media usage of white people living in poverty, white informal urban settlements tend to be portrayed in the media for novelty and sensational reasons due to the racialised apartheid background of the country (Bruwer, 2014; Burrows, 2016; Basson, 2015; O’ Reilly, 2010; Dibetle, 2009; Myburgh, 2015; Simpson, 2013; Summers, 2016; Lottering, 2015; McAteer, 2016; Fourie, 2015). Although some research has been undertaken to understand the historical context and daily realities of poor white communities (cf. du Plessis, 2016: 879; du Plessis, 2016: 3), little is understood about white informal settlements in general, let alone residents’ social media engagement.

In her MA study (Leal, 2015-2017) in Pango Camp, a white informal settlement in Krugersdorp, she found that some children had braces (expensive dental devices mostly for aesthetic reasons), and that food parcels were delivered regularly. The residents attributed this to “sponsors”, and explained that these benefactors had become aware of them and their situation through the internet and social media platforms. They also said that they used Facebook groups to obtain furniture, clothing and other necessities. The researcher’s further investigation revealed that there are Facebook pages dedicated to aiding white informal settlements. She contacted several of the support facilitators and they explained their role in obtaining clothes, school uniforms and food parcels for residents of the said informal settlements. These

benefactors are mostly people who reside elsewhere (not in an informal settlement), and their contact with informal settlement residents was predominantly initiated through social media. The support that white informal settlement residents in Pango Camp receive, as a result of their online engagements, is in stark contrast with the rest of the (black) informal settlement which appears to live in dire poverty without the prospect of this form of outside assistance. In fact, a bartering system became apparent in Pango Camp where the white residents would trade clothes and goods received from their “sponsors” in return for electricity connections and help with manual labour from their black neighbours. According to one of the Pango Camp participants, the reason that they receive outside help while the rest of the Munsieville informal settlement does not is because “they don’t advertise on Facebook and on the internet” (Pango Camp community leader, Hugo, 2016).

Consequently, the present research project drew on the previous findings and the researcher went on to investigate the social media engagements of the residents in several white informal settlements to establish which platforms they use and for what reasons. This study involves five informal settlements in Gauteng, as the researcher has access to these communities. The choice of investigating only white communities was not for political reasons – it was simply a matter of access to participants of the study, and exploring under-researched topics.

### **1.3 Key research objective and aims**

The purpose of this study is to consider the role and impact of social media in white informal settlements in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. Gauteng is South Africa’s financial capital as well as the country’s most densely populated province. The informal settlements in this study are Filadelfia Ark in Pretoria, Funny Farm in Alberton, Pango Camp on the West Rand of Johannesburg, Sonheuwel in Pretoria, and Endicott in Springs. The following research aims are set out for this study:

- To determine participants’ access to social media
- To establish which social media platforms are used and for what reasons by participants
- To deduce patterns of social media usage and draw comparisons between communities, and

- Based on the above, to seek to establish the relation between social media and social capital.

A Nexus search indicated that this study is unique, as the role and impact of social media in white informal settlements of South Africa has not been studied.

#### **1.4 Research approach**

This section provides a brief overview of the rationale in choosing the research approach. The details of executing the empirical part of the study are explained in Chapter Four.

The role and impact of social media in white informal settlements in Gauteng has not previously been studied. For this reason, a qualitative research paradigm was chosen, the goal of which was to elicit rich data describing feelings and experiences of participants. This project lent itself favourably to the qualitative approach, since the subject-intentionality of the study implies that the researcher wishes to capture and preserve the unique use of language, symbols, codes and communication methods used by the participants (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007: 9). Furthermore, qualitative researchers seek to explore ideas and questions in the natural setting in which they arise (Delyser, 2008: 234; Grossoehme, 2014: 109; Atieno, 2009: 14).

For this study, the researcher visited five different white informal settlements – Funny Farm, Sonheuwel, Endicott, Pango Camp and Filadelfia Ark, all in different regions of the Gauteng Province of South Africa. The researcher interviewed the participants in their everyday environment, which the researcher believes adds to the authenticity and veracity of the data. For data collection, personal, semi-structured interviews were used, as open-ended questions invite reflection and exploration, and lead to a deeper discovery than simple yes or no answers (Davies & Hughes, 2014: 28). Open-ended questions furthermore allow participants to ponder their own thoughts and feelings, and to express them openly (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 166-167). The interviews followed a thematic narrative approach, structured around pre-defined topics (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 3). Whilst the researcher ensured discussion of certain topics and questions core to the study, she allowed the participants to determine much of the interview pace and structure (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 3). However, the fundamental underlying purpose of the interview demands that diligent preparation

takes place before the first question is asked – it is crucial that the interview is not derailed to the extent that the participant takes it into an irrelevant direction (Greer, 2008: 150). An interview guide which lists the questions and topics to be covered during the interview (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 54) was therefore used to ensure the intended purpose of the study was adhered to. Adjustments were made to the interview guide after the initial interviews when other topics relevant to the study emerged. The researcher used a cell phone to audio-record all interviews. This was tested in several environments beforehand to ensure good quality recordings.

Non-probability sampling methods were used in this study, namely convenience sampling, and purposive non-random, stratified sampling. Convenience sampling applies when a researcher selects participants based on convenient and practical aspects such as geographical proximity, accessibility, availability and willingness to take part in research interviews (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2015: 2; Robinson, 2014: 32). In the informal settlements that form part of this study, the researcher mostly interviewed participants who were sitting outside their homes or in communal dining areas (in the settlements that had such facilities). The researcher did stratify the population, however, in such a way that participants represented different genders, ages and employment status. This is a method of stratified, purposive non-random sampling, which implies that participants are selected to ensure certain particular groupings are included in the population (Yang & Banamah, 2013: 4; Robinson, 2014: 33-34). A large number interviews were conducted – 51 in five informal settlements. This was not done with generalisation in mind, but rather to ensure that a wide range of views, thoughts, opinions and practices were incorporated into the research data.

Thematic analysis was used as a method to analyse the data collected from interviews. The researcher adhered to the steps as set out by Braun and Clarke (2006: 79) as well as Liamputtong (2013: 249). She transcribed all the interviews herself and during this process, initial codes were generated. Themes were subsequently organised and revised, and, lastly, clearly defined.

## **1.5 Contribution to the field of study**

Research on social media is not in its infancy, but much of the research focuses on the middle class and the affluent – those who can afford constant and reliable internet access. Recent research is, however, exploring social media usage beyond the digital divide considering how the more economically disadvantaged segments of society use social media. These case studies are isolated when it comes to informal settlements. This doctoral study therefore aims to weave together what is understood about social media use in these communities to form a more comprehensive backdrop to the role and impact of social media in informal settlements.

Five white informal settlements in Gauteng were selected for this study. Although one could argue that a limitation of this study is the focus on one small segment of society, it is compatible with the intensifying wave of research on the social media engagements of the poor. This study is critical in the sense that it does not necessarily suggest that internet access and social media engagement is the panacea to problems associated with being poor. Instead, it draws on critical thought to give a textured account of the lived experiences of people affected by poverty. The researcher has access to the communities that form part of this study. According to the assumptions of qualitative research, this relationship of trust between researcher and participant is likely to yield comprehensive, in-depth results that would perhaps not be afforded to a newcomer.

The scholarly contribution of this study is thus to provide wide-ranging insight into the social media engagements of residents of informal settlements – a considerably understudied segment of society. The hope is that this will open doors to further research into the social media engagements of people living in poverty and/or informal settlements. In other words, this research project will expand the knowledge available in this field of study, as barely any information is currently available on the role and impact of social media in white informal settlements in South Africa. The study will therefore shed light on a field that has not been researched.



## 1.6 Chapter outline

The first chapter, the present one, provides a brief background on the relationship between the media and the poor as well as poverty and social media. It further explains the rationale and motivation for this research study against the backdrop of existing studies done in the realm of internet and social media usage in informal settlements – globally and locally. This highlights that not only are these fields and environments understudied, there is little academic information available on white informal settlements in South Africa in general. This contextualisation underscores the importance of this study, and why it warrants research at the doctoral level. This chapter also states the research objective and aims, and it provides an overview of the research approach.

Chapter Two focuses on poverty, information and voice exclusion. It unpacks the definitions of poverty and its multi-dimensional nature. This chapter also considers the link between poverty, social welfare, unemployment, and low formal education levels. Furthermore, aspects such as the digital divide, information poverty and voice poverty are explored against the backdrop of income poverty and social exclusion. In this context, it concentrates on the media's role in excluding the poor, and how impoverished individuals and communities are often blamed for their circumstances, resulting in further marginalisation. This chapter further discusses the history of white poverty and white informal settlements in South Africa, and how being white and poor leads to exclusion. Lastly, Chapter Two, in pointing to existing literature, emphasises the importance of refraining from categorising “the poor” as one uniform and homogenous category.

Chapter Three deals with the connection between social media and social capital. It discusses general uses of the internet and social media, and it delves into the bright side as well as the dark side of social media in exploring participatory culture, online identities, self-expression, connectedness, cyberbullying, trolling and fake news. This chapter further explores how poverty and unemployment affect social media use. The uses and gratifications theory is considered as a theoretical framework, specifically with regard to the evolution of the theory in the context of new media. Lastly, the network theory and social capital receive in-depth focus within the context of social media use of low-income, impoverished individuals.

Chapter Four details the methodological research approach of this study. It discusses the method of data collection that was followed as well as the sampling methods and process of data analysis. The limitations of this study are mentioned, as are the ethical considerations that are particularly relevant to this group of participants.

Chapter Five presents the findings of this study based on the themes derived from the in-depth personal interviews. These themes are considered against the topics discussed in Chapters Two and Three whilst preserving the authenticity and unique experiences of each participant.

Chapter Six focuses on the interpretation and reflection of the findings against the literature discussed in Chapter Two and Three.

Chapter Seven is the final chapter. It summarises the study's contributions to the field and makes recommendations for further research.

## **1.7 Key concepts**

### **1.7.1 Poverty**

Although poverty refers to economic deprivation, it is not limited to that (Pochun, 2000: 1). People who suffer from financial poverty are also limited in terms of choices and opportunities that could lead to upward mobility (Pochun, 2000: 1). Poverty is therefore regarded as multi-dimensional since it includes a person's health, their education, and their standard of living (Alkire & Santos, 2010: 7). There are also hidden or "missing" dimensions of poverty which include employment, agency, physical safety, and the ability to live without shame (Alkire, 2007: 348).

### **1.7.2 "The poor"**

People affected by income poverty should not universally be categorised and referred to as "the poor" (Krishna, 2009: 948). Any group that is disadvantaged or marginalised deserves to be treated with sensitivity – their individuality and uniqueness are important (Feuls et al., 2014: 958). For this reason, a group of impoverished people should not be treated as if they are one identical collective (Feuls et al., 2014: 958).



### 1.7.3 Poverty and social exclusion

To participate in social activities, a person needs financial resources (Bayram et al., 2012: 377). Without the financial means to socialise and engage with others, an impoverished person is often left behind – excluded from society (Axhausen, 2002: 34). In turn, a person loses support from others, assistance in the shape of physical aid, emotional comfort and social communication (Levitas et al., 2000: 60-61). A consequential inward focus often leads to further isolation, confinement and civic disengagement for those experiencing poverty (Levitas et al., 2000: 65).

### 1.7.4 Social media and social networking sites

Social media and social networking sites give users an opportunity to engage with new acquaintances and to maintain relationships using online platforms (Quinn, 2016: 61; Alhabash & Ma, 2017: 7). Social media users participate on these platforms as they enable them to share information, to self-document and to interact socially (Alhabash & Ma, 2017: 7). Social media engagement further provides avenues for users to self-express, kill time and entertain themselves (Alhabash & Ma, 2017: 7).

### 1.7.5 Poverty and access to social media

Even though the cost of data hampers the internet access of impoverished people, economically disadvantaged people do tend to use social media, albeit not with the same frequency as wealthier users (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016: 1). In fact, lower-income users actively participate on social media to establish connections and to maintain these through regular communication (Kumar, 2014: 1122; OECD, 2016: 1). Social media can therefore be seen as a vital platform on which users can bypass their socio-economic disadvantages to reach out to others in different economic brackets (Kumar, 2014: 1130). The connections established on social media may even extend to low-income users receiving tangible, physical support from willing benefactors (Davis & Moscato, 2018: 283; Briones et al., 2011: 38).

### 1.7.6 Poverty and voice

People who are poor are not privy to the same opportunities as the affluent to voice their views, concerns and frustrations (Mohr, 2008: 9). In essence, those who are poor lack access to the right channels to express their plight (Mohr, 2008: 9). Having a voice means a person is included in political, social and economic discussions in the public sphere (Tacchi, 2008: 12). As a result of the missing voice of the poor, their lives are rarely understood from a first-person experience, and they remain excluded from important civic discourse (Tacchi, 2008: 12).

### 1.7.7 Social capital

Social capital is the value attached to a person's social networks (Bourdieu, 1986: 248-249). Although social capital emphasises the benefits of sociability, it further conceptualises the imbalance and inequality of social networks between different socio-economic spheres (Osterling, 2007: 123, 130; Gowan, 2010: 51; Portes, 1998: 2). For this reason, inadequate social capital is seen as a component of poverty – illustrating the importance of the right contacts for upward mobility (DeFilippis, 2001: 784; Putnam, 1995: 66).

### 1.7.8 Poverty and social capital

Initial views on the social capital of the poor inferred that people who are poor lack social capital (Granovetter, 1973: 1360). Recent research, however, points to people who are poor as not necessarily lacking social capital, but the right kind of social capital (Lewandowski, 2008: 27). In other words, poor people tend to have strictly bonding social capital, which refers to close ties with people typically in the same or similar circumstances (Van Eijk, 2010: 469). People who are poor thus tend to lack bridging social capital – loose relations with individuals in a higher socio-economic bracket that could provide opportunities for upward mobility (Letki & Mierina, 2015: 221).

### 1.7.9 Connectedness

Human beings have a fundamental need to belong and to connect with others (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006: 697; Stevens & Fiske, 1995: 192). Social media platforms enable people to engage with others, and they facilitate social contact in line with a person's need to be part of a group (James et al., 2017: 561).

## 1.8 Conclusion

This chapter provides some background on existing research on poverty, the media and social media. With this as backdrop, this chapter discusses the rationale and motivation for this study. The research objective and questions are explained as well as the research approach. Lastly, the thesis outline is clarified, and key terms associated with the study and findings are highlighted.



## **Chapter 2: Poverty, information and voice exclusion**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter contextualises this study by providing an overview of the relationship between poverty and social media, as is applied to the sample used in this study.

The chapter firstly discusses what it means to be poor and the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. It also addresses aspects such as unemployment, social welfare and poor formal education – variables inextricably linked to poverty. Secondly, the chapter explores the social exclusion that inevitably results from poverty and how this is aggravated by the digital divide, information poverty, voice poverty and media agenda setting.

Since the sample of this study focuses on the social media usage of white people living in poverty-stricken environments, this study sketches the context for this study against the recent history of South Africa. In so doing, the first two sections of this chapter are effectively an overview of the existing research in the field of communication and media studies (more specifically the information that pertains to poverty and social media), and in the third section, by explaining the context of the chosen sample for this study, the chapter alludes to the contribution this study makes to the body of academic knowledge that exists in the discipline.

### **2.2 Poverty**

Poverty is often understood as a singular condition in which people find themselves when they are without the financial means to make ends meet. However, it is argued in this section that poverty is much more complex than a dire economic situation (Carr, 2008: 730). Instead, poverty is a combination of factors and each of these needs to be understood individually as well as in relation to the others. Poverty is thus not singular, but rather has multiple facets that contribute to the challenges associated with it.

### 2.2.1 The multi-dimensional nature of poverty

Human poverty is firstly a lack of financial means that result in deprivation, and this is most often, if not always, accompanied by a lack of options fundamental to human development (Pochun, 2000: 1). In this vein, the World Bank World Development Report (2000/2001: 15) indicates:

To be poor is to be hungry, to lack shelter and clothing, to be sick and not cared for, to be illiterate and not schooled. But for poor people, living in poverty is more than this. Poor people are particularly vulnerable to adverse events outside their control. They are often treated badly by the institutions of state and society and excluded from voice and power in those institutions.

A multi-dimensional understanding of poverty is thus associated with health, education, and standard of living and, important for this study, a lack of opportunities to be heard by those in power taking decisions on behalf of the citizenry, and thus also on behalf of the poor (Alkire & Santos, 2010: 7). Alkire (2007: 348) refers to the “missing dimensions of poverty” – that is, different elements associated with poverty that are usually not included in the standard, multi-dimensional description of what poverty entails. These include 1) a lack of employment, both in the formal sector but also informal employment; 2) a lack of agency (or empowerment), which refers to a person’s ability to pursue certain goals that might alleviate their situation; 3) a lack of physical safety, more specifically security and safety from violence or perceived violence; 4) a lack of the ability to live without shame – this emphasises the significance and value of dignity and respect without humiliation; and subsequently 5) often a lack of psychological well-being.

In other words, with a lack of access to economic opportunities come challenges regarding social positioning that are often being restricted to a particular geographical location, caught up in class inequality, and a lack of community structure to put forth a communal voice to address the situation (Yodmani, 2001: 7). It is these facets of poverty that can result in powerlessness, helplessness, defencelessness’ and social marginalisation (Fransman & Yu, 2018: 51). In fact, the interlinked relationship between vulnerability and poverty suggests that the one may very well cause the other (Philip & Rayhan, 2004: 15).

When considering causes of and solutions to poverty, it is thus imperative that focus is given not only to education, minimum wage jobs and affordable housing, but also to economic inequality, classism, prejudice and stereotypes (Turner & Lehning, 2007: 69). For a person not to be poor, they need to have an education that will provide them with well-remunerated job opportunities, they need to be able to participate in society with pride and dignity, and they need to have the confidence to appear in public and to command respect (Akindola, 2009: 146).

To summarise, poverty is to be viewed as the deprivation of several elements, many of which are inextricably linked. By implication, this suggests that meaningful interventions to alleviate poverty will not only address the financial aspects of being poor, but also the contributing factors that are either causal or just associated with poverty.

### 2.2.2 Poverty, social welfare and unemployment

As indicated above, one of the largest problems contributing to poverty is unemployment. In this sense, unemployment refers to the absence or shortage of gainful, productive means of acquiring an income, regardless whether it is in the formal or informal sector, self-employment or employment by another (Rao, 2014: 5). Unemployment contributes to increased economic inequalities between groups of people (Rao, 2014: 5). South Africa faces an unemployment rate of a 27.7 percent<sup>1</sup> (Statistics South Africa, 2017), and this, according to Forbes (2015), puts South Africa amongst the five countries with the highest unemployment rates in the world. As a result, the country faces devastating poverty.

In recent years, in the global South, social welfare programmes have emerged that involve directly transferring small amounts of money to a large number of low-income individuals (Ferguson, 2015: 1). South Africa has been at the forefront of this with its expansive social grant system predominantly structured to reduce poverty among groups that are unable to fully participate in the labour market, such as those in old age, children, and people with disabilities (Ferguson, 2015: 2; Mutyenoyoka & Tsheola, 2017: 411). In addition to addressing poverty in South Africa, the grant system is also

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<sup>1</sup> This is the percentage documented before the COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdown. Unemployment in South Africa has increased significantly as a result.

aimed at increasing health, nutrition and education in order to stimulate economic development (Mutiyenyoka & Tsheola, 2017: 411). Widespread criticism, not only locally, but also globally, surrounds the discourse around social welfare grants. Sceptics view any form of social assistance as creating “welfare dependency” with long-term unemployment problems, as the root of the problem of unemployment is not addressed (Marston, 2008: 368). Underlying this perspective is the assumption that unemployment is not a result of behavioural problems and moral deficiencies but rather caused by structural inequalities in the local and international economy (Marston, 2008: 359). This is a longstanding debate in the field of development communication – whether a lack of development or employment is due to a group of people inherently having a problem or lacking certain qualities (for instance a lack of education or literacy) or whether it is structurally, historically or contextually induced (by colonisation or other systemic exclusion) (Tacchi, 2008: 12). However, despite this debate, Mutiyenyoka and Tsheola (2017: 416) found that there is very little evidence to suggest that social grants contribute to a growing dependency on financial assistance or even the loss of private savings. In fact, given the history of South Africa and its subsequent systemic inequality, social grants have been proven to empower recipients to leverage and increase resources (Mutiyenyoka & Tsheola, 2017: 416). In fact, research indicates that social grants even assist recipients in increasing their productive activity and output (Mutiyenyoka & Tsheola, 2017: 416).

Unemployment is associated with a range of other aspects, one of which is the “tragic gift” of free time (Lobo, 2018: 81). On the one hand, free time can be seen as an opportunity to engage in leisure and social activities, but on the other, for the unemployed, it is most often a day void of a productive purpose or routine (Lobo, 2018: 81, 86-87; Van Hoye & Lootens, 2013: 87). In this sense, days can be fairly meaningless, which could result in idle inactivity, the loss of significance of family days like Sundays, and feelings of guilt, shame and rejection (Delaney, Egan & O’Connell, 2011: 25). This negative situation could send an individual into a downward spiral of loss, not only of work, but meaningful social connections and a necessary income (Gallie, Paugam & Jacobs, 2003: 1). As a result of the negative experiences associated with unemployment, the risk increases of unemployment becoming long term or even permanent (Gallie, Paugam & Jacobs, 2003: 1). In fact, a vicious cycle where exclusion from the labour market leads to social isolation and poverty has

become a reality (Gallie et al., 2003: 1). Since unemployment most often diminishes a person's social contacts, this tends to strengthen their ties with peers who share the experience of unemployment (Zeng, 2012: 92). As a result, the unemployed often become increasingly segregated and marginalised from mainstream (employed) society, and this inward focus further deprives them of meaningful connections that may assist with job opportunities (Zeng, 2012: 92). In fact, strong evidence suggests that unemployment greatly increases the risk of poverty and directly contributes to inequality, which, in turn, leads to a sequence of devastating social effects not only on the unemployed themselves, but also their families and the communities in which they live (Saunders, 2002: 507).

Thus, both poverty and unemployment tend to exclude people from others and from prospects that could alleviate crippling circumstances. On the one hand, this exacerbates isolation and, on the other, it supports comradeship with those in similar situations. Even geographically, those who do not work and who cannot afford to pay for reasonable accommodation live on the fringes of society amongst others who find themselves trapped in similar conditions and situations (Aguilar & Guerrero, 2013: 360). Such impoverished communities, often characterised by unemployed people milling about (Lobo, 2018: 81), frequently become unique homely spaces for residents where they can depend on each other for a sense of belonging and identity instead of relying on assistance, support or acceptance from the outside world (Davis, 2011: 680).

In other words, unemployment and poverty often work hand in hand as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion – that is exclusion from others with greater opportunities to find work, but inclusion in groups of people in a similar situation.

### 2.2.3 Poverty and poor or low formal education levels

Formal education has the potential to alleviate poverty and the associated effects of poverty, as formal education is associated with increased knowledge, skills and capabilities required to lead a productive, successful and balanced life (Coley & Baker, 2013: 3).



In poor communities, low income often means that formal education is not prioritised, as basic needs like shelter and food are foregrounded (Nambissan, 2010: 729). Banerjee and Duflo (2007: 7, 17) found that there tends to be minimal investment in and commitment to education in poor communities as the parents or seniors in these families lack formal education themselves and are therefore either intimidated by or unfamiliar with the benefits and demands of schooling and formal learning. This is not to say that there is not a hunger for literacy in poor communities, it is simply that schooling itself tends to receive limited attention, as it is simply not always affordable (Narayan et al., 1999: 7). The lack of education that is often rife in poor communities further limits future employment opportunities or income-generating activities (Iqbal, 2006: 36). So much so that poverty rates have been found to be highest for households headed by illiterate, uneducated or under-educated individuals, and poverty rates reduce as education increases (Iqbal, 2006: 36).

Interestingly, however, where poverty is often cited as a reason for learners to drop out of school, this is not necessarily the case in South Africa (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2008/2009: 46). In fact, although 70 percent of children lived in poverty in 2006, South Africa had a considerable school enrolment rate (96 percent for Grade R to Grade 9, 86 percent for Grade 10 to Grade 12) according to the Department of Education (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2008/2009: 46).

Aside from attending school, the quality of education received is a factor to consider as this might influence employability (Ferguson, 2015: 38). In light of this, Van der Berg (2002: 23) and Taylor, and Van der Berg and Burger (2011: 4) have found in their studies that there are critical problems with the quality of education in the South African school system – a system which proves to be racially and socio-economically unequal. The vast difference in academic performance reported by schools corresponds with the former racially separate education system under apartheid (Taylor, Van der Berg & Burger, 2011: 4). It was found that low quality education is still mostly found in historically disadvantaged schools (Taylor et al., 2011: 1). In other words, income inequality is related to low or poor educational attainment (Van der Berg, 2002: 23). In fact, research indicates that the quality of education a person receives is more important for earning capacity than the years of education a person has behind them (Taylor et al., 2011: 10). The socio-economic background of teachers contributes only marginally to the quality of education as it is mostly school

management that determines the standard of education at any given school (Van der Berg, 2002: 23). The educational vulnerabilities of children living in poverty, however, do not pertain only to their schooling. Their home environments and a lack of access to electricity, candles or paraffin for lamps may prevent them from studying or doing homework at night which will have an adverse impact on their scholastic performance (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2009: 47). In the context of poverty and education, the way in which children and parents become isolated and excluded should therefore be considered, as this may account for high repetition of grades and possible late entry into school (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2009: 49). In other words, it can be argued that education alone, or in isolation, would not necessarily address the issues of unemployment and poverty, but that education should be seen as part of a wider social system that needs to be addressed.

This means that education may have a critical effect on either mitigating or strengthening social exclusion. But education should not be seen in isolation; instead as an element in a chain of aspects that address social exclusion (Klasen, 2001: 413). Knowledge and skills acquired through the education system to successfully alleviate social exclusion should also be a purpose of education (Klasen, 2001: 413). This view is echoed by Montserrat, Casas and Malo (2013: 6), who believe education to be one of the most important aspects to prevent social exclusion. In fact, when children are denied adequate educational opportunities, this denial of access to fundamental rights tends to be perpetuated in adulthood, resulting in consistent exclusion and marginalisation (Whitty, 2001: 292).

To summarise, a link between education, poverty and employment is evident, but these are inextricably linked to other aspects such as social inclusion or exclusion, which, in turn, affects whether the needs of poor communities are brought to the attention of those in decision-making positions.

## 2.3 Poverty and social exclusion

In this section it is indicated that poverty is linked to social exclusion and that the situation is rather complex due to the interplay of various factors. Poverty denies people the same opportunities as others, and fewer opportunities have a knock-on effect of further exclusion and inward focus. In fact, loosely defined, social exclusion is linked to poverty, and the technical definitions of the two terms show remarkable overlaps (Bayram et al., 2012: 377).

Not being able, due to poverty, to afford social and leisure activities, such as going on holiday, dining out, inviting friends and family over for dinner, engaging in hobbies and other leisure activities, nourishing bonds by visiting people, and even attending meaningful life events such as weddings and funerals, act as a mechanism of social exclusion and ultimately social isolation (Levitas et al., 2000: 60-61). As financial resources are considered necessary requirements for social inclusion, the lack thereof can result in social rejection and marginalisation – self-inflicted or imposed by others (Axhausen, 2002: 34; Bayram et al., 2012: 375). Thus, the social exclusion experienced by people who are poor affects the support and assistance they will receive at a practical level, but also at an emotional level, that is in the course of regular life but also in times of need (Levitas et al., 2000: 63-64). Since physical accessibility to friends and family is often restricted for people who are poor, it may lead to confinement and disengagement entirely from civic activities (Levitas et al., 2000: 65).

The social isolation experienced by impoverished people is so profound it is even considered a “missing component” in the understanding of multi-dimensional poverty (Samuel et al., 2017: 83). Yet, although social exclusion cannot be viewed as a “euphemism for poverty”, highlighting social exclusion as part of the understanding and definition of poverty explains how, in a myriad of ways, individuals may not be granted the same access to society to share rights of citizenship in every sphere, be it civil, social or political (Lister, 2000: 38). Whereas poverty is mainly distributional, social exclusion concentrates on relational and connective issues such as detachment from work opportunities, minimal overall participation in activities and civil society, and social isolation (Madanipour, Shucksmith & Talbot, 2015: 725). In other words, the focus of social exclusion is not necessarily on the “victims” per se, but more on the processes that contribute to and cause exclusion from public life (Madanipour et al.,

2015: 725). In fact, it has been suggested that, as a group term, those who are poor should be referred to as “the excluded poor” as they are essentially entirely left out of the formal economy and mainstream society (Gans, 2009: 80).

### 2.3.1 Information poverty: exclusion from accessing information

So far in this section it has been indicated that poverty and a lack of education and employment are associated with social exclusion. It has been argued that social exclusion may be on the level of geographic living space and social ties. In this section, social exclusion on the level of accessing information and a lack of opportunities to express the views of poor people is political, as they are largely “forgotten” since their situation is not brought to the attention of public debate.

Traditionally, information poverty was understood as the adverse impact and consequences due to a lack of adequate access to information, and that a lack of access results in a lack of skills and abilities that may help a person to find employment (Britz, 2004: 192; Barja & Gigler, 2007: 17). However, more recent studies consider the complexity of information poverty and information inequality. In fact, Yu (2006: 233) specifically refers to numerous studies suggesting that a lack of information is linked to social structures, economic configurations, and political power institutions. Yu (2006: 233) argues that these social institutions impact information distribution in the sense that existing power structures can “colonise” the information sphere in their favour, that is to reap benefits from information resources that are aligned with current and established power associations between certain classes and countries (Yu, 2006: 233). This view effectively suggests that not having access to information consistently keeps the poor and marginalised at a disadvantage as it precludes them from vital information essential to development and improvement (Neuman, 2002: 5). In this vein, Cañizález (2011: 50) refers to the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Report indicating that it is predominantly the poor who are unable to obtain information that could be core to their lives such as free services and assistance, access to justice and protection, and awareness of what their rights are.

However, even the assumption that the poor are universally affected by information poverty is an over-simplification. Even though the traditional belief is that information poverty mostly only affects the global South, the reality is that information poverty does indeed affect individuals and communities in enclaves in the most developed and

industrialised societies (Goulding, 2001: 109). Physical access to devices through which information is accessed (such as laptops or smart phones) or the print media (books, newspapers, etc.) does not necessarily guarantee that the consumer uses or understands the information (Silva et al., 2011: 419-420). Even in relatively wealthy households not everybody accesses the available information (Silva et al., 2011: 419-420). Furthermore, some people are more inclined to master technology through which they can access information – they are often referred to as “infomediaries” in their households and communities as they access information, act as gatekeepers, and distribute information to those around them (Avilés, Larghi & Aguayo, 2016: 666). In other words, even though information poverty certainly does exist more so in poor communities than elsewhere, one cannot assume that information poverty affects all people in the same way. Whether it is those who are poor, or female, or elderly (see for instance Halford & Savage, 2010: 941, 943-944), there are variables that may impact information poverty, but even those do not affect the said groups homogenously. Put differently, not all elderly people are information poor, neither are all women or impoverished individuals and communities.

However, the fact remains that access to information is inextricably linked to at least having physical access to information (Bell, 2006, 35-55). In fact, Hersberger (2002-2003: 47) suggests that even though the poor may not have consistent and easy access to digital information and the mass media, this does not imply per se that they fail to obtain necessary and helpful information altogether. So much so that some individuals affected by income and financial poverty have even stated that they experience an overload of abundant information from religious workers, health care staff and social service personnel (Hersberger, 2002-2003: 57). It is therefore incorrect to assume that people who are poor mutually and collectively point to information poverty as the predominant burden and struggle of their everyday lives (Hersberger, 2002-2003: 57). Instead, it is the deprivation of vital resources and financial access that cause the devastation and desperation people who are poor suffer of almost daily (Hersberger, 2002-2003: 57).

In other words, even though poverty, low education levels, unemployment, and a lack of physical access to information are linked in broad terms, it is an oversimplification that the poor in all cases lack information. In fact, that may lead to further social exclusion; instead their voices should be heard as they can make a meaningful contribution to information in society.

### 2.3.2 Voice poverty: exclusion from public platforms to voice views

Another typical problem associated with poverty and social exclusion is a lack of social knowledge and understanding of impoverished individuals, communities and their situation. In order for society to understand problems related to poverty, the views and “stories” of people who are poor should be told – not by others, but by themselves. This means that those who are poor should have a voice and that their voices should be heard.

A deep concern, often expressed by people who are poor, is that no one will listen to their experiences, that nobody cares enough to address those problems, and that those who are resourceful enough to address problems, are unapproachable and inaccessible – this is the daily plight of impoverished people (Mohr, 2008: 9; Britz, 2004: 193; Tacchi, 2008: 12; Cañizález, 2011: 50). In other words, people living in poverty tend to lack the assets and avenues to effectively make their voices heard (Mohr, 2008: 9). As a result, not being able to voice their views and opinions, financially impoverished individuals and communities are less able to engage in communicative acts with those in power (Mohr, 2008: 9). In fact, the voices and experiences of impoverished people are frequently viewed as anecdotal by authorities, policy-makers and researchers, and whilst their accounts may be used in lectures or appear in political agenda, they are seldom used as sources of critical knowledge and a basis for policy change or implementation of intervention strategies (Krumer-Nevo, 2008: 556).

Since a person’s voice refers to their inclusion and participation in political, economic and social development, voice poverty is the exclusion from and denial of a person’s right to impact decisions that affect their lives (Tacchi, 2008: 12). Since the public sphere is a communicative space that allows for the circulation of information, ideas and debates (Dahlgren, 2005: 148; Habermas, 1989: 4), voice poverty is, in essence, minimal presence or even a total absence from the public sphere. This leaves a void



in the discussion around poverty itself, and in order to truly understand poverty, it is crucial that those who experience it are given a voice to explain what this experience is like, instead of external so-called experts describing poverty from the periphery (Tacchi & Kiran, 2008: 32). People who live, or have lived, in poverty can describe poverty in a distinctive, unique and authentic way; after all, they are the actual experts, yet their views, experiences and opinions are consistently excluded from public discussions around poverty (Robinson et al., 2009: 7).

Poor persons, in describing poverty, express feelings of utter hopelessness, embarrassment and marginalisation better than those who have not had personal experiences with poverty (Narayan et al., 1999: 32). In fact, impoverished people experience exclusion as a result of poverty as an all-encompassing sense of powerlessness fuelled by the inability to make themselves heard (Narayan et al., 1999: 32). If the obstacles faced by those who are poor in achieving freedom of expression and access to the media are not improved and remedied, it can impede their ability to partake in democratic processes (Kidd & Barker-Plummer, 2009: 479). This may lead to their complete disregard for political process, resulting in apathy and/or violence (Kidd & Barker-Plummer, 2009: 479).

Poor people are thus the true experts on poverty, and their outlooks and opinions on the definition and description of poverty should adequately be presented by the media and everyone else critically discussing the topic (Robinson, Else, Sherlock & Zass-Ogilvie, 2009: 7). Yet, the poor are perpetually excluded from themes and issues central to their own living and being. In the media, they are often misrepresented, stereotyped or excluded (cf. Garland, 2015: 5; Harper, 2014: 83-97; Wood & Hendricks, 2009: 16), and the mere dynamics of their survival regularly entails existing only on the sidelines (Aguilar & Guerrero, 2013: 360). This renders impoverished people almost invisible – precluded from conversations regarding infrastructure, schooling, health care and other basic and crucial requirements for a meaningful and healthy life (Agarwal, 2011: 20-26).

### 2.3.3 Media exclusion and marginalisation of the poor

The media's portrayal of the poor has a profound impact on the discourse around poverty. Negative narratives about impoverished people or, on the other hand, overly romanticised or excessively gruesome depictions of poverty, affect the role of the poor in society, and the way they are perceived. But when poor people are absent from media broadcasts, their invisibility is even more profound. The part the media plays in marginalising or excluding the poor is thus crucial.

The war on the poor is said to be fuelled by the media that have vested interests in serving the elite – those with wealth and power who wish to preserve the current state of society and capitalism (Garland, 2015: 7). As a result, media discussions on poverty have moved from debates around the structural causes of poverty and the social costs of large-scale poverty to depictions of the poor as dishonest opportunists abusing flawed welfare systems (Rose & Baumgartner, 2013: 22). The social and economic challenges experienced by the poor are, in other words, regularly applied to sensational storylines suggesting that the poor's financial demise is often as a result of their own self-destructive, ill-disciplined behaviour (Wood & Hendricks, 2009: 16). Media exclusion is further highlighted through terms and expressions like “those people” and “lazy, poorly behaved and incompetent”, and the message serves to underline the separation between “them” and “us” – intimating that the poor abuse benefits, and that they are the cause of their own and the broader economic demise (Garland, 2015: 5, 6, 9; Harper, 2014: 83-97; Jeppesen, 2009: 488). In this context, the poor can be called “the blamed poor” since they are frequently condemned and criticised for their own poverty and exclusion by supposedly failing to abide by the accepted norms and standards of civilisation (Gans, 2009: 81). The common assumption tends to be that people who are impoverished are so because of a deficiency in character or moral development – most specifically, they are considered lazy, inept in handling basic household finances, and wasteful when it comes to unnecessary expenditure (Dorey, 2010: 334).

The discourse around blaming the poor for their own demise also includes distinct differentiations between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor (Harper, 2014: 92). The view is that the deserving poor, unlike the undeserving poor, cannot be blamed for their impoverished circumstances (Bridges, 2017: 1049). In other words,



the deserving poor are seen not to be poor as a result of personal failings or improper conduct, but as a result of structural, external factors beyond the person's control (Bridges, 2017: 1049). This distinction could be seen as further war on the poor – essentially determining who is worthy of assistance and who is not, based on external observations and findings (Jeppesen, 2009: 493). The poor, in other words, should be faultless, victims of merciless circumstances in order to be considered deserving of understanding, compassion and help (Jeppesen, 2009: 493). This system of separation between the poor further isolates people and renders them victims of intensified social exclusion (Sales, 2002: 456).

On the other hand, the media is also seen to romanticise people who are poor. The assumption, and subsequent media depictions, that the poor are creative entrepreneurs and value-conscious consumers resilient to economic challenges are empirically incorrect (Karnani, 2007: 151). In portraying the poor in an almost glamorous way, the media hurts them and their plight for survival. These unrealistically positive accounts of poverty result in minimal emphasis on the necessary legal, regulatory and social tools to protect the poor as vulnerable consumers (Karnani, 2007: 151-152). The reality is that many poor people become entrepreneurs as a result of a lack of skills and capital, and self-employment is often their only avenue in a market where jobs and secured employment are scarce (Banerjee & Dufloo, 2007: 156). It is therefore of the utmost importance that the media does not romanticise these penniless entrepreneurs – they have no money and are unable to borrow from credible institutions (Banerjee & Dufloo, 2007: 156). As a result, their businesses remain extremely small and driven by fundamental survival (Banerjee & Dufloo, 2007: 156).

Whether the poor are portrayed negatively, over-romantically or not at all, the portrayals of poverty form part of a broader theme of agenda setting by the media. The media, in other words, packages topics on poverty in a way that conveys the message the media outlet would like to represent. In organising thoughts and events succinctly to produce a predetermined result is essentially framing the poor (Ryan & Gamson, 2006: 13) – suggesting that everyone in this category is the same or similar (Greer, 2008: 69; O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2012: 409). The media's role in continually marginalising the poor should be considered since to consistently fail in addressing the structural causes of poverty is to never get beyond rediscovering the poor over and over again (Moss, 1987: 54).

### 2.3.4 Social exclusion and the digital divide

In today's media-saturated society, and more recently in the contemporary internet-driven society, the above exclusionary problems associated with voice and access to information are exacerbated.

Before the internet, the media divide (whether analogue or digital) has been described as the gap between the information haves and the information have-nots (Cohron, 2015: 78; Bornman, 2014: 7). In this sense, the information have-nots are systematically excluded from political participation in the public sphere as they simply do not have the same level of access to information and to platforms to voice their opinions (Britz, 2004: 192; Nwagwu, 2006: 167).

With the advent of the internet, the notion of the digital divide is more complex. The digital divide is now considered in the context of the information have-less (Qui, 2009: 3; Kamath, 2018: 386). The have-less may have limited and infrequent income, especially when compared to the affluent, but they do however go online and use mobile phone devices - often smartphones - to a certain extent (Qui, 2009: 4). This significant group of people includes those who are often considered to be the poor – those who have vulnerable and inconsistent working income, and are often migrant informal jobseekers (Kamath, 2018: 386). Although they most likely own digital communication devices, mostly mobile phones, they are still alienated and removed from and deprived of full participation and citizenship as even these communication technologies appear to function within existing physical social spheres and the conditions attached to those (Kamath, 2018: 387). In fact, these mobile phones may even further cement their experience of “stuckness” as even though a broader, richer virtual world may seem available and penetrable, their own immediate environment and the physical restrictions that are associated with poverty prevent them from fully engaging with others who are of a different social standing – this then results in further social immobility (Schoon & Strelitz, 2014: 25).

In other words, research on digital social inequality considers not only how access to hardware and the appropriate skills to navigate communications devices and applications either enable or restrict someone from obtaining valuable information and voicing their opinions (See for example Hargittai, 2002: 3). Instead, it emphasises that having technology is not enough as it is still associated with the manifestations of

existing physical social relations (Halford & Savage, 2010: 950). More affluent individuals are perpetually inclined to have access to wealthier and fuller media landscapes which they navigate successfully to produce substantial benefits (Madianou, 2015: 1). Lower income persons, on the other hand, are trapped and stuck in a world where their restrictive and diminished social media opportunities mirror the reality of their physical social world (Madianou, 2015: 1).

Thus, in understanding poverty, the focus should be on the variety of challenges the poor experience as a result of economic deprivation. A singular and simplistic view on poverty - only concentrating on the lack of financial resources - brutally narrows down a complex problem affecting individuals and communities around the globe.

## **2.4 White poverty in South Africa**

In the context of South Africa, where a large portion of the population lives in and experiences poverty daily, the history and meaning of poverty requires special consideration, especially regarding the impact this has on different racial segments of society.

### **2.4.1 Contextualisation: poverty in South Africa**

The legacy of apartheid left the largest share of South Africa's resources and wealth in minority hands, while a considerable part of the population was either living in poverty or was vulnerable to becoming poor (Ngwane et al., 2001: 201). Having won the first democratic election in 1994, the African National Congress held a vision of transforming the country through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and later Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR), policy frameworks aimed at reducing the poverty affecting a large proportion of the country's population, whereby inequalities and past injustices were to be addressed (Aliber, 2003: 475). Access to water, land, jobs, education and healthcare for all was prioritised to alleviate the poverty experienced by many (Aliber, 2003: 475).

As a result, poverty rates in South Africa declined between 2006 and 2015, but this positive trajectory has reversed since then (The World Bank, 2018: 40). In fact, poverty in South Africa is persistent, and the economy and wealth distribution remain extremely polarised (The World Bank, 2018: 41). In having generations affected by continuous poverty during and since apartheid, it could be argued that many South

Africans suffer from chronic poverty, that is an inherited condition perpetually remaining in families (Aliber, 2003: 476). Although South Africa's living standards are, on average, considerably higher than those of countries where chronic poverty is most extreme, the racially entrenched inequality and poverty endemic in South Africa implores one to consider the real likelihood of a poor person to fruitfully craft a way out of poverty (Adato, Carter & May, 2006: 244).

The inequality in terms of resource distribution is what makes South Africa unique, so much so that South Africa is considered one of the most unequal countries in the world (The World Bank, 2018: 42). This socioeconomic disparity resulting from colonialism and apartheid still lingers today, with black people mostly affected by poverty and a lack of access to opportunities and necessary resources (Meiring, Kannemeyer & Potgieter, 2018: 5-6). Approximately half (49.2%) of the South African population lives in poverty (Statistics South Africa, 2014/2015). Racially, poverty is highly unequal – 70% of black people are poor, 56% of coloured people, 20% of Asian/Indian people, but only 4% of the white population is considered poor (Francis & Webster, 2019: 792). Other groups vulnerable to chronic poverty, specifically, are those who reside in rural areas, female-headed households, people with disabilities, the elderly, cross-border migrants, retrenched farm workers, the homeless, AIDS orphans, and households with AIDS sufferers (Aliber, 2003: 480-482). This suggests that, apart from race, there are certain factors that will contribute to a person being excluded from economic opportunities and social integration.

Meiring, Kannemeyer and Potgieter (2018: 24) suggest that those who consider themselves financially worse off than others are more inclined to attribute inequality as the source of division in South Africa, whereas those who are seen as financially better off or similar to their counterparts are less likely to view inequality as a vital contributor to division. One could therefore infer that - beyond the obvious and well-documented race inequality in the country - those who find themselves on the wrong side of the poverty scale may all experience poverty in a similar way, and may all experience an exclusion or separation that they perceive to be the result of their impoverished circumstances.

#### 2.4.2 An historic overview of white poverty in South Africa

Research on white poverty in the South African context dates as far back as the Great Depression which lasted from 1929 to 1939 (Romer, 2003: 1; Vosloo, 2011: 68). Wilson and Ramphela (1989: ix) explain that, during this time, there was great concern amongst the leaders of South Africa about the large number of white people who were displaced as a result of war, plague (rinderpest), rapid population growth, drought and the capitalisation of agriculture. Due to these circumstances, they were migrating to cities where they lived in poverty – lacking the very basic resources to survive in a modern, industrialised world (Wilson & Ramphela, 1989: ix). The white poverty problem was so grave that it is reported that by 1930 approximately 400,000 of only two million white people were living in poverty, that is, destitution and deprivation (Klausen, 2001: 55).

This challenge affecting the poor whites compelled a group of people from the Dutch Reformed Church, in conjunction with the Carnegie Corporation in New York, to set up the Carnegie Commission which focused on understanding the poor white problem in South Africa (Vosloo, 2011: 68). This resulted, in 1932, in the publication of a five-volume report, referred to as the first Carnegie Report (Vosloo, 2011: 68). According to Seekings (2008: 520), the analysis drawn by the Carnegie Commission was fundamentally psychological in nature, emphasising the elimination of immorality and ignorance to successfully address white poverty and the challenges associated with it. In fact, as Seekings (2008: 520) points out, the Carnegie Report found that:

A part of the poor white class is characterised by one or more of such qualities as improvidence and irresponsibility, untruthfulness and lack of a sense of duty, a feeling of inferiority and lack of self-respect, ignorance and credulity, a lack of industry and ambition, and unsettledness of mode of life. Some evince poor social heredity (especially of home training and discipline), are of poor intelligence or suffer from some physical infirmity, or have failings of character, such as tendencies to intemperance or crime.

In other words, hereditary degeneration was considered a cause of white poverty – referring to poor whites as “genetic embarrassments” (Willoughby-Heard, 2015: 31, 77), who were “reckless, self-indulgent and destined by their nature to breed uncontrollably” (Klausen, 2004: 9). According to these views, poor whites had low intelligence, and they were despised for their willingness to live amongst black people, and sometimes have mixed-race children with them (Klausen, 2001: 56). Their

behaviour was therefore seen as anti-social, defiant of authority, and generally immoral – often entailing an indulgence in alcohol and gambling (Morrell, 1992: 10). Malherbe (1929: 888) summarised this by explaining:

By “Poor White,” I understand not merely a poor person but also one who has a mental attitude towards life, owing, for example, to lack of intelligence, lack of education, temperamental defects, or to physiological conditions, which prevents him from rising to, or maintaining a decent standard of living when exposed to the economic forces around him.

These factors were not the only reasons attributed to white poverty, however. Fourie (2006: 9-20) explains that low educational attainment, conservative views on education, poor agricultural practices, rapid and chaotic urbanisation, and insufficient language ability contributed to the white poverty problem mostly affecting Afrikaans-speaking individuals. The typical urbanising white Afrikaner was unable to speak, read or write English, which proved to be extremely limiting during a time when the gold rush drew many traders to South Africa, where commerce was conducted in English (Fourie, 2006: 13). On the other hand, the white farmers affected by poverty had for decades been isolated from emerging technologies, influences and philosophies, which resulted in a level of stagnation, and simple, subsistence farming (Wilcocks, 1932: viii). Under the new economic order caused by an influx of European migrants pursuing gains in South Africa with the discovery of gold and diamonds, these farmers struggled to adapt, and often declined into economic ruin (Wilcocks, 1932: viii).

The government, viewing white people as fundamentally superior to black people, took steps to address and alleviate white poverty – considering white poverty something that could be rehabilitated (Seekings, 2008: 521). Whenever the white working class failed to enter professional fields of clerkship, or were unsuccessful in establishing themselves as captains of industry, as punishment, they would be reminded that they too were at risk for being treated in the same inhumane way that characterised the lives and deaths of black people (Willoughby-Heard, 2015: 21). In other words, white people who became manual workers were reprimanded for having failed at claiming their sovereignty, rulership, and potential to lead or govern (Willoughby-Heard, 2015, 21). Concrete measures taken to solve the white poverty problem mostly involved the enforcement of job mandates that restricted industries from hiring black employees (Saunders, 1993: 243), and it also focused on social welfare, and the improvement of



education and healthcare for the poorest of the white poor (Seekings, 2008: 516; Fourie, 2006: 18). Removing children from poor white families as well as sterilisation were also put forward as possible means to control the poor white problem (Willoughby-Heard, 2015: 88).

The end result was that white poverty, predominantly thought to be caused by a substandard education system, conservative practices of insulated farmers, rapid urbanisation, the Anglo-Boer war, rinderpest and drought, was alleviated in less than fifty years (Fourie, 2006: 19). The most valuable lessons from research into white poverty, however, illustrate that government welfare and labour regulations and policies had very little impact on the long-term reduction of white poverty (Fourie, 2006: 19). In fact, it was the high economic growth and the increase in employment since 1933 that contributed to the elimination of white poverty (Fourie, 2006: 19).

In other words, although white poverty seems to be a novel concept in post-apartheid South Africa, where economic capital is still predominantly in the hands of the white population (Leibbrandt, Woollard & Woollard, 2009: 42), the concept of white poverty is not new to South Africa's history. Although reasons for the poverty experienced today may differ from the causes of poverty during and after the Great Depression, the experience of being poor may bear surprising similarities.

#### 2.4.3 White "squatter camps" in South Africa

Just as white poverty forms an integral part of South Africa's complex history, white informal settlements, or squatter camps as they are colloquially known locally, are equally entrenched in the country's past. Parnell (1992:115) explains that since Johannesburg's inception, the housing conditions were considered among the worst in the world. Tin and tent structures erected by gold diggers initiated a housing system of slums, characterised by appalling living conditions, which led to a sanitation crisis and the subsequent removal of people and slums from city limits (Parnell, 1992 :115).

During the first surveys conducted on Johannesburg slums, one third of the slum dwellers were white (Parnell, 1992 :115), the majority of whom were unskilled or without relevant transferrable knowledge or abilities (du Plessis, 2004: 881-882). In actual fact, the reason most of them had migrated to the cities was to escape dire poverty in the rural areas (du Plessis, 2004: 882). By the 1920s, approximately 12,000 white people were migrating to the cities each year, where they constituted a "large

army of the unemployed, known as poor whites” (O’ Meara, 1983: 26). As Johannesburg developed and became a more permanent base, decrepit wood and iron houses (shacks) close to the city absorbed more and more of the urban poor (Parnell, 1992: 116). The conditions were inhumane and disturbing, and were aggravated not only by those trying to capitalise on the mining industry but also by traders and other non-mining related ambitions (Parnell, 1992: 116). The 1920s also saw the arrival from Europe of women and the children of early pioneers (Beavon, 1986: 53).

The Carnegie Commission of Enquiry into the poor white problem recommended the additional training of social workers to address problems associated with “poor whiteism”, and to assist with the social upliftment of those affected by it (du Plessis, 2016: 3). The state was worried about poor whites living in close proximity to other racial groups, concerned about intimacy between different races, and the potential loss of political support (du Plessis, 2016: 3). In other words, the increase of white people living in slums shaped the state’s stance on working-class residential segregation (Parnell, 1992: 115). Once it became clear that whites formed a considerable part of the slum-yards, local government policies changed in such a way to accommodate the white working class by ensuring a minimum standard of living for them whilst continuing racial residential segregation (Parnell, 1992: 115).

In this vein, a special, dedicated committee was appointed to reduce and improve unemployment, eradicate disease, ensure the social and economic enhancement of certain classes, and to better the general economic, moral and hygienic state of the city (Parnell, 1992: 123). The result was a recommendation to embark on a widespread slum clearance programme and a subsidised white housing scheme (Parnell, 1992: 123). Hence, slum clearances occurred throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, during which slums were evacuated and residents moved to alternative housing (Beavon, 1986: 55). What is significant is that during this time, most informal settlements had become predominantly mixed, but the forceful removal of the slum-dwellers resulted in subsequent segregated housing allocations (Beavon, 1986: 55). The government allocated funds towards white housing schemes with the direct aim of uplifting the white poor over other races (du Plessis, 2016: 3). The decision to provide subsidised housing for the poor whites was however not entirely for philanthropic or health reasons (du Plessis, 2016: 4). The goal and strategy was to



racially segregate the urban working class, and to rehouse them at considerably different standards of accommodation and living (du Plessis, 2016: 4). The outcome was the establishment of council housing for whites - a crucial strategy in abolishing racial mixing in the slums of the city - aimed to eliminate white slum living entirely (Parnell, 1992: 129).

White people living in informal settlements or squatter camps are thus not an entirely foreign or unique concept considering their history in South Africa. However, the intensive government focus to eradicate poor whiteism during the early part of the 20th century addressed this with such devotion and urgency that it resulted in a reduction, and almost elimination of white people living in dilapidated or informal housing structures. In fact, despite growth in the proportions of householders who live in brick structures, informal settlement living remains highly racialised – the vast majority of informal settlement dwellers are black or coloured (mix-raced) (Ndinda, Uzodike & Winaar, 2011: 761).

Recent media interest in poor whites living in informal settlements (see for instance Bruwer, 2014; Burrows, 2016; Basson, 2015; Myburgh, 2015; Simpson, 2013; Summers, 2016; Lottering, 2015; McAteer, 2016 and Fourie, 2015) has garnered attention around the novelty value of white informal settlements. Thus, although South Africa's history points to white informal settlements being part of the country's background, under apartheid these informal settlements essentially disappeared. In other words, currently, the mere existence of white informal settlements is considered strange and out-of-place. So much so that the exact number of white people living in urban informal settlements is unknown. Simpson (2013: 2) controversially reported that there are approximately 80 white informal settlements across the country with around 400,000 white people living in extreme poverty in these environments. The 2011 census statistics, however, state that there are only 7,754 white households residing in informal settlements (Rademeyer, 2013: 1-15). Considering that 4.4 million South Africans are white (Statista, 2020), this is a pinprick of the white population – compared to 42% of black people (19,740,000) who live in informal settlements (Statistics South Africa, 2016). The reality however is, as Anton, an area manager for a large aid organisation focused on alleviating poverty, explained: "*Blanke armoede kruip weg*" [White poverty hides]. In other words, the true context and prevalence of white informal settlements in South Africa is unknown.

This study took root against this background of white informal settlements inhabited by poor white people, focusing especially on the social media activities of residents of white informal residents. Research in South Africa tends not to focus on white poverty, as the poverty of other racial groups is on a larger scale and is linked to the colonial history of the country.

#### 2.4.4 Being white and poor – “white trash”

With a growing research interest in investigating various aspects of white poverty in relation to the poverty of other groups (Steyn, 2005: 120), an understanding is growing of the finer nuances of poverty, in relation also to the media, internet and social media (Micheli, 2016: 565).

Being conscious about the relative global power imbalance between black and white groups, as well as that of the global South versus the global North, and a range of identity political matters, research on the relative power of whiteness gained impetus after the Second World War and the lead-up to the wave of political independence in the previous century (Steyn, 2005: 120). In this vein, blackness and the social construction of blackness received focus in the 1980s, while issues around identity and whiteness started getting widespread attention in the 1990s (Fishkin, 1995: 430). Fishkin attributes the credit for pushing the construction of whiteness to the forefront of the academic agenda to Toni Morrison’s book, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (see also Steyn, 2005: 120). According to Fishkin (1995: 430-431), *Playing in the Dark* discussed a set of questions as well as a research agenda that echoed and assimilated several projects that were already being studied and considered. Twine and Gallagher (2008: 5) describe the background to whiteness studies as such:

The slow, empirical academic work on whiteness has now been done. The study of whiteness and white identities now includes hundreds of books, ethnographies, scholarly articles and reviews that examine the role whiteness and white identities play in framing and reworking racial categories, hierarchies and boundaries. Drawing on how racial identities frame and are framed by nation, class, gender and immigration, these new empirical studies of whiteness and white identities pose novel questions that challenge existing historical and contemporary accounts of racial identity construction. The recent research on whiteness focuses primarily on examining and exposing the often invisible or masked power relations within existing racial hierarchies.

The universality of whiteness has kept it invisible, and this presumed invisibility has been key to its functional success (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995: 293; Winders, 2003: 46). In other words, the communication patterns and experiences of white people have naturally been assumed as the norm against which all other races are compared, evaluated and judged (Winders, 2003: 46; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995: 293; Dyer, 1988: 44). Whiteness is closely associated with political and social elitism as well as economic privilege (Winders, 2003: 46; Razzante, 2019: 19). Thus, against the “centre of whiteness” all other racial bodies, communities and individuals are considered different (Winders, 2003: 46; Razzante, 2019: 17). Dyer (1988: 44) explains that since the focus has been kept on other races on the margins, it was expected for these groups to align themselves with the centre. Approaching non-dominant groups with such biased narrow-minded perspectives, it created the effect that these other racial groups are seen as different, odd and even abnormal when compared to the norm of whiteness (Dyer 1988, 44). This, in turn, allows the whiteness centre to proceed as if it is the only ordinary and inevitable way of being human (Dyer 1988, 44). In this vein, Hamel (2005: 76) writes:

In its most metaphorical form, whiteness is a myth that constructs white people as heroes and non-white people as villains. Phrases such as “white knight” and “black sheep” are examples of the mythical binary of white as right and black as wrong.

Whiteness can therefore best be understood as an ideology that supports the social positioning of economic and political advantage of people of European descent gained during European colonialism (Steyn, 2005: 121). Whiteness is the “shared social space in which the psychological, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of this privileged positionality are normalised, and rendered unremarkable” (Steyn, 2005: 121). To summarise, Garner (2006: 257) considers five interpretations of whiteness – whiteness as absence, whiteness as content, whiteness as a set of norms, whiteness as resources and whiteness as a contingent hierarchy. Whiteness as absence refers to its capacity to move through the public space unbothered and untouched (Garner, 2006: 260; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995: 293). Whiteness with content refers to how the internal boundaries and content of whiteness are prioritised and centralised (Garner, 2006: 260). Whiteness as a set of norms involves the racial supremacist identity associated with being white (Garner, 2006: 262), while whiteness as resources refers to the cultural capital of whites – the discrimination that favours and indulges whites,

giving them superior agency (Garner, 2006: 263). Lastly, whiteness as a contingent hierarchy concentrates on the internal boundaries evident within the white racial group (Garner, 2006: 263). This hierarchy provides a variance in access to economic and cultural capital depending on class and ethnicity – the economic and psychological remunerations are scattered the lower you are on the white hierarchy (Garner, 2006: 263).

Whiteness is essentially equivalent to power and the absolute norm on a structural level. Dyer (1988: 45) explains:

In the realm of categories, black is always marked as a colour (as the term “coloured” egregiously acknowledges), and is always particularising; whereas white is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularising quality, because it is everything – white is no colour because it is all colours.

Considering the superiority associated with being white – the esteem of whiteness, and the exclusion of those who do not fit the mould is considered. The whiteness hierarchy can be rather hypocritical in its stance towards its own (Garner, 2006: 261).

As is indicated above, the social construct of whiteness is associated with privilege on various levels (Winders, 2003: 45). For this reason, the term “white trash”, that was used during apartheid to refer to poor white people, can be viewed as a contradictory term since the white racial identity is not historically connected to unfavourable or undesirable class attributions (Portwood-Stacer, 2007: 1). In fact, the image that has been portrayed of the typical white person is someone with integrity, who is brave, hard-working, diligent, kind, respectable and polite (Portwood-Stacer, 2007: 2). In this context, the label “white trash” is reserved for a subculture of poor whites that are ranked at the social bottom of the racial identity group (Hartigan, 1997: 316; Portwood-Stacer, 2007: 2; Heavner, 2007: 78). This suggests that there is a hierarchy of whiteness with a lowermost tier seen and thought of as white, but in all the wrong ways – the worst of the race (Webster, 2008: 293; Winders, 2003: 46; Hartigan, 2005: 88).

The term “white trash” suggests and implies that the type of poverty experienced in this subgroup is chronic and hereditary – passed on from one generation to the next without the ambition or intention to advance themselves through productive means (Wilson, 2002: 388). Hartigan (2005: 67) explains that since the 19th century, the classification of a group of lower class whites arose from a moral separation between

those who would work and those who would not. In other words, the concept of white trash refers to a perceived lack of moral character and, as a result, low social worth (Portwood-Stacer, 2007: 3). It is associated with certain types of behaviour – a problematic relationship with the law, drug use, laziness, immorality, ignorance, poor hygiene, domestic violence, sex work, neglect of children and alcoholism (Wilson, 2002: 388; Linneman & Wall, 2013: 330; Portwood-Stacer, 2007: 2). In analysing discourse around white trash, insinuations point to the perceived prolific sexuality of this subgroup, and their reluctance and inability to work (Webster, 2008: 298; Heavner, 2007: 77). They are also seen to procreate faster than the rest of the white population (Webster, 2008: 298).

In suggesting that white poverty and the behaviour that is associated with a specific subculture of poor whites - white trash - is as a result of genetics and, essentially, unfixable, an entire group of people are systemically and consistently stigmatised and dishonoured (Wray, 2006: 153). The social contempt towards white people who live in trailer parks or informal settlements results not only in social and moral exclusion but physical segregation as well (Webster, 2008: 305). A wall between “them” and the rest of the world is constructed through the invisible barriers of class amplified by its juxtaposition in terms of what is expected from someone who is white (Webster, 2008: 305). In other words, not only does this group bear the exclusion that is associated with poverty, it is further marginalised by stigma and perpetual, inescapable negative generalisations.

#### 2.4.5 Exclusion and white poverty in South Africa

The pattern of blaming poor people for their circumstances is far from a novel notion. During his research on white poverty in South Africa, Malherbe (1929: 893-894) famously wrote:

It is often said that the poor white is lazy. Yes, he is, but he is lazy for the same reasons that many a well-to-do man is lazy. It is the absence of a specific stimulus to work.

In attributing a lack of motivation to the reason for the poor being stuck in impoverished circumstances, there is the insinuation that it is in the poor’s power to change their situation. Although Malherbe (1929: 895) acknowledges that structural and systemic

causes underlie poverty, he attributes part of the condition of poverty to those who are affected by it.

... these people being somewhat weaker in intelligence probably, or less enterprising, were the first to suffer – particularly as there was a complete absence of prophylactic measures which might have prevented such a considerable proportion of them from being caught in the maelstrom and being whirled downwards, without their realising how and why they were going down and under.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, blaming the poor for where they find themselves is not something that is only part of South Africa's context or history. Everatt (2008: 293) explains that fourteen years post apartheid, the poor changed from being central to reconstruction and development to politically being portrayed as the undeserving poor. In fact, the undeserving poor who are dependent on financial support from the state, and who lack the requisite moral character to benefit from economic development have become a significant point of discussion and policy formulation of the post-apartheid government (Everatt, 2008: 293). This is not to say that the South African government does not acknowledge or provide assistance to the poor. In fact, social aid is extended to firstly cover the South Africans that are considered most deprived and underprivileged (Seekings, 2008: 40, 47). There is however no evidence that the South African government has analysed or dissected how deserving the different groups of unemployed adults are, and a detailed analysis is required to determine needs and disadvantages (Seekings, 2008: 49).

The principles of any social support system should always aim to terminate any person's separation from mainstream benefits and services (Sales, 2002: 474). Policies should be directed at supporting the poor in rebuilding their lives irrespective of whether they fall into the categories of well-behaved homeless people, innocent children or helpless people with disabilities – the so-called deserving poor (Jeppesen, 2009: 494). Creating a permanently excluded layer of the poor proposes an immediate danger to society, and preventing this is a necessity to avoid generations suffering from the effects of poverty (Gans, 2009: 93-94).

Racially speaking, even though political power has shifted since the end of apartheid, economic imbalance is still skewed in favour of South Africa's white population, and, in this context, whiteness remains synonymous with a comfortable lifestyle



(Schuermans & Visser, 2005: 293; Leibbrandt, Woollard & Woollard, 2009: 42; Steyn, 2005: 122). The unique conditions of South Africa's socio-political history bring about a unique perspective of whiteness, even among the poor whites themselves (Schuermans & Visser, 2005: 293; Kruger, 2016: 47). Whiteness has never been invisible in South Africa (Steyn, 2005: 112). In fact, the ideology of whiteness in the apartheid regime openly afforded white people more privileges than any other racial group in the country (Steyn, 2005: 112; Kruger, 2016: 47). Being a member of this elite and superior race, however, implied that white people in South Africa had a duty to behave in a proper and virtuous way (Malherbe, 1929: 893-894; Röhr, 1996: 97; Teppo, 2004: 87). Those who did not adhere to the expected norms were considered racially unworthy, and the onus was on the whites themselves to continually prove their worthiness of whiteness (Röhr, 1996: 97; Teppo, 2004: 87; Garner, 2006: 266). Since blacks or Africans were seen as childlike, the same expectations were not placed on them – it was expected that they were incapable of managing their impulses (Teppo, 2004: 87). The same was assumed for a white racially unworthy – the poor white (Teppo, 2004: 87).

Poor white people in South Africa are aware of and pained by the stigma that is attached to poor whiteism (Kruger, 2016: 55). Sibanda (2018: 15) argues that poor whites “have been bruised and wounded” by the post-colonial, post-apartheid world. In fact, Sibanda (2018: 15) elaborates further:

Political changes have presented poor whites with something new and unpleasant, thereby leading to experiences of rejection, shame and uncertainty. The paradox of these experiences is that, while poor whites bear the historical shame of being part of the initial “wounders”, they also carry the identity of the “wounded” in contemporary South Africa. However, white poverty and white dispossession are often trivialised in the South African context, thereby making it “invisible.”

Bottomley (2012: 17) explains that poor whites in South Africa continue to be the victims of severe stigmatisation. They are associated with morally ill behaviour – violence, drunkenness, inbreeding (Bottomley, 2012: 17). To mitigate this stigma, poor whites, especially those who live in informal settlements, emphasise the worsening economic and political conditions in the country as causes for their demise (Kruger, 2016: 55). In doing this, the poor whites wish to exude signs of rehabilitation from poverty to set them apart from other impoverished racial groups (Kruger, 2016: 55).



Since poor whites belong to a category that is unwanted, stigmatised and deplored, poor whiteism in the South African context does not only pertain to material losses, but to “dented personhood as well as emotional and psychological trauma” (Sibanda, 2018: 9). In losing prior rights, opportunities, privileges and resources, poor whites are excluded from the group they previously belonged to (Sibanda, 2018: 9).

In summary, whiteism and whiteness are associated with a certain class and lifestyle. Those who fit into the category of poor white are historically considered genetically unworthy of being white – invisibly excluded from this racial grouping (Teppo, 2004: 85). The pain and shame associated with such exclusion may result in destructive behaviour that further strengthens the stigma around being poor and white. It can therefore be suggested that poor whites in South Africa are affected by wounded citizenship and struggling to heal from their current predicament (Sibanda, 2018: 20; Schuermans & Visser, 2005: 293).

## **2.5 “The poor” is not a uniform category**

As can be deduced from this chapter, it is an oversimplification to understand that “the poor” is one homogenous group with similar characteristics and traits. In this vein, Krishna (2009: 948) emphasises that “the poor” does not constitute an actual valid category, and should not universally be painted with the same brush.

Any disadvantaged or marginalised group such as the poor and/or unemployed should be treated with sensitivity and their individual challenges must be foregrounded – heard and recognised (Feuls et al., 2014: 958). In other words, people affected by poverty should not be seen as an identical group of people or treated as one (Feuls et al., 2014: 958). In fact, categorising poor people as one large group or community excludes them from the broader society and invalidates the uniqueness of each person affected by economic poverty. As with all communities, even in poor communities and environments, there are considerable variances between individuals as well as distinct subgroups (Krishna, 2009: 948).

Poverty in itself is experienced differently by different groups in different contexts and time periods – and they are thought of and understood by society in varied ways (Notten & De Neubourg, 2015: 247). Some have only been impoverished for a short time, others are on the brink of escaping poverty, and then there are those who have

been poor for generations (Krishna, 2009: 948). It is therefore important to acknowledge the causes that result in poverty as well as the contributing factors to overcoming poverty (Krishna et al., 2004: 211; Krishna, 2009: 948). Only focusing on statistics and generalised categories means to ignore those who have succeeded in upward mobility or even escaping the well of poverty (Krishna et al., 2004: 223; Krishna, 2009: 948). This risks the disastrous effect of self-categorisation and self-stereotyping among those who live in poverty (Lindqvist, Björklund & Bäckström, 2017: 243; Fell & Hewstone, 2015: 34). Thinking of oneself as part of a group named “the poor” may insinuate incompetence and inability, which, in turn, could adversely impact performance and important decisions (Lindqvist et al., 2017: 243). In other words, people affected by poverty deserve to and need to be looked at as more than just a statistic (Krishna et al., 2004: 223). In considering them individually, one will learn that the descent into poverty have a different set of reasons for each individual (Krishna, 2009: 949).

Furthermore, in seeking to alleviate poverty, it is helpful and constructive to distinguish, acknowledge and incorporate strategies employed by impoverished individuals to break out of their disadvantaged circumstances (Krishna et al., 2004: 224). Instead of categorising, attention could be given to ending the cycle of poverty and those who have been successful in doing so (Gopal & Malek, 2015: 34). It is thus crucial that poverty is understood as a dynamic concept – not a fixed state that deserves a singular categorisation (Gopal & Malek, 2015: 38).

However, it seems that “the poor” is mostly defined as an abstract group with, at most, several subgroups (Schouteden & Wauters, 2016: 135). In very few studies are the poor noticed and observed as more than a standard category but, instead, a group with widely diverging characteristics (Schouteden & Wauters, 2016: 145). A disaggregated view of people who suffer from poverty is however crucial to move beyond the unrealistic and unfair category termed “the poor” (Krishna, 2009: 958).

## 2.6 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter discusses the multidimensional nature of poverty and the severe impact it has on individuals and communities. Poverty is a diversity of experiences and a combination of factors, instead of a singular and uniform condition. A multi-dimensional understanding of poverty suggests considering the interplay of social structures, employment, education, access to information and opportunities for self-expression, and a whole host of other aspects.

In addition, aspects such as health, education and standard of living are amongst the many variables that are compromised when a person is financially poor. Then, too, there are the “missing dimensions” of poverty which refer to elements associated with poverty, but which are often excluded from the descriptions and definitions thereof. These missing dimensions include employment, agency (the capacity to make independent choices), safety, security and the ability to live without shame – to walk this earth with dignity and self-respect. In this regard specifically, one needs to consider the interchanging connection between poverty and vulnerability. People who are poor feel helpless, powerless and unable to participate in the public sphere as an equal citizen with pride and self-worth.

Poverty is further characterised by unemployment and social welfare. South Africa is one of the five countries in the world with the highest unemployment statistics. South Africa also, as result, has an extensive social welfare (grants) programme that financially assists those who are unable to work (pensioners, children and people with disabilities). These welfare programmes further aim to improve healthcare, nutrition and education for those affected by poverty and/or unemployment. Critics of social welfare programmes view unemployment and economic difficulty as the results of moral shortcomings or behavioural challenges. Research indicates, however, that social grants enable people affected by poverty to leverage or increase their resources, which in turn often supports intensified productivity.

As part of the poverty experience, unemployment has been described as a tragic gift. Even though it allows a person more flexibility in their daily schedule to socialise with family and friends, it is seldom enjoyed in this capacity as feelings of shame, guilt and fear often eclipse any possible positives that could result from being unemployed. These negative emotions may also become more permanent if an unemployed person

further loses social contact with others and/or forfeits all income. A vicious cycle of social isolation could exclude the unemployed more and more, and through the loss of old work and other relationships, the unemployed may end up mostly circulating among one another (other unemployed people). This pushes the unemployed towards marginalisation – not only socially, but geographically as well, as those who are poor and unemployed often find themselves on the fringes of cities or in rural areas.

As part of the discussion on poverty, education was once considered to be the great equaliser – the answer to alleviating poverty and flattening the distribution curve of resources. Unfortunately, however, in low-income families, the high cost of education often hampers the potential opportunities that could be derived from it. Frequently, minimal investment is given to education by the parents in low-income homes. In fact, poverty is directly linked to low education. In South Africa, however, the drive and advocacy for education for everyone has been successful. So much so, that the country's school enrolment figures indicate that 96 percent of the children in this country are enrolled at school – 70 percent of whom are poor. The challenge South Africa faces is that an education does not guarantee a job nor does a job ensure an acceptable standard of living. This boils down to the quality of education that is offered and received. Unfortunately, even post apartheid, the South African education system still disadvantages those who were previously deprived. Race and socio-economic status determine the quality of education a learner will receive. Taking this into account, low or poor quality education is considered one of the greatest factors that lead to social and productive exclusion. If a person is unable to integrate into these realms successfully, what is left but to be marginalised or left behind?

All the points of this discussion so far highlight how poverty isolates and excludes people. People affected by poverty are denied opportunities for upward mobility and social, political or economic engagements. Without partaking in such activities, social inclusion is forfeited. This results in further marginalisation and disengagement. In fact, social isolation is so profound among people affected by poverty that it should form part of the overall understanding of being poor.

This social exclusion associated with poverty expands to include the digital divide, information poverty and voice poverty. In recent studies, the digital divide distinguishes between the information haves and the information have-nots. Individuals affected by

poverty are still able to go online, mostly using mobile devices, but their overall digital access is limited and infrequent compared to more affluent internet users. Furthermore, the digital divide persists because at some point social spheres marry digital spheres, and the same restrictions that apply in the physical world spills into the digital one. In fact, some poor mobile internet users have even expressed a sense of stuckness as they are unable to fully penetrate a world that does not mirror their own restrictive challenges.

Regarding information poverty as a contributor to exclusion; initially it was argued that information poverty affects the poor as they are unaware of important information that could be beneficial to their lives. Current studies concentrate more on how existing power structures colonise information to keep reaping the benefits thereof. For the poor, this would mean deliberate exclusion from these power and political spheres where important information is shared. What is imperative to note, however, is that information poverty is not necessarily experienced by poor people in the same way. In fact, some poor individuals and communities report no information poverty at all.

Voice poverty, on the other hand, refers to a lack of access to avenues that could improve one's life. In not being able to share their views and opinions, the poor are excluded from communicative acts, and denied agency. They are therefore essentially absent from the public sphere, which leads to further marginalisation. In fact, ignoring or excluding the poor is a present reality in the public discourse around poverty. Those who are poor - the true experts on how it feels to live an impoverished life - are excluded from policy discussions around poverty. They are out of the loop even when it comes to their own struggles and challenges. Furthermore, the poor are regularly blamed for their circumstances – viewed as people with low moral fiber, character deficiencies or just plain lazy. In this vein, the poor should be considered “the excluded and blamed poor”. Further separations between the undeserving poor and the deserving poor serve to create even more divisiveness between those who are economically disadvantaged. In other words, a poor person needs to be faultless and of impeccable character – only vulnerable to external pressures and disasters out of his or her control in order to be deemed worthy of any help or assistance. This sub-classification system only excludes and isolates those who are the weakest more which could create permanent danger to the exclusion of generations.

The media plays a part, not to be overlooked, in marginalising the poor. Whether the media frames topics around poverty to portray them negatively or over-romantically, it impacts how people affected by poverty are perceived, and this has a knock-on effect on any possible opportunities. On the other hand, the poor's absence from media broadcasts is profound in its invisibility – exclusion and marginalisation. The war on the poor could in fact be seen to be fuelled by the media who protects the interests of the powerful and those who can pay for media-produced information. By ignoring the structural causes that lead to poverty, and only focusing on intrinsic and personal shortcomings of poor people, the media agenda on poverty remains unchanged, and sadly, devoid of any progress.

Lastly, this chapter concludes by suggesting that categorising “the poor” is a form of marginalisation and exclusion in itself. In never moving beyond seeing the poor as one synonymous group with identical attributes, challenges and opportunities, each and every poor individual is denied their humanity and their right to be someone who is unique and important.

The next chapter considers the potential of agency via social media. It discusses how this can be employed by the poor to make ends meet.

## **Chapter 3: Social media and social capital**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The relationship between poverty and access to information and platforms to express voice discussed in the previous chapter warrants research into how information and voice are linked to the internet and social media, as these both seem to be largely driven by ordinary people. In fact, unlike the mass media steered by the media elite, the internet's interactive nature, especially social media, was initially viewed as a panacea to give voice to everyone and anyone. However, this is a rather simplistic view of the voice and information opportunities created by social media. Against this background, the purpose of this chapter is to investigate the interplay of voice, information, and social media, and the agency and social capital of poor people to harness the opportunities facilitated by social media.

### **3.2 The mass media, the internet and social media**

The mass media, the internet and social media are generally seen as sources of information. In contrast to the largely one-directional communication of the mass media, the interactive functionality of the internet (Web 2.0), especially social media, is often associated with opportunities for ordinary people and social groups to share their views and opinions – to exercise their voice. Traditionally, the mass media commanded much power in deciding what information is brought to the forefront in the public sphere and whose voices are prioritised. The internet, and specifically social media, has impacted the circulation of voice and information in society, as it hypothetically allows even the most marginalised to participate in the public sphere.

#### **3.2.1 Mass media**

Traditionally, the mass media has played a crucial part in forming a person's perceptions of what is happening in the world and how it is governed (Altheide, 2007: 287; Lev, 2008: 427). It contextualises and provides meaning to words and images, which, in turn, impacts individuals' views and social or political decisions (Altheide, 2007: 287). Since the largest part of the mass media is not publicly but privately owned and mostly profit-driven, the meaning-making part of the mass media has often been criticised for being driven by commercial interests and not necessarily by public demand or serving the greater good of humanity or a particular society (du Plooy,



2009: 226; Harper, 2014: 83-97; Altheide, 2007: 287). In fact, many critical scholars emphasise that the mass media's primary interest is to protect and reinforce the status quo and elitist social order – and in the process marginalised groups are not well represented in the mass media (Lee & Chan, 2006: 38). By represented well, it is meant that they often do not carry information in congruence with views and experiences of marginalised groups, or when information is carried by the mass media, marginalised groups are represented or framed from the perspective of mainstream society or the media elite (owners, gatekeepers, media workers, etc.) that dictates the content and sentiment of the mass media.

The media elite can control the media content in various ways, especially in terms of control of feedback and distribution. In this sense, control of feedback pertains to the exchange of information between the public and editors, and between different media organisations, whilst control of distribution is the process of selecting the information and stories that are shared with the public (Yamamoto, 2011: 822). The nett result is that the mass media, in many ways, dictates what society understands as acceptable, especially in terms of public beliefs and views (Happer & Philo, 2013: 321). How the media portrays a certain group or topic has an effect on the attitudes of the audience to that specific group or topic (Happer & Philo, 2013: 321). It can therefore be said that the mass media can either aid the understanding of particular causes or debilitate them, and can facilitate and understanding of poverty, or hamper it (Happer & Philo, 2013: 321).

In other words, criticism of the mass media in relation to poverty is manifold. The mass media do not always carry correct information about people living in poverty, and when it does, it tends to offer or frame that information from an outsider perspective, that of mainstream society. Also, due to the commercialisation of the media with its resultant profit orientation, mainstream media do not see poor people as their main target audience and thus do not carry much information about people living in poverty. The effect is that the chances of the general population receiving adequate and correct information via the mass media are limited. In addition, information about poverty and ways to alleviate it are not emphasised by the mass media, leaving people living with poverty with an information void, or information poverty. Furthermore, the voices of people living in poverty are not heard loudly through the mainstream mass media, and they thus suffer from voice poverty.

With the advent of the internet this was thought to change as the operational model of the recent shifts in the internet give ordinary people, also people living in poverty, opportunities to voice their views in the internet's public spheres and they theoretically have access to information. For this reason, the internet era with its interactive nature (called Web 2.0 in contrast to the early "read only" Web 1) was initially thought to be a panacea to the information and voice exclusion of marginalised groups.

### 3.2.2 The internet

In the early years of the internet, information was posted and users accessed that information. The second phase of the internet (Web 2.0) saw the evolution of the interactive capabilities of the internet, where users could also post information (called user-generated content). More recently, the tracking or surveillance capabilities of the internet made for a more user-friendly internet experience where algorithms use a user's internet history to predict the kinds of information the particular user is looking for. The downside to this is digital surveillance preying on the data of an individual.

Nevertheless, nowadays the internet is used for various reasons including entertainment, to conduct business and administer financial transactions, to communicate with others, and as a source of information (Horrigan, 2000: 1, 2, 14; Chen, Boase & Wellman, 2002: 94-99). Adding to these, Fallows (2004: 2) argues that the internet is used a) for acquiring everyday information such as driving directions, weather reports, online news, sport scores, phone numbers and addresses, b) for interpersonal communication, c) for transactions such as buying tickets for events, banking and doing online shopping, and d) for entertainment through gaming, music, hobbies, reading, and watching videos. Beyond these practical and obvious reasons for internet engagement, the internet can be seen as offering opportunities that empower citizens (Norris, 2001: 13). The internet enables a person to increase their social capital by connecting with others despite physical boundaries (Feuls et al., 2014: 551), and it also promotes opportunity in the form of skill enhancement, education and consumer information (Norris, 2001: 13). The internet further organises civic dialogue and social movement by creating a space where ideas are shared and communication, coordinated (Norris, 2001: 13).

The various functionalities of the internet deem it an essential element in the day-to-day lives of people – often a tool without which an individual’s normal routine would be completely disrupted (Fallows, 2004: 2). In fact, the internet is such an integral part in the lives of most people that their daily activities seldom exclude internet usage for the purposes of connecting with friends, family and work associates, to receive news, to shop or search for information (Anderson, Perrin & Jiang, 2018: 1). This dependency on being connected and partaking on a wider platform emphasises the role the internet plays in creating a space where one could freely share, express and engage with others.

However, not everybody has equal access to the internet to gain information and to express themselves. In this sense it could be physical access (lack of money to access a device such as a laptop, PC, tablet, or smart phone, as well as a lack of money for data), or other forms of access (such as linguistic ability, style conventions, gender, religion, or class situations that might impact on willingness to access the internet).

### 3.2.3 Social media

Social media is one of the largest parts of the internet and is the focus of this study. The first premise of social media is that it is considered social and interactive. It is also digital. The use of social media ties into the active audience theory focusing on people’s conscious choices regarding their media usage (Baran & Davis, 2015: 197). In this, the audience is viewed as the decisive and assertive component in the relationship between media and audience (Baran & Davis, 2015: 197). Media consumption, specifically when taking into consideration audience-centred research studies, refers to the active choices people make when they select to use and respond to media and how they do this (Lancaster, Hughes & Spicer, 2012: 16; LaRose, 2010: 194).

Osborne-Gowey (2014: 55) describes social media as follows:

At its most basic level it is simply a collection of websites and applications designed to build and enhance online communities for networking and sharing information. It really is no different from hanging around the water cooler exchanging the latest news, sharing a pint after work talking about “the game,” or having friends over to just hang out and “talk shop.” The only difference in social media is that these interactions occur online.

Similarly, Ariel and Avidar (2015: 19) highlight that there are three key aspects to the social media environment, namely information, interactivity and sociability. They argue that although information is the most basic component of the communication process, social media users themselves determine and navigate how much information they share and if or when to comment on the social media platform (Ariel & Avidar, 2015: 19). In other words, the interactivity and sociability aspects of social media are not solely reliant on the technological features but are also, to the same extent, determined by the actions of social media users (Jovanovic & Van Leeuwen, 2018: 683; Ariel & Avidar, 2015: 19).

In the field of communication studies, social media can be viewed as a “distinct subset of media tools that share a common set of traits and characteristics, where the affordances for disparate individuals and groups to contribute to the creation of the content they are consuming provide intrinsic value far greater than what each individual site feature provides” (Carr & Hayes, 2015: 49).

The interconnectedness of social media is what boyd (2010: 1) refers to as “networked publics”. These networked publics are structured by networked technologies where they are both “the space constructed through networked technologies as well as the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology and practice” (boyd, 2010: 1). These spaces, similar to other publics, give people the opportunity to gather socially, culturally and for civic purposes with groups and individuals that fall beyond their immediate family and friend circles (boyd, 2010: 1).

### **3.3 The bright side of social media**

Social media has introduced a myriad of functionalities that have fulfilled people’s lives. These benefits extend from self-expression to convenience and easy access to information.

The uses and gratifications theory was initially developed in the 1970s to explain why audiences use the mass media (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973-1974: 509-523). The uses and gratification theory encompasses the different ways in people use the media – to derive certain outcomes (O’Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2012: 101). Rubin et al., (2003: 129) summarise the uses and gratifications theory in the following way: a) media behaviour is purposive, goal-directed and motivated, b) people select media

content to satisfy their needs or desires, c) social and psychological dispositions mediate that behaviour and d) the media compete with other forms of communication - or functional alternatives - such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention, and use.

The traditional uses and gratifications theory was developed by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973-1974: 509-523). This theory considered the main reasons for people to engage with the media to be diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance or scanning of their environment (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972: 135-165; O'Sullivan et al., 2006: 326; Lewis, 2008: 37). Diversion refers to the act when individuals use media material to escape from the repetition of their daily routines (O'Sullivan et al., 2006: 326; Payne, Dozier, Nomai & Yagade, 2003: 116; Lewis, 2008: 37). Personal relationships pertain to how media content addresses a person's needs for company and interaction (O'Sullivan et al., 2006: 326; Lewis, 2008: 37), and personal identity relates to using media content for to learn about, uncover, challenge, adjust or confirm one's identity, through comparisons with characters portrayed in the media (O'Sullivan et al., 2006: 326; Payne et al., 2003: 116). Lastly, surveillance covers the media's role in providing people with information about their immediate environment and wider world (O'Sullivan et al., 2006: 326; Payne et al., 2003: 116; Lewis, 2008: 37).

The emergence and rise of new media, especially social media, has altered the adaptation of the uses and gratifications theory to the social media environment (Kamarck & Gabriele, 2015: 1-11; LaRose & Eastin, 2004: 358-377; Ruggiero, 2000: 3-37). Different sets of uses and gratifications designed around social media have subsequently developed.

More recently newer explanations of why people use social media have emerged. These tie into the bright side of social capital – the reasons social media adds value to the lives of users.

### 3.3.1 Self-expression

Increasingly in the last decades, a participatory culture is seen around the globe. This means that ordinary people seek to participate publicly in self-expression to make their views heard.

The general public has, in the past two decades, increased their own capacity to communicate on a broader platform to a wider audience, and in this, they apply enormous control over what is being produced and circulated (Jenkins, 2014: 35). This is referred to as participatory culture, since each individual has the power to contribute to the culture and discourse around them (Jenkins, 2014: 35). Jenkins et al. (2006: 7) further clarify participatory culture as one with “relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations with others, some type of informal mentorship framework, a space where members believe their contributions matter, and where members feel some degree of social connection with each other.” Crucial also to participatory culture is that every member is not obligated to participate, but everyone must believe that they are allowed to contribute when they wish to, and that their contribution will be appropriately valued (Jenkins et al., 2006: 7). Cultural significance is of utmost importance to people – it is the reason they engage with their identities (Willis, 2012: xxiii-xxiv). This participatory culture is most prominent in the online environment where ordinary people exercise self-expression through their interactive web engagement – mostly on social media platforms (Burger, 2015: 259).

Self-expression has emerged as a strong personal value in recent years indicating an inherent need in people to emphasise their autonomy and uniqueness (Inglehart, 2008: 130). As self-expression values are increasing, different mediums for self-expression are emerging with social media platforms being established as frontrunners (Tshivhase, 2015: 374; Orehek & Human, 2016: 60). Self-expression is essentially the representation of one’s personhood – that which an individual chooses to show of themselves (Tshivhase, 2015: 376). The ability to creatively, consciously and visibly perform one’s identity offers meaningful avenues and opportunities to individuals to express themselves in an otherwise inaccessible public sphere (Burger, 2015: 264; Gabriel, 2014: 104; Livingstone, 2008: 394). In other words, social media platforms propagate an environment and culture where individuals can design, create,



control and publicise their own content (Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015: 302). This is the height of self-expression, further simplified and eased by the accessibility of social network applications on mobile phones (Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015: 304).

This form of self-expression is not only limited to uploading photos, videos and written content (Takahashi, 2016: 47). Through commenting on other's posts and liking other's contributions, individuals experience a sense of validation of their own existence (Takahashi, 2016: 47). This "proof of existence" and recognition of self happens not only when one's own posts are approved and accepted by others, but also in taking advantage of the opportunity to comment and respond to someone else's post (Takahashi, 2016: 47). In other words, social media users seek recognition from themselves and others in order to prove their own existence in a world characterised by globalisation and swift social change (Takahashi, 2016: 47). The ability to assert one's own identity and opinions is thus an empowering tool for many social media users (Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015: 307).

The challenge with any form of online self-expression, however, is the authenticity of the character or identity being portrayed (Tshivhase, 2015: 374, 385). Social media platforms essentially give an individual the opportunity to re-imagine themselves (Burger, 2015: 264), providing them with unprecedented possibilities for controlling their self-representations in ways that are impossible in physical interaction (Nakamura, 1995: 1). These self-representations or rather self-presentations are often linked to users of social media engaging publicly with online identity "work". This can take on many forms.

### 3.3.2 Identity

Social media provides users with an opportunity to mould and (re)create their identities. The act of asserting an online identity can imply simple actions such as liking or commenting on posts, or even venture into designing an identity that is quite different to the one a user has in the physical world.

Gauntlett (2011: 56, 95-96) suggests that people use the internet and social media platforms to craft and mould their life stories to what they would like them to be, and they derive joy and gratification in doing so. A desire for validation, acknowledgement and a connection with others further drives individuals to curate a certain online identity as a way to express themselves (Burger, 2015: 281). This creation of self is done



through the staging, shooting, selecting, sharing and posting of online content (Cruz & Thornham, 2015: 7). It is also done, however, by commenting on others' posts and liking digital contributions – through these engagements and mediations, the performance of the self-image becomes meaningful as part of a complex process to construct the self (Cruz & Thornham, 2015: 7). But since the representation of self on social media platforms is predominantly done in a strategic and instrumental way, to impress or provoke reactions from others, the authenticity of this identity is often lacking (Tshivhase, 2015: 375).

Cover and Doak (2015: 547, 550) distinguish between online and offline identities. This separation suggests that the internet and social media platforms allow for the creation of a virtual self separate from one's offline identity (Cover & Doak, 2015: 547, 550; Webb, 2001: 560; Hatton, 2012: 36). Essentially, a person can use digital platforms for an online construction of the public presentation of self (Marshall, Moore & Barbour, 2015: 302). Goffman (1959, 11-14) refers to the mobilisation of a certain image a person wishes to portray as impression management. Although Goffman's work was originally applied to real-time, face-to-face engagements, the relevance of his findings within the context of social media is profound (Picone, 2015: 3). In fact, self-representations on social media form part of the general strategy of impression management (Picone, 2015: 5).

This is not to say that all online identities are in complete contrast to the person's non-virtual character. In fact, people tend to reproduce their offline characters online, but this replication deliberately excludes certain aspects whilst highlighting others (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013: 107). In other words, one's offline self is divided into different facets of self and only certain selected facets are then presented online (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013: 107). Since social media users have a need for multiple stories about themselves, different platforms allow for a variety of personas to be created to succinctly portray the identity suitable to that particular social media platform and its audience (Van Dijck, 2013: 211). Although fear of negative responses or behaviour is considered a reason for people to mask their identity online (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013: 108-109), people also create altered online identities for self-promotion, and to be received positively either professionally or socially (Van Dijck, 2013: 211).

Identity tourism, on the other hand, is the act of someone adopting a different race or gender to the one they have in the non-virtual world online (Nakamura, 2001: 1). An identity tourist will thus pretend to be someone of a different ethnic background or socio-economic class online, and their virtual behaviour will correspond with their perception of what such a person will be like (Nakamura, 2001: 1, 7). Considering this online identity experimentation with a completely different persona against the backdrop of this study - internet usage in a poor, vulnerable community - one is urged to explore the online identity adoption individuals who are poor.

Goffman (1963: 7), in his profound work on identity construction, explains that identity stigmatisation takes place when one's individual identity does not conform to social expectations, and when a person struggles to fit in and be accepted because they are unable to meet the required standards of the group. Poverty causes unparalleled humiliation, trauma and stigmatisation to people affected by and suffering from it (Hudson, 2016: 121). Disparaging information regarding the self, limited opportunities, consistent stress, and exposure to negative life events - all aspects closely linked to poverty - affect a person's identity exploration and adoption (Phillips & Pittman, 2003: 128). This often leads to a poor person adopting several strategies to negotiate an invisible identity in order to secure upward mobility (Radmacher & Azmitia, 2013: 324; Akfirat, Polat & Yetim, 2015: 413). This includes developing more socially acceptable online identities.

In creating an online persona that is not affected by identity stigmatisation as a result of poverty, an individual may experience the absence of judgement, embarrassment and humiliation – resulting in a sense of social freedom (Tufekci, 2010: 174). For the poor, in presenting themselves perhaps slightly more favourably online, it is not done as a shallow narcissistic display for attention or self-promotion, but instead it is the recognition and use of an opportunity to improve their quality of life, and to empower themselves (Nemer & Freeman, 2015: 1844; Literat, 2017: 6).

In other words, one of the many reasons that people use social media is to engage with their identities. It also serves as a platform where identities can be experimented with and expressed in different ways through a variety of online actions.

### 3.3.3 “Just for fun”, pleasure and entertainment

Another reason why people use social media is simply because they enjoy it. They do it for the pleasure of it – just for fun.

Internet and specifically social media use can comfortably be associated with leisure and play (Stafford, Stafford & Schkade, 2004: 279; Quinn, 2016: 81). In fact, the enjoyment derived from this has pure hedonistic qualities to it (Gan, 2018: 143, Stafford et al., 2004: 279). Just as affection gratification (showing concern and care for others), information gratification (gaining helpful, meaningful and new information) and social gratification (making new acquaintances, finding people and being sought after) motivate users to engage with social media platforms (Gan, 2018: 143), not all social media activity is functional, practical and utilitarian in nature (Stafford et al., 2004: 279; Ernst, 2015: 25).

The hedonistic gratifications sought pertain to elements such as relaxation, entertainment, fun, enjoyment and getting away from demands and pressures (Gan, 2018: 143; Valkonen et al., 2015: 167). Killing or passing time is also a large component of this gratification (Gan, 2018: 143) equating social media browsing to window shopping when the activity is not necessarily directed at information searching (Stafford et al., 2004: 279). In these instances, social media is engaged with when individuals are bored and/or wanting to pass time – finding leisure in a state of waiting (Kumar, 2014: 1133, Chigona, Kamkwenda, & Saffia Manjoo, 2008: 12; Valkonen et al., 2015: 173; Hartman et al., 2006: 816-817; Błachnio, Przepiórka, & Rudnicka, 2013: 781).

This hedonic gratification is embedded in motives such as escaping reality and engaging in entertainment to momentarily evade the pressures and unenjoyable aspects of daily life (Mir, 2017: 100). Social networking sites not only provide opportunities to escape, but incentives for partaking purposelessly as well (Hoffmann et al., 2017: 2). However, where traditional media such as television watching is associated with passive escapism, social media, through its functionalities of liking, sharing, and commenting, actually renders the hedonistic use and gratification of passing time and escapism an active media consumption deed (Hoffmann et al., 2017: 2).

This highlights that social media use may not always be goal-directed in the sense that the gratification sought is information or communication driven. Instead it could be motivated by the need to escape from either boredom or daily realities, resulting in social networking sites not necessarily being a place to look for information or to connect with others, but a platform to interact for the fun of it and the relaxation that comes with escape.

Another reason why people use social media is to gain information in the sense of scanning or surveillance of their environment, to keep abreast with what is happening in their field of interest.

### 3.3.4 Surveillance or scanning

In the context of the uses and gratifications theory, the act of surveillance pertains to an individual's need to understand their immediate environment and the wider world (O'Sullivan et al., 2006: 326; Payne et al., 2003: 116; Lewis, 2008: 37). The distribution of and interaction with material and content that gratify the need for information about issues and events is therefore considered part of surveillance (O'Sullivan et al., 2006: 326; Payne et al., 2003: 116; Lewis, 2008: 37). Social engagement has always played a part in the dissemination of news (Hermida et al., 2012: 815). The rise of social media, however, has put platforms like Facebook at the very centre of the distribution of news (Choi, 2016: 817; Almgren, 2017: 1060; Beam et al., 2018: 940). Social media users are increasingly able to access and read news shared by journalists, organisations, groups and friends on Facebook (Hermida et al., 2012: 815; Hille & Bakker, 2013: 663).

The act of surveillance exercised on Facebook is often embroiled in undifferentiated searches for information that ranges from social and entertainment to political and economic (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi, 2017: 1785). In this regard, news exposure and engagement is frequently incidental or unintentional which, however, does not suggest that this information is not consumed and/or adopted (Mitchell et al., 2013: 1; Boczkowski et al., 2017: 1785). The constant access to news of all kinds and forms on social media has led to the discontinuation of engagement with other news source such as newspapers or radio broadcasts (Boczkowski et al., 2017: 1785). In fact, Facebook exposes users to news that they would otherwise most likely not receive (Mitchell et al., 2013: 1).

The interactive component of surveillance that Facebook facilitates and encourages through its share, like and comment functionalities allows users to assert themselves as opinion leaders in their respective networks (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015: 240). The discussions that erupt on social media around news and current events lead to greater civic engagement by users in their acts of spreading and sharing information (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015: 240). So much so that the act of surveillance on Facebook leads to involvement in several news topics and different aspects of the public sphere (Greenhow & Reifman, 2009: 55). This emphasises the important role individuals have as sources of information in their networks, and how Facebook enables them to exert this (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015: 240). In addition to surveillance of their immediate and broader environment, the information-sharing functionality of social media supports a togetherness that, in itself, adds value to social media users.

### 3.3.5 Connectedness and the need to belong

Humans are social beings and they therefore have the need to communicate and to form part of groups that they belong to. Social media can facilitate the gratification of this social need.

The need to belong theory suggests that social connections are of critical importance for human beings (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006: 697; Stevens & Fiske, 1995: 192). Being a member of a group has historically offered survival value to people, and therefore, individuals are driven to maintain relationships with others to feel protected, nurtured and supported (Stevens & Fiske, 1995: 192). In other words, people strive to have relationships with others since these fulfil a fundamental need for attachment (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006: 697; Baumeister & Leary, 1995: 497). Healthy relationships positively correlate with emotional well-being and cognitive processes, whereas a lack of attachments holds negative risks for a person's health and adjustment (Baumeister & Leary, 1995: 497).

The intensive motivation to form and maintain several positive, meaningful and lasting interpersonal relationships involves two aspects – 1) the need for regular, joyful interactions in a 2) stable and enduring framework of sincere care for each other's wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995: 497). Attachment behaviour and the need to belong is, in fact, accompanied by the strongest feeling associated with any other

behaviour (Bowlby, 1969: 177). In this vein, this need drives strategies to allow for long-term interactions and relationships with people (Bowlby, 1969: 193; Stevens & Fiske, 1995: 194; Peterson, Giguere & Sherman, 2016: 216).

Social media platforms play an important role in facilitating social contact to fulfil one's need to belong (James et al., 2017: 561). These platforms not only assist individuals in maintaining social connections, they also allow people to establish new connections and to engage with people with similar interests (James et al., 2017: 561; Rice & Hagen, 2010: 3; Kemp, 2018: 1). Yu, Hu and Cheng (2015: 240) summarise the role that social media plays in connecting people and meeting their need to belong as such:

Social networking websites such as Facebook are popular places for socialising, which allow people to connect with family members, catch up with friends, or meet new acquaintances, regardless of their geographic locations. Using these sites grants people enjoyable feelings of affiliation, belonging, and social support; similar to face-to-face contexts, they engage in social interactions and develop interpersonal relationships by sharing personal information. Through self-disclosures, users also voluntarily share personal information with others, such as updates, activities, photos, whereabouts, thoughts, opinions, feelings, experiences, and preferences.

In practical terms, social media platforms allow individuals to construct a profile, express a list of people they share connections with, and view and crisscross their connection lists with others' lists on the platform (boyd & Ellison, 2008: 211). The uniqueness of social media platforms lies in the functionality that allows users to express and make visible their social networks (boyd & Ellison, 2008: 211). This constitutes the backbone of social media as it results in connections that would alternatively perhaps never have been made (boyd & Ellison, 2008: 211; Light & Cassidy, 2014: 1169). In this vein, Facebook specifically is acknowledged for its profound potential to facilitate social connection and participation (Sujon, Viney & Toker-Turnalar, 2018: 1). The social aspect far supersedes the technology component, rendering Facebook a connective tool between people and communities (Sujon et al., 2018: 3).

Connectedness is not only a primal human need, it is also the constitution of the human condition and culture (Van Dijck, 2012: 141). Technologies are shaping these connection frameworks, and social media platforms are central to a shift in social dynamics where various role-players - technology, users, content - collectively build a



connective space (Van Dijck, 2012: 141). Engaging with friends and acquaintances on Facebook is increasingly recognised as a common and even preferred means of social interaction (Uimonen, 2013: 122). This places social media in the middle of meeting a person's need for connectedness and belonging.

In this context, loneliness can be a factor affecting the uses and gratifications to be derived from new and social media usage since loneliness in itself has been associated with increased internet use (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003: 659). The gratifications obtained from social media use for people who are lonely include companionship, alternative online social patterns and mitigation of negative emotions experienced as a result of loneliness (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003: 659). Furthermore, the control that social media allows over anonymity, invisibility and timing of interactions are appealing attributes to people who are self-conscious or who suffer from social anxiety (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003: 659). In fact, it could actually be considered pro-social behaviour in these cases, as people who are lonely are more likely to go online when they feel depressed, isolated or anxious, whether it is for relaxation or to feel captivated by online activities and engagements (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003: 668). This is an example of how the depth and diversity of the uses and gratifications associated with new media, and developed with new media in mind, highlights the complexity of social media and internet use (Quinn, 2016: 81).

Social media addresses users' need to belong – their desire to be connected to others. Social media can mitigate loneliness in providing a space where relations are formed and conversations had. This is an important component of social media - something that even leads to habitual social media use - something done to alleviate boredom and kill time.

### 3.3.6 Killing time, relieving boredom, and habit

The seamless navigability of social media (Sundar & Limperos, 2013: 518) lends itself to the platform frequently being used without clear intent, but, rather, simply to occupy oneself – to pass or kill time. In this, a user scrolls and clicks, often purely out of habit.

Ferris and Hollenbaugh (2018: 65-66) mention passing or killing time as a primary reason users engage with social media. Facebook is effective in relieving boredom for users, as watching videos, reading walls and communicating with others are powerful



time-killing mechanisms – enabling the user to engage in several activities at the same time (Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018: 66). In other words, the technology attributes of social media such as visual elements, recommendation algorithms and intuitive navigation allows users to browse with great ease, which leads to social media activity out of habit, boredom, and simply to have something to do (Kim & Kim, 2019: 156; Quinn, 2016: 81; Sundar & Limperos, 2013: 520).

LaRose (2010: 194) even goes so far as to broaden the uses and gratifications associated with social networking sites by including “habit” as a gratification sought, since, according to this research, new media consumption behaviour is not determined purely by internal dialogue but also by non-conscious habit often formed out of media consumption behaviour that was initially goal-directed. This corresponds with Rubin (1984: 69), who points out the difference between intentional, instrumental motives and ritualised ones – “the more or less habitualised use of a medium to gratify diversionary needs or motives.” Papacharissi and Mendelson (2008: 11) include “habit” in the uses and gratifications categories they developed pertaining to social media usage. Habit in this case would refer to the automatic and non-conscious response to stimuli acting in isolation or with conscious intentions supported by expected outcomes determining behaviour (LaRose, 2010: 196).

Interestingly and accordingly, Papacharissi and Mendelson (2008:16, 18, 19) found habitual pastime and relaxing entertainment to be the highest motives for engaging with social media, suggesting that the uses and gratifications associated with social networking sites such as Facebook tend to be ritualistic and somewhat passive. This corresponds with the work of Payne et al. (2003: 115) that suggest that newspapers were mostly used for surveillance and the internet for diversion. In fact, social media users frequently refer to Facebook’s ability to relieve boredom and to serve as a distraction from daily pressures (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2008: 19).

It would appear that social media fulfils a function even when that is not specific or concrete. It could be as simple as having something to do – interacting without really engaging. This almost aimless online behaviour opens up discussions around the dark side of social media, when it becomes a place where interaction extends from being harmless to being destructive.

### **3.4 The dark side of social media**

Social media is a platform that fulfils needs, offers benefits and adds values to users. This does not suggest however that social media is a flawless space that provides endless opportunities or a safe sphere where users can participate without risk of failings. Unfortunately, due to social media's pervasive use and enormous popularity, it has also become a platform where harm is committed and damage is done. It could further be exacerbated by what Gerbner (1996: 10) calls the "mean world syndrome" where many people expect a certain degree of victimisation, and, at some point, they will get it.

This section discusses the harm that can befall social media users as a result of their social media engagements. Negative Facebook experiences further indicate the role and impact that social media could have in informal settlements.

#### **3.4.1 Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is a worldwide phenomenon of social aggression committed through the use of digital and electronic media (see for instance, Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015: 304; Menesini & Spiel, 2012: 163; Wade & Beran, 2011: 44). It occurs via smart phones, computers and tablets through a myriad of communication channels such as chat rooms, games, emails, social media platforms, websites and instant messaging (Bussey, Fitzpatrick & Raman, 2015: 31). Although cyberbullying contains elements similar to those of traditional forms of bullying, the unique qualities associated with cyberbullying amplifies the damage caused to victims, and it often makes it difficult to detect (Vaillancourt, Faris & Mishna, 2016: 368). These characteristics include the persistent, endless nature of cyberbullying and its ability to reach large audiences (Vaillancourt et al., 2016: 368).

The ability to self-express using technology simplifies the bullying process substantially, and, as a result, even those who would not typically bully in the physical, non-virtual world are now allowed the opportunity to do so while staying anonymous (Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015: 304). This potential for anonymity and the distance created by screens and technological devices further allow for the cruelty and nastiness of cyberbullying to remain unimpeded (Vaillancourt et al., 2016: 368). Moreover, since technology provides anonymity, this prevents the victim from responding in a way that could potentially stop or minimise the perpetrator's

aggressive behaviour (David-Ferdon & Feldman Hertz, 2007: S3). Naturally, this serves as a considerable advantage to the offender (David-Ferdon & Feldman Hertz, 2007: S3), and it leaves the victim with social, psychological, emotional and behavioural scars (Wade & Beran, 2011: 57; Bussey et al., 2015: 31). In the same vein, Miller (2012: 265) goes as far as to suggest that “the mediated presences we can achieve amplify our cultural tendency to objectify the social world and weaken our sense of moral and ethical responsibility to others.”

Whilst those who bully in the physical world are more likely to bully online, the victims of cyberbullying are not necessarily bullied in all contexts and spheres (Menesini & Spiel, 2012: 163). The internet and social media platforms have increased the chances of someone being targeted and bullied – someone who may not have been exposed to this type of treatment in different circumstances (David-Ferdon & Feldman Hertz, 2007: S1). In other words, the availability and use of multimedia technology has produced and shaped a vulnerability that would not ordinarily be experienced in other environments (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007: 1).

The previous chapter discussed blaming the poor for their misfortune. Victims of cyberbullying, or bullying in general, are also often considered responsible for being targeted (Gabriel, 2014: 106-107; Garland et al., 2016: 80). Weber, Koehler and Schnauber-Stockmann (2018: 14) consider victim blaming primarily a cognitive process – an attempt at assuring people that they are in control of their own lives. In fact, research suggests that the cyberbully as well as the victim of cyberbullying frequently view negative treatment that is received online as a deserved and justifiable consequence (Seo et al., 2016: 44). From the perspective of the victim, this may indicate that their victimisation through cyberbullying correlates with low self-esteem and a negative self-image, whereas from the viewpoint of the perpetrator, it may signify a deflection of responsibility (Seo et al., 2016: 44). The outcome, however, remains that those at the receiving end of cyberbullying often receive very little empathy or support, and are even blamed for putting themselves in a position to be cyberbullied (Koehler & Weber, 2018: 11; Weber, Ziegele & Schnauber, 2013: 254).

It would further appear that individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds are most at risk of being bullied (Kakarla, 2012: 1). In fact, inequality in terms of affluence and financial means is strongly associated with exposure to and the prevalence of

bullying (Due et al., 2009: 907). Considering the pervasiveness of cyberbullying, it may yet again emerge that instead of the internet being a liberated space, allowing for the re-invention of self free from physical constraints and realities - a convenient entrance into the public sphere - it becomes another platform where the typical victims are subjected to further abuse.

### 3.4.2 Trolling

Cyberbullying and internet trolling are both types of online harassment and aggression (Zezulka & Seigfried-Spellar, 2016: 7). The difference however is that where cyberbullies wish to inflict hurt or damage, typically to people they know in the physical world, the intent of trolls is not always as clear since their deceptive online trolling behaviour aims to cause disruption and confusion (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017: 1341). In fact, trolling in itself can be viewed as a strategy of identity deception in which no-one understands the nature or agenda except the troll itself (Herring et al., 2002: 372). In this vein, Golf-Papez and Veer (2017: 1339) describe trolling as “deliberate, deceptive and mischievous attempts to provoke reactions from other online users.”

Trolling is typically done anonymously to either waste the target's time, to provoke them, annoy them or scare them into submission or silence (Mkono, 2015: 791-792). In online groups, the troll will deliberately frustrate and incite other members to disturb and derail the group from its primary focus (Herring et al., 2002: 371; Massanari, 2019: 19). In this vein, trolls carefully design their online harassment efforts to elicit a response from their targets which could only benefit the troll and its followers – often at a cost to their targets (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017: 1339). In other words, in a social media group setting, the troll would engineer an identity befitting to the group it wishes to join, only to create conflict and disruption among group members for its own purpose and entertainment (Mkono, 2015: 793; Tham & Wang, 2017: 260). Once part of the group, the troll would abandon all efforts to maintain a social disguise (Herring et al., 2002: 380). It would, instead, attempt to gain optimum effect and self-benefit through insults and derogatory comments (Herring et al., 2002: 380). What is important to note however is that, unlike cyberbullying, trolling does not generally involve a power imbalance between troll and target (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017: 1341), and often, as a result of the distress and anguish the troll had cost members of the group it attacked, the troll faces eviction from the online community (Tham & Wang, 2017: 260). By this

time however, the troll had usually achieved its aim in causing as much disruption and complication as possible (Herring et al., 2002: 380).

Trolling can be a once-off event (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017: 1341) and it takes on various forms. Sometimes trolling is relatively innocent and even childish, but, more often than not, trolling evolves into problematic stalking and harassment (Mkono, 2015: 791-792; Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017: 1341). Online trolling behaviour involves highly hostile language, humiliation, degradation and mockery, and although the degrees of trolling vary considerably, it often constitutes vicious attempts at disrupting democratic discourse and creating moral panic (Weber & Davis, 2019: 5; Bishop, 2013: 301-302). It is therefore crucial to acknowledge that trolling is a form of online hate speech that uses a variety of online discourse types such as memes, hacking and regular posts to spread content as extreme as death or rape threats or veiled innuendos targeting minorities, other races, or specific people (Cunningham, 2016: 933).

### 3.4.3 Fake news

There are three types to consider when it comes to information disorder – misinformation, disinformation and mal-information. Walder and Derakhshan (2017: 18) emphasise that it is crucial to differentiate between true content and false content, and messages that are deliberately distributed to cause damage and those that are not intent on inflicting trauma. In this vein, disinformation is false and manufactured to do harm whereas misinformation can be explained as something that is, albeit false, not designed to cause damage (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017: 18; Freelon & Wells, 2020: 146). Mal-information, on the other hand, is true information directly aimed at imposing destruction to people, organisations and countries (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017: 18; (Sinatra & Lombardi, 2020: 2)

#### 3.4.3.1 Misinformation

Misinformation refers to the distribution of misleading and/or false information intentionally or innocently – often on a mass scale (Brown, 2018: 198). In other words, those who disseminate misinformation using social media do it with either a political or commercial agenda in mind, or it is done as a result of being misinformed oneself, and erroneously and unwittingly perpetuating a cycle of falsehood-spreading (Pomputius, 2019: 369-370; Brown, 2018: 198).

In this vein, Li and Santos (2019: 398) distinguish between three types of misinformation narratives – misunderstood stories, stories with incorrect assumptions and stories with altered opinions. Intent is the underlying differentiator which determines whether someone wished to deceive or simply became confused with content themselves (Li & Santos, 2019: 382). When there is a misunderstanding, in the context of misinformation, it implies that the information the speaker disseminates is contradictory with what the speaker aims to communicate (Li & Santos, 2019: 382). Wrong assumptions occur when listeners' prior knowledge of the content differs from the speaker's, and opinion change refers to when the speaker's opinion alters from one that they had earlier (Li & Santos, 2019: 382). It is therefore clear that some cases of misinformation are deliberate propaganda while others are as a result of ignorance and mistakes – the failure to gather correct information or communicate correctly (Brown, 2018: 198; Pomputius, 2019: 369-370). This is not to say, however, the one is necessarily less harmful than the other.

Inadvertent or unintentional misinformation is problematic, or even disastrous, in impacting the beliefs and behaviour of people (Brown, 2018: 194). In fact, Walter and Murphy (2018: 438) argue that the influence of being exposed to misinformation can never be completely reversed. Social media plays a key role in the pervasiveness of misinformation (Khan & Idris, 2019: 1194). In the landscape of persistent online sharing, individuals (and not only media or political organisations) are central in either stopping or spreading misinformation (Khan & Idris, 2019: 1194). Using social media as a source of news is a profound component of the cycle of spreading misinformation (Valenzuela et al., 2019: 814). Especially those who are politically engaged are more inclined to forward and redistribute inaccurate information about governmental affairs, natural disasters and science-related matters – the news feeds that mostly align with their views and thoughts (Valenzuela et al., 2019: 814).

To mitigate or protect against misinformation, the regulation and eradication of false social media sources is imperative (Pomputius, 2019: 369-370). Furthermore, social media platforms need to provide for a warning that false information may be circulated, and also the rebuttal of such news when it is distributed – fact checks to reduce the adoption of misinformation (Walter & Murphy, 2018: 438). In an individual capacity, internet skills, verification of information before sharing and a steadfast approach to reliability of content affect the spread of misinformation (Khan & Idris, 2019: 1194). In



other words, the responsibility of halting the spread of misinformation and/or the rebuttal thereof demands communal efforts from organisations and individuals alike (Walter & Murphy, 2018: 438; Khan & Idris, 2019: 1194; Pomputius, 2019: 369-370).

#### *3.4.3.2 Disinformation*

According to the High Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation of the European Commission, disinformation includes “all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit” (Freelon & Wells, 2020: 145). This definition underlines the role of deception, the potential for harm and the intent to harm (Freelon & Wells, 2020: 145).

Social media platforms, with their potential to disseminate content to millions of users within minutes, serve as breeding grounds for the uncontained spread of disinformation (Hameleers et al., 2020: 281). Disinformation campaigns of information warfare threaten impartial, objective decision-making of individuals, and the various actors that are able to manipulate and shape political information take advantage of the biased nature of social media platforms reliant on viral content (Walker, Mercea & Bastos, 2019: 1532; Freelon & Wells, 2020: 146; Hameleers et al., 2020: 281). Those intent on distributing disinformation adopt fake identities, and through echo chambers and filter bubbles, they infiltrate and contaminate passive social media users to erode existing democratic social institutions (Krafft & Donovan, 2020: 194).

Disinformation circulated through social media has considerable implications for public and policy discourse, democracies, governance and elections, and the integrity and accountability of political parties and leaders (Landon-Murray, Mujkic & Nussbaum, 2019: 512; Freelon & Wells, 2020: 146). Disinformation campaigns aim to create fear and panic that could have long-term effects on countries, their citizens and leaders (Bechmann, 2020: 2).

#### *3.4.3.3 Mal-information*

Mal-information is “genuine, truthful information that is spread with an intent to cause harm.” (Sinatra & Lombardi, 2020: 2). Mal-information is often overlooked since it is much harder to discern between a true message that is sent to do harm and simply a true message – much more challenging than it is to distinguish between something



that is false and something that is true (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2018: 44; Baines & Elliott, 2020: 3). The weaponisation of true information does violate the privacy of individuals, groups and organisations without it being warranted by public interest (Sinatra & Lombardi, 2020: 2; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2018: 44). It could have calamitous effects when mal-information disguises itself as scientific information, rendering anyone not informed enough to understand the difference highly vulnerable (Sinatra & Lombardi, 2020: 2).

#### *3.4.3.4 Selected information – echo chambers and filter bubbles*

Social media, specifically Facebook, is an ever-increasing source of news and information (Beam et al., 2018: 940). Although this may lead to greater exposure to diverse ideas and opinions (Flaxman, Goel & Rao, 2016: 299), it could also isolate people from perspectives that differ from their own (Beam et al., 2018: 940). When information is categorised through digital algorithms (filter bubbles) and/or through an information environment characteristic of social recommendations (echo chambers), what is received may not be as neutral or diverse as one would hope or expect (Beam et al., 2018: 940).

##### *3.4.3.4.1 Echo chambers*

People tend to seek information that is aligned with their own opinions and ideas (Quattrociocchi, Scala & Sunstein, 2016: 1-2). On social media, predominantly Facebook, users engage in groups and newsfeeds that confirm their own ideologies – this is referred to as echo chambers (Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018: 992). Echo chambers circulate news articles that users agree with, and although social media in general may incidentally expose users to opposing views, echo chambers impact decisions made by individuals to further distribute content or not, which promotes group polarisation (Quattrociocchi et al., 2016: 1-2; Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018: 992; Flaxman et al., 2016: 299).

The selective exposure associated with echo chambers may underscore and heighten individuals' existing views (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009: 34). In fact, social media interaction across an ideological opinion divide is much less frequent than the sharing, liking and commenting of social media users that share similar views (Grömping, 2014: 39). As a result of echo chambers, people are over-exposed to the same information, which creates the false perception that their views are dominant in society (Fletcher &

Nielsen, 2018: 978). In this regard, social media becomes a one-way mirror that predominantly serves to reflect a person's own judgements and ideas (Pariser, 2011: 61). In other words, despite the supposed abundance of information distributed on social media, echo chambers encourage a news selection that excludes views opposed to the user's own (Sunstein, 2001: 6-8).

#### 3.4.3.4.2 Filter bubbles

Filter bubbles are algorithms that, perhaps unintentionally, promote ideological segregation and divide by automatically filtering content an individual would agree with (Flaxman et al., 2016: 299). This algorithmic selection subjects users to news and information they would not necessarily have been exposed to had they searched for content themselves (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018: 976-977). In other words, with filter bubbles, some information is concealed from users mostly because it is unpopular with them and does not correspond with their interests (Pariser, 2011: 15-16). This could render non-social media users less polarised than those who solely rely on social media platforms for news (Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018: 991).

Many individuals may see social media as trusted platforms, making important and valued decisions for them based on their preferences, but the reality is that social media platforms are no longer free, independent spaces (Pariser, 2011: 113). Filter bubbles mould and engineer the content - information and news - that individuals are exposed to without allowing individuals to partake in this conscious decision-making process (Kanai & McGrane, 2020: 2). In fact, Facebook is coming under intense scrutiny from algorithm scholars for not providing a platform conducive to democratic civil debate (Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018: 992).

Furthermore, the often commercial drive behind filter bubbles narrows individuals' news and information exposure, much to the benefit of advertisers and organisations that monitor every click to gain more information about potential customers (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018: 976-977; Pariser, 2011: 126-127). This level of personalisation is not done for the benefit of the social media user, but rather to market products and services that would appeal to the right individual (Pariser, 2011: 15-16).

The information that is disseminated on social media is not always true, reliable or factual. Information is spread for different reasons by different players. The way information is shared and filtered is furthermore a process that is driven by factors

users are often not aware of. Since social media has become, in many cases, a primary source of news and information, the critical role it plays in what is being distributed and believed cannot be understated.

#### 3.4.4. Internet and social media addiction

A positive indication that the gratifications sought through social media engagement are met is through the “stickiness” factor, which connects and keeps a person connected online (Milbourne & Wilkinson, 2016: 81). As much as this could positively suggest platform effectiveness, there could also be an overuse of such mediums that may lead to internet and social media addiction (Milbourne & Wilkinson, 2016: 81). Much like other addictions, internet addiction may manifest in the following – change in sleep patterns, a preoccupation with privacy, ignoring other responsibilities, personality changes, loss of interest in other activities previously enjoyed and declining to invest in personal relationships (Young, 2004: 402). The bottom line of internet and social media addiction is that the practices this person overly indulges in are not productive and may even be detrimental to their overall wellbeing (Johnson & Keane, 2017: 282). A person’s inability to manage, restrict and control their online activities should be considered and understood within the particular social context of the individual, however (Johnson & Keane, 2017: 268).

Starcevic (2012: 17) actually denounces the term “internet addiction” and stresses that individuals do not become addicted to the internet itself, but instead to activities performed on online platforms which may include gaming, gambling, pornography, chatting, shopping and/or sending messages. These patterns of behavioural addiction (Starcevic, 2012: 18) have their foundation in other contextual and personal aspects of the person’s life.

Social phobia has been associated with excessive gaming and web and social media surfing as people suffering from social phobia would often elect to engage online instead of physically socialising (Yayan et al., 2017: 1240). Loneliness also positively correlates to addiction to internet and social media activities in attempts by lonely individuals to alleviate and avoid feelings of isolation and loneliness (Ang, Chan & Lee, 2017: 31). In these instances, the boundary and separation between the “real” world and the virtual world become confused and obscured, specifically when people who are very shy almost solely use social media to meet and interact with others in a space

where they can regulate and control the self-presentation and communication (Ang et al., 2017: 31).

This essentially suggests that the wide field of uses and gratifications pertaining to internet and social media use may also lead to problematic behaviour. Within an environment where poverty and unemployment may lead to loneliness and isolation, these are important factors to consider.

### **3.5 Social capital**

Studies of social media indicate that the socio-economic backgrounds and contexts of users are not definitive predictors of their social media engagements. Ahn (2011: 159) points out that the level of internet access, place of access and autonomy of use do not necessarily hamper social media use since low-income users have proven to be creative in finding means to interact and communicate using social media platforms. From this perspective, social media platforms offer an entry point to many who have been digitally excluded – especially in developing countries and marginalised, impoverished communities. This section discusses the online behavioural patterns of the poor and unemployed.

#### **3.5.1 Social media, information and voice**

The ability of the poor to access a variety of online platforms, especially social media sites, warrants a deeper look into the variances in internet and social media activities between users from different socio-economic backgrounds. Albeit that even the most disadvantaged users have access (even if intermittently) to the internet and social media, inequality is still found to exist on levels beyond access (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016: 1).

More socio-economically advantaged users are inclined to use the internet to send emails, to perform financial transactions, read online news and to search for information, whereas more disadvantaged users tend to use the internet for leisure-driven engagements such as online chatting and playing games (Kumar, 2014: 1122; OECD, 2016: 1). In fact, browsing data indicates that internet users from lower socio-economic groups use the internet predominantly, and often solely, with the intention of participating and engaging on social media platforms (Viswanath et al., 2013: 202). Such virtual interaction allows the disadvantaged to bypass their education status,

class and economic background in order to communicate with others around the world – often making use of tools such as Google Translate (Kumar, 2014: 1130). It would appear, though, that this “socialisation”, the act of which is mostly driven by leisure and excitement, remains virtual and online in an attempt by the impoverished and marginalised to break out of their imposed social boundaries and to expand their relationship circles (Kumar, 2014: 1134).

However, equal access does not necessarily translate into equal opportunities, as digital inequalities do not obliterate social inequalities (Madianou, 2015: 9). In fact, the different forms of digital media usage represent other social, cultural and economic facets of social class and contemporary social structures of distinction (Yates & Lockley, 2018: 1). This reveals profound digital inequalities woven into existing social inequalities, where wealthier individuals also partake in an abundant social media landscape navigated to produce substantial benefits (Madianou, 2015: 1). Low-income individuals, on the other hand, are often trapped in an online world that, to an extent, mirrors their physical environment and relationships in which they are perpetually unable to reach beyond social boundaries by requesting actual assistance or anything more than online engagement – essentially experiencing a “stuckness” even in the promising virtual world (Madianou, 2015: 1; Schoon & Strelitz, 2014: 25; Kibere, 2016: 47). In other words, even though people affected by poverty use social media to connect with others from all around the world - something they would not have been able to do without social media - the interaction remains unequal since their engagements rarely translate into anything more than online chatting. Better resourced or wealthier people, on the other hand, can and do use social media to tangibly benefit from it.

Evidently, there are prominent differences between the social media activities of the poor and the non-poor. Blank (2013: 590) distinguishes between three types of social media content creation – skilled content, social and entertainment content, and political content (Blank, 2013: 590). These different types of content creation further highlight discrepancies between users from different socio-economic backgrounds. Skilled content entails blogging, writing an online diary, poetry, or managing a personal website (Blank, 2013: 597). It is called skilled content as it demands certain technological and creative skills as well as dedicated commitment (Blank, 2013: 597). Posting photos and uploading video content or music files is considered social and

entertainment content creation, and political content creation describes acts of forwarding, sharing, liking and commenting on social and political matters (Blank, 2013: 598). Elite socio-economic groups and individuals are predominantly associated with political content creation whereas social and entertainment content is more common among lower-income and marginalised communities (Blank, 2013: 590; Micheli, 2016: 565).

The mere differences in patterns of activity may exclude the poor from opportunities, since where advantaged users would use the internet and social media as a tool to enrol for online courses, respond to career opportunities, enquire about law-making processes or alert municipalities of violations or concerns, disadvantaged users may not be aware of these opportunities that the technology presents, as their engagement is centered around other behaviours (OECD, 2016: 3). The concept of socio-economic inequality in a digital world, encompassing the activities social media users engage in and the differences in practices across income barriers, highlights additional discrepancies. In fact, Indaco and Manovich (2016: 3) focus on what they term “social media inequality”, which refers to “the measure of the distribution of characteristics from social media content shared in a particular geographic area or between areas”. This, in essence, speaks to the inconsistency found in the pictures that people of different socio-economic backgrounds post online. Those who do not live in affluent areas, but who commute there and back for work purposes tend to post pictures of their whereabouts only during lunch hours or before and after work, whereas those who live in parts of the city associated with higher median incomes display their surroundings on a more frequent basis (Indaco & Manovich, 2016: 3).

Seeing that one’s geographical location of residence and socialisation can easily be detected based on social media posts, the inequality in terms of content received via these platforms further indicates a difference in online interaction between the rich and the poor. Businesses and companies use the information obtained from users’ social media postings to present what they deem could financially benefit them (the businesses and companies) (Fertik, 2013: 1). Based on their analysis, companies make decisions about individuals and if they are, in fact, worth marketing and selling to at all (Fertik, 2013: 1). In other words, in the event that an individual finds themselves on the “wrong side of the digital tracks”, something that is bound to happen to someone affected by income poverty, they may not be privy to knowledge about credit offerings,



loans or other personal and/or professional assistance that may very well be able to assist them with upward mobility (Fertik, 2013: 1).

This essentially suggests that the poor see an entirely different internet and social media, as the customisation of social media feeds (determining who belongs to the right side of the digital tracks and who does not) is done through the use of algorithms (filter bubbles) set by the platform as a result of the navigational behaviour patterns of the internet user (Prakash, 2016: 18321).

Where poverty might affect the social media and internet behaviour of individuals, unemployment as a variable itself should be considered. Being unemployed has implications beyond simply being without a job and losing income (Feuls et al., 2016: 945). Unemployment also often entails the forfeiture of social structure, and participation in a social context which results in unemployed persons experiencing boredom, detachment and a sense of exclusion (Jeffrey, 2010: 471; Feuls et al., 2016: 945). Being unemployed is a fluid and unrestrictive experience for a person finding themselves in such a situation, since they usually have a considerable amount of free time with little or no structure (Muller et al., 2018: 264). As much as some of their time may be dedicated to finding employment, large parts of their day are frequently spent just waiting, and without definite instructions or guidance on what to do, which is usually associated with employment (Muller et al., 2018: 264).

The way in which the unemployed experience the internet cannot be generalised, as each person affected by unemployment will have their own internet engagement patterns (Feuls et al., 2016: 958). Where the internet may assist in alleviating some of the negative repercussions of being unemployed by introducing, facilitating and maintaining online or virtual connections that may produce employment opportunities, online engagement has also proven to result in problems such as depression and procrastination, due to heavy internet usage (Muller et al., 2018: 264). In fact, Feuls et al. (2016: 958) distinguish between three types of unemployed internet users: The first group uses the internet predominantly as a tool to overcome unemployment either through applying for online job advertisements or by posting content that would promote their services (Feuls et al., 2016: 958-959). For the second group, the internet facilitates social life and they use it to organise social gatherings and to increase their knowledge, whereas the third group use the internet to disengage from the real



world and real life to create a unique environment online where unemployment does not take centre stage and where job searching, as a result, is not high in importance or priority (Feuls et al., 2016: 958-959).

In cases where the computer becomes the epicentre of an unemployed person's life and daily routine, their interaction with the internet and social media platforms may lead to procrastination. Procrastination refers to "the voluntary delay of an intended and necessary and/or [personally] important activity, despite expecting potential negative consequences that outweigh the positive consequences of the delay" (Klingsieck, 2013: 26). As a result of communication devices (computers, laptops, mobile phones, tablets) usually being comfortably accessible, it is easy and tempting to use these devices to procrastinate (Muller et al., 2018: 264). Procrastination could actually even be seen as an understandable and reasonable activity when an unemployed person may need detachment from the frustration of job searching (Muller et al., 2018: 264; Reinecke & Hofmann, 2016: 15). Procrastination as a result of internet and social media use can be harmful and damaging, however, in terms of self control and the achievement of important objectives and goals (Muller et al., 2018: 264; Reinecke & Hofmann, 2016: 15). It may, in fact, lead to further exclusion and a loss of motivation, which could have detrimental effects for the unemployed (Muller et al., 2018: 271).

As mentioned earlier, the unemployed do not experience their situation in the same way across the board, and in the same vein, one should determine whether online procrastination is indeed problematic (Muller et al., 2018: 271). Research suggests that in some cases, although unemployed individuals were found to use the internet and social media to procrastinate, this did not negatively impact their job searching activities as the two activities (online procrastination and looking for a job) are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Muller et al., 2018: 271). Even the use of social media has its benefits, especially during times of unemployment. Social networking sites are conducive to cultivating social support networks and to alleviating feelings of exclusion (Feuls et al., 2014: 551, 567-568). Literature does indicate, however, that using social media to establish new professional or personal contacts and to liaise with potential employers or networks that could assist in overcoming unemployment and re-entering the productive sphere of society remains low for unemployed social media users (Feuls et al., 2014: 551, 568).

In sum, the challenges the unemployed face should be treated with sensitivity and in studying any part of their lives or behaviour, including their internet and social media engagements, the unemployed should not be treated as a homogenous group. Instead, they must be seen as individuals with unique traits and experiences (Feuls et al., 2016: 958), much as “the poor” does not constitute a valid and universal category that is the same across all communities and persons affected by poverty (Krishna. 2009: 948).

### 3.5.2 Poverty, social capital and social media

This section investigates how social capital in a network is related to poverty, and explores the link between social capital and social media activity. The role social capital plays in providing individuals with networks that spread information and provide voice platforms is considered, with emphasis on poverty in this context.

#### *3.5.2.1 Networks, poverty and social capital*

When studying communities and networks, the relationships between people should be taken into consideration (Wellman, 1988: 20). Any social network comprises actors (nodes) and the relationship between these actors – the ties or edges (Sauer & Kauffeld, 2013: 28; Borgatti & Foster, 2003: 992; Van Dijck, 2012: 250; Collar, 2007: 152). The network perspective can be used to understand poverty. In fact, networks surrounding impoverished individuals and communities are of crucial importance since these networks are instrumental factors contributing to financial deprivation (Marques et al., 2008: 10).

Generally, the poor suffer from “network poverty”, which suggests that their relationships are predominantly with other resource-poor people (van Eijk, 2010: 469). Since social connectivity and network integration have an effect on survival strategies and living conditions, network poverty is a risk factor, and perhaps even a cause of unemployment and poverty (Osterling, 2007: 124; Marques et al., 2008: 12). After all, in a network-poor environment, ties to important resources such as skills, knowledge, wealth and power are scarce (van Eijk, 2010: 469). For this reason, value can be attached to one’s networks and the capital associated with them. Bourdieu (1986: 248-249) describes and defines social capital as follows:

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit in the various senses of the word.

Network studies on poverty focus on a person's social capital and the effect this has on poverty and upward mobility (Gowan, 2010: 60). Portes (1998: 2) explains that while social capital highlights the benefits of sociability, it also draws attention to the framework of social networks and how these are important sources of power and influence. In other words, if a person lacks the right networks (is network poor), they essentially become stuck in their poverty (Osterling, 2007: 123, 130; Gowan, 2010: 51). This concept of network poverty or social poverty (Lewandowski, 2008: 27) is so considerable in understanding poverty that social capital has been considered to be the missing link in understanding economic development (DeFilippis, 2001: 784; Putnam, 1995: 66).

Although social capital is connected to a person's socio-economic status, this is not to say that poor people lack social capital entirely (Afridi, 2011: 10). The problem is, however, that poor individuals and poor communities possess and nurture the wrong kind of social capital (Osterling, 2007: 123). In this context, one should differentiate between bridging capital and bonding capital (Gowan, 2010: 51; Van Eijck, 2010: 478; Osterling, 2007: 130). Bridging social capital comes from weak ties that reach beyond a person's immediate social circle and across socio-economic boundaries (Osterling, 2007: 130; Gowan, 2010: 51; Lewandowski, 2008: 32; Granovetter, 1973: 1364). Bridging capital therefore has the ability to provide opportunities for upward mobility (Lewandowski, 2008: 32). Bonding capital, on the other hand, comes from a person's central, primary networks of strong ties (Adato et al., 2006: 245; Saracostti, 2007: 520; Santini & De Pascale, 2012: 19; Granovetter, 1973: 1364). These strong and close networks are helpful in providing assistance with basic day-to-day tasks, but they are unable to uplift poor individuals (Adato et al., 2006: 245; Saracostti, 2007: 520; Santini & De Pascale, 2012: 19; Granovetter, 1973: 1364).

A network that mostly includes bonding ties - relationships that are closely connected - can be viewed as a redundant network suffering from weak-tie poverty (Van Eijck, 2010: 478; Osterling, 2007: 130). To support an economically sustainable and balanced life, both bridging and bonding capital are needed (Saracostti, 2007: 520; Woolcock, 2001: 78; Huda, Rahman & Guirguis, 2008: 312). Since the networks of the poor are not resource-rich or successful, limited or no opportunities and resources can be accessed through their networks (Letki & Mierina, 2015: 221). Furthermore, since the poor do not have much to offer that could be of benefit to others, establishing ties with those who are economically advantaged is difficult (Letki & Mierina, 2015: 221). For this reason, the poor's networks remain firm and unchanging – mostly restricted to other people that are poor (Letki & Mierina, 2015: 221). This essentially amplifies and perpetuates their social and financial isolation (Osterling, 2007: 130; Gowan, 2010: 51). Taking Bourdieu's view into account that success is determined by who you know, the social capital of the poor brings to the forefront the harsh realities of social inequality (Gauntlett, 2011: 132).

Since networks are helpful in providing access to schools, jobs and other opportunities, elite groups and networks tend to be closed, private and restricted (DeFilippis, 2001: 784; Afridi, 2011: 10). This reinforces social divisions and patterns of exclusion and segregation (Letki & Mierina, 2015: 221). People of a higher socio-economic class seldom engage with individuals in lower socio-economic groups, and this creates and maintains class monopolies (Afridi, 2011: 10). In the same vein, as inequality increases, so does the desire of the middle-class and elite to preserve their unequally distributed privilege (Letki & Mierina, 2015: 221). As a result, both disadvantages and benefits accumulate respectively – the poor stay poor and become poorer, and the wealthy increasingly leverage their networks to extend their power and affluence (Letki & Mierina, 2015: 221). Poor people's social capital and their potential to enhance their social capital is therefore severely hampered by the elite's intolerance for outsiders, and their active interest in excluding and marginalising others (Baiyegunhi, 2014: 49). Since social capital is a strong predictor and indicator of household poverty, strong social networks spanning across socio-economic divides are needed to alleviate poverty, and the absence of these far-reaching networks has a calamitous effect on the wellbeing of the poor (Baiyegunhi, 2014: 49; du Toit, Skuse & Cousins, 2007: 521).

Just as the networks of socially and economically disadvantaged individuals are less diverse than the networks of individuals with high social standing, so are the networks of poor communities (Hofreiter & Bahna, 2020: 104; DeFilippis, 2001: 783-784). Social capital does not only pertain to individuals, but also the communities these individuals live in (Huda et al., 2008: 312). The social capital of a community is characterised by the relationships, values and attitudes overarching the interaction between people and institutions (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2001: 4) This impacts the economic and social development of a community (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2001: 4). A socio-economic mix in a community as well as neighbourhood resources such as childcare centres, parks, libraries and recreational facilities could therefore play an instrumental role in enhancing community members' social capital through interaction with others that are not equally poverty-stricken (Curley, 2010: 93-94; Weaver, 2012: 70). Since social ties are established and developed through contact, the opportunity to socially interact outside of one's socio-economic sphere, can be profound (Curley, 2010: 93-94). If poor communities remain isolated from better-resourced environments, these settings essentially become poverty traps (Gowan, 2010: 51).

In order to alleviate poverty, community development programmes need to move away from a geographical paradigm and its fixation on neighbourhood, and acknowledge that poor people deserve and require the same geographically open, diverse networks that middle-class people have access to (Saracostti, 2007: 525). Governmental and social agencies need to implement strategic, creative community interventions to promote the enhancement of social capital for poor people through building networks across socio-economic and geographically segregated lines (Weaver, 2012: 70; Saracostti, 2007: 524). In this vein, hobby groups, sports teams and places of religious worships are accessible conduits for social capital enhancement since they are not restricted or defined by exclusivity (Weaver, 2012: 70; Saracostti, 2007: 525). Lastly, social media platforms may assist impoverished individuals in bridging barriers such as poverty and socio-economic status to engage with people of all backgrounds (Ahn, 2011: 159, Micheli, 2016: 565).

A lack of social capital or weak, bridging ties that can enhance upward mobility is directly connected to poverty. Relationships with individuals outside the restriction of impoverished communities are needed to end the cycle of poverty. Although bridging ties are difficult to establish as a result of the exclusive nature of elite networks, there are ways in which this can be done. It is therefore important to consider the avenues and platforms available that could assist in the enhancement of social capital and the establishment of bridging capital or weak ties. The important role this may play in the alleviation of poverty is profound.

### *3.5.2.2 Social capital and social media*

Social capital, the sum of a person's network and human resource connections, assists individuals with opportunities for upward mobility and access to wealth (Brooks et al., 2011: 529). Since the poor's networks are typically challenged and mostly consist of other resource-poor individuals, their networks are seldom able to provide more than basic support (Santini & De Pascale, 2012: 19; Granovetter, 1973: 1364). Where physical social boundaries are designed to keep different socio-economic groups separate, social media provides unique conditions for possibly altering this and allowing all users, irrespective of social and economic background, access to weak ties (Micheli, 2016: 565; Wellman, Haase, Witte and Hampton, 2001: 436; Gil de Zúñiga, 2012: 329; Utz & Muscanell, 2015: 422).

The nature of social network sites enables users to establish and maintain relationships in a convenient and cost-effective manner (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007: 1161-1162). Social media use shows a positive correlation with creating and nurturing bridging capital, and in many ways the low cost of social media engagement eases the participation on these platforms for users with compromised financial means (Ellison et al., 2007: 1162; Gil de Zúñiga, 2012: 329; Utz & Muscanell, 2015: 422). Facebook especially provides a foothold and entry point for socially and financially disadvantaged users to interact with others in order to build bridging ties (Bouchillon & Gotlieb, 2017: 312; Greenhow & Burton, 2011: 223). In providing someone who would have hesitated under different circumstances with a platform to initiate contact and communication, impoverished individuals are able to establish networks from which they could potentially benefit (Ellison et al., 2007: 1164).



Furthermore, social engagements across socio-economic spheres on Facebook develop communication competence – enabling even the most physically isolated person to increasingly interact more effectively (Bouchillon & Gotlieb, 2017: 299). In this vein, Milioni, Doudaki and Demertzis (2014: 333) point out that the disadvantaged eagerly make use of social media to create and share content, communicate and learn. This could even be viewed as a reverse digital divide, suggesting that impoverished and marginalised social groups are more motivated and inclined to use social media to enhance their bridging social capital (Milioni et al., 2014: 333). This is further aided by the more open nature of social network sites, especially compared to offline social networks that tend to be closed and exclusive (Lee, 2006: 4). It can therefore be said that social media assists users, often specifically those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, to increase the number of weak ties they have (Kavanaugh et al., 2005: 1; Zhao, 2006: 844; Ellison et al., 2007: 1143; Ellison et al., 2014: 863; Bouchillon & Gotlieb, 2017: 299). These ties, in turn, are mined by users to extract opportunities for upward mobility (Kavanaugh et al., 2005: 1; Ellison et al., 2014: 863; Ellison et al., 2007: 1143).

Despite online connections often mirroring physical networks and the access thereto (boyd & Ellison, 2008: 221), social media platforms have been able to break socio-economic barriers (Micheli, 2016: 565). Motives, intent and status aspirations are key differentiators in the active pursuit of obtaining bridging social capital using social media (Lee, 2006: 2; Johnston et al., 2013: 35; Mahmood, Zakar & Zakar, 2018: 856). The intensity of Facebook use has a direct impact on a user's bridging social capital – especially for low-income users (Johnston et al., 2013: 35; Mahmood et al., 2018: 856; Greenhow & Burton, 2011: 235). In other words, when users make a concerted, goal-directed effort to expand their personal networks, social media platforms enable them to enlarge and diversify the contacts they have (Bouchillon & Gotlieb, 2017: 299).

The relationships that are nurtured through social media could intensify to the extent that they offer emotional support (Lee, 2006: 2). Even low-income individuals who have depressed offline social capital benefit from support obtained through social media community engagement (Lee, 2006: 2). When users indicate a desire and motivation to grow weak ties on social media and for these to fulfil needs for esteem, the responses received are usually sufficient (High & Buehler, 2017: 719). Just the mere fact that someone is invested enough in a social media connection to respond



in an encouraging manner is often all the support a person trying to build bridging capital needs (High & Buehler, 2017: 734). Thus, from the point of view that social media platforms facilitate introductions to supportive networks, the benefits and potential for doing good of the likes of Facebook can no longer be overlooked (Bouchillon & Gottlieb, 2017: 312). In considering the pivotal role that social media plays in acquiring and sustaining networks, the social power these platforms offer is considerable (Lee, 2006: 2).

The advantages that marginalised and impoverished groups derive from using social media to increase their social capital warrants a deeper understanding of using social media for fundraising. Bridging social capital and weak ties could very well assist economically marginalised people and communities in bettering their circumstances, not only through opportunities for upward mobility, but also by finding donors willing to assist them in overcoming immediate pressing financial challenges.

#### 3.5.2.2.1 Using social capital accrued through social media to improve the lives of the poor

Social capital is built and nurtured by being part of relationships, and certain relationships with individuals and organisations have the ability to improve and enhance the circumstances of individuals and the communities they are part of (Taylor, 2011: 441). The weak, bridging ties accumulated through social media interaction could potentially be the key to resource development for disadvantaged communities as being actively entrenched in social relationships (virtual or physical) is central to fostering social capital (Miloni et al., 2014: 333; Davis & Moscato, 2018: 283). This interchange, made possible through online social network spaces, between building social capital and opportunities for engagement and participation, is vital for individuals and communities that are isolated from others (for whatever reason) and who would, under normal, physical circumstances, be excluded from fundraising occasions and relationships that could assist with resources (Davis & Moscato, 2018: 283; Briones et al., 2011: 38).

Social networking sites have introduced and facilitated new and novel ways of raising and donating money to individuals, organisations and causes (Saxton & Wang, 2014: 862). Recipients and audiences that have mostly been unrecognised or unnoticed, unable to connect with one another, are now provided with powerful ways to make contact and to raise and exchange money and other resources (Davis & Moscato,

2018: 284). The social network effect increases the chance of charitable contributions through the very essence of social media – reaching expanding circles of contacts through being part of a large virtual social network (Saxton & Wang, 2014: 862-863). Although donations from social networking sites like Facebook are typically small, these donors are more preoccupied with the cause they are donating to than the efficiency of any charitable organisation (Saxton & Wang, 2014: 864)

Social media can be used to bring awareness to a cause, to sustain a community of donors and supporters, and to accrue or mobilise resources (Guo & Saxton, 2013: 74). Thus, the effective utilisation of the internet and social media can boost a community, organisation or individual's ability to successfully source and secure funding or other assistance from those willing and prepared to help and provide (Hackler & Saxton, 2007: 474).

#### 3.5.2.2.2 The pornography of poverty

The conceptualisation and visual representation of the poor and poverty are often concerning practices even when done by non-profit organisations focused on alleviating the experience of poverty for those affected by it (Clair & Anderson, 2013: 537-538). The promotional material that is circulated, most often to raise funds, may actually be harmful to the poor as these portray a limited and narrow-minded view of what it is like to be poor (Clair & Anderson, 2013: 537-538). Poverty pornography displays destitution and desperation in its most extreme forms as exploitation to shock viewers and audiences, and in such severe portrayals, poverty becomes consumable (Van Schagen, 2015: 64). Nathanson (2013: 104) describes how “images of buzzing flies, begging eyes, and bloated bellies” flood media platforms, and how this presents distorted depictions of what poverty entails. As a result of the pornography of poverty, the public remains uneducated regarding the root causes of poverty, and the societal attitude and approach to poverty remains characterised by guilt, charity, helplessness, paternalism, and in some cases, racism (Nathanson, 2013: 104). In these cases, the “spectacle of the poor” socially constructs the supposed role of caregiver and recipient (Lancione, 2014: 707).

In not acknowledging the role the poor play in the improvement of their own lives, it creates a blatant difference between us and them (Rutherford, 2000: 135). In fact, the pornography of poverty focuses solely on eliciting emotions of pity and guilt from potential donors in highlighting the helplessness and vulnerability of the poor – predominantly in the global South (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008: 1476). This brings to the forefront the unequal relations between the two parties, even portraying the westerner as superior in terms of race and culture, and perpetuating the narrative of the superior global North assisting an inferior global South (Sin & He, 2019: 219).

When poverty is depicted in such aggressive ways, poor communities and individuals often experience invisibility in not meeting the expected criteria of being poor (Lancione, 2014: 707). In these cases, impoverished individuals report that they only receive attention on media platforms when they resort to extreme, destructive or violent behaviour (Wasserman, Bosch & Chuma, 2016: 3). Their daily fight for survival and ongoing struggle to access government channels receive limited coverage (Wasserman et al., 2016: 3; Berger, 2003: 7). Essentially, the lack of definitive resolution and happy endings pushes the poverty agenda further into the corner of invisibility since the public displays very little interest in a perpetuating sad story that remains an obstinate reality of life (Garces, 2012: 1).

In other words, if and when poverty is not sensational or dramatic, it is not considered quite newsworthy enough. This naturally results in the poor becoming increasingly invisible in the public sphere (Lancione, 2014: 708). It further defines their role in society and portrays the reality of poverty in an over-simplistic and consumable manner.

#### 3.5.2.2.3 Going viral – reaching millions with a message

The very nature of social media enables those with restrictive physical boundaries to reach beyond these to form weak bridging ties with individuals and institutions that would otherwise be almost impossible to reach or penetrate. It also gives individuals the opportunity to create and post a story or information about their plight which, if effectively constructed and circulated, has the ability to reach thousands of people.

A viral video or message, one that reaches thousands and even millions of people, is considered the new driving force of popular culture (West, 2011: 77). As people are increasingly using social media such as Facebook and Twitter as their primary news

sources, researchers are progressively seeking for answers to what causes certain shared topics, clips and articles to be spread aggressively and intensely among a wide variety of groups and people (Friedman, 2014: 33; West, 2011: 76). Research suggests that people like to click and share things that make them and others feel something or that teaches them something, and, crucially, what makes them feel that they are part of the times and the current popular mood or sentiment (Friedman, 2014: 33). West (2011: 79-81) considers the following characteristics essential to a video or information piece becoming a viral success: appropriate length and run-time, elements of laughter, surprise, irony, ethnic minority presence, youth, talent and music.

Raising funds is dependent on shedding light on a particular plight or cause – raising awareness with as many people as possible (Adamsson & Axner, 2015/2016: 3). Using social media to incorporate and distribute powerful emotional characteristics that may prompt feelings of empathy or even sadness significantly raises an individual, community or organisation's chances of reaching large audiences (Adamsson & Axner, 2015/2016: 55). Considering that participatory internet involvement through the creation of general social content is more common amongst lower-income and marginalised users than other groups (Micheli, 2016: 565), the poor and the disadvantaged not only have content that may appeal to those in a position to assist, but they may also, in spite of a lack of resources, be equipped to produce material and liaise with donors in a constructive and beneficial way.

#### 3.5.2.2.4 The dark side of social capital

Social media platforms are successful in connecting the poor to well-resourced individuals and organisations. These relationships are often embedded in power dynamics, however, and they may perpetuate a dependency on donor-recipient type networks (Huda et al., 2008: 312). This can be considered the dark side of social capital (Huda et al., 2008: 312). Ayios et al. (2013: 110-111) succinctly describe the dark side of social capital as follows:

To sum up the arguments regarding social capital's "dark side", it is a resource that can be subject to high levels of selectivity and manipulation by actors using it and those subject to it, and this can lead to great inequalities and perverse outcomes in the attainment of optimum "economic outcomes".

In the framework of donor-recipient, one should consider the power dynamics still at play even when the networks between low-income individuals or communities and the elite overlap. The group of givers remains close-knit and exclusive (Whittaker & Holland-Smith, 2014: 356). In fact, through the act of charity and volunteering, their bonds with others in the same socio-economic sphere who are also contributing may strengthen (Whittaker & Holland-Smith, 2014: 356). In other words, the groups within the respective sides of the bridging capital ties will remain predominantly homogeneous, built around a shared interest – further entrenching social positions (Hearne & Powell, 2014: 498; Edwards & Onyx, 2007: 17).

The agency of the poor should not be underestimated, nor should their strategies for daily survival (Huda et al., 2008: 312). In consistently only offering weak ties or bridging capital in a donation-type capacity, instead of full, real access to networks, these relationships between donor and recipient lend themselves to abuse and manipulation (Whittaker & Holland-Smith, 2014: 356). The repeated requests for assistance by marginalised groups may exhaust any network capacity and turn a relationship into a finger-pointing exercise of who is to blame for not doing what (Portes, 2014: 18407). Poverty rehabilitation or recovery may in fact be hampered by ever-present access to aid-providing social networks (Weston, Honor & Best, 2017: 490). Those fully reliant on bridging capital networks to survive may end up entirely social capital deficient (Billett, 2012: 847). Furthermore, as discussed in the work by Freire (1970: 74), the oppressed should not be seen as “marginals” or people living on the “outside”. Considering this perspective, the solution is not to integrate the poor into a structure of oppression as “beings for others”, but to transform this structure to allow them to be beings for themselves, independent and self-sufficient (Freire, 1970: 74),

De Souza Briggs (1997: 113) highlights cautionary points. Firstly, while social capital may be beneficial for one individual, it does not automatically imply that it is good for the community (De Souza Briggs, 1997: 113) Individuals may be intent only on pursuing their own goals without this resulting in anything positive for their wider community (De Souza Briggs, 1997: 113). Secondly, social capital is accrued through repeated exchanges - borrowing and lending - between parties (De Souza Briggs, 1997: 113). This one-sided power relationship continues to marginalise (De Souza Briggs, 1997: 113). Thirdly, social capital is only valued for the service and benefits it

can provide, and, lastly, due to the dynamics involved in weak tie relationships, especially those characterised by donor-recipient activities, there is still a division drawn along the same fault lines that caused inequality in the first place (De Souza Briggs, 1997: 114-115).

#### 3.5.2.2.5 The social capital of the poor white

Within the context of social capital of networked communities, and social capital as a factor in poverty, whiteness as a form of social capital should be considered. Whiteness itself has been viewed as important capital in the construction of social status as those able to claim it with success receive elevated positions within existing social hierarchies (Reiter, 2010: 19). Furthermore, white people tend to have greater access to resources and power than people of colour do which suggests that purely on the basis of skin colour, doors are open to those who are white that are not open to those that are not (Kendall, 2002: 1). Whiteness also appears to have a cash value – through insider networks that channel employment opportunities to the relatives, friends and acquaintances of those who have profited and benefitted most from past racial discrimination (Lipsitz, 1998: vii; Winddance Twine, 2010: 292). Whiteness is therefore a highly desirable form of capital to all those who stand to benefit from it (Reiter, 2010: 27) In fact, whiteness has developed into the strongest marker of elevated social status as it almost automatically symbolises education, employment, money, car ownership and having access to certain services and, most importantly, contacts. (Reiter, 2010: 27).

Whiteness and even being associated with a white person (if a person is not white themselves) is often seen as an asset – a source of economic and social capital, since social mobility has, in the past, not consistently been an option open to people who are not white (Davis, 2016: 339; Garner, 2006: 266; Winddance Twine, 2010: 292). In the global context, whiteness is therefore marked as a visible superior identity of power intrinsically linked to the global circulation of capital, culture and people (Lan, 2011: 1669, 1690). In order for a fair and equal world to flourish, the daily practices and racial hierarchies that reconfirm and assert white privilege need to be dismantled (Winddance Twine & Gallagher, 2008: 19-20).



In the South African context, the concept of whiteness holds a unique position (Steyn, 2005: 122). White people have lost their political power, yet they still largely maintain economic power – their social capital is thus skewed as they are not marginalised but not sovereign leaders either (Steyn, 2005: 122). Whiteness is a phenomenon practically unthinkable in a context where white does not naturally equal power at some structural level (Garner, 2006: 262). However, since definitive hierarchies exist within groups referred to as white, research should consider the power and disempowerment experienced by white people with differing relationships to social, economic and cultural capital – for example the poor white (Garner, 2006: 268). For this study, it is crucial to consider the more advantaged and privileged circles a person may have access to on social media purely because they are white – poor or not. Whiteness as social capital may very well be a present reality on social media even for users that are severely financially impoverished.

In a networked society, the value of an individual's networks can be measured as social capital. A person needs a healthy combination of weak ties (bridging capital) and strong ties (bonding capital) to sustain a balanced life. The poor often lack bridging capital – ties that connect them with people in higher socio-economic brackets that could offer opportunities to break free from poverty. Since elite circles are difficult to penetrate, the power imbalance between the rich and the poor has remained relatively constant. Social media offers a unique prospect of bridging the threshold between the rich and the poor. Although a divide remains, low-income social media users with intent and social motivation are increasingly able to build weak ties and to leverage these for their benefit and survival through fundraising campaigns. Unfortunately, this has paved the way for practices such as the pornography of poverty where poverty is made consumable and extreme for maximum donor extraction.

In the same vein, the dark side of social capital received attention, as the power dynamics of donor and recipient brings into question the efficacy of penetrating different socio-economic circles through social media. If the relationship remains purely one of giver and receiver, a charity environment is created that lends itself to abuse and manipulation. In order to truly balance social power, an equal footing is necessary and not one of pity and guilt. Lastly, this section concludes with a brief focus on whiteness as social capital. This ties into the dark side of social capital in terms of the power imbalance that whiteness perpetuates. The association of whiteness with



economic, social and political power creates a challenging position for white South Africans that do not fit the mould of what is expected of someone who is white – to be financially stable and successful. This concluded the discussion on social networks, social capital and social media.

### *3.5.2.3 Preferred social media platforms – Facebook and WhatsApp*

In Leal's previous research (2015-2017), she found that participants solely use Facebook and WhatsApp. This was confirmed again in this study. This section discusses the social media functionalities of these two platforms.

#### *3.5.2.3.1 Facebook*

Facebook allows users to distribute and broadcast information (photos, messages, videos) - personal and relational - through public posts (Carr & Hayes, 2015: 52). Facebook's functionality enables users to disseminate these messages either directly to friends and contacts or to a mass, often interpersonal, audience (Carr & Hayes, 2015: 52). Facebook further encourages users to peruse the posts submitted by their friends, and it offers multiple options and methods to respond to posts – privately and/or openly (Sumner, Ruge-Jones & Alcorn: 2018: 1454). In other words, through Facebook, a person is not limited to direct interpersonal communication as is the case with cell phone text messages (Carr & Hayes, 2015: 52). Furthermore, Facebook broadens feedback opportunities that are generally restricted by mass media organisations since it allows messages to flow freely between users, from user to audience, audience to user and audience to audience (Carr & Hayes, 2015: 52).

The interactive functionality of Facebook that encourages users to share, comment and like is fundamental to the widespread use of this social media platform (Sumner et al., 2018: 1454). The other main differentiating features of Facebook are: events (notifications of birthdays and other social updates), timeline (used for photos sharing, adding new friends and other relevant content), social plugins allowing users to comment on trends and popular topics which are then added directly to the active page, relationship status updates, turning off notifications, and newsfeed (Sumner et al., 2018: 1454).

As a result of these powerful communicative tools, Facebook is, in many ways, considered central to people's engagement and interaction with one another – through groups with similar interests, familiar contacts or shared connections (Hermida et al., 2012: 815). In fact, the convenient usability of Facebook that allows for the quick and seamless sharing of self (through posting, commenting, liking and sharing) to several friends simultaneously has made it the most popular social media platform in the world. It has, as per Facebook's mission of 2016, given people "the power to share and make the world more open and connected" (Alhabash & Ma, 2017: 2).

#### 3.5.2.3.2 WhatsApp

The main difference between WhatsApp and Facebook is that Facebook focuses on social networking through the sharing of a variety of media, and the updating of events and statuses (Reg, 2015: 1). WhatsApp, on the other hand, is designed especially for smartphones with the intent to distribute messages (Reg, 2015: 1). Another important functionality difference is that WhatsApp users are not able to like or comment on posts of other WhatsApp users (Reg, 2015: 1). As a result of these differences in functionality, Facebook renders itself better to multi-tasking in terms of communication practices whereas WhatsApp's more intimate landscape renders users more present in their acts of communication (Karapanos, Teixeira & Gouveia, 2016: 888).

Although WhatsApp is predominantly a text message service, it is considered a social media platform since it facilitates communication with others, in groups or individually, and it allows users to broadcast a message to a wider audience (Karapanos et al., 2016: 888). In this vein, WhatsApp is a communicative space that is instrumental in maintaining personal relationships, organising political movements, facilitating voice in civil society, and aiding virtual education (Pindayi, 2017: 35; Güler, 2016: 272; Dahdal, 2020: 239). It is specifically the WhatsApp group functionality that catapults it into the social media sphere as it is not a messaging platform that allows solely for one-to-one communication (Stip, Mugaddam & Amiri, 2020: 1). In fact, users are increasingly members of several WhatsApp groups in which all the members are not necessarily known to the user (Güler, 2016: 272; Chen & Neo, 2019: 4). Furthermore, WhatsApp allows users to create a profile picture and to update their WhatsApp status, which is central to social media (Jakaza, 2020: 1).

### 3.6 Conclusion

From a Communication and Media Studies perspective, voice and information are crucial as they help people navigate the world they live in. Worldwide, people living in poverty usually have less access to information and fewer opportunities to voice their thoughts and concerns than those who are wealthier and better-resourced. This implies that poverty is associated with voice and information poverty.

Furthermore, the plight of people living in poverty is often not foregrounded in the media (one of the key carriers of information and thus a great influencer of public opinion). If poor people are represented in the media, it is often from an outsider perspective, meaning that they do not have the opportunity to put forth their voice as the media elite speaks on their behalf. The problem with this is that a wider social understanding of the plight of poor people is not that evident in the media.

The advent of the interactive ability of the web, and specifically social media, is that ordinary people (thus also the marginalised and those living in poverty) can voice their views. However, the interactive web is not necessarily the panacea to voice poverty as not everybody has equal access to express their views via social media. Nevertheless, current research has found that people in poverty do use social media to a certain extent - the accessibility of social media platforms and the relatively low cost associated with this type of engagement results in low-income individuals being active participants on social media platforms - especially Facebook and WhatsApp. Whilst these networking sites allow the disadvantaged and marginalised to break free from restrictive physical boundaries, there are digital inequalities that remain married to socio-economic background which could cause a sense of stuckness.

Generally speaking, however, people use social media for self-expression, identity, pleasure, surveillance, connectedness and simply to pass time. On the other hand, the downside of social media involves cyberbullying and trolling as well as the distribution and dissemination of fake news.

This study focuses on the role and impact of social media in impoverished communities. Applying existing knowledge to this study, to people living in poverty, it is crucial to consider social capital and how social media ties into social capital. It is bridging social capital (loose ties spread across different and particularly higher socio-economic brackets) that leads to upward mobility and a balanced economic life. Not

coincidentally, it is also bridging social capital that is lacking in impoverished communities.

In this vein, current research indicates that social media does enhance the social capital of the poor – especially bridging social capital. Although a sense of stuckness is experienced by users in low-income communities, frustrated by their low physical mobility, social media platforms enable even impoverished individuals to reach out to others irrespective of their financial deprivation. Through social media, especially Facebook, users can connect with others from around the world to experience connectedness and partake in all the other “bright side of social media” activities.

The connections that are established through social media may further produce actual physical results for individuals and communities affected by poverty. Fundraising activities are common on social media platforms, and the beneficial ties established between donor and recipient are often purely a result of Facebook connectivity. This unfortunately paves the way for poverty being depicted in its most aggressive and extreme form. The practice of poverty pornography aims to depict graphically dramatic imagery to invoke intense reactions of pity and guilt in potential donors. This harms those affected by income poverty as their plight and suffering may be downplayed when not creating intense signs of being impoverished. Shock value does underpin the communication of poverty on social media, however, as the most effective fundraising campaigns rely on messages going viral – reaching thousands in a short space of time.

Whilst social media may be effective in propagating help and support for poor communities, the dark side of social capital has also reared its head. This brings into question whether the loose ties (bridging social capital) that poor individuals establish with donors through social media are really beneficial in terms of upliftment at all. In the donor-recipient relationship, the skewed power dynamics remain, as the elite circles are never truly penetrated by those in lower socio-economic spheres – the relationships remain unequal. Furthermore, the ties between benefactors may actually strengthen as they engage in a common purpose to assist the poor.

In summary, this chapter has discussed social media use and how this can lead to inclusion for people and communities of all socio-economic spheres. It explored the benefits as well as the challenges associated with social media engagement. It

specifically focused on social capital, the role social media plays in its enhancement, and the evils it has produced as a result. The inclusive nature of social media platforms should however not be overlooked in the spirit of focusing on negatives.

The rest of this thesis consists of empirical work researching the role and impact of social media in white informal settlements in Gauteng, South Africa. It considers the bright side as well as the dark side of social capital in the lives of participants and it focuses on how social media has enhanced the social capital of participants and their communities, and what the outcome of this has been. It further discusses similarities and differences between communities and ascertains whether any patterns can be deduced.



## Chapter 4: Methodology

In the previous chapters it was argued that initially it was thought that the advent of the interactive web would be the panacea to problems experienced with access to information and voicing the views of the poor. This optimism was short-lived as it became evident that the poor have problems with access to the internet, most often due to the high cost of digital devices and access to data. Other access issues also exist, such as language divides, cultural, religious differences, and so forth. However, pockets of research are starting to emerge indicating that people living in poverty, and specifically in informal settlements, have varied access to the internet and that they are using it in important ways. Against this background, this study took shape. More specifically, this research study explores the role and impact of social media in white informal settlements in Gauteng, a rather under-investigated group. The study investigates residents' access to social media and why they use the platforms they do. Comparisons between individuals and communities are drawn to determine the impact social media has on them.

This chapter discusses the research design for the empirical part of this study. That is the intricacies, procedural aspects and implications of conducting interviews with the target population. This chapter thus explains the research approach, data collection method, sampling procedure and data analysis process. It also details the limitations of this study as well as ethical considerations specifically with regard to studying vulnerable communities.

### 4.1 Research approach

A qualitative approach was decided upon for this study since the focus is to extract rich information from residents in informal settlements on their unique social media use. Qualitative research is most often used to explore a topic where little prior knowledge exists as limited research has been undertaken on that particular subject (McLeod, 2015: 196). The description of qualitative studies by Delyser (2008: 234) aptly explains this approach's suitability to this study:

For qualitative researchers, the very research questions themselves are sought from the communities we study and work with. Our approach is often said to be “naturalistic”, meaning that we explore issues, ideas and questions on the ground, in the settings in which they arise, striving to understand and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings the groups and individuals we study and work with bring to them.

In the same vein, Chesebro and Borisoff (2007: 9) highlight key characteristics of qualitative research. Each of these correlate with this specific study. Firstly, qualitative research is done in participants’ natural or home setting (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007: 9; Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 6; Delyser, 2008: 234). The researcher visited five informal settlements, and interviews were conducted there. The informal settlements in this study varied in size, but it was easy to walk around in them and cover the entire space that is populated. Since unemployment is prevalent in these communities, it was not difficult to secure interviews as the informal settlements remained busy and occupied throughout the day. Even the participants that did report working were mostly engaged in shift work. This allowed stable availability of participants – even those who are employed in some capacity. The interviews were mostly done outside participants’ homes as residents enjoy being separated from the small confines of their informal housing structures.

The second point refers to the researcher being a participant in the study – in this vein, a participant is someone who, although known as the researcher, partakes in the verbal and non-verbal actions of communication (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007: 9; Shaw, 2003: 12; Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 5). The researcher in this study did 51 interviews with 62 participants. In each of these interviews, the researcher allowed the participants to talk freely, and she partook in these conversations without excessive rigidity and authority in terms of interview questions. This adds to the point of allowing for subject-based communication (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007: 9; Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 6). Participants in qualitative studies are allowed and encouraged to discuss topics as they wish and to transition between them as they feel comfortable (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007: 9). Although an interview guide was used in these interviews, the researcher only used it as a broad framework to guide participants in terms of overall research question. The interview guide is attached to this study as Appendix 1.



The subject intentionality is thus crucial to qualitative research (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007: 9; Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 5). This describes the process during which the researcher aims to capture, record and preserve the specific and unique language and symbols participants used during interviews (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007: 9). When transcribing interviews and analysing findings, the researcher focused on participants' use of words and phrases. In the Findings Chapter, the researcher used participants' terminology to describe themes, and their own sentences were incorporated to keep the content authentic. Lastly, qualitative research is pragmatic in the sense that the results are useful in providing insight into a social process or problem relevant at the time (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007: 9). This study focuses on social media in the context of renewed uses and gratifications, and recent interest in social capital. In this regards, it adds to the body of knowledge available and relevant at the time.

Since this study was concerned with “what”, “why” and “how” questions (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape, 2013: 3; Grossoehme, 2014: 119; McLeod, 2015: 196; du Plooy, 2009: 148), qualitative approach lent itself best to this research investigation. The goal is, after all, to produce data that is rich in words, expressions, views and opinions (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape, 2013: 3; Grossoehme, 2014: 119; McLeod, 2015: 196; du Plooy, 2009: 148). Many significant themes around experiences on social media emerged as a result of following a qualitative method in this study.

## **4.2 Method of data collection**

This study used semi-structured interviews, and these comprise some key questions that sketch a framework of the areas being investigated (Gill et al., 2008: 291). The loose structure of the interview, however, does allow the researcher to divert from the questions when an idea or topic warrants deeper exploration (Gill et al., 2008: 291). Since the purpose of a qualitative study is to uncover the views, experiences and motivations of participants, a flexible structure is imperative to provide in-depth detail (Gill et al., 2008: 292; Davies & Hughes, 2014: 28).

In this study, the researcher predominantly interviewed participants individually. However, the nature of contact between residents in the informal settlements of this study is fluid and informal. In other words, residents would often casually drop by for a visit at someone else's home without prior notification or arrangement. After all, the

residential space of informal settlements does not allow for much privacy. As a result, during interviews, other residents would occasionally join in, and in these cases, more than one participant would answer questions at the same time. The tables of participants (see Table 1-5) indicates when participants were interviewed together. These do not resemble the characteristics of focus group interviews, but simply as interviewing a primary participant while secondary participants chip in. A focus group by definition is “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger & Casey, 2009: 2). A focus group is further designed to give participants the opportunity to probe and question one another when the group dynamic is crucial to the study itself (George, 2012: 257). Although, the questions asked were semi-structured and required planning and forethought from the researcher, the intent was not to interview participants as a group, nor was it to study the group dynamics or interaction between participants. Therefore, this type of data collection cannot be seen as focus groups.

This form of interview was possible because semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility and adjustment to the situation in order to achieve the purpose of the interview. In fact, in line with the recommendations of Edwards and Holland (2013: 54) as well as Daymon and Holloway (2002: 171), this study used an interview guide. This ensured that important questions directed to answering the purpose of the interviews were asked in this study, whilst allowing participants freedom to express themselves (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 54). The interview guide further ensured that all participants were directed along the same lines even when the guide was not strictly followed (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 171). In other words, the interview guide ensured that the interview did not deviate from its purpose, and protected the researcher’s control over the interview itself to ensure that the purpose of the research study was achieved (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 171).

In conducting interviews, it is crucial that the researcher is well familiarised with the interview guide and questions before the interviews so that the focus can remain on the participants and their responses (Gill et al., 2008: 292). In the same vein, the researcher needs to have enough skills and experience in interviewing to ensure relevant and comprehensive data is collected during interviews (Gill et al., 2008: 292). Furthermore, the researcher should be able to re-assess the interview guide after the

initial interviews to decide which questions should remain and also to add questions in line with data collected already (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 171).

As indicated above, the questions posed to participants in qualitative studies are done so as to extract comprehensive data and deeper insight into a particular topic. Just as semi-structured interviews allow for free expressions by the participants, so do open-ended questions that do not simply invite a “yes” or “no” answer (Davies & Hughes, 2014: 28; Gill et al., 2008: 292). In other words, in in-depth semi-structured interviews the questions posed to participants should be of an exploratory nature – ones that are structured to invite a conversation on any specific topic (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 176). This means that participants should be encouraged to share their experiences and views in as much detail as time and context would allow (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 176). However, these questions should not lead the participant in any pre-determined direction (Delyser, 2008: 239; Tollefson et al., 2001: 261). To support this process, one of the most important things the researcher can do is to listen attentively and analytically, to allow the participant to speak without unnecessary interruptions (Gill et al., 2008: 292). The strategic use of silences should further support participants in pondering their answers, and elaborating should they wish to (Tollefson et al., 2001: 262).

For this study, the researcher developed an initial interview guide to address the research questions and aim. This was adjusted after the first four interviews, which were conducted in Funny Farm, and subsequently it was amended slightly to suit the circumstances in each of the informal settlements where this study was conducted. Although adaptations were made, the general gist of the content of the interview guide remained the same. Naturally, some interviews lasted longer than others as certain participants were intensely engaged on Facebook, and others hardly at all. A handful of interviews were brief and the data elicited from them restricted, and that in itself, is a valuable finding as is indicated in the Findings Chapter.

Semi-structured, open-ended questions were a successful method of data collection in this study. The research themes deduced from conversations with participants are comprehensive and far-reaching. As a result of this method of interviewing, a broad spectrum of data was compiled that makes for a rich body of knowledge.

### 4.3 Sampling

For this study, the population under study included all residents of white informal settlements in Gauteng. As all residents cannot possibly be interviewed, a sample needed to be drawn. A research sample should be chosen in such a way that the purpose of the study is met, whilst ensuring that the participants in the sample are willing to participate in the study (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 160).

No official directory of white informal settlements in the country exists, and there is no registry for Gauteng either. This meant that the researcher had to compile her own list of informal settlements for this study. The researcher completed her MA research project investigating news media consumption in a white informal settlement in Gauteng; Pango Camp. At the time, the researcher learned about this particular settlement from news publications covering a young athlete from the community. Since white informal settlements are anomalous in the South African context, there was much interest in this athlete's life, background and circumstances. The researcher found that Pango Camp residents used social media to voice their views. Furthermore, the researcher could speak Afrikaans and would thus have easy access to understanding the community. In other words, for her MA study, the researcher had some prior knowledge (via the news coverage of the young athlete) that the particular community used social media, and she had linguistic access to the community. During the course of the interview process for her MA research, the researcher learned of a number of other white informal settlements that her MA participants referred to. She thus realised that there were more white informal settlements than many people in the country might be aware of. This knowledge aroused her interest in this doctoral study.

Since there is no official directory of white informal settlements, the researcher relied on the knowledge and contacts gained from interviews for her MA study, and embarked on an internet search for more white informal settlements in Gauteng. Gauteng was chosen because the researcher had already established some form of contact with some informal settlement residents and the aid organisations involved in informal settlements in the province via her MA study.

The researcher became aware of Funny Farm by making contact with a donor she learned about through a desk-based internet search. The researcher found Facebook pages that were set up to raise funds for certain informal settlements. She contacted these numbers and spoke to donation facilitators. This was how Funny Farm and Endicott were discovered. None of the donors or donation facilitators were present during interviews. They only escorted the researcher to the informal settlement, in a separate vehicle, and facilitated a brief introduction with the informal settlement contact person. Subsequent to this, the researcher went to the informal settlements independently. Pango Camp was the focus of the researcher's Masters' research. Sonheuwel was found because it was in the vicinity of Sonskynhoekie, which the researcher read about on Facebook. The community leader at Sonskynhoekie denied the researcher access to the community, and on her way back from that informal settlement, the researcher stumbled upon Sonheuwel, which was pointed out to her by a white man begging at a nearby traffic light. An aid organisation manager with whom the researcher had telephonic contact informed the researcher of Filadelfia Ark. The researcher found the farm owner's number on the internet and contacted him to make an appointment to visit the settlement and to interview participants. These contacts provided the researcher with names and contact details so she could find more white informal settlements in Gauteng (see Figure 1 below).

Through social media research and exploratory visits, the researcher was therefore able to identify the five informal settlements that form part of this study. These communities are stable in terms of residents and housing structures, and, according to the definition of an informal settlement, can be considered informal settlements – hence their inclusion in this study. The most recent definition of an informal settlement is that by Statistics South Africa (2004): “An unplanned settlement on land which has not been surveyed or proclaimed as residential, consisting mainly of informal dwellings (shacks)”. Statistics South Africa (2004) further defines an “informal dwelling” as: “A makeshift structure not erected according to approved architectural plans.”

The map below (Figure 1) shows the white informal settlements that are known to the researcher. Research reports on white informal settlements are, after all, scarce. They are often of a temporary nature (purely a place to sleep at night) and are sometimes illegal. It is therefore important to note that white informal settlements tend to be invisible and obscured from public view. In fact, through interviews with community

leaders, the researcher became increasingly aware of other informal settlements in the area, all of which are completely out of sight. As Anton, the aid organisation area manager said: “*Blanke armoede kruip weg*” (white poverty hides). The elusive nature of these informal settlements and the limited information available on them is another reason the researcher selected them for her doctoral study. The researcher drew up Figure 1 based on the information received from several donors, charity organisations, community leaders and informal settlement farm owners.

Five informal settlements were selected for this study – Funny Farm, Sonheuwel, Pango Camp, Filadelfia Ark and Endicott. These were selected because they vary in nature – most notably in terms of leadership, size and types of housing (purposive sampling). Their differences are highlighted and explained in the next chapter. The reasoning was that the wider the range of “types” of informal settlements, the higher the chances of a wider range of answers, and this is typical of qualitative studies that explore relatively under-researched topics.



# White Informal Settlement-Gauteng

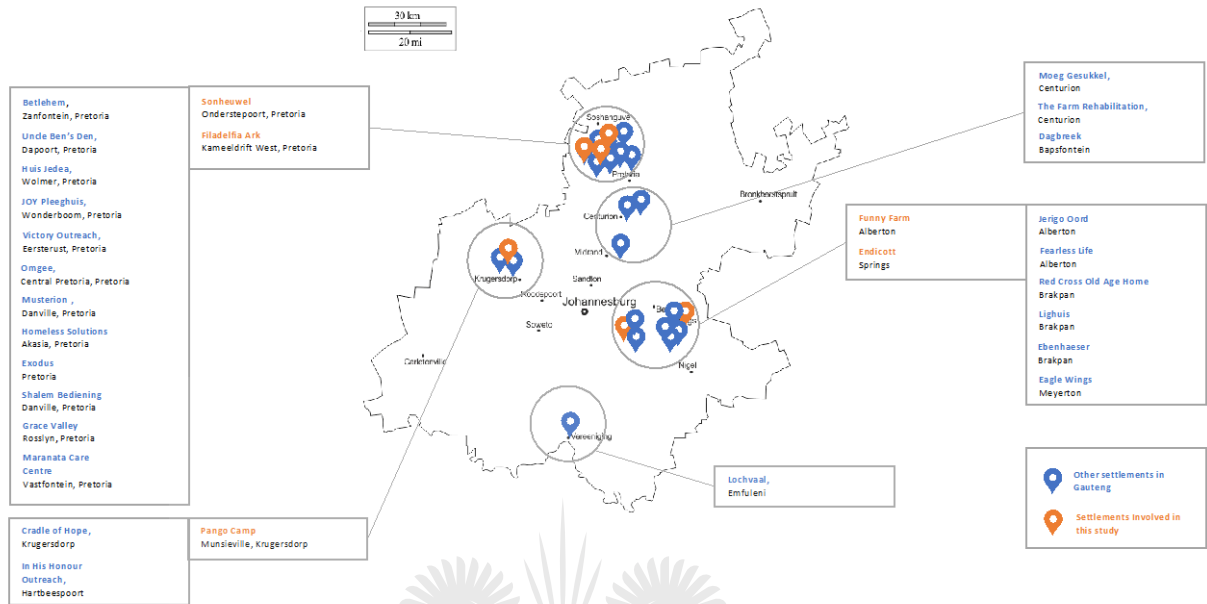


Figure 1: White informal settlements in Gauteng



Three non-probability sampling methods were used in this study, namely convenience sampling, snowball sampling, and purposive non-random sampling.

The convenience sampling technique was applied to this research study. This sampling method is used when the study population is selected based on practical criteria such as easy accessibility, geographic location, availability and eagerness to participate (Etikan et al., 2016, 2; Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 163; Edwards & Holland, 2013: 6). The informal settlements selected are all based in Gauteng since this is where the researcher lives and where the university she is affiliated with is situated. In addition, and as was mentioned earlier, it is where the researcher had prior contacts to identify the informal settlements. The actual participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to be interviewed. Since cases of drug and alcohol abuse in some of the communities that formed part of this study were reported to the researcher by social workers and donors, the researcher only interviewed residents that were sitting outside their homes or inside with a door open – she did not wish to disturb anyone that might be involved in an activity they wished to keep private. This did not compromise information collection as most residents tend to spend their time outside the restricted confines of their small homes.

Some of the participants were referred to by other participants who had taken part, based on the content of the questions and a perceived knowledge of the subject matter. This amounts to snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is when one participant points the researcher to another participant (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 161; Edwards & Holland, 2013: 6). After conducting an interview with one participant, they would, on occasion, refer the researcher to another participant they considered to be knowledgeable in the research field – in this specific case, social media use. This was an effective method and led the researcher to other contributing participants. In the cases where this occurred, the researcher was prepared to enter participants' homes. Often, she would be escorted by the referring participant.

Purposive non-random sampling entails using a technique that evaluates the characteristics of the study population (Wilmot, 2005: 55). The participants for this study were purposefully selected to represent different age brackets and genders.

The following tables present the lists of participants from each of the five settlements, and illustrate the diversity in age and gender of participants. The sampling techniques applied led the researcher to conduct 51 interviews with 62 participants which provided enlightening data. As discussed earlier in this chapter, on occasion, a one-on-one interview turned into an interview with two participants. This occurred when another resident either came for a visit or intentionally wanted to join the interview and share their views. The researcher further included three interviews with participants that are not informal settlement dwellers – Marnelle, the donation facilitator for Endicott, Ronel, the donation facilitator for Funny Farm, and Dirk, the farm owner of Filadelfia Ark. The researcher included Marnelle and Ronel as they were able to give her a thorough background on the communities (Marnelle used to live in Endicott), and because their own fundraising campaigns for these communities are wholly reliant on social media. In this sense, their social media activity ties in to the role and impact of social media in white informal settlements. Dirk was interviewed because, as the farm owner, he is in the ideal position to explain the Filadelfia Ark setup.

A point of saturation or redundancy was reached, upon which the researcher stopped including more participants in this study. A point of redundancy implies that no more information is forthcoming from participants in interviews (Morton, 2005: 255). It was important to the researcher to conduct enough interviews to truly be in a position to compare the different informal settlements with each other. Once the access to social media in a community became clear as well as the reasons for using certain platforms, the researcher felt the point of saturation was achieved. This differed from one community to the next, depending on the information participants provided. When something new came to the forefront, the researcher continued interviewing to gain a complete and comprehensive understanding.

**Table 1: Endicott**

Name	Age	Gender	Social media access	Employment status	Interviewed with
Henk	41	Male	WhatsApp	Does home renovations and fixes cars	Colleen
Colleen	38	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	Henk
Sharon	45	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Prostitute	
Charmaine	50	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Disability grant	
Marnelle	38	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Donor and donation facilitator. Does not live in the informal settlement	

**Table 2: Filadelfia Ark**

Name	Age	Gender	Social media access	Employment status	Interviewed with
Gordon	58	Male	WhatsApp	Unemployed	Sidney
Sidney	61	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Pensioner	Gordon
Pierre	35	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	
Nicolene	53	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	
Piet	67	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook (Not using Facebook anymore)	Pensioner	
Brenton	40	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook (Not using Facebook anymore)	Unemployed	Elana
Elana	40	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook (Not using Facebook anymore)	Unemployed	Brenton
James	57	Male	WhatsApp	Security guard	
Sharlotte	23	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	
Leonard	40	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Truck driver	
Ansie	70	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook (Not using Facebook anymore)	Pensioner	Andre
Andre	45	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Mine manager	Ansie
Dirk	65	Male	WhatsApp	Farm owner	

**Table 3: Funny Farm**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Social media access</b>	<b>Employment status / income</b>	<b>Interviewed with</b>
Deon	49	Male	None	Unemployed	Esmerelda
Esmerelda	23	Female	None	Unemployed	Deon
Nico	44	Male	None	Unemployed	Bibi
Bibi	46	Female	None	Babysits granddaughter	Nico
Troelien	34	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	
Amanda	38	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Disability grant	
Priscilla	29	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Begs at nearby supermarket	
Jannie	52	Male	WhatsApp	Unemployed	Carol
Carol	38	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	Jannie
Clint	49	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Self-employed – sells fuel-injection equipment	
JP	25	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	
Debbie	32	Female	Facebook	Unemployed	
Morné	35	Male	Facebook	Unemployed	
Wayne	34	Male	Facebook	Self-employed – sells scrap metal, copper and antiques	Marius
Marius	37	Male	Not on Facebook anymore (None)	Self-employed – sells scrap metal and copper	Wayne
Ronel	51	Female		Donor and donation facilitator. Does not live at Funny Farm.	

**Table 4: Pango Camp**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Social media access</b>	<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Interviewed with</b>
Elize	42	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Works for donor – runs the soup kitchen for school-going children in Pango Camp	Rudolph
Rudolph	21	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	Elize
Chantel	43	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	
Mariska	24	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	
Gerda	63	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Pensioner	
Natasha	42	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Truck driver	
Martin	45	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Technician	
Hugo	63	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Community leader, pensioner and trader	
Lorraine	46	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Self-employed – sells needlework	
Douglas	35	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Technician	
Samantha	20	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	
Duane	24	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	
Bianca	33	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Unemployed	

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**Table 5: Sonheuwel**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Social media access</b>	<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Interviewed with</b>
Bokkie	66	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Pensioner and self-employed – sells needlework	
Salome	42	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Car guard	Nic
Nic	42	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Laser operator in factory	Salome
Louis	55	Male	None	Unemployed	
Jannie	36	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Car guard and car trader	Ann
Ann	28	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Car guard	Jannie
Alta	53	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Was recently employed to manage a game farm	Christo
Christo	50	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Was recently employed to manage a game farm	Alta
Elsie	65	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Disability grant	
Koos	50	Male	None	Unemployed	
JP	42	Male	WhatsApp and Facebook	Self-employed – web designs and VOIP telephone numbers	
Antoinette	40	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Self-employed – graphic designer	
Linda	37	Female	WhatsApp and Facebook	Does piece jobs	
Melt	55	Male	None	Unemployed	
Willie	72	Male	None	Pensioner	

#### **4.4 Data analysis**

In order to analyse data, a researcher needs to transcribe interviews, and if done by researchers themselves the chances of accuracy and adding field notes are enhanced (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 179). The process of transcribing is a long, time-consuming exercise, but in doing this personally, the researcher becomes familiar with the content, and in doing so, becomes sensitive and acutely aware of important topics throughout the transcribing process (Delyser, 2008: 239; Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 179). In this study, the researcher transcribed each interview herself by manually using the audio recordings she made during interviews. Topics and overarching themes were highlighted during transcribing, and these were later grouped together.

The researcher used thematic analysis to formulate topics in this research study. Thematic analysis is a data analysis method used to identify, analyse and report patterns in data elicited (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79; Miles & Huberman, 1994: 14). There are certain steps followed in this process. The first phase involves the researcher transcribing own verbal and recorded data (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87-88). Then the researcher generates initial codes – creating a list of ideas and concepts present in the data and noting what is relevant and important about them (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 88; Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 234). After this, the researcher sorts the different codes into possible themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 89; Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 238). Once the transcriptions had been formed, they were reviewed by the researcher herself (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 91; Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 238). This involves a process of refinement during which some themes are discarded as a result of a lack of data, and others are perhaps expanded on or broken up into several themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 91). In the next phase, themes are defined and named (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 92). At this stage, the essence of each theme is clear and the concept it captures is well identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 92). Lastly, a report is produced detailing the findings of the research in terms of themes and topics (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 93). The researcher followed these steps in analysing the data collected from interviews at the five different informal settlements.



The process of analysing data essentially describes and brings to life the voices behind the interviews interwoven with the researcher's own understanding and conceptualisation (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 239). This is then further compared with the work of other similar and relevant studies (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 239). The themes derived from the interviews are highlighted in Chapter Five, which discusses the findings of this research study. The topics for the themes are explored in detail under each theme. How these correspond with the literature that formed the academic backbone of this study is further emphasised and pointed out.

#### **4.5 Limitations of the study**

As with any research, qualitative research has limitations and does not necessarily constitute good research (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 91). The nature of qualitative research is subjective – the researcher can choose to either limit or manage their subjectivity or to embrace it to support the data (Morrow, 2005: 254). The focus of qualitative research, however, is not to replicate or generalise objective data, but to gain better insight into a phenomenon only revealed through the opinions, views and thoughts of participants who live in it (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 12). In other words, qualitative researchers are interested in subjective reality – the experiences of others (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 12). This study aimed to investigate the role and impact of social media in white informal settlements as understood and experienced by the residents themselves. The findings simply highlight what was communicated to the researcher. Furthermore, this research did not aim to produce data that can be generalised and applied to other informal settlements. The researcher appreciates that the findings of this study only represent the views of the participants who contributed to this research.

In the same vein, qualitative interviews are impossible to replicate as they are unique to each social experience and participant (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 92). Each participant has their own emotions, views and opinions, and these are cherished for the rich data they produce and not for statistical purposes (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 92). A challenge that may present itself during interviews is when there is a disconnect between what participants say they and what they really do (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 184). Some participants may express untruths or exaggerate when they feel such a response may be more favoured by the researcher (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:

184). A way to mitigate this is to compare answers between participants, and to ask similar questions with slight variations each time (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 184). The research questions in this study are not of a sensitive nature. They also do not pose any threat to participants and their wellbeing. Furthermore, participants were guaranteed anonymity, and they understood that the interviews were conducted to collect material for an academic research study and not to be published on a public forum or in the mass media. The researcher has no reason to believe participants adjusted their answers, as questions were open-ended and neutral without any laden sentiment.

Limitations with regards to thematic analysis may occur during the data analysis process. It is therefore crucial that the themes presented are not just an amalgamation of extracts without any analytical narrative supporting it (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 94). It should also not primarily contain paraphrases with a few analytical comments (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 94). The excerpts of the thematic analysis should illustrate the analytical points the researcher is highlighting in the data, and should extend beyond the collected data to discuss the overall meaning and application thereof (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 94). The interview guide should also not be mistaken for the themes of the research study since this could imply that there was pre-mediation involved as far as the findings are concerned (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 94; Joffe & Yardley, 2003: 66). Thematic analysis can further be compromised if the themes are not succinct and logical (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 94; Joffe & Yardley, 2003: 66). There should not be excessive overlap between themes, and the ones that are presented need to be sensible and coherent (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 94; Joffe & Yardley, 2003: 66). The researcher has considerable experience doing research and applying thematic analysis. Her work was also overseen by a highly qualified and respected academic supervisor.

The trustworthiness of a study is embedded in the processes that are followed. It is paramount that the philosophical assumptions of the research support the research aim, research questions and research design (Morrow, 2005: 259). Theoretical triangulation refers to the application of more than one hypothesis when reviewing literature on any given topic or phenomenon (du Plooy, 2009: 40). In the case of this study, the researcher included a body of knowledge and different theories in Chapters Two and Three as a background to the research. In this vein, the researcher believes

that the findings of this study contribute to the literature, specifically with regards to social media usage of low-income and marginalised individuals and communities.

#### **4.6 Ethical considerations**

Research ethics should be considered at all times. Most educational and professional institutions demand that researchers obtain signed consent forms from participants before conducting interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 67). This signifies that participants are willing to be interviewed, and that they know their rights in terms of distribution of content, anonymity and liberty to terminate the interview at any time (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 67). Whilst an informed consent form deals with ethics in terms of obtaining written permission from participants, that does not mean the participants' involvement is completely sanctioned and protected (Shaw, 2003: 15). Participants may still end up disclosing more than they had wished to, and educationally compromised or vulnerable participants may hesitate to advise the researcher when they are unclear or uncomfortable with the process (Shaw, 2003: 15). For this reason, it is essential that the consent form is written in a way the participant understands, and that they do not feel pressured in any way to take part in the research (Davies & Hughes, 2014: 43). In this study, the researcher presented the consent form to the participants in both English and Afrikaans. Most participants in the study were Afrikaans. The researcher is fluent in Afrikaans, and could easily explain the context of the study and content of the consent form. There was no resistance from participants. Furthermore, because the researcher is white and Afrikaans-speaking, there was a sense of trust from participants as result of perceived similarities. This eased open communication and rapport between researcher and participant.

When doing any research, adhering to ethics is as important as all the other processes in the study (Shaw, 2003: 11). Ethical problems may arise when the nature of the research is withheld from participants or when participants could be harmed or negatively affected as a result of the research (Shaw, 2003: 14-15). Ethics are also compromised when the privacy of participants is invaded or when benefits associated with the research are denied to participants (Shaw, 2003: 15). In this study, the researcher was transparent with participants and donors about the aim of the research. Participants were only interviewed when they indicated a willingness to do

so, and no one's privacy was invaded in any way. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the researcher deliberately did not knock on closed doors. There were no benefits due to participants of this study, and, to protect everyone that contributed to the study, the researcher has kept participants anonymous.

Extra attention should be paid to ethics when researching marginalised or vulnerable communities and individuals such as those affected by poverty (Motley & Sturgill, 2014: 175). There is even criticism against interviewing marginalised groups, as this may perpetuate their exclusion in putting a focus on their inequality and the behaviour this manifests in (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 79). On the other hand, it could give them a voice and emphasise the importance of their views and opinions (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 79; Fisher, 2012: 2). Either way, a researcher needs to be aware of the possibility that there is a power or positional imbalance between the marginalised participant and the researcher who potentially represents a different background (Edwards & Holland, 2013: 79).

Motley and Sturgill (2014: 175) therefore advise that any researcher that engages with economically poor participants is adequately prepared to manage the process. There comes great responsibility with the opportunity to engage and communicate with someone who is vulnerable (Motley and Sturgill, 2014: 175). Background knowledge on and a sensitivity to economic disparity is important in preparing for research in this field (Motley and Sturgill, 2014: 175). Researchers should further understand that not only will they gain from the data elicited through contact with participants, the researcher may very well learn more about the multi-dimensional nature and various aspects that are associated with being poor (Motley & Sturgill, 2014: 175). Additional preparation specifically around this component is thus imperative when doing research in poor communities (Motley & Sturgill, 2014: 175).

The researcher in this study has been involved in several research projects in informal settlements. Just as she appreciates that every community and participant is different and unique, she also acknowledges that poverty is embedded in every aspect of life in an informal settlement. An acute and sensitive awareness of this underscored the researcher's approach to and engagements with participants. Much attention was given to pacify the potential perception of a power imbalance. The researcher emphasised the importance and value of participants' contributions to the study, and

provided as much clarity about the research study as was requested by participants. The researcher made every endeavour to convey that participants were not merely subjects of study, but essential contributors to a research project.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter details the research design that was followed in this study. It explains why a qualitative paradigm was selected in emphasising the importance of the views and opinions of participants. This chapter also describes why interviews were best suited to achieve the research aim in terms of data collection. It further discusses the sampling methods that were used to select informal settlements as well as participants. Thematic analysis as a technique to analyse data receives attention, and so do possible limitations of this study as well as ways the researcher tried to mitigate these. Lastly, ethics are discussed in general research, but also with specific focus on marginalised, impoverished participants since this study explores the role and impact of social media in white informal settlements. The next chapter highlights the findings of this study.



## Chapter 5: Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

The researcher purposefully selected the informal settlements in this study as they vary considerably in terms of characteristics. These differences pertain to the community leadership, infrastructure, size, and age of residents. Although the communities selected are categorised as informal settlements, in accordance with the definition of an informal settlement described in the previous chapter, it was important to the researcher that the settlements differ as this produced richer data and a better understanding of the research question. These informal settlements are compared to one another in the next chapter. This comparison illustrates the importance of having different types of informal settlements as part of this study as it highlights discrepancies and similarities in social media use and possible reasons for this. A quick overview indicates the landscape of each of these informal settlements. Photos of these communities are included in Appendix 2.

Endicott informal settlement in Springs is an array of different types of accommodation on several smallholdings all belonging to one owner. There are a few wooden structures (Wendy houses) dotted around the property and one semi-brick and corrugated iron structure accommodating two families. They have electricity and there are shared ablution facilities on the property. The Endicott settlement configuration is different to the other four informal settlements in this study. The area with the Wendy houses (prefabricated one-room wooden houses usually marketed as garden sheds) is a few hundred metres away from the other structure. Collectively, 44 families reside here, of which 81 are adults and 62 children. Resident couples pay a monthly fee of R3,000 to live at Endicott and single occupants pay R1,500. They enjoy complete independence as the farm owner is not involved on a personal level, and there are no set rules to abide by. It may be considered unusual for residents to have to pay to stay in an informal settlement, but in this case it can be seen as residents paying to either erect a Wendy house or live in an existing one while also contributing financially to water and lights. Even though residents pay to live in Endicott, it still meets the defined criteria of what is labelled an informal settlement in terms of housing structures and infrastructure, especially considering that the property has not been demarcated or

configured for formal housing and the structures have not been approved as official housing residences.

Filadelfia Ark<sup>2</sup> is a well-resourced and aesthetically pleasing informal settlement. Wooden housing structures (Wendy houses) are neatly demarcated with picket fences, and each house has a small garden mostly filled with flowering plants and other garden decorations. Well-defined dirt roads allow for easy navigation throughout the community. There is also a rather large dam where stilted houses have been erected and where residents often relax and fish. This informal settlement has fruit orchards, a pre-primary school, a dining hall, barbeque facilities, ablution blocks and a medical clinic. Residents receive three nutritious meals daily which are served in the dining hall, and every Sunday, weather-permitting, residents enjoy a barbeque. Residents do not pay to live at Filadelfia Ark, but, should they not be employed outside the informal settlement, they are expected to assist with duties on the farm itself. The owner of the farm, Dirk, is a civil engineer by profession. He has an asphalt plant on the property as well composting worm farms. Dirk maintains a strict sense of law and order on his property – residents have to abide by several rules, such as no alcohol, no drugs, and no man alone in a home with a child unless the door is open. Dirk is a devout Christian and considers it his calling “to uplift my people.” Filadelfia Ark is an attractive option for many marginalised and destitute white people. Dirk and his administrative team receive several calls and requests for accommodation daily. Filadelfia Ark is at capacity, though, as currently 450 people reside here of whom 100 are children, and there is no more space for newcomers. Filadelfia Ark is a departure from what one would consider an informal settlement, but, again, this property has not been designed or approved by municipal town planners to accommodate formal housing. Furthermore, the houses on the Filadelfia Ark farm are informal dwellings, “shacks” or Wendy houses.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Filadelfia Ark’s website, Filadelfia means *brotherly love* in Greek.



Funny Farm is an ill-resourced informal settlement (compared to the two already mentioned) comprising one main building and several room structures against the boundary wall. The grounds belong to the Department of Education, and the residents of Funny Farm are considered “illegal squatters”. In the main building, residents use sheets or towels to create partitions between beds and mattresses on the floor. The informal settlement does have electricity, but there is only one tap attached to the outside wall of the main building. There are no toilets, and residents use a hole that they have dug in the front of the property as a lavatory. There are 81 residents of whom eleven are children. This informal settlement has no leader, representative or manager.

Pango Camp is the only municipally-allocated informal settlement in this study. In 2014, the residents of Pango Camp were removed from the caravan park at Coronation Dam (that they had occupied illegally), and were given a temporary stretch of land in the Munsieville township – this was named Pango Camp. Corrugated iron homes were erected for them by the Red Ant Security Relocation and Eviction Services (commonly referred to as the Red Ants). Today, there are approximately 80 homes made of metal, wood or cardboard at Pango Camp, and these serve as accommodation to approximately 240 white residents – 100 adults and 140 children. There are six taps with running water in the settlement, and several of the residents have successfully plumbed the water source to lead directly to their homes. On average, one mobile toilet is shared between two households, and these are cleaned by municipal cleaning personnel once a week. There are no legal electricity connections, but Pango Camp residents have proven to be creative in sourcing electricity from their neighbours in Munsieville. Hugo (63) is the community leader of Pango Camp. He is a resident of Pango Camp and also lived with the other Pango Camp residents in Coronation Caravan Park. Hugo (63) fulfils a paternal role in the community – facilitating donations on their behalf, and acting as a mediator in family disputes. He does encourage residents to be independent, however, as he feels he will not always be there to help and support them.

Sonheuwel is another visually attractive informal settlement set alongside the Bon Accord Dam. There are approximately 75 homes and 200 residents of whom 25 are children. The home structures vary from caravans, tents, wooden houses, and corrugated iron assemblies to half-brick, half-iron structures. Residents pay around R1,200 for their monthly accommodation. There is a centralised ablution facility, electricity connections and a colourful, well-maintained park for the children. There is also a tuck shop adjacent to the administration building. This settlement is a registered and legal caravan park that belongs to one owner. The owner has formally appointed a manager, Hendrik, who lives with his wife in a fairly large brick home on the Sonheuwel caravan park premises. As manager, he organises a mobile clinic to visit the settlement once a month, ensures all the provided facilities are in working order, and maintains a sense of order in the community. For the most part, however, residents are independent and self-reliant. Sonheuwel was not designed to support permanent residents nor was it laid out for formal housing. The characteristics of the property and housing structures further render Sonheuwel an informal settlement.



**Table 6: Themes and topics elicited during interviews**

<b>Themes elicited through interviews</b>	<b>Topics in each theme</b>	<b>Corresponding topics in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3</b>
Clarifying the sample: poverty, education, unemployment and social media access	Education levels Unemployment, employment and income Social media access	The multidimensional nature of poverty Unemployment and social welfare Poor and low education levels Social media access
The long arm of Facebook	Support, financial aid, donations as a result of “advertising” on Facebook. Income and employment obtained through Facebook Cheap and/or inexpensive goods acquired through Facebook	Social capital Social capital and social media The dark side of social capital
“Facebook is a toilet” – the dark side of social media	Exploiting and farming with poverty Using Facebook as a weapon Fake news, bombardment and going viral The dangers of Facebook	Cyberbullying Trolling Pornography of poverty Misinformation, disinformation and mal-information Going viral
“Make my day” – The bright side of Facebook in every day life	Connectedness Emotional support Advice Entertainment and killing time Positive anecdotes	Uses and gratifications The bright side of social media The need to belong and connectedness Hedonic gratification
Surveillance of the environment	Facebook and WhatsApp as sources of news Understanding the world and broader picture through social media	Uses and gratifications The bright side of social media Echo chambers Filter bubbles
“The poor” is not a uniform category	Informal settlements vary characteristically Levels of poverty in camps differ Levels of poverty in individuals vary Reasons why participants are in informal settlements vary	Categorising “the poor”
Networks of community leaders, informal settlement farm owners and aid organisations	WhatsApp groups Aid Farming with poverty	Social capital

## 5.2 Theme 1: Clarifying the sample: poverty, education, unemployment and social media access

In the previous chapters it was argued that poverty is associated with informal settlements, and is often associated with low educational levels and lesser employment prospects.

### 5.2.1 Topic 1: Education levels of participants

In the literature, Iqbal (2006: 36) explains that a lack of education is persistent in poor communities, and that this continues the cycle of poverty. Education levels per informal settlement differed considerably. In Sonheuwel and Filadelfia Ark, both well-resourced communities, some participants indicated that they had completed some form of tertiary education. As Melt (55, Sonheuwel) explains:

I had Wi-Fi at my home, all those types of things. Let me put it to you this way ... access to the internet is, at this stage, a real problem. I sit with two engineering diplomas. For seven years, I worked as a factory engineer. I also taught, and I am Sage registered.<sup>3</sup> When I was teaching, the platinum mines approached me – I became head of their engineer training division. The mine closed down, we were retrenched. I started teaching at a school – I was a Maths teacher ... in Pietersburg, and, for a short while, a Muslim school. But the long and short is, my wife left me. I left Pietersburg. Tomorrow, we would have been married for 33 years. I can't tell you how much I struggle to find work. Especially with the poor internet signal here [at Sonheuwel]. I can show you my diplomas and Sage registration.

Melt (55, Sonheuwel) went on to explain what contributed to his socio-economic decline despite being well qualified. He also indicated that his lack of money, transport and reliable internet connectivity is what perpetuates his inability to move forward in life.

And then one day, my wife told me she's leaving. My whole life fell apart. I lost my job and I started drinking heavily ... all those types of things. If you take it, from senior mine manager to this. I just want a job so I can get out of here. I want to teach, that is my passion ... Everyone says I'm a good teacher. If only I could get out, or contact someone to help me get out ... . You're in checkmate. You

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<sup>3</sup> Sage Pastel is an accounting software platform. By being Sage registered, it would imply that a person is accredited to sell their software and support.

can look in any direction, you're blocked. You sit in a hole out of which you can't climb.

In other words, in Melt's (55, Sonheuwel) case, low education levels were not a factor in his decline into poverty. Another participant, Willie (72, Sonheuwel), shared a similar anecdote – he has a BSc degree in mining engineering, owned his own construction business, and worked for Iscor for many years before retiring in 2002. He lives in a modest but pretty and functional wooden house which he designed and built himself. Unfortunately, as a result of “poor decisions”, he was declared bankrupt and lost his home. Louis (55, Sonheuwel) shared his view of the correlation between education and living at Sonheuwel.

I believe they did [finish school]. The main thing on how they got here ... here there are no stupid people. They've only lost their way. They still can. It's only about their financial position now.

Two participants indicated that they had finished school and earned their matric certificates (Esmerelda, 23, Funny Farm; Rudolph, 21, Pango Camp). Pierre (35, Filadelfia Ark) shared with the researcher that he had obtained a degree in Psychology, and Carol (38, Funny Farm) used to be a qualified nurse – she has since been dismissed. Most participants, however, had only completed some formal schooling but seldom advanced past Grade 10. Both Ann (28, Sonheuwel) and Wayne (34, Funny Farm) left school in the middle of their Grade 11 year.

The reasons for early school career terminations vary. Some participants told the researcher that they had developed drug dependencies early in their lives which prevented them from completing school.

Hugo (63, Pango Camp) explained to the researcher during her research at Pango Camp in 2016:

Let me be honest with you, a lot of them had learning difficulties in school. They're not going to come right, you can do what you want. So, that's the problem; and I think that's the biggest problem we have at the moment. People here aren't educated. You'll see, they all left school early. They won't come right anywhere.

As is evident in the literature, poverty is often associated with low education levels (Banerjee & Duflo, 2007: 7, 17) but low formal educational levels are most often not the only reason for poverty (Alkire, 2007: 348). As mentioned, a handful of participants did achieve tertiary education, yet they still found themselves affected and surrounded by poverty.

## 5.2.2 Topic 2: Unemployment, employment and income

In the earlier chapters it was argued that a shortage or absence of gainful employment perpetuates economic inequalities and results in a reduction of assets (Rao, 2014: 5). Unemployment increases the risk of poverty and inequality resulting in devastating social effects not only on the unemployed themselves, but also their families and the communities in which they live (Saunders, 2002: 507). This means that high unemployment is associated with poverty, and low income is associated with informal settlement living. A lack of formal employment cannot be interpreted as no income, however; instead, many participants in this study who are not formally employed engage in a myriad of practices to earn money. Whilst living hand-to-mouth appears to be the norm in the communities of this study, some form of money-generating activities do occur as is indicated below.

### 5.2.2.1 Grants and pensions

Social welfare programmes in the global South attempt to alleviate some of the immediate deprivation impoverished people experience by directly transferring small amounts of money to a large number of low-income individuals (Ferguson, 2015: 1). This is referred to as social grants. Financial assistance from the government is paid through grants or pensions. Bokkie (66, Sonheuwel) explained that she earns a monthly pension of R1,750 from the state as well as her late husband's "small pension" of R992 per month. Several participants receive the monthly pension from the national government – this is the case for Sidney (61, Filadelfia Ark), Ansie (70, Filadelfia Ark), Gerda (63, Pango Camp), Willie (72, Sonheuwel), and Hugo (63, Pango Camp).

The other participants who benefit from government support are parents with children. Mariska (24, Pango Camp), a mother of four daughters, stated: "I get money for the children from the state, yes." Chantel (43, Pango Camp), a mother of eight children, mentioned that she receives grants for "some of the children" amounting to R450 per child per month. She added that she had "not applied for the other two children yet".

Jannie (36, Sonheuwel) explained that he received a pension from the mines:

At this stage I get a mine pension. We were retrenched from the mines. I was at Marikana with all the strikes.<sup>4</sup> Directly after that, we didn't have work anymore. I worked there for 19 years. I drove a Mercedes ...

Amanda (38, Funny Farm) said that she had never worked and that she earns a disability pension. The details of this disability are unclear as she only said "it's a long story". Elsie (65, Sonheuwel) stated that she receives disability pension as she has three types of arthritis, and her husband is also a recipient of the same government assistance as he suffers from liver cancer. Charmaine (50, Endicott) also benefits from a state disability grant as she has breast cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy at the time of the interview.

#### *5.2.2.2 Piece jobs, informal labour and shift work*

Several participants earn money through shift work, temporary project-jobs or by engaging in labour activities in the informal employment sector. Chantel (43, Pango Camp), who receives grants for some of her children, also added: "My husband does some jobs here and there." This was echoed by Mariska (24, Pango Camp) who explained that in addition to receiving an income through child support grants, her husband "helps his cousins out with work. First, he did security for windows and then he did glass. Now he's on cameras and gate motors." Bokkie (66, Sonheuwel) also supplements the income she derives from two monthly pension pay-outs by doing needlework: "I do art needlework, I make duvets, bed covers ... I sell outside the park too." Lorraine (46, Pango Camp) also said how she enjoys her needlework as she could "try something new every day to sell to bring in money."

Several participants were involved in "security" work, which predominantly entailed guarding motor vehicles. Jannie (36, Sonheuwel) and his wife Ann (28, Sonheuwel) both work in the parking lot at a nearby church. Since the church also serves as a venue for evening classes throughout the week, they each work "six shifts per week, including night shifts." James (57, Filadelfia Ark) works as an official security guard "seven days a week" at a residential estate in Hartbeespoort where he has been

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<sup>4</sup> The Marikana mine disaster the participant is referring to happened on 16 August 2012. The South African Police Services opened fire on striking mineworkers which resulted in the deaths of 34 people.



employed for the past five years. Leonard (40, Filadelfia Ark) works as a truck driver, as does Nastasha (42, Pango Camp). Douglas (35, Pango Camp) is contracted as a fibre optic technician. Nic (42, Sonheuwel) at the time of the interview had started a new job doing evening shifts:

I am a laser operator for a company that builds trucks. And just like with any other jobs, you have to start at the bottom. It's hard work for little money. So, at the moment, we don't budget. We live from week to week.

Linda (37, Sonheuwel) also made reference to the "piece jobs" she did by "cleaning people's houses sometimes", and Jannie (36, Sonheuwel), in addition to guarding cars, also buys, fixes and sells cars. Henk (41, Endicott) repairs cars and does small home improvement jobs.

Elize (42, Pango Camp) works for a donor who is heavily involved in Pango Camp:

I've grown a lot. I don't just do the porridge in the morning and lunch for school anymore [meals paid for by the donor for the school-going children in Pango Camp]. I cook in the afternoon too now. I even built on an additional kitchen.

JP (42, Sonheuwel) and his wife Antoinette (40, Sonheuwel) proved themselves to be rather industrious. As JP (42, Sonheuwel) put it:

I am self-employed, I do web designs and web hosting. I have my own web hosting server – VOIP (voice over internet protocol) telephones and telephone numbers ... [I do it for] small business websites, and for normal mobile landlines like we call it, just so that they have a phone number. Many departments in South Africa demand a landline. Then I can put a 011 or 012 number on the cell phone ... I only work on a cash upfront basis or EFT (electronic funds transfer). Because, look, most of the people are the black market. So, if they don't have a bank account, they can go to the ATM (automatic teller machine) or they can buy a cash voucher at Pep Stores.

Antoinette (40, Sonheuwel) adds value by getting involved in the creative side of the business:

Most of the time I do the graphic design. I'm not that clued up on websites and stuff. Like when someone wants a birthday invitation or they are looking for flyers to hand out. I used to work at a printing place, but after my scooter accident, I couldn't lift the heavy printing rolls anymore, so I lost my job.

Certain participants are able to support themselves to an extent through different means of work, but not everyone is in this position. These participants need to rely on other forms of income.

#### *5.2.2.3 Trading*

At Funny Farm, the researcher observed two residents stripping cables. Upon enquiring, Wayne (34, Funny Farm) explained: “We get these from the scrapyards. It’s the geysers that come in that people scrap. Then, I only take these, then I strip these ... I don’t just do copper. Anything that is sell-able like iron pipes that we can sell there, across the road.”

A considerable number of participants admitted to selling the donations they receive for money. Jannie (52, Funny Farm) candidly shared:

Do you know what happens? Sometimes cars stop here. They give food and clothes and stuff. So, we exchange stuff when sometimes something is too big or small, when it doesn’t fit. To be honest with you, we sell some of the stuff to buy food or this or that. Every now and then, a bottle of wine, to be honest. We have to survive here ... We basically sell what we are given.

Bibi (46, Funny Farm) acknowledged that “the stuff that comes in that we don’t use, we sell.” Debbie (32, Funny Farm) confirmed this by suggesting that was the only way she could survive.

Salome (42, Sonheuwel) is also of the opinion that donations often end up in different hands than what was intended: “There are people here [in Sonheuwel] who are given food, and then they cross the [train] tracks and sell it on the other side for booze. Clothing donations too.” Alta (53, Sonheuwel) agreed, saying: “They [other Sonheuwel residents] receive a lot and they just sell it – they don’t appreciate anything.” Martin (45, Pango Camp) also held a cynical view regarding the resale of donated goods: “They [Pango Camp residents] are all crooks. The people here don’t receive things they need. They sell it all. Everyone sells.” Pango Camp community leader Hugo (63) offered insight into residents’ practice of selling donated items:

Look, when clothes come in, they all sell clothes. I told them if you don’t have money for food, sell the stuff. How many clothes can you fit in your cupboard?

Even me who drive with the *bakkie*<sup>5</sup> to collect stuff [as donations for Pango Camp]. How will I be able to do that? I only get a pension of R1,800 per month. I also sell clothes to cover my petrol expenses.

Participants are aware that selling the aid they are given is frowned upon. They do however believe that if goods are sold for food and other necessities, it is an acceptable practice of survival.

#### *5.2.2.4 Unemployment and begging*

Participants in this study displayed innovative and creative ways to earn an income to survive. There were however several participants that indicated a sense of despondency. Deon (49, Funny Farm), who has been at Funny Farm for twelve years, articulated it as follows:

Very few people here find jobs. To be honest with you, I have thrown in the towel – it's been that long. The last time I worked was in 2007 ... I was manager at a retail store. I've tried so many times [to find something else]. With this hopelessness, that's why the majority of the people here are on something.

Priscilla (29, Funny Farm) admitted to approaching people at a nearby store for financial assistance: "I go out, how do I say this nicely? I ask people to help me with donations to survive. I mean, I have a little baby, I have to buy stuff." Sharon (45, Endicott), who used to work as a prostitute at a nearby brothel, has found another way to support herself: "I have a sugar daddy. His oldest daughter is four years younger than me. How do they say? I'd rather be an old man's darling than a young man's slave."

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<sup>5</sup> A *bakkie* is a South African colloquialism referring to a light pickup truck.



**Figure 2: Patterns of unemployment, employment and income**

Figure 2 illustrates the patterns of unemployment, employment and income in the different informal settlements of this study. This suggests that residents in informal settlements such as Filadelfia Ark - where healthy food is served three times a day - are less reliant on “outside” help. This then translates into a reduced need to sell donated items, to beg or to search for temporary labour jobs. On the other hand, in informal settlement like Endicott, Sonheuwel and Pango Camp, where there is no leader who commits themselves to the survival and upliftment of residents, individual job-seeking and other ways of earning an income prevail. At Funny Farm, the pattern seems to be that of instant gratification through trading and begging. The next section will illustrate how Facebook is woven into this informal settlement-specific landscape of behaviour.

This study confirms, to an extent, Lobo’s findings (2018: 81) that people in impoverished communities are often aimlessly sitting around. The researcher does wish to emphasise, however, that this statement does not universally apply to all the informal settlements in this study. As stated above, a great variety of behaviours in terms of employment were found, and informal work (piece jobs) should not be discounted. The findings of this research are thus more in line with the work done by Ferguson (2015: 2) and Mutyenyo and Tsheola (2017: 411), supporting the importance of the South African grant system for the elderly, children and those with disabilities.

Even though there is often a link between informal settlements, poverty, employment and education levels, this section has demonstrated that the link is not absolute. In fact, the participants of this study showed that the general link between low formal educational levels, low employment prospects, poverty and living in informal settlements does not necessarily hold. The circumstances of each participant remain unique as there are no two identical situations and backgrounds when it comes to poverty and informal settlement living.

### 5.2.3 Topic 3: Social media access

Variances in social media access extended to participants either having no access, having WhatsApp access, having Facebook access or having both WhatsApp and Facebook access. Participants did not report having access to or using any other social media platforms. In section 4.3., Tables 1-5 indicate which participants had access to which platform(s), and who had none at all. No discernible pattern can be drawn, however, with regard to social media access per informal settlement. In other words, it was not found, for example, that in certain informal settlements no-one had social media access whereas in others, everyone younger than 50 did. In this regard, the actual informal settlements the participants reside in does not appear to affect their social media access. The following table provides a summary of participants' social media access:

**Table 7: Participants' access to social media platforms<sup>6</sup>**

<b>Informal settlement</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>No social media</b>	<b>WhatsApp</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Facebook and WhatsApp</b>
Endicott	4		1		3
Filadelfia Ark	12		2		10
Funny Farm	15	5	1	3	6
Pango Camp	13				13
Sonheuwel	15	4			11

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<sup>6</sup> Funny Farm donor facilitator; Ronel, Filadelfia Ark farm owner; Dirk and Endicott donor facilitator; Marnelle were not included in this table as, although they were interviewed to understand the role and impact of social media in informal settlements, they are not informal settlement residents themselves. Their social media access is thus not relevant for the purpose of determining access in the respective informal settlements.

An overview of the participants' social media access per informal settlement gives a more detailed description of their specific and unique situations and how this impacts their social media access and social media choices. This further highlights that a view on social media access of informal settlement residents cannot be generalised.

#### *5.2.3.1 Social media access in Endicott*

In Endicott, the age of the participants appears to play a role in their adoption of social media. Several residents older than sixty announced to the researcher, on the first question, that they had no access to social media and were therefore not further included in this study. In Endicott, participants only had social media access through their cell phones. No one reported having a personal computer or a tablet. Social media access was intermittent, depending on when participants had money to buy data bundles (data purchasing packages). Colleen (38) explained:

I buy WhatsApp bundles. I don't use normal data, because it's too expensive. That's why, at the moment, my Facebook is just sitting. Now, I'm only on WhatsApp bundles ... . Once or twice a month, I'm on Facebook when I load data. If I put R30 WhatsApp on, because I'm on Cell C and they give you R30 Cell C to Cell C, within fifteen minutes, there's nothing left if you go on Facebook. I promise you, within fifteen minutes, it's done. And that's just Facebook.

Sharon (45) made a similar comment: "I'm only on Facebook when I have data." Charmaine's (50) social media access depended on the pricing structures of her service provider:

I don't always have, but I always check to see if Vodacom has specials – they sometimes do. Then you get a certain amount of data for a fixed price ... . When I have money, I'm on Facebook every day.

Since the residents of Endicott do not receive daily meals, participants explained that much if not most of their disposable income is spent on food supplies. This naturally affects their data expenditures.

### 5.2.3.2 Social media access in Filadelfia Ark

Residents of Filadelfia Ark are in the unique position that they reside there for free and that their three daily meals are provided at no cost to them. Some of the participants work “outside” while others fulfil tasks and jobs in and around Filadelfia Ark. Filadelfia Ark is one of the two informal settlements (the other one being Pango Camp) where all participants reported having access to social media. In the case of this specific settlement this is because they are able to allocate money to their data connectivity that would otherwise have been spent on food and perhaps shelter. This is not to suggest, however, that participants had uninterrupted social media access. Most participants reported intermittent social media access. Sidney (61) shared that “as I get money, I buy data.” Pierre (35) explained that the cost of data affected his decisions on which social media platform to access:

WhatsApp is the cheapest. You’ll have your Facebook, but WhatsApp is the cheapest, do you understand? You’ll buy your social bundles, but with Telkom for R15 you’ll get a Gig and that will last you a week, so R60 will give you four Gig. That’s more than enough. You can even watch videos, so you don’t really need more than that. Of course you’ll have people who are poorer than me that can’t use social media like I can. Do you understand? They’ll only use it for photos of whatever ... just on WhatsApp or Facebook. That’s how it is.

Most participants used their cell phones to access social media. Charlotte (23) has a tablet, however, and both Andre (45) and Leonard (40) have laptops. Data bundles are purchased mostly, except for Andre (45) who has a basic data contract that came with a data dongle (a stick-in modem used to connect to wireless or mobile broadband).

Brenton (40) and Elana (40), a married couple with two young daughters, do not use Facebook, but this is not due to an inability or unaffordability to access this social media platform. In fact, it was a conscious decision to deactivate their Facebook accounts. As Elana (40) explained:

We don’t believe in it anymore. We don’t want Facebook. We had profiles, but not anymore. When we were single, yes, we used it. But now we are married and stuff, so no.



Brenton (40) further clarified that he feared hacking on Facebook as well as the safety of his children. It is thus important to highlight that in their case, they have different and deliberate reasons for disengaging from Facebook.

#### *5.2.3.3 Social media access in Funny Farm*

Funny Farm is the only community where participants reported having Facebook access and no WhatsApp. The reason for this is that having a cell phone and stable phone number has proven to be challenging. Wayne (34) explained it as follows: “See, the thing is, sometimes when we’re struggling, we have to sell our phones. Then we wait to have a little bit of money to get another one.” Each time Marius (37) acquired a new phone, he bought a new SIM card which meant his number changed frequently. This was the same for Debbie (32) and Morné (35), who further added that they therefore did not have anyone’s numbers saved, and could only reach friends and family through Facebook.

Participants at Funny Farm use their cell phones for social media access. Clint (49) told the researcher, however, that he uses the free Wi-Fi at the library to access Facebook and WhatsApp. Interestingly, no other participant in Funny Farm visited the library to have social media access. Funny Farm is a particularly ill-resourced community – participants struggle for survival. The little money participants do manage to scrape together is as a result of begging, selling donated goods and doing odd jobs. As a result, their access is highly infrequent. In this vein, Troelien (34) referred to periods where she had access to Facebook, and Amanda (38) stated that she has social media access “now and then.” Morné (35) indicated that he has access “when he’s on the outside” meaning when he is not living in the informal settlement, where he ends up from time-to-time.

#### *5.2.3.4 Social media access in Pango Camp*

Pango Camp is the only informal settlement in this study where all participants have access to WhatsApp and Facebook. This is rather surprising considering that this is not an informal settlement where meals are provided to residents. Furthermore, almost half of the participants are unemployed (six out of thirteen). Mariska (24) and Chantel (43) are both married, however, and their husbands derive income from work, and Rudolph (21) lives with his mother, Elize (42), who has a data contract.

Social media access is relatively constant in Pango Camp. Elize (42), Natasha (42) and Lorraine (46) have data contracts. Lorraine's account of her social media access was:

The one phone is a contract phone, so that we pay every month with my husband's salary. But for the Cell C one, I buy a R30 bundle, then I have internet and I'm on WhatsApp all the time.

Elize explained that she had access "24 hours a day". Hugo (63) who has Telkom Wi-Fi said: "I am covered the whole time."

Data bundles were purchased by other participants to ensure their social media connectivity. Samantha (20) shared that she buys bundles and that she is "connected every night." Gerda (63) stated:

I usually have access because I freelance. I don't have a permanent job, but I do small things here and there. I look after my grandkids and I help with the cars.

Elize (42) and Lorraine (46) each have a tablet and a personal computer, and Hugo (63) uses a personal computer. The other Pango Camp participants use their cell phones for social media.

Facebook, being an important tool to enhance social capital for economic benefit, is a driver behind the permanent and stable connectedness of some Pango Camp participants. In other words, their social media access is reliable because it pays to be online. This is discussed in detail in Section 5.3.

#### *5.2.3.5 Social media access in Sonheuwel*

The participants in Sonheuwel who have access to social media are fairly stable in their connectivity. Jannie (36) and Ann (28) have Wi-Fi and a personal computer, and it is the same for JP (42) and Antoinette (40), who share a personal computer with a "flat screen monitor". Alta (53) and her husband Christo (50) each have a cell phone that they use for social media, and they also share a tablet. Their son pays for their Wi-Fi connection:

It helps, that's why Christo has always made sure we have data on our phones even before Johantjie [their son] paid for it. At least he's not as technologically disabled as we are [laughs].

Even for participants like Bokkie (66) and Elsie (65), the data bundles they purchase allow for almost constant access. As Elsie (65) stated:

For a WhatsApp bundle of R39, you get one gig. You can chat a lot. Mine is only expiring today, since the end of last month [20 days]. And then, as you can afford it, you can buy more.

Both Louis (55) and Melt (55) understand the importance of having social media. Louis (55) had just purchased a tablet and wanted someone to help him access WhatsApp and Facebook. He explained:

I need to be connected, they tell me, so that I can get sponsors and help [for his disabled daughter]. I have now gotten one sponsor, so if I'm connected, I can get more.

Melt (55) had bought a computer and a data dongle. He struggled to get connected, however:

I don't have internet access here. I've gone and bought myself a computer a week ago and I got one of those sticks (a data dongle), a Vodafone one. But, I'm just not managing to get it right. I don't know if it's the signal or what, but when I log on, it just eats all my data, quickly, quickly, quickly and it's gone.

For Willie (72), his lack of access was deliberate: "I hate Facebook. No social media for me. I hate Facebook."

Overall, the Sonheuwel informal settlement is a well-resourced community. Most of the participants receive an income either from work or as a grant or pension from the government. This is evident in their regular social media access and the ability of some to become connected should they wish to or know how to.

The findings above confirm other studies (Schoon, 2012: 690; Schoon & Strelitz, 2014: 25; Leal, 2019: 1-18) that Facebook and WhatsApp are used by residents of informal settlements in South Africa. Data access in South Africa is expensive. In fact, South Africa has amongst the most expensive mobile data in Africa (Cable.co.uk, 2020: n.p.). In the global context, South Africa ranks 148 out of 228 countries on the price of mobile bandwidth (Cable.co.uk, 2020: n.p.). The average price of 1GB in South Africa is R88 or \$5.87. That puts South Africa in the same situation as Japan (137th) and Germany (140th) (Cable.co.uk, 2020: n.p.). In this sense there seems to be a link between disposable income and access to data for social media purposes. However, this is not

a quantitative study that seeks to prove the point; this section merely indicates that the samples in the five informal settlements are different due to the varied circumstances and contexts of each of the five communities and their residents.

This topic addresses the first research aim, namely exploring the social media access of participants and the specific platforms participants access. It is further illustrated in Section 4.3. The rest of the chapter explores the reasons that participants access WhatsApp and Facebook – the second research aim.

### **5.3 Theme 2: The long arm of Facebook**

One of the most significant findings of this study was participants' reliance on Facebook - directly and indirectly - for survival. Through what they often called personal, social media “advertising” during interviews, participants and community leaders are able to draw on their own social capital to, at the very least, survive a little better.

#### **5.3.1 Topic 1: Support, financial aid and donations as a result of Facebook “advertising”**

All the informal settlements in this study benefit in one way or another from Facebook groups. Pango Camp is the most organised of all the informal settlements in this regard. Community leader Hugo (63, Pango Camp) has, over the years, designed and implemented a successful Facebook strategy to attract donors to Pango Camp. He is mostly in charge of “advertising” and the relationship with benefactors. The process of receiving and distributing the donated items was first managed by his wife Irene, who passed away in August 2017. Hugo remarried shortly thereafter to a woman named Verona, and she took over Irene's duties. Hugo described the process of acquiring Facebook donations in great detail:

Mostly, I use Facebook to advertise. I am part of groups – there are many. I sit with something like eighteen groups. See, I put up a post that says we need help with this and this. Then we take the post and share it with our people [individual donors and groups on Facebook]. So, it's a thing ... how shall I say? You balloon the thing. You blow the balloon bigger than what it is. So, now it goes to so many people – if you take it and you share with your people, then you have access to so many people. Those people that we have in our group, they share it then with other people. Then the thing builds.

Although Hugo is still heavily involved in the process of eliciting donations for Pango Camp, he made it clear that he wanted his fellow Pango Camp residents to learn to become more self-sufficient. Before being moved to Pango Camp, residents illegally occupied a nearby caravan park, Coronation Park. There, Hugo and his late wife, Irene, looked after the residents with great care and involvement, as they cooked for them, provided essential items (acquired from “sponsors”), organised transport and addressed personal problems. Since being evicted from “the Dam” and relocated to Munsieville in 2014, Hugo has wanted to instil autonomy in the Pango Camp residents. His view is that soon the residents will receive their RDP houses,<sup>7</sup> and since these will be spread across different areas, they need to be able to survive on their own. This is not to say, he extracted himself completely. As Hugo put it:

They must become more independent and learn to look after themselves. If he has a problem now, he must phone the police – don’t come and see me. You go and phone them yourself. If you don’t have a phone, I’ll do it for you ... Here everyone is for himself. When we moved here, I told them: “Listen here, here you live in your own house, you get your own house, you must start looking after yourself. So, you are responsible for you and for your house. I will help you where I can, so ... .” Many of them interpret this the wrong way. I must provide, I must give. When something comes in [from sponsors], then he must receive. There’s a woman here, if three shirts come in, she must have one. Doesn’t matter how many people there are here, she must have one. So, I put her in her place – I told her to get a job. They just want and want. The moment we receive something, they want it. Sorry, but it doesn’t work like that.

Despite Hugo’s desire to withdraw as community leader and what he calls “primary caregiver” to Pango Camp, essentially he remains the contact person for Pango Camp donors. He also continues to actively engage in Facebook advertising campaigns:

If a man here is looking for building material, then I ask on Facebook: “Listen, here’s someone who needs building material, can anyone help him? I’m specific [when I ask]. Like, now, for Christmas, the [Pango Camp] people said they wanted something for Christmas. So, I advertised on Facebook. I can show you, there [in a storage room] are hordes of toys and gifts. Hordes.

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<sup>7</sup> RDP is the abbreviation for the Reconstruction and Development Programme. This initiative aims to provide low-cost housing to South African citizens older than 21 earning an income of R3,500 or less per month.

Hugo was adamant in underscoring the usefulness and value of Facebook's platform specifically to reach individuals and/or groups that he would never have been aware of without it. Not only does Facebook allow Hugo to branch outside of his own physical community, it also enables him to engage, productively, with individuals in a higher socio-economic bracket. Being able to leverage such individuals' networks has resulted in generous advantages for him, his family and the Pango Camp settlement as a whole. As Hugo said: "Yes, because of Facebook, I can contact someone I would never have known. Look, how will a guy on the outside know he can bring stuff here if he doesn't see that on Facebook?"

The struggle of facilitating the Facebook donations for Pango Camp has caused frustration for Hugo. It has also resulted in tensions in the community. Hugo relayed his plan in dealing with this responsibility.

You have to use your instinct to decide who you want to give to, and then you give who you want to give to. And, if you know that guy is going to sell it for drugs or alcohol, then you don't give to him. Finish! I don't care if he's going to blow a gasket or ten gaskets or talk nonsense about me – when I get up there one day, I have to take responsibility ... Let me put it like this, for me it's not about the adults. For me, it's more about the children. So, if a child doesn't have food, you're welcome to ask and I'll make a plan. If you want to drink and do drugs, you have money for food. I'm sorry.

Although Hugo is the most actively involved on Facebook - he has created a Facebook page for Pango Camp, and an NPO (non-profit organisation) under which he trades - other residents also use Facebook as a platform to liaise with potential donors. Chantel (43) explained how a woman had helped her with baby clothes for her new-born. She explained that Mariska (24) had given her the woman's cell phone number. When asked how she learned of the woman, Mariska answered:

I met her on Facebook. She has her own page. When I was pregnant with my twins, I asked her for baby stuff and she gave me her number. Those are the only groups I follow, like the one Chantel told you about where I got that lady's number who can help with stuff.

Pango Camp runs like a well-oiled machine when it comes to Facebook-elicited donations. In fact, when one arrives at Pango Camp, one is struck by a large fenced-in courtyard, attached to Hugo's house, filled to the brim with clothes, toys, books, bags, shoes, food, containers, appliances and furniture. Adjacent to this courtyard is



a big brick storage room where food donations are kept – all of this (Hugo's house, courtyard and storage room) is protected through closed-circuit television. Hugo has built an empire of donations through his Facebook engagement and activities. Many of the initial Facebook introductions have now become regular donors and acquaintances. In fact, the researcher wishes to state that throughout her visits to Pango Camp (for her Master's and Doctoral research), there has never been a day where there was not at least one donor dropping off items.

Using Facebook as a platform to engage with individuals or organisations that could provide assistance is not unique to Pango Camp. Certain participants at Sonheuwel are actively engaged on Facebook to organise activities and donations for their fellow Sonheuwel residents. JP (42) said:

Antoinette [JP's wife] and I do lots of donations for the park. We ask people for a bed or if someone needs something, then we ask ... and we receive. I also have a non-profit, an NPO that I use for donations and stuff when people are struggling. I connect through Facebook groups. I post ... not too far, obviously only on Pretoria groups. When the stuff arrives, they drop it off with us, but we always confirm first with Hendrik. We don't take the donations to our house.

Antoinette (40) elaborated:

You can ask my mom how many donations we got in last December. We posted a thing on Facebook and we got a good response. There were probably five, six, seven people here in one week with donations. And I drove fifteen kilometres to a smallholding where I was told I could get vegetables. Last year, I also organised something for the children for Easter. The people came from the Facebook groups, but then they ask for my WhatsApp number, they were individuals [not organisational aid]. They learn about me through Facebook groups. When they react to your post, they also tell you who you can contact. So, we called the one shopping mall and the lady there organised gifts for the children for Christmas.

Participants at Filadelfia Ark, on the other hand, did not report donation-seeking behaviour on Facebook. One could deduce that this was because their needs were met by the owner, Dirk. At Filadelfia Ark, Dirk, orchestrates and facilitates contact with outside benefactors himself. In addition to this, he also generates a sizeable income through the farm's farming activities, cattle trading and factory output – much of this is then spent to provide for and support the residents. At Filadelfia Ark, residents are not expected to contribute financially. Participants at Filadelfia Ark seem comfortable with this. When asked if they are part of Facebook groups that could assist in securing



donations, Pierre (35) answered: “That is all managed through the farm.” Brenton (40) echoed this by sharing: “Yes, by the Ark (Filadelfia Ark),” and Elana (40) concluded: “That’s not our job.”

Endicott residents also tend not to use Facebook to secure aid. From the interviews, the researcher deduced that this is because of the weekly provisions they receive from a nearby charity organisation, and because there is always someone in the family who works, and who can help. At Funny Farm, no real survival strategy is in place, and their needs appear to be more intense and urgent.

#### *5.3.1.1 Facebook networks of benefactors and donor organisations*

The arm of Facebook is long, it reaches far, and those who benefit cannot always see where the help is coming from. This points to the work published by Davis and Moscato (2018: 283) and Briones et al. (2011: 38) that emphasises the role of social media in fundraising activities and connections between donors and recipients. At Endicott, participants regularly receive food parcels and other essential goods packages. They, themselves are not active on Facebook, or any other social media platform, to encourage donations, however. The person who facilitates this for them is a woman named Marnelle (38). She does not reside in the Endicott settlement, but nearby on a smallholding she shares with her family. Marnelle (38) used to be an Endicott resident herself but through support, hard work and an entrepreneurial spirit, she has been able to “create a good life on the outside”. However, she remains involved, specifically to garner support and donations for the Endicott residents. When participants are asked how they think their benefactors know about them, their answers confirm their unfamiliarity and unawareness. Henk (41, Endicott) initially said that they do not receive any donations. When another participant, Colleen, (38, Endicott) reminded him of Marnelle (38) delivering supplies, he answered: “Oh, yes, Marnelle – she comes quite a lot.” When asked about the people behind Marnelle (38), the ones who supply her with aid, he said: “No, this is the first time I hear about that.” Whilst other participants knew about the non-profit organisation Tomorrow’s Angels<sup>8</sup> that works with Marnelle (38), they did not consider how the organisation elicits essentials to be

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<sup>8</sup> Name changed for confidentiality.

distributed at Endicott. “I really don’t know how they do it,” Colleen (38, Endicott) communicated.

The researcher interviewed the two non-profit organisations that are involved at Endicott. Both of the spokespeople for these organisations informed the researcher that Facebook forms an integral part of their fundraising activities. In fact, the representative of We Help Families<sup>9</sup> told the researcher that 80 percent of their donations, voluntary services and general aid is acquired through Facebook. She explained that by connecting with other groups on Facebook that are sympathetic to people who are poverty-stricken, they are able to successfully connect with benefactors. All of this, however, barely serves as a backdrop to participants as the Facebook connection is not known to them.

As indicated, several participants expressed being completely comfortable with someone else handling aid on their behalf. Such is the case with Filadelfia Ark where residents are sheltered and fed, and their children, schooled – at no expense to the residents. Filadelfia Ark farm owner, Dirk is able to do this as a result of his own successful farming and engineering projects, but also through community associates he has established over the years – these are physical networks, not Facebook contacts. Elana (40, Filadelfia Ark) accurately summed up the shared sentiment among the Filadelfia Ark participants regarding its aid networks: “No, we’ve never thought about that.” Although Dirk does not use Facebook to liaise with anyone - donor or not - one community aid organisation that is actively involved at Filadelfia Ark, has a significant Facebook presence structured around the theme of white poverty. On Facebook, this organisation announces what is needed in certain informal settlements - piece jobs, clothes, food - and as a result of their large Facebook following, a steady stream of support keeps flowing in. Again, what this illustrates is that even if the informal settlement farm owner himself avoids Facebook, its long arm reaches far and wide.

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<sup>9</sup> Name changed for confidentiality.

Funny Farm participants display an apathetic attitude towards donations, some delivered by a donor well-known to participants (Ronel, 51), and others by strangers or local shops. The infrequency of aid has forced participants to find other ways to survive. As Clint (49, Funny Farm) explained:

If they come or whatever, I guess it helps, but, like I say, my ex wife is up the road. If I need something, I go up there. I know people so I go here and there.

Ronel (51), the woman who facilitates donations for Funny Farm and who introduced the researcher to the community, is aware of the social problems present at Funny Farm, but nonetheless, she continues to request aid to help where she can (she lives a few kilometres from Funny Farm). “I use all my networks, my Facebook ... Corner Aid Forum<sup>10</sup> ... I talk to my friends, they talk to their friends and on WhatsApp groups, because I am on many groups, so I can ask on all those groups.” Deon (49, Funny Farm) indicated a vague awareness of this: “They talk among each other [to help us].”

Although Facebook as a platform has been successful in bridging across social divides, and between rich and poor in the informal settlements involved in this study, it also means that when Facebook comes full circle, certain realities are laid bare. In other words, when underhanded tactics to lure donations are exposed, the very same platform that provides a long arm of help, can be the same one that destroys all means of assistance.

#### *5.3.1.2 When the bright side of Facebook becomes the dark side of Facebook*

This section touches on blaming the poor for their circumstances, but, in this case, it is done very publicly and visibly – on Facebook. In blaming people for their poverty, they are made out to be the undeserving poor (Bridges, 2017: 1049; Harper, 2014: 92), condemned for their behaviour which is believed to be the fundamental cause of their demise (Garland, 2015: 5, 6, 9; Harper, 2014: 83-97; Jeppesen, 2009: 488; Gans, 2009: 81).

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<sup>10</sup> Name changed for confidentiality.

Out of the five informal settlements the researcher visited, Funny Farm was strikingly under-resourced, dirty and dilapidated. There was also no activity in terms of donations being delivered, which was in contrast to the situation at the other informal settlements. Wayne (34, Funny Farm) offered insight into why he thought donations and aid had dried up:

It's just they, they bring clothes and stuff, and they're not even gone yet, and the people go to sell the stuff. That while the children are standing outside waiting for the stuff. Some of the people here are like that. People deliver food and stuff and before they are even out of the gates, they take it to sell for drugs. So, now they want to tell other people not to come here. That's why people [aid facilitators] have stopped asking on Facebook. Everyone is fed-up. They're sick of trying to help and all the people just sell the stuff ... . This place is discussed a lot on Facebook and not in very nice words.

Marius (37, Funny Farm) elaborated further on the damage negative Facebook posts about Funny Farm have caused:

It's really bad. When we first got here, before Christmas a few years ago, we got so much stuff. I can't even tell you how much we got. Now ... we hardly get anything. Once a month, maybe. Then, we didn't even have to work. People brought us food every day. It was nice, but too comfortable. Now it's stopped because of what the people say on Facebook about us.

In Pango Camp, Facebook donations have caused a rift between two community factions. There is distrust and hostility as a result of the way participants perceive the handouts to be distributed. The arguments between residents have spilled onto Facebook, and have also reached the donors and financial contributors. Hugo (63, Pango Camp) commented:

Now the people [benefactors] are saying the food and stuff don't go to the right people. So many of the people, even the ones on the inside, go onto Facebook and say the stuff that they deliver is used for other things. That's how it goes. At the moment there's a huge fight about it. But, if you get 30 chickens, how do you divide that between 400 people? Everyone wants a chicken. So, that's the problem.

Mariska (24, Pango Camp) also shared her concerns over the decline in donations. She attributed this to negative posts on Facebook.

People know sponsors always come here, but that we don't always have the stuff [that is delivered]. Now they want to know what's going on. So now there aren't really that many people who want to help us on Facebook.

Hugo is aware of “the situation outside” and how Pango Camp’s negative reputation has resulted in fewer donations. But he remains practical and solutions-driven in the hope that it will mitigate the damage caused by harmful Facebook posts:

Many sponsors have withdrawn because of the comments on Facebook. Many of them don't respond to this place anymore, because they know what this place is like. There are much fewer sponsors, much fewer. But now we're getting new ones, not old ones. I get a lot on Facebook. What I do is I advertise that I clean home garages as long as I get something out of the stuff I clean out. If I don't, please just cover my petrol costs and I'll come and help you. A lot of my new sponsors I get through that.

Much of the support, in all forms, that is provided to the informal settlements in this study is as a result of Facebook engagements. This is done by various stakeholders – settlement leaders, residents, community facilitators and aid organisations. Whichever way one approaches this, it can be said unequivocally that these informal settlement residents' social capital has increased as a result of Facebook. Facebook has enabled them, or representatives on their behalf, to widen their networks beyond their immediate physical restrictions. This aligns with the findings of Kavanaugh et al. (2005: 1), Zhao (2006: 844), Ellison et al. (2007: 1143), and Bouchillon and Gotlieb (2017: 299) who suggest that through social media, low-income users are able to grow and maintain weak ties. These ties are then utilised and leveraged to create opportunities for quality of life improvement (Kavanaugh et al., 2005: 1; Ellison et al., 2014: 863; Ellison et al., 2007: 1143). The question remains, however, if this enhancement of bridging social capital has really assisted in upward mobility or only to survive a little better. This, in fact, could be seen to further pointing to the dark side of social capital where the reliance on donations and donors in well-resourced socio-economic spheres is potentially harmful to people who are marginalised and impoverished (Huda et al., 2008: 312; Ayios et al., 2013: 110-111). It is almost like it can be easy come, easy go depending completely on the views and attitudes of the donors – rendering the recipients vulnerable to donations being discontinued at any moment. This is, in other words, a power imbalance that perpetuates and never realigns (Huda et al., 2008: 312; Ayios et al., 2013: 110-111).

### 5.3.2 Topic 2: Income and employment obtained through Facebook

Facebook does not only serve as a net to fish for potential donors. There are study participants that find Facebook a helpful tool to promote their business, attract clients, or apply for jobs. JP (42, Sonheuwel) who, together with his wife, Antoinette (40, Sonheuwel) own a small business that does web designs, web hosting and VOIP telephone numbers was clear in expressing his reliance on Facebook:

Without it, I would have been stranded. Our entire income comes from the internet. All my work, I get through Facebook.

He elaborated by sharing that he advertises his services on several groups: “I randomise between 700 groups. I use them all.” He further stated that he has enough work to keep him busy every day.

Alta (53, Sonheuwel) had her own Facebook success story to share. When the researcher approached her for an interview, Alta invited her into her home. She apologised for the mess and explained that she and her husband were busy packing as they were moving to a game farm where her husband will work as a general maintenance man and she will cook for the game farm lodge guests. She told the researcher that this opportunity presented itself through Facebook.

I went onto the one Facebook page *Afrikaners Wat Werk Soek en Arbeidswet*<sup>11</sup>. I went onto it and I typed that I was doing it on behalf of my husband. Then I put in his skills and everything, and his phone number. I did it for the guy next door too. The next day, we were sitting here when my phone rang. Then they [her husband and the game farm owner] spoke, and he [game farm owner] then asked: “Can your wife cook?”

It turned out that Alta (53, Sonheuwel) and her husband were invited for an interview shortly after that phone call and were offered positions to help with the daily running of the game lodge. They were asked to live on the farm on a permanent basis. Alta made her feelings known: “I am so happy for Facebook.”

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<sup>11</sup> Interviews were predominantly conducted in Afrikaans as most participants' mother tongue is Afrikaans. The researcher is fully bilingual and was comfortable speaking Afrikaans to participants. *Afrikaners Wat Werk Soek en Arbeidswet* translates to *Afrikaners Looking for Work and Labour Act*.

These participants are able to use Facebook to improve their circumstances. Although JP (42, Sonheuwel) and Antoinette (40, Sonheuwel) still reside in an informal settlement, their personal situation is considerably better than many of their neighbours – their home is one of the largest, they have a new flat-screen television and they have a car and a scooter. In fact, Antoinette affirmed that a reason for their stay at Sonheuwel is because her mom, Bokkie (66, Sonheuwel), lives two houses away and she is happy there.

### 5.3.3 Topic 3: Free and cheap goods acquired through Facebook

Informal settlement living is associated with minimal financial means. Facebook has proved a helpful platform in acquiring commodities at reduced prices. Participants shared how Facebook facilitates this process. As Jannie (36, Sonheuwel) explained: “If you couldn’t use Facebook, you would struggle a lot to get stuff and to sell.” Bokkie (66, Sonheuwel) uses Facebook to support her needlework business:

When I go onto Facebook, I like Marketplace<sup>12</sup>. For example, if I need an overlocker urgently, I will put on Facebook that I am a pensioner, and trust me, I will get one for cheap. But, I will have to go fetch it, so I say it must be in somewhere in Pretoria.

JP (25, Funny Farm) uses a Facebook group *Alberton Koop en Verkoop*<sup>13</sup> “to see what I can get for a good price, so I can sell it. Like in, a bargain ... bikes and stuff.” This is a similar experience to the one Troelien (34, Funny Farm) shared: “An Alberton group worked for me once. I picked up a TV, just down the road from us.”

In Pango Camp, several participants spoke about their activities on Facebook groups designed to buy and sell products. Elize (42, Pango Camp) mentioned *Koop en Verkoop*, *Karre onder R5,000* and *Karre onder R15,000*,<sup>14</sup> explaining that her husband uses several of these for purchasing old vehicles to fix and resell. Hugo shared how useful these Facebook groups are, specifically *Kom Vra of Gratis en Verniet*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Marketplace is a Facebook service of classified advertisements. This offers Facebook users a platform to sell and buy goods using their Facebook profiles.

<sup>13</sup> Alberton Buy and Sell in English.

<sup>14</sup> Buy and Sell, Cars under R5,000 and Cars under R15,000.

<sup>15</sup> Come Ask or Free.



It is very helpful, because if he says come and take a lounge suite for free, then you quickly go there to get it. There you go! Then you give it to someone who needs it. This one [Hugo was interviewed in his neighbour's house, and pointed to the couch he was sitting on], I got like that.

Douglas (35, Pango Camp) was busy fixing a car when the researcher approached him for an interview. He stated that he was part of several Facebook groups advertising discounted items, mostly second-hand. The ones he engaged with are all community-specific as proximity is an important factor considering the cost of transport:

I am part of *Randfontein Koop en Verkoop*,<sup>16</sup> *Rand-en-Dal*, *Meyersdal* ... all those places. My work [fibre optic technician] is everywhere in Gauteng, so when I drive there, I join those groups. That's how it goes.

Douglas said that he mostly participates on these groups to “window shop”, but that he has used them to buy and sell in the past. Chantel (43, Pango Camp) has been successful on *Kom Vra of Gratis en Verniet* in securing items needed for her new-born baby. Mariska (24, Pango Camp) used *Krugersdorp, kom haal of word weggegooi gratis en verniet “Mahala”*<sup>17</sup>, and suggested that “the people who can give, will give to you.”

Facebook enables participants to take advantage of goods being given away or sold at competitive prices in the area they reside in. Since access to cash is one of the biggest challenges the informal settlement residents in this study face, having access to Facebook and being part of virtual community groups that offer unique opportunities is indeed transformative – perhaps not life altering, but certainly uplifting. Noticeable again is that no-one at Filadelfia Ark makes use of the Facebook groups discussed in this section. One could conclude that this is as a result of a lack of need. Endicott participants are also absent from this section as they appear to rely more on the charity organisation committed to assisting them as well as working family members.

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<sup>16</sup> Randfontein Buy and Sell.

<sup>17</sup> Krugersdorp, come get or it will be discarded, it's for free.

This theme concentrates on the long arm of Facebook. It explores how donations are elicited through Facebook, and how benefactors' Facebook networks often render the long arm of Facebook invisible to recipients of aid. This however does not imply that Facebook networks are the gift that keeps on giving. In fact, when groups or individuals that have been supporting informal settlements feel they have been taken advantage of, they use the same platform, Facebook, to share this with other potential donors. This, naturally, has negative consequences for the residents of the informal settlement. Having said this, Facebook does however serve as a useful tool through which an income can be earned, and employment gained. It also facilitates transactions between those in need and those who wish to rid themselves of used possessions. The contacts that are established through Facebook, especially those that extend beyond social and economic barriers, enhance participants' bridging social capital (see also Kavanaugh et al., 2005: 1; Zhao, 2006: 844; Ellison et al., 2007: 1143; Bouchillon & Gotlieb, 2017: 299). It does however not necessarily always result in upward mobility, but more, assistance with daily struggles.

#### **5.4 Theme 3: “Facebook is a toilet” – the dark side of social media**

Despite the positive role Facebook plays in certain white informal settlements - through donations, work, income - several participants shared negative sentiments and experiences regarding Facebook. This section expands on the literature discussed in Chapter 3 under the dark side of social media. The expression “Facebook is a toilet” was often used in interviews. A myriad of reasons was provided for these vehement proclamations, and they are considered in this section.

##### **5.4.1 Topic 1: Exploiting and farming with poverty**

In discussing the white informal settlements of Gauteng with a large aid organisation focused on alleviating poverty, the contact person the researcher liaised with explained that the reason they are not involved in all the informal settlements in Gauteng is because some informal settlement farm owners “farm with poverty”. Essentially what this remark pertains to is either using free or inexpensive labour or putting up a false front to extract donations. This could be seen as a further element of the dark side of social capital (Huda et al., 2008: 312; Ayios et al., 2013: 110-111), perhaps with a slightly different angle and interpretation, but, yet, one where the power imbalance remains favourable to the donor in the donor-recipient relationship.

Participants expressed frustration albeit not necessarily aimed at their respective community leaders or farm owner, but other opportunists. Mariska (24, Pango Camp) explained an unfortunate event where she felt used for someone else's gain:

They collected so many diapers and baby formula for the twins and I didn't see any of it. I got nothing, nothing for the twins. They put photos on Facebook of the twins and my youngest daughter. They said my children sleep on the floor. They didn't even get my age right. They said I was eighteen.

Elize (42, Pango Camp) further elaborated on the process of how residents are exploited. She shared that this is often done by those posing as charitable people or groups:

They put photos up on Facebook pretending to give people stuff and that's how they get donations. I feel the people in Munsieville also have the right to have a private life. They make you stand there with the stuff to take the photo, and then afterwards they tell you to put the stuff down and go. It happens in this place ... I told everyone they are not allowed to put photos of my kids on Facebook. If I see my child on Facebook, there will be trouble ... Outside your home, if that child is on Facebook, I feel you embarrass the child. That's how I feel.

Hugo (63, Pango Camp), an active Facebook user, detailed how Facebook, although a helpful platform, also serves to facilitate underhanded activities at times. Since most of his initial contact with potential donors is through Facebook, he had a clear understanding of the modus operandi of those with ill intent:

The problem is you get people who abuse it [Facebook]. Like, they'll take your site and share it, but they take out your [phone] number and put their own numbers in. That's how they abuse the thing. You'll see it on Facebook. That one Afrikaner<sup>18</sup> group is like that. They even steal our photos and then they use it ... You can't do anything about it. What are you going to do about it? Even if you complain, who's going to stop it?

Rudolph (21, Pango Camp) indicated that "there are so many Facebook pages of Pango Camp" managed by impostors for their own benefit, and Natasha (42, Pango Camp) shared that the fraudsters sometimes try to protect themselves by "blurring out

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<sup>18</sup> The term Afrikaner, specifically in this context, refers to the cultural group of white South Africans that are Afrikaans-speaking. Hugo (63, Pango Camp) named the group, but for the sake of confidentiality, this is not disclosed.

the faces". Lorraine (46, Pango Camp) was concerned about how the residents were depicted and discussed a solution that had been proposed:

There was this one case where two children were playing outside. Okay, they were really dirty, but kids are kids. So, someone took a picture of them and it wasn't even ten minutes later and that photo was up on Facebook [to collect money]. That's why we said no-one was allowed to take pictures of our children and they must please take all the photos of our children down. Because, after that picture, they were all saying we don't look after our children. The welfare wanted to step in and stuff ... So, someone suggested that if you want to take a picture of us standing with a parcel, you must take it from the shoulders down. Faces may not be advertised.

Priscilla (29, Funny Farm) had her daughter taken away from her by welfare when she was younger and "living on the streets." Hence, she was apprehensive about posting photos of her new-born baby boy on Facebook. She mentioned however that the church did: "One of the church congregations put my son on Facebook. I don't get help from them physically but they put us on Facebook for if someone wants to donate, then they can. They put the address up too." Although Priscilla (29, Funny Farm) appeared comfortable and trusting enough of the church to facilitate this process on her behalf, she remained sceptical about others sharing content on Facebook that could cause her and her son harm:

I am scared of welfare. Like, if there's someone that posts, and the wrong people see the wrong things. If they see the way we live. I am very cautious when it comes to welfare. I don't want them to take my baby. They've already taken three children away here.

The act of pornography of poverty where it is depicted in its most excessive form to evoke one or other severe reaction from an audience (Van Schagen, 2015: 64; Nathanson, 2013: 104) is clearly present and evident in some of the informal settlements in this study. Participants display a distinct understanding of this practice and the harm it may cause them. This contributes to a negative sentiment towards Facebook as Elize (42, Pango Camp) succinctly indicated: "That's why I'm not really a Facebook person."

#### 5.4.2 Topic 2: Using Facebook as a weapon: shame, embarrassment, hurt

Not only is Facebook used to exploit informal settlement residents in this study. The platform is also weaponised to publicly cause shame, embarrassment and hurt to participants. Throughout the interview process, the researcher learned how arguments and fights in the informal settlements, among each others or with “outsiders”, spilled onto Facebook. This corresponds with cyberbullying where social aggression targets individuals or groups through social media platforms to cause them humiliation and harm (Rachoene & Oyedemi, 2015: 304; Menesini & Spiel, 2012: 163; Wade & Beran, 2011: 44). As a result of this public airing of dirty laundry, several participants expressed avoiding Facebook exactly for that reason.

Henk (41, Endicott) was the first to suggest that “Facebook is a toilet of rubbish that I’m not interested in.” Sharon (45, Endicott) clarified the statement:

I was slandered on Facebook. It is a big toilet. They said that I sold children on Facebook. I almost got locked up ... They found my Facebook page and that’s how it started. They really broke me ... It was this woman. She doesn’t like me. It’s all just jealousy.

As is the case with Sharon, many participants discussed how they were victimised through Facebook by someone they know. Ansie (70, Filadelfia Ark) explained how she understood the process to work:

For example, my sister who lives in Vaalrivier will talk about someone who lives in Brakpan and then the next one will add something and then another one ... So, one person will talk about something specific about someone she doesn’t like, and then one person will add a little something to that story. You know, it’s a messed-up situation. For example, if I don’t like her, I go onto Facebook and say to my sister on her wall, where everyone can see it, that Charlotte is a whore<sup>19</sup> and everything else ... That’s the type of thing I’m talking about.

JP (25, Funny Farm) told the researcher that his ex-girlfriend, unhappy about their breakup, falsely accused him on Facebook of stealing her car – for all their mutual friends to see. In Pango Camp, the fight between the two factions is consistently broadcast on Facebook. Chantel (43, Pango Camp) showed the researcher several

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<sup>19</sup> The researcher is directly quoting a participant. The researcher does however appreciate that this language could be considered offensive by readers. It is only used to convey the participant’s passionate response to the situation. Moreover, the name Charlotte that was used by the participant was only used as a hypothetical example.

Facebook posts by Verona (Hugo's wife) who was in charge of the distribution of donations. Chantel alleged that the aim of these posts was to discredit Chantel and her husband, Gerrie. According to Chantel, she and her husband are coming up in the ranks in Pango Camp, which threatens Hugo and Verona's leadership and, by default, string of donations. Chantel explained:

My husband is the chairman here and last Saturday he confronted her in front of the sponsors, because they [Hugo and Verona] sell the stuff that comes in – the people in here don't get it. Hugo and them [his family who also reside in Pango Camp], they sell *bakkies* and *bakkies* full of the stuff. They have storage there next to the highway. That's why she went after me, my husband and Elize. Because Elize also receives things from sponsors, like Charmaine. I'll show you the screenshots [of Facebook posts]. She insulted us badly – calling us druggies and stuff. I was waiting for the words "druggies". My husband and I are big deals here [in Pango Camp]. I tell you, I was waiting for the day that she'll accuse us of taking drugs. Even if it costs me the last panties on my bottom to take her to the High Court for this drug story, I will do it. Look at the stuff she says about us on Facebook [Chantel shows the researcher].

Rudolph (21, Pango Camp) expressed concern over the online attacks on Facebook: "That's the negative thing about Facebook. The fighting." Martin (45, Pango Camp) also felt that Facebook is often used as a method and platform to air grievances: "When someone is upset with someone else, they use Facebook to lie and betray each other." Piet (67, Filadelfia Ark) voiced his reluctance to go onto Facebook as a result of the hostility he sees on the platform:

Let me put it to you this way. At one stage I did use Facebook – I found many of my family members on Facebook. But now Facebook has become so bad you're actually scared to go on it. You're too scared of what you'll see there ... all the gossip. That stuff, you know, where they break each other down like "have you heard about that person? He is like this and she is that. She slept with this one and he slept with that one."

Lorraine (46, Pango Camp) indicated a similar approach: "I have a Facebook profile, but I don't go on it much anymore. The people talk too much on it. It's just gossip." Gordon (58, Filadelfia Ark) also shared that he purposefully avoids "groups that gossip."

Although much of the harmful and hurtful conversations and declarations on Facebook are between individuals who know each other, participants also shared that strangers often left derogatory comments on their Facebook pages or pages that are in some way connected to them and the informal settlement. Jannie (36, Sonheuwel) told the researcher:

That group of Leon.<sup>20</sup> There are so many ugly comments on there. People don't know our circumstances, so it's easy to say things without really knowing what it's about.

Ann (28, Sonheuwel) explained that although the intentions of certain charity Facebook pages are pure and honourable, people often use this platform to leave insulting and derogatory comments:

They will make a video of us, but then there will be some people who will say that we don't bath our children. At some camps people only get five litres of water a day. With that they must bath and they must drink it too. People don't think about that. People are struggling but they just criticise.

Natasha (42, Pango Camp) confirmed this, stating: "When people don't know you, they are quick to judge on Facebook."

The practice of trolling (Herring et al., 2002: 372), joining social media groups under false pretensions, is something participants experience frequently on Facebook. These hostile interactions emotionally harm and scar the victims (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017: 1339). For some, this results in the avoidance of Facebook, while others simply view this as something that goes with the territory.

#### 5.4.3 Topic 3: Fake news, bombardment and going viral

The insults, criticism and arguments that occur on Facebook have left several affected participants disillusioned with the platform. In addition to these engagements contributing to the view that "Facebook is a toilet", fake news and the bombardment of push notifications are cited by some participants as traumatising and destructive. Concerns are also expressed about the speed and efficacy with which incorrect and

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<sup>20</sup> Leon is the name of the contact person and donation facilitator of an aid organisation.



false news travels. The false news mainly reported by participants is misinformation, where false news is circulated without the intent to do harm (Brown, 2018: 198).

Disinformation - news that is disseminated to cause confusion and/or damage (Freelon & Wells, 2020: 145) - was also mentioned in the interviews. James (57, Filadelfia Ark) shared that he had abruptly “cancelled Facebook” after using it for a few weeks: “

There was all this talk about viruses you can get. People kept sending me stuff about viruses I will get on my computer and cell phone. It wasn't true and I don't have time for lies. I mean, lies, where will lying get you in this world?

William (24, Pango Camp) also voiced his frustration with how false news is spread on Facebook:

There is so much fake news on Facebook. Too much, too much. It goes from one pal to the next pal to the next pal. Everyone keeps posting it, that's how it keeps going.

Piet (67, Filadelfia Ark) articulated his opinion of Facebook news: “There are many people who use Facebook as a, how I can I put it ... a molehill.” Andre (45, Filadelfia Ark) also believed some Facebook users strive to “make a mountain out of nothing.” He elaborated:

Oh my word, the other day there was this huge Facebook scene about a truck and plane that supposedly burnt to the ground. Everyone was up in arms, but in the meantime, it is old news that happened four, five years ago that someone wanted to distort completely to make a massive thing for no reason. It's like saying there's a genocide, there's a genocide. They make it sound like we're getting slaughtered here.

Leonard (40, Filadelfia Ark) had a logical, pragmatic approach to the existence and perpetuation of fake Facebook news: “Look here, everything can't be true – that in itself is contradictory. But to get the truth out of each news story can be very difficult ...” Andre (45, Filadelfia Ark) feels that as a result of the prevalence of fake news on Facebook, one “can't trust it, really, you just can't trust what you read there.”

Leonard (40, Filadelfia Ark) found the way in which information was constantly pushed at him on Facebook “aggressive”. As he put it: “Suddenly, lots of stuff comes onto your phone, whoop, whoop, whoop. Maybe that is someone you know, or maybe that is your friend. I don't want that in my life because it saps energy out of me that I can use

somewhere else. Do you understand?” Leonard (40, Filadelfia Ark) further shared how Facebook had been the reason for his downfall and demise in the past:

The last three times that I fell hard in life started with Facebook every time. Because you talk to people you don't know. You trust a person because of what you see on his page. But, it's not real, do you understand? The next thing I'm on a page that says we must all stand together and we must do this or that. We're going to do this, a thousand people and it just won't stop. It goes on and on and then finally I say, okay, let's do it and then there's no-one. It's not real. It's a fantasy world ... There was this guy and this place, a place like this one, but in the Karoo. But then it turned out he was stealing the people's money. You pay him a R1,000 for your stand and then you can put up a little house there. But then we got there and there was nothing. He stole our money. It just never stops. It [the information] keeps coming.

This is a very clear instance of the damage of disinformation. As Freelon and Wells (2020: 145) suggest, it is the spread of false information to cause damage or to gain profit. Social media, unfortunately, has the ability to spread fake messages to thousands of people, rendering it a breeding ground for this type of destructive behaviour (Hameleers et al., 2020: 281).

Jannie (52, Funny Farm) disclosed that Facebook added to his paranoia: “You know what, I don't want to go into details, but I had this paranoia with cell phones and people tracking me [on Facebook]. I kept trying to stand and come up in life again but all this stuff just keeps pushing at you and pushing at you. Now, I'm going to be honest with you. I don't really want it.” A similar sentiment was conveyed by William (24, Pango Camp): “There are too many problems on Facebook. From everyone, everyone, everyone, everyone. That's why I said I don't want it anymore.”

Misinformation (Brown, 2018: 198) that is circulated on Facebook is disconcerting to several participants. Not only is it the incorrect content that participants find bothersome, but also the intensity and frequency with which this misinformation is circulated. This ties in with online content going viral (Friedman, 2014: 33; West, 2011: 76) – messages, videos or pictures spreading across platforms at a rapid rate. The loss of control over content, the spread and persistence associated with Facebook alerts caused distress to some. This distrustful approach to Facebook led some participants to the conclusion that Facebook is downright dangerous.

#### 5.4.4 Topic 4: The dangers of Facebook

In observing the damage Facebook can do to people's reputations, and the havoc it wreaks in communities, some participants stated that they perceive Facebook to be a dangerous platform – one that could threaten children and families. The practice of trolling should be considered here, as the aim of trolling is deception to cause confusion and disruption in online groups (Herring et al., 2002: 372; Papez & Veer, 2017: 1339). For this reason, there were participants who took part in this study that tended to avoid Facebook entirely.

Brenton (40, Filadelfia Ark) and his wife Elana (40, Filadelfia Ark) claimed to have deleted their Facebook accounts after becoming parents. As Brenton put it: "It is too dangerous. I have two little girls ..." Elana continued: "Yes, we don't do it. Facebook is a site for chatting and that type of of thing. It's not really our thing." Brenton added: "We deleted it for privacy. We won't do it," and Elana pointed out: "There used to be people that came through on Facebook who we don't know at all. Stuff that they said and we didn't even know them from a bar of soap. We didn't even know how they found us."

Colleen (38, Endicott) explained that she was nervous that her young children might become targets of online bullying: "I am scared that people will make up stories about my children and that they'll find out about it. They are so naïve and gullible at this stage." Charmaine (50, Endicott) also shared this concern, explaining that because of the "ugliness" of Facebook, she has put an age limit on using it for her children.

Melt (55, Sonheuwel) blamed WhatsApp and Facebook for "ruining" his life: "With the affair my wife had ... she sat next to me in the lounge while communicating with him. She said they were only friends." Willie (72, Sonheuwel) had an equally passionate response to the researcher's question about Facebook: "I hate Facebook. No social media. I hate Facebook." He felt that it robbed people of their privacy. Pierre (35, Filadelfia Ark) was frightened about the hidden dangers of Facebook and the risks this posed to teenagers:

Those guys [the people at Facebook], they are busy feeding people rubbish and they make a lot of money doing it. They can actually change the world but now they're busy with this shit.<sup>21</sup> They are handing children to paedophiles. Now it's normal for fourteen and fifteen-year olds to share their own porn. Where are the cartoons we used to watch? What are they watching now? Now there is some or other paedophile causing trouble for children on the internet. And the parents look the other way.

Besides mentioning exploiting and farming with poverty, the weaponising of Facebook, the bombardment of fake news, and dangerous Facebook liaisons, participants discussed several reasons for being nervous and sceptical of this social media platform. But whilst some chose to avoid it or minimise their Facebook activity, others aimed to focus on the positive aspects of Facebook. They centralised their Facebook activities around encouragement and a sense of connectedness.

## **5.5 Theme 4: “Make my day” – the bright side of Facebook**

Despite reporting undesirable and damaging activities and practices on Facebook, several participants derived much joy and upliftment through their social media engagements. Elements of emotional support, advice from strangers, humour and entertainment contribute to positive Facebook experiences. Furthermore, a sense of connectedness despite physical constraints brought about by poverty confirmed, for many participants, their own existence in terms of the broader and wider world.

### **5.5.1 Topic 1: Connectedness and the need to belong**

Poverty is associated with low physical mobility – a level of “stuckness” as a result of the high cost of transport (Schoon, 2012: 690; Schoon & Strelitz, 2014: 25). Participants (Mariska, 24 Pango Camp; Hugo, 63 Pango Camp) discussed how having to either pay for petrol or public transport often deters residents of informal settlements from having physical contact with others in various capacities – for work, business transactions or socially. Although the cost of data is still considered substantial, especially to the participants, it does allow for more personal engagement.

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<sup>21</sup> The participant is quoted directly to convey how strongly he feels about the subject, although the researcher appreciates that this language may be considered offensive.

For participants, WhatsApp and Facebook serve as important platforms to communicate with family and friends who live outside the informal settlements. This corresponds with the research of James et al. (2017: 561), Rice and Hagen (2010: 3), and Kemp (2018: 1) who emphasise the importance of Facebook to facilitate and support communication with social and familial contacts. In fact, many participants mentioned contact with relatives and loved ones as a primary reason for using Facebook and/or WhatsApp. Several of those in Funny Farm also explained that because they often either sell or lose their phones, and they change their phone numbers regularly, Facebook is a consistent way of contacting friends and family, and of remaining contactable in some form.

However, aside from social media enabling contact with loved ones, it also facilitates an important connectedness with the broader world and community. This touches on the theory of a person's need to belong (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006: 697; Stevens & Fiske, 1995: 192). Furthermore, it reveals the important role of social media in connecting users not only to people whom they share a close bond with, but also individuals that are not previously known to them (Yu, Hu and Cheng, 2015: 240).

As Samantha (20, Pango Camp) put it: "I can communicate from far [on groups]. It would have been bad if I couldn't – look where I'm sitting." Clint (49, Funny Farm) shared this sentiment: "Well, once you communicate with other people, it helps you to see what's going on around you and that sort of thing. If you haven't got Facebook, you're basically stranded." This sense of connectedness extended to sharing similar experiences.

Mariska (24, Pango Camp) explained that she finds joy through her interactions with different groups: "Without it, I would have felt lonely. Because with the messages that come through every day, it makes me feel excited about the day ahead." Duane (24, Pango Camp) also said that Facebook made him feel part of a wider community: "You meet new people on Facebook that you've never known before. Like for me, who doesn't have a girl in my life, I can do it all day."

Gerda (63, Pango Camp) explained the profound value of Facebook in her life, in these words:

I connect with people on the outside on Facebook. I only know them on Facebook. I tell them when I have problems or when there is something wrong. People want to pray for you. That type of thing. Without it, I wouldn't have had contact with anyone, that's all. You need Facebook to connect with these people.

A further indication of how much a network of supportive “strangers” means to participants was clearly articulated by Elsie (65, Sonheuwel). She explained it as such:

On Facebook, we're all like one family – the groups you belong to. We motivate each other. Some mornings you get “Good morning, everyone” or “Have a good day or blessed day.” It makes you feel like there is someone, except the Lord, who looks after you and who cares. It makes a difference.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp have been highly effective in keeping people in touch and connected (James et al., 2017: 561). In the informal settlements of this study, Facebook and WhatsApp are often the only means of communication and contact participants have with people outside their informal settlement. This connectedness that binds participants to the world through wider and far-reaching networks also supports and uplifts them. Participants shared a preference for good news stories and light-hearted conversations. Through Facebook groups, participants found encouragement and motivation.

#### 5.5.2 Topic 2: Emotional support and inspiration

Feeling love, care and comfort from strangers in all corners of the world has a profound effect on some participants. Due to debilitating and difficult circumstances aggravated by poverty, participants displayed a heightened appreciation for emotional support and kindness from Facebook group members. This segment supports the findings of Lee (2006: 2) insofar as participants indicated the positive value they attach to support they receive from the Facebook groups they are part of.

Charmaine (50, Endicott), a breast cancer sufferer who was undergoing chemotherapy at the time of the interview, articulated how much being part of survivor groups on Facebook meant to her: “They inspire me a lot. When I feel down, they send beautiful messages.” Gerda (63, Pango Camp) communicated a similar sentiment:

“When I have a problem, we [Facebook groups and friends] talk about it. They’ll talk to you and try to help you.”

Much of the support and spiritual upliftment for participants came from Facebook church groups and affiliations. Linda (37, Sonheuwel) said that she mostly used Facebook to read “bible verses” others post. She enjoys seeing “pretty [motivational] pictures” and taking part in Facebook prayers. Elize (42, Pango Camp) told the researcher that she is part of several Facebook church groups spreading the message that “God is love.” Chantel (43, Pango Camp) also shared that her Facebook activities are often centred around Christian and church groups that bring comfort to many. Carol (38, Funny Farm) said that on Facebook her favourite group is “the Christian one. I love that. I love the things they post.” Elsie (65, Sonheuwel) also follows Christian groups and Troelien (34, Funny Farm) remarked that Christian Facebook groups had brought her tremendous comfort after the death of her child. Salome (42, Sonheuwel), a Roman Catholic, finds the information on Facebook useful in terms of “when there are fastings and other things I may otherwise miss. It helps because I can’t always make it to church.”

Perhaps most remarkably, the researcher interviewed a Filadelfia Ark resident and participant, Nicolene (53). She has a Facebook page called Pitkos/Soulfood which, at the time of the interview, had 6,900 followers. Nicolene, who had only been at Filadelfia Ark for three weeks at the time of the interview, had fallen onto difficult times after her husband committed suicide. She lost the game farm he owned and found herself alone and homeless for the first time in her life. Despite her struggles, she found salvation in being able to uplift and motivate others. The content of her public Facebook page concentrates on positive messages, Christian revelations and general emotional support. As Nicolene herself describes it:

I feel I can inspire people through posting something meaningful. I have always been someone to help and support others. Even the people here, my heart bleeds for many of them. When people send me beautiful pictures and messages [on Facebook], I’ll post that too on Pitkos/Soulfood.

Words of kindness come from many sources on Facebook – all valuable and significant to participants needing inspiration, motivation or simply positivity. This further ties in to a person’s need to be part of a system that offers care and emotional support (Baumeister & Leary, 1995: 497). For people who are restricted in terms of



their physical mobility - in this case as a result of a lack of funds - Facebook messages of encouragement and compassion are enormously significant. The value of Facebook also stretches beyond words to include concrete and pragmatic guidance on everyday matters and common challenges. This is highly regarded by participants.

### 5.5.3 Topic 3: Practical advice

Having access to Facebook connects one to a wider network of people facing similar challenges and/or having comparable questions. Not only is relatable advice a few finger-clicks away, ideas are exchanged and solutions found merely by typing a sentence. This fruitful exchange offers productive guidance on everyday tests and trials to participants.

Bianca (33, Pango Camp) discussed the mother Facebook groups she is part of and how she enjoys their practicality: "I am part of ones about homework and how to help children with that. Also, one on old traditional medicine and that type of thing." Charlotte (23, Filadelfia Ark) joined a Facebook group Mom Life after having her baby. She described it as a group "where mommies of new-born babies are on Facebook. Some of them are struggling with their babies especially breast babies. I know how hard it is – mine is also a little breast baby. It can be difficult with the cramps and stuff. You really have to watch what you eat and drink. They give good advice." Samantha (20, Pango Camp), like Charlotte (23, Filadelfia Ark), is also a follower of the Facebook group Mom Life. She explained that, as a new mom, the group has given her useful tips on caring for an infant.

Elize (42, Pango Camp) is paid by a donor to manage a kitchen from her home providing the children in Pango Camp with breakfast before school, sandwiches for their school snack, and lunch after they return to the informal settlement. She described how practical groups on Facebook have assisted her.

That's mostly what I go on Facebook for. I like, for example, information for the children's kitchen. I get massive tomato sauce containers and I don't always have smaller bottles, so Facebook showed me how to make a small bottle for tomato sauce. Those half-litre Coke bottles, you make a tomato sauce bottle with it to decant it in ... I learn a lot of things on Facebook. Also about remedies you can make at home for colds, sore throats and stuff like that. Things that are not too expensive and that you can do quickly.

Chantel (43, Pango Camp) is also part of groups on Facebook discussing home remedies for “sick children”. Elsie (65, Sonheuwel) is an enthusiastic member of an animal group named Pierre@Dieregesondheid/Animal Health. She shared: “Nowadays, everyone goes onto this group. He gives advice on four-legged animals and he makes ointments and stuff. Actually, it [the home-made ointment] is for dogs, but people have also started using it now.”

The practical tips and helpful advice that participants receive also spill over into hobby groups where participants can share their handiwork and craftsmanship. Facebook allows participants interactive engagements with people from all around the world sharing similar interests – another positive Facebook experience that aligns with connectedness and the need to belong (James et al., 2017: 561).

#### 5.5.4 Topic 4: Hobbies

Although money is limited among participants in the informal settlements of this study, participants find enjoyment in simple, inexpensive leisure activities and hobbies. Participants report an interest in gardening, cooking, needlework and crocheting. Facebook is seen as a useful tool and platform to liaise with others sharing common hobby interests.

Andre (45, Filadelfia Ark) and his mother Ansie (70, Filadelfia Ark) both have “green fingers”. Although mostly managed by Andre (45, Filadelfia Ark), they keenly engage in Facebook gardening groups which is evident in the landscape design features of their modest garden. As Andre (45, Filadelfia Ark) puts it: “Anything to do with gardens, that you’ll see a lot of on my Facebook. Both my mom and I, we changed this place [the home they share] completely. We love design”.

Cooking and recipe groups are popular among several participants. Charmaine (50, Endicott) mentioned “a few [Facebook] groups, food groups, because I like cooking”. Duane (24, Pango Camp) also shared that he goes on Facebook “to get recipes for weekends. You see, we cook”. James (57, Filadelfia Ark) explained: “I like the stuff [Facebook groups] about survival stuff. And, here and there, cooking things. That’s all, really”. Carol (38, Funny Farm) is also part of cooking groups on Facebook as is Alta (53, Sonheuwel) who “looks for recipes. I have two groups for that. My child helped me with my [Facebook] page.”

Antoinette (40, Sonheuwel) discussed getting “recipes from Facebook,” and she also mentioned that she shares the quilts she makes on Facebook groups about sewing, knitting and needlework. Lorraine (46, Pango Camp), who sells her needlework creations, mentioned two Facebook groups named *Kom Ons Hekel en Brei*<sup>22</sup> and *Vrydag Se Naaldwerk*.<sup>23</sup> She eagerly participates on both: “It’s really interesting to see what other people are making. People also show each other different techniques to crochet.” Elize (42, Pango Camp) mentioned being part of a Facebook group called 5-Minute Crafts which focuses on easy do-it-yourself art projects. She enjoys creative ideas such as “everything you can do with wood. I like things like that.” Wayne (34, Funny Farm), an antique enthusiast and excavator, sometimes goes searching for antiques and then posts his finds “like a bottle or something” on Facebook.

Facebook allows certain participants to remain involved in and expand on their hobbies and activities of interest. This is a pleasurable engagement through which social contacts are formed and crafts are refined.

#### 5.5.5 Topic 5: Entertainment and passing time

Social media - Facebook and WhatsApp - prove to be distractions in the informal settlements in this study, where unemployment is rampant. Without structured activities, aside from intermittent work – a frequent consequence of being unemployed (Lobo, 2018: 81, 86-87; Van Hoya & Lootens, 2013: 87) – participants turn to Facebook and WhatsApp for entertainment and to kill time (of which there is often an abundance). Not only do these platforms provide humour, they also keep participants engaged in some type of activity.

Elsie (65, Sonheuwel) enjoys the jokes she gets through a Facebook group called *Gatiep en Meraai* and *Lag Saam*<sup>24</sup>: “They put jokes on. There are a few joke groups.” Colleen (38, Endicott) also sees the merit in Facebook and WhatsApp joke groups: “It’s a good morning to everyone when we laugh and share pictures.” Elize (42, Pango

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<sup>22</sup> Let’s Crochet and Knit.

<sup>23</sup> Friday’s Sewing or Friday’s Needlework.

<sup>24</sup> Let’s Laugh Together.

Camp) shares this view, telling the researcher that one of her favourite Facebook groups is *Lag Jou Gat Af*.<sup>25</sup>

Antoinette (40, Sonheuwel) explained that she is a fan of the “short movies” on Facebook that she sees by being part of Facebook groups: “There are these clips of ... I am a dog-lover. So, anything to do with dogs or any animals. If I could buy a farm where I could keep lots of animals, it would be my best.”

Some participants admitted that they are not always sure what they are doing on Facebook – the habit of using social media to pass time. Bianca (33, Pango Camp) said that she often finds herself “just scrolling”. Samantha (20, Pango Camp) communicated a similar pattern of social media behaviour. Sharlotte (23, Filadelfia Ark) acknowledged: “Every now and then, I’ll read the stuff on Facebook, but I ignore it. I don’t want to concern myself too much with what I read there.” Duane (24, Pango Camp) displayed an understanding of killing time using his phone and Facebook:

Without Facebook or WhatsApp, life would be boring, because life without social media is actually kind of awful. Just imagine ... no phone. Life with just talking, nah. Like you can go sit in your room and go onto Facebook and enjoy yourself.

Lorraine (46, Pango Camp) is concerned about the accessibility of social media, specifically on one’s cell phone: “All I’m saying is it makes you bad. You caused it for yourself that you are bored easily unless you’re doing something with your phone.”

Leonard (40, Filadelfia Ark) was also worried about this:

Now it’s falling apart. Love turns cold because you’re not spending time with people. You’re hooked [on your phone]. It doesn’t matter what you’re doing on it, the effect is the same. There are very few people who know how to work with their phones.

Although participants are happily entertained through Facebook groups, not everyone views this as a healthy or acceptable practice. It does underscore the importance of social media, however, perhaps even more so to people who have much time to kill. This corresponds with literature highlighting the role of social media platforms in passing time and gratifying hedonic needs – leisure in a time of waiting (Gan, 2018: 143, Stafford et al., 2004: 279; Ernst, 2015: 25; Kumar, 2014: 1133, Chigona et al.,

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<sup>25</sup> Laugh Your Butt Off.

2008: 12; Valkonen et al., 2015: 173; Hartman, Shim, Barber & O'Brien, 2006: 816-817; Błachnio et al., 2013: 781; Ferris & Hollenbaugh, 2018: 65).

#### 5.5.6 Topic 6: Happy anecdotes

As highlighted in the rest of Theme 4, participants feel that part of Facebook's purpose is to bring them happiness. This is further reflected in participants' preference for good news stories and positive anecdotes. Several participants were happy to share and retell such uplifting tales.

Ansie (70, Filadelfia Ark) eagerly shared a story she felt herself part of through a large WhatsApp group among truck drivers<sup>26</sup> in the country. It involved a man, woman and two young children:

They lost everything – his job and their home. Her own sister phoned welfare to come and get the kids. I said [on the group], I will get in my car and come and get them. They gave the address of where they were. I told them I will bring them all here to our home, not just the kids. I would've squeezed them in here ... I wouldn't have separated them from their parents. That's inhumane. We were ready to go and get them and then they said [on the WhatsApp group] that a super rich man has just arrived there. He got their address on the group and he said he would take them in – the mom, dad and two children.

Ansie (70, Filadelfia Ark) was eager to tell another bitter sweet anecdote also circulating on the "truck drivers' group". She said:

I'll tell you now, there was this guy who lives in Virginia in the Free State. His dad had a stroke and they said they weren't sure he was going to make it. This guy doesn't have a lot of money and within three hours all the truck drivers had paid enough money into his account for him to pay for a bus ticket – a return ticket. His dad died, but he made it in time to say goodbye. He was next to his dad on his death bed for five hours and then his dad passed away. The message he sent to the group. You know what, you cry when you listen to it.

Facebook and WhatsApp groups do, in many ways, contribute to positive experiences for participants. Whether it is emotional support, connectedness or happy tales going viral, being able to engage with other by means of social media is an important

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<sup>26</sup> The connection between Ansie (70, FA), Andre (45, FA) and the truck driver WhatsApp group is not clear. Neither of them has ever been a truck driver. It seems, though, that the truck driver group is seen as a credible source of "on the ground" news among participants.

component of participants' emotional survival. To belong and feel part of is, after all, an important basic need that requires fulfilment – irrespective of who or where you are.

## **5.6 Theme 5: Surveillance of the environment**

Participants rely on Facebook and WhatsApp groups to provide them with news and information that pertains to them and the broader society. The more targeted and focused the news is in terms of relevance to participants, the more frequently they are inclined to cite these sources. Certain news themes such as farm murders, kidnappings of children and community security concerns receive much attention regarding surveillance. The responses received from participants highlight the role of social media platforms in disseminating news for the act of surveillance (Payne et al., 2003: 116; Lewis, 2008: 37; Quinn, 2016: 81). However, this also confirms the existence of echo chambers (Quattrociocchi et al., 2016: 1-2) and filter bubbles (Flaxman et al., 2016: 299; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018: 976-977) since the news received by participants tends to cover the same or similar topics – disproportionate to what is featured in the news in general.

### **5.6.1 Topic 1: Facebook and WhatsApp groups as sources of news**

Participants are inclined to engage with news broadcasts using their social media platforms – WhatsApp and Facebook. The sources of these bits of news and bulletins of information vary, from neighbours, local security companies, or the national police force, to large media organisations. An important and relevant aspect of using social media as news sources is the low cost associated with this. Participants openly admit that they cannot afford magazines or newspapers. Furthermore, they prefer abbreviated snippets of information without images and videos that add to the cost of downloads. The news topics mostly discussed by participants are community surveillance as well as farm murders and kidnappings.

#### *5.6.1.1 Community surveillance*

Local WhatsApp groups serve as popular and reliable news forums for participants, such as news distributed by security services in the area or truck drivers. Different groups are often established in and for the informal settlements for different reasons. As Colleen (38, Endicott) explained:

On WhatsApp groups we have the action group, the emergency group and the chat group. It's only local, because when you're so far [on a smallholding and not in town], they [criminals] are most likely to strike here – between us and Springs. Like when they block the roads [for protests], they block it there [points in one direction] and they block it there [points in another direction]. They block it off completely so we can't go anywhere. Most of the people here are on the emergency group and the action group. The emergency group has the most people on it – some people don't want to be on the other groups because they want to save their data only for emergencies. The emergency group tells us if there is an attack somewhere or if there's just been a break-in. For the action group, it's about any action, like if there's a vehicle driving around at night without lights on or, let's say, there are three suspicious people hanging around, they'll say what clothes they're wearing and stuff and that we must be on the lookout. So, they haven't struck yet, but we must be careful. It's the same with other news too. I don't need to read the whole article on Facebook, I just need the announcement on WhatsApp.

Gordon (58, Filadelfia Ark) shared that he belongs to local farm groups that “provide information about anything, like road closures.” Sidney (61, Filadelfia Ark) confirmed this, saying: “Yes, anything that happens in the area. From here to the other side of the mountain. Security and everything.” Morné (35, Funny Farm) said that he occasionally links up to WhatsApp security groups around the Alberton area and that he became aware of a murder not too far from Funny Farm through a WhatsApp group. Morné also indicated that he follows tactical response units on Facebook as well as the Pink Ladies.<sup>27</sup>

Clint (49, Funny Farm) also displayed an interest in crime in the area:

This morning I looked at something about car hijacking and how they recover the cars. Stuff like that. And the other one ... somewhere here they were rioting.

Piet (67, Filadelfia Ark), a member of a “truck group”, shared:

Yes, see, that truck group is actually a great thing to be part of, because they tell you to watch out for that place because there's a speed trap and to watch out for road blocks. Also, they tell you if there's an accident, a serious accident. It's a very interesting group.

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<sup>27</sup> The Pink Ladies is an organisation focused on finding missing people, and reuniting them with loved ones.



Lorraine (46, Pango Camp) uses a combination of physical hearsay, WhatsApp and Facebook groups in her acts of surveillance: “They will tell me there’s been an accident or something, and then I’ll quickly go on to Facebook to see what happened with the accident. Also, sometimes they will say it on WhatsApp and then tell me to go onto Facebook to see the full link.” Andre (45, Filadelfia Ark) shared that although he gets “some news” on Facebook, “for that, we’re mostly on WhatsApp. Yes, WhatsApp gives you much more information on the groups. That’s why we’re on them.” He added:

I’m on groups [Facebook and WhatsApp] of the police in the Brits area, trucks, news and crime. With the truck drivers, you get lots of stuff on there. That’s on my WhatsApp groups. Stuff that is important to me.

Community security and surveillance alerts are meaningful to participants, and they value the real information they receive from people on the ground. Extending further than their immediate environment to the broader community, participants displayed an interest in information about farm murders and kidnappings. These were the only specific news stories participants spoke about.

#### 5.6.1.2 *Farm murders and kidnappings*

Residents of Filadelfia Ark and Endicott often suggested that they are “living on the farm” (Brenton, 40, Filadelfia Ark; Elana, 40, Filadelfia Ark; Sharlotte, 23, Filadelfia Ark; Andre, 45, Filadelfia Ark; Henk, 41, Endicott; Colleen, 38, Endicott). Perhaps for this reason and perceived cultural similarities between themselves and white *boere*<sup>28</sup>, participants showed a particular interest in farm murders, much more so than in any other crime or corruption reported in the local and international news media. Kidnappings and child abuse also surfaced as fields of interest.

Colleen contextualised her concern about the farm murders: “Funny enough, we also live on small farms, so that’s why I also read about the attacks on farms and farmers. That’s also why I have so many dogs to guard us.” Natasha (42, Pango Camp) said that she mostly gets her news on Facebook: “I use Facebook for news, but not the ones where you have to sign up and pay, I get it through what people say. They will send me stuff like about the old lady who was attacked on her farm.” Martin (45, Pango

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<sup>28</sup> *Boere* directly translated to English means farmers, but there is also a cultural use of the word specifically related to Afrikaners.

Camp), who followed a similar pattern to get news, added: “They talk a lot about the farm murders and those things.” Christo (50, Sonheuwel) explained that he has set his phone to alert him every morning on what is going on in the news. However, he continued: “I like Facebook because that’s where I read about the farm murders, because that they don’t tell you on the news.” Alta (53, Sonheuwel) also relies on Facebook for her news:

On Facebook, you see everything. You get videos, like that woman who pushed that little boy around. You can go and look. If I didn’t have Facebook, I wouldn’t have known how many people were being murdered. Otherwise [without Facebook], you’ll just sit here and you won’t even hear about the accidents ... like on the Moloto Road. So, with Facebook, you know exactly.

William (24, Pango Camp) also made reference to the “Facebook group about farm murders.” Priscilla (29, Funny Farm) feels the world is “being influenced by bad things. There’s no good in the world left. Look at all the missing kids on Facebook.” Douglas (35, Pango Camp) said that he was also made aware of similar news “through people sharing it on my Facebook page.” Samantha (20, Pango Camp) feels that Facebook shows her news about world events “like the girl that went missing in Vereeniging.” Bianca (33, Pango Camp) shared the pattern of her news media consumption:

I get news on Facebook through what people share on my page, so I scroll to see what’s happening. It would be boring without it [Facebook], boring. It’s quiet, you don’t know what’s going on, and now I’m used to having it. If it’s taken away, you’ll wonder what’s happening.

The theme-specific news that participants receive through Facebook indicates the presence of filter bubbles and echo chambers. Although incidents of farm murders and kidnappings are reported in the mass media, the prominence these held in the informal settlements was disproportionate to the other available and current news content. Flaxman et al. (2016: 299) describe filter bubbles as the algorithms that strengthen ideological segregation by filtering content to only expose the user to information they would agree with. Similarly, echo chambers circulate news content that is aligned with users’ views, further promoting divisiveness (Quattrociocchi et al., 2016: 1-2; Bechmann & Nielbo, 2018: 992).

## 5.6.2 Topic 2: Understanding the world through social media

Although not a prominent topic, some participants spoke of learning more about the world through Facebook. In broad terms, a handful of participants mentioned the general knowledge they had acquired through Facebook. In this regard, Pierre (35, Filadelfia Ark) commented:

They believe they are going to Mars. Listen to this, Elon Musk from South Africa who is a billionaire is going to Mars on his own. They can't even save the world, where there is already too much life. Do you understand?

Andre (45, Filadelfia Ark) told the researcher about people he is in contact with through Facebook. He also shared what he had seen about other countries on Facebook:

I speak to someone in Argentina; he speaks broken English and it's so beautiful. I also know wonderful people in the Philippines. The Philippines is on the list of the top ten world's best national defence forces ... It is amazingly beautiful. Once I saw a photo of the Philippines defence force where they basically covered 90 percent of the beach. That's a country you don't just take on. You don't take them on without gloves ... Sometimes they also post nice photos and stuff of the environment. I love nature.

Salome (42, Sonheuwel) and Antoinette (40, Sonheuwel) both mentioned enjoying talking to “people overseas on Facebook,” and Antoinette was happy to share that she had met someone who is not from South Africa. Priscilla (29, Funny Farm) saw Facebook as a way “to learn about things of the world and what's going on.”

On the contrary, Leonard (40, Filadelfia Ark) avoided Facebook precisely so that he would not be part of the information shared about the world on Facebook. He explained:

I am out of the world now. That's exactly why I don't want to be on Facebook. All the media from Hollywood and stuff, I don't want to be brainwashed and become a sheep that follows people down a stream. It's all brainwashing.

Since participants experience a sense of physical stuckness, often the only way for them to make their worlds bigger is through social media. Whether it is a photo or video of a beautiful beach, or a conversation with someone who lives in a different country, these simple acts of surveillance can mean a lot – positive or negative.

## **5.7 Theme 6: “The poor” is not a uniform category**

Just as the informal settlements vary in character, the reasons for participants living in them are also different. Furthermore, the levels of poverty are not the same in each informal settlement nor are they identical between residents. Participants in this study have in common that they reside in informal settlements in Gauteng, and that they either lack the social capital that would afford them an opportunity to live on the outside, or that they choose, perhaps unwittingly, not to use their social capital for that purpose.

As discussed under the section on employment, participants' sources of income and the amounts generated differ. This naturally has an impact on their wellbeing. Moreover, while some are rendered incapable of working either as a result of disability or old age, others have fallen victim to substance abuse, which has overtaken their lives and daily activities. Participants' social media habits also range widely. Although commonalities were found, it can certainly not be said that “all participants do this” or “all participants do that” on Facebook or WhatsApp. This section concentrates on specific participants to illustrate how different “poor people” are, even when their circumstances appear similar. This provides background and also highlights why social media practices differ among people who may appear to be the same or similar.

### **5.7.1 Living in an informal settlement – reasons and feelings**

The levels of support that are provided in informal settlements differ. Intensities of poverty and desperation, for that matter, are experienced in different ways by informal settlement participants. While some are desperate to “get out” (JP, 25 Funny Farm; Duane 24, Pango Camp; Esmerelda, 23 Funny Farm), others are content with the lives they have created for themselves and their families in the informal settlement (Lorraine, 46 Pango Camp; Mariska, 24 Pango Camp; Elize, 42 Pango Camp; Pierre, 35 Filadelfia Ark; Brenton, 40 Filadelfia Ark, Elana, 40 Filadelfia Ark). There are also those participants who just feel stuck (Melt, 55 Sonheuwel; Nicolene, 53 Filadelfia Ark), and some who have turned to unhealthy habits to cope with their despair. Participants' accounts of their lives inside the respective informal settlements are indicative of their varied perspectives on informal settlement living. Esmerelda (23, Funny Farm) pointed out her view on why residents often “get stuck” at Funny Farm:

I think they end up here because of circumstances, and then they start using [drugs]. I don't think anyone wants to use, but they do it so that they don't have to feel anything. They feel it's their only way of escaping. That's how I see it.

JP (25, Funny Farm) had only been at Funny Farm for a few days when the researcher interviewed him. He had never lived in an informal settlement but "always in a house." He appeared aware and frightened of his prospects: "It is actually traumatic to come from there to here." At the time of the interview, Nicolene (53, Filadelfia Ark) was also a newcomer to informal settlement living. She had lost contact and relationships with all of her friends and family:

Now I don't have anywhere to go. My family is not interested in helping me ... It is very sad. My son is still in Cape Town [with family]. He is 14 years old and even he has turned his back on me ... The friend I was staying with [in Bloemfontein] sent me a WhatsApp to say she doesn't want me at her place ... Now it's probably to the rubbish dumps with me. There the worms and bugs will probably eat me ... I don't know anymore, I don't know anymore!

Ironically, Nicolene has an inspirational Facebook page that has amassed 6,900 followers. Yet, she feels she has no-one to turn to.

Willie (72, Sonheuwel) ended up at Sonheuwel as a result of financial difficulties five months before the interview. He had never lived in an informal settlement before. Willie had a pickup truck and had built a wooden home with three separate rooms. He explained that someone else manages his electronic communications: "I phone, but there is a woman who does my emails for me. She's an old friend – a loving, dear person, both she and her husband." When asked what he mostly uses his email account for, he explained: "There are interests that need to be looked after. One has to get certain things done." Willie shared how he survives:

I never get help or donations from charity groups. Never. What I get is from my own personal friend and family circle, and what I receive myself. I support myself ... Those close to me give to me. My children and friends, no organisation. I don't believe in that ... I'm not saying I'm right.

The length of time that participants have lived in the settlement, as well as the consistency of this existence, affect participants and their approach to informal settlement living. Mariska (24, Pango Camp) grew up in Coronation Caravan Park with her sister, mother and father, before the residents were moved to Pango Camp. Both her parents passed away while living in Pango Camp. Mariska and her sister are both

still in Pango Camp, but their relationship was strained at the time of the interview. Mariska met her now husband while they were both living in Coronation Caravan Park – she was fourteen when she fell pregnant with their first child and he was 21 years old. Mariska explained: “My mom was upset with me at first, but after a day or two, it was fine.” Mariska, now a mother of four daughters, has never worked. After the birth of their first child, she and the father of her children married, and they remain committed and happy. She explained:

My husband doesn't want me to work, so that I can be here with the children. He says it's the man's job to bring in money so that I can stay at home.

Naturally, for Mariska, raising a family in an informal settlement is not a hardship she is unaccustomed to – it is the only life she has ever known. In fact, she considers being able to be with her young children every day “a blessing”. In contrast with the positive association that Mariska has with “camp living”, Esmerelda (23) has a less favourable attitude towards Funny Farm, but feels stuck in the environment:

My mom and dad lived here for, I think, seven years. This used to be a church [before it became a squatter camp] and the rooms outside were for Sunday school classes. My dad lived in one of the rooms at the bottom as you enter [Funny Farm]. It was a long time ago, but people just kept moving in over time. I was in an orphanage. I finished school in 2016 and it's been almost two years since I left the orphanage. But I haven't been here the whole time ... I also went somewhere else with my boyfriend. I don't want to live here. Anywhere just not in this place.

The tragedy is that although Esmerelda hates living at Funny Farm, it was the only place she knew to return to after she left the orphanage – the home she once had with her parents. Esmerelda's parents no longer live at Funny Farm and it is unclear if they are still alive.

Deon (49) has been living at Funny Farm since 2008, when he lost his job. Although he has made his dry-walled room comfortable - lined with books and personal effects - the growth of the impromptu illegal squatting community is a worry for him:

More and more people are coming here. I don't know how they know about this place, but when you look again, they are here. There's no more space here. The place is bursting at the seams. Friends that brought friends ... It's a serious problem. I wish they would stop that.



Considering that Funny Farm only has one tap and no toilet facilities, overcrowding is an understandable concern. Since there is also a reliance on the occasional donor, having to share food or clothing between increasing numbers of residents is adding to the frustration of participants.

For some participants, informal settlement living was a process that started with an intermittent relapse, but which, over time, became a permanent situation. Jannie (52, Funny Farm) explained that once you are in an informal settlement, the perception that people on the outside have of informal settlement dwellers makes it difficult to leave, even when the plan was to get out as soon as possible:

Actually, you know what, people have got this thing about Funny Farm ...They judge us. They judge us quite a bit which I actually understand, 'cause that used to be me. I was out there. I used to judge my brother [a Funny Farm resident]. Even as an addict, I use to see these people as much lower. Then things had to turn out for me to stay here permanently. There's actually quite a couple of very good people in here.

Lorraine (46, Pango Camp) felt that once strangers learn that you are from Pango Camp or Munsieville, they do not want to help with donations or even job opportunities. She clarified:

You see, they think we just sit here and wait for people to give us stuff. I say that's unfair, because, yes, there are people who do that, but we shouldn't all be seen as the same. They say we are bad people that live here. Very bad people. I don't know why. There are many people here who drink and do drugs and steal and stuff, but we are not all the same.

Antoinette (40, Sonheuwel) holds the view that getting into an informal settlement is much easier than getting out. She provided a deeper understanding of different factors that contribute to long-term or permanent "camp living":

Many times people would come here and offer R50 for a day's work. Then they must work the fields of a farm and stuff for R50 for the whole day. What are you going to do with R50? And then they say they offer people jobs and stuff, and all we do is buy booze and stuff. They ask why the people live here and why they have the one child after the next. I say, yes, people who live here that get pregnant can avoid it, but what about the other people? Take that little wooden house there in the middle [of Sonheuwel]. That lady has four children. She was pregnant when they moved here. Some of the people here, like me, had jobs once. I earned R6,500 a month. I had a nice life. But then I lost my job and ended up here. The plan was to only stay here for six months. Now I've been here for



almost two years. I thought I'd get a job quickly, but my applications get rejected. Just this past Monday, I was rejected for a job I applied for. People say, sorry, if you're struggling with your ankle, you can't work here. And that was for a receptionist position.

Esmerelda (23, Funny Farm) emphasised that she is only living at Funny Farm because she has no other options:

Auntie Ronel [a donor] has sent out my CV to so many places. We don't hear anything back. And the pastor too, he's sent my CV all over, but one never hears from them.

On the other hand, Pierre (35, Filadelfia Ark) had ambitions of moving to the coast, but, by chance, he stumbled onto Filadelfia Ark. Life under Dirk's wing proved to be too comfortable to leave. Pierre shared:

I was just walking past here, I was on my way to the coast. I wanted to go see what was going on there. And then people referred me to this place. That's how I found out about it. My whole life, I've lived in Pretoria. But then, I sold my *bakkie* and thought I'd go to the coast to, like, Jeffreys Bay where people go on holiday. But a guy showed me this place and now I'm here.

So, I thought I'm going to have a nice time at the coast and build myself back up again, but then I arrived here at Dirk's holiday resort [laughs]. I am happy here. I must say, a safer place you won't find. Just look at how beautiful it is here too. See, when a person arrives here ... some people don't see it that way ... they think we get stuck and that. Maybe it's true, but, at the end of the day, where are you going to find another place? This is actually like a holiday resort. I see it as a holiday resort.

People say we're poor people ... That's the way it is, you get poor people and rich people. There are different levels. Some people think they are better than other people, but they live a lie. When people think they are better than others because of their bank balance, they are brain dead. Anything can happen, you understand, right? See, I am not stupid, but I did things and now I am here. And, I must say, I enjoy it here. I've met people, we talk and I like living here. I won't leave here. This will be the place I'll work from. I might leave to go on holiday, but I will always come back here.

Participants gave different reasons for living in an informal settlement and their feelings about their surroundings. The varied responses underpin the importance of considering the stories of impoverished people especially when focusing on the role and impact of social media in their lives.

### 5.7.2 Means of social media access

Although social media access is discussed in detail earlier in this chapter, some examples will briefly illustrate how this differs from participant to participant. This is purely to illustrate the importance of not stereotyping people affected by poverty, as one generalised grouping does not give the full picture.

Koos (50, Sonheuwel) and Deon (49, Funny Farm) have no internet-enabled devices, and refrain entirely from using Facebook and WhatsApp. Koos explained: “I don’t have any of that stuff. I just use a simple cell phone, that’s all I have with me. The kids phone me and I phone them. There is no other communication.”

Clint (49, Funny Farm), who does not have a cell phone, uses the computers and Wi-Fi connection at the local library predominantly for Facebook, Google and email access. He gave some details:

It’s about a ten-minute walk. I was there this morning, so ... You can stay there as long as you want if the place isn’t too full. I’m busy selling equipment, fuel injection equipment. I’m selling some of it, so I can get out of this place ... I’ve been here on and off, but for about a month now, I’ve been staying here permanently.

Jannie (36, Sonheuwel) has a cell phone, a computer and Wi-Fi internet connection in his home. He explained that he uses it “mostly for the children at this stage. To download movies and for educational things for them.” JP (42, Sonheuwel) also has a home-installed Wi-Fi system and he uses his computer or cell phone as devices to connect with. Nico (44, Funny Farm) and his wife Bibi (46, Funny Farm), on the other hand, share a cell phone.

Participants do not report the same or uniform means of access. This differs from one participant to another, and the reasons for their social media access also vary. There is thus no generalisation that can be drawn about the social media access of participants. Appreciating their unique position and situation is crucial to this study.

### 5.7.3 Reasons for social media use

This chapter explores in depth the reasons that participants use social media. In the context of this section, an overview emphasises the uniqueness of each and every person affected by poverty.

In Pango Camp, several participants are actively engaged on Facebook to elicit support and donations, or to benefit from free giveaways in the area. Similar social media behaviour was discussed by some participants in Sonheuwel. At Filadelfia Ark, no participants individually seek out financial aid as they trust the farm owner Dirk to provide them with basic care. In Endicott, no participants reported using social media for the purposes mentioned by Pango Camp and Sonheuwel participants. This could be because the practice in itself is foreign and unknown to them or because there is enough income generated by the working members of families in Endicott. It could also be because the parcels delivered by Marnelle (38) are sufficient. The close bond that participants share with Marnelle has also created an environment where Endicott residents are more likely to reach out to her for support than to a stranger on Facebook. At Funny Farm, its reputation as a alleged drug den has resulted in a negative depiction of the informal settlement and its residents on social media. As a result, participants avoid indicating they live there out of shame and because they do not believe it will produce a fruitful result.

JP (25, Funny Farm) told the researcher that he was no longer speaking to his mother and that she did not know where he was. He said that Facebook helps him “to get in touch with my family so someone can bring me food.” This, is in contrast with Lorraine (46, Pango Camp) who has lived in an informal settlement for eight years – first at Coronation Caravan Park and then in Pango Camp. For her, life without Facebook would be “boring”. As she put it:

I’m alone here most nights as he [her husband] only works night shifts. So, in the evenings I download games and stuff. Also patterns that I will use to start crocheting something new.

Poverty in the informal settlements of this study affects all the respective participants differently and unequally. Not only would it be unfair to categorise the participants of this research study simply as “the poor”, it would also be inaccurate and incorrect. While participants certainly voiced a lack of readily available resources that would

allow for a more luxurious lifestyle, each situation differs personally, professionally, socially and psychologically. All the factors that contribute to poverty and, in this case, informal settlement living, should be taken into account when exploring the role and impact of social media on the participants.

This segment of the findings chapter emphasises the importance of not lumping everyone affected by poverty into one large category named “the poor”. This finding corresponds with the work of Krishna (2009: 948), Feuls et al. (2014: 958) and Notten and De Neubourg (2015: 247). People who are economically disadvantaged and marginalised do not uniformly share the same backgrounds, characteristics or beliefs. To preserve their individuality and dignity, the differences of individuals need to not only be acknowledged but also respected and foregrounded. In the context of this study the focus of which is to understand the role and impact of social media in white informal settlements, it is important to clarify that no blanket conclusion can be drawn with regard to participants’ social media use. Their circumstances differ and so do their social media access and reasons for social media engagements.

### **5.8 Theme 7: The networks of informal settlement farm owners, community leaders, charity organisations and benefactors**

The five informal settlements in this study differ considerably in terms of infrastructure, aid provision, facilities, and service to residents. But each informal settlement forms part of a wider network that assists in caring for residents. Some of these supportive networks are established or facilitated through Facebook and WhatsApp, whereas others are entirely non-virtual or offline. One cannot exclude these networks from a study on social media engagements of white informal settlement residents – the networks of and around the informal settlements are integral to the residents own social media habits. In other words, these networks impact the very quality of life of the informal settlement residents, and are therefore seen as an important component of this study. Hence, this section discusses the aid networks of each community, and then focuses on the larger relief networks that concentrate on alleviating poverty.

### 5.8.1 Topic 1: Networks in the different informal settlements

Earlier in this chapter, the characteristics of each informal settlement were discussed. Just as these differ considerably, so do the networks that support the residents of the informal settlements in this study. This topic discusses the often invisible aid networks actively contributing to each informal settlement, and how these tie into social media and the role and impact of this on these informal settlements.

#### 5.8.1.1 *Filadelfia Ark*

Dirk, a civil engineer, asphalt plant owner and farmer, owns the farm Filadelfia Ark. A deeply religious man, Dirk considers it his calling to help and uplift impoverished white South Africans. Filadelfia Ark has a dedicated website. It also has a Facebook page but this has been inactive for years – its last Facebook post was in 2014. Dirk is a respected man in his local community. In fact, he is the pastor of a church where his Sunday service are well attended by people in the area. According to Dirk, sometimes as many as 2,000 people will come to Filadelfia Ark on Sunday mornings to worship. Several outside volunteers help Dirk with administrative duties on the farm on a casual basis. He also receives regular, scheduled donations. Every Saturday morning, Dirk collects enough loaves of bread to last the community the entire week – this is donated by a large bakery in the Pretoria area. Another benefactor also buys a dozen eggs for each resident every month. These are used for communal breakfast servings in the mornings. A large aid organisation assisting impoverished individuals and families often outsources temporary labour projects and opportunities to residents of Filadelfia Ark. This organisation informed the researcher that Dirk is a thorough and reliable project manager and that the work produced by Filadelfia Ark residents is always of good quality.

Through Dirk's various sources of income (the asphalt factory and engineering projects), he is able to supplement the residents' financial requirements. Moreover, a solar system and boreholes render Filadelfia Ark self-supportive in terms of water and electricity. Fruit and vegetables are grown and harvested on the farm, and livestock is kept as well. As a result of this, Filadelfia Ark is the informal settlement in this study least reliant on the goodwill of others. It is the only informal settlement where an abundance of products and services are provided to residents at no financial cost to them at all.

### 5.8.1.2 Endicott

Endicott in Springs comprises a few home structures on three adjacent smallholdings. Marnelle (38), a previous Endicott resident, lives in a home with her family a few kilometres from the smallholdings. Over the years, Marnelle has established a donor network that assists Endicott residents when and where they can. She developed the connection with the two non-profit organisations involved at Endicott through Facebook – both these NPOs are area-specific. The support Marnelle is given by other donors in her network is not fixed or structured. In other words, there is no set date or time, like the beginning of every week or month, when specific products are delivered. The entire system is based purely on product availability. The non-profit organisation administrators the researcher engaged with regarding Endicott informal settlement told the researcher that they were also involved in helping other families in the Springs area. One such non-profit explained that 80 percent of their donations are elicited and secured through Facebook. She explained that although their initial introduction is most commonly done through Facebook groups, a personal connection often develops. Communication regarding the needs of those assisted is later mainly done on WhatsApp.

The networks that Marnelle has established over the years have been successful in addressing residents' unique needs as and when they arise. One example is when Charmaine (50, Endicott) had to go to hospital for a mastectomy. She sent a voice note to Marnelle in which she asked for pyjamas. Marnelle then circulated the message to her contact groups on WhatsApp, and those who responded were given Charmaine's contact details. The strategy was successful and Charmaine was well and comfortably prepared for her hospital stay.

### 5.8.1.3 Funny Farm

The researcher was introduced to Funny Farm through a woman named Ronel (51), who facilitates most of the donations for the settlement. Ronel is highly organised in her efforts to secure clothes and other necessities for the Funny Farm residents, especially the children. In fact, during the researcher's first WhatsApp communications with Ronel, she provided a comprehensive Excel spreadsheet called *Alberton White Camp*, detailing each resident's shirt, pants and shoe sizes. The spreadsheet also highlighted shortages. Ronel explained that she shares this spreadsheet on various

WhatsApp groups, and why it was important to strictly coordinate donation efforts at Funny Farm:

The people there ... they are a different breed. If you drop goods off, the people that's in the front, they take everything and they don't worry about the others. You understand? It's different there. They don't have a leader either. It's a free for all. They're a bunch of crazies. That's why they say they're the funny farm [laughs] ... It's not just us that help. There are also other people that drop stuff off there. I get so angry at those people, because all they do is they take a whole heap of things, put it there and leave. They don't know what happens there. But I can't stop it. It's people in the area that drop stuff off there.

The researcher met Ronel at her home in Alberton. The interview was conducted outside next to a storage room filled with black bags all neatly marked and sorted per item and size. Ronel explained that over the course of many years, she has been able to construct a network of willing benefactors. She also said that her network would sometimes respond to specific requests by her, for example school clothes or stationery, and other times, they would simply spread the word to families or individuals wanting to donate clothes or items discarded in the process of cleaning or moving. Despite evidently having several fruitful connections, Ronel admitted to hardly ever using Facebook for this purpose. She was an avid WhatsApp user, however. She described the process she follows:

I talk to my friends. My friends talk to their friends. And I'm on WhatsApp groups, I am on many groups, so I ask on these groups. And, after all these years, the people know me so they give. You see, I don't have a non-profit number. I used to work under another non-profit's number, but now they are too big. I am part of security groups, political groups and *Afrikaner* groups. They are all helping to empower white people.

Ronel manages the only organised effort to assist Funny Farm residents. Her contributions are mostly in the form of clothes, which are often sold by residents to support themselves. Ronel is not oblivious to this, but she believes that the Funny Farm residents are still better off with the little help they do receive.



#### 5.8.1.4 Pango Camp

Historically, since the days at Coronation Caravan Park, Hugo (63) has looked after residents of Pango Camp, solely through the Facebook and WhatsApp networks he keeps maintaining and growing. Hugo himself is a man of limited financial means. He has discovered the power of Facebook, however, and has utilised this platform to the best of his ability and for the benefit of many. Although a rift caused by the emergence of an opposing faction in Pango Camp is threatening the stability of the informal settlement and the status quo with existing donors, Facebook still serves as a well-utilised and successful platform to accrue donors and to elicit goods. But, as effective as Facebook has been in expanding Hugo's network, it can also be seen as a double-edged sword. In many ways, Hugo's prominence on Facebook and wide-reaching Facebook contacts have resulted in resentment towards him and his family from other Pango Camp residents.

The donors tell me straight, you hand this out on Christmas, not before then. Now, it all stays there [in the fenced storage area in front of his house]. The people [in Pango Camp] think I'm keeping the things. That I'm going to sell it. That's how the people in here think. They don't see it's there and it stays there. They think we sell everything.

This bitterness towards Hugo for his Facebook networks and the way he and his wife Verona are perceived to be distributing the donations have caused several other Pango Camp residents to start their own Facebook "advertising" and canvassing. This has caused confusion among donors. Hugo explained:

Now a sponsor will ask me that he hears [on Facebook] this or that guy didn't get anything. Then I ask him who is he talking about. Then he will say it's that guy. Then I tell him let's go to that person and ask him to his face. I will tell you in front of him why I don't give him anything. It's because he takes drugs. That's how I am.

Despite these challenges, Pango Camp still receives an enormous amount of aid from donors and benefactors who learn about the place through Hugo's Facebook activities. In this vein, Hugo has been able to reach far beyond the community in his support efforts:

Let me put it to you this way. I don't worry anymore about people bringing too much, because there are people on the outside that are also in need. I'm busy helping the mission down there [in the Munsieville township] too. The food I got from [a large franchised retailer] I actually gave to them, because they also help people on the streets and there's not enough food for them.

Hugo does not leverage being white as social capital (Reiter, 2010: 19) purely for the benefit of other white people. In fact, even though he understands why certain groups choose to assist the white Pango Camp residents (whiteness as social capital), he extends the long arm of Facebook across the colour line. Hugo explained:

I get a lot of people who tell me I'm not allowed to hand out their donations to black people. Just like that, straight, they tell me if they find out I handed it to a black person, they won't come here anymore. So, what do I do now? I say okay, you can leave the goods there. Then I take pictures of it being handed out to the white people and when there is stuff left, I give it to some of the black people next door [in Munsieville]. But in a way that they [donors] won't know. What else are you going to do? They are also people. Just this morning, I handed parcels out to them.

Pango Camp is an example of how productively Facebook can be used to expand networks and bridging social capital. It can be argued that Facebook has been an essential tool of survival in Pango Camp. This correlates with the work of Davis and Moscato (2018: 283) as well as Briones et al. (2011: 38) that argue that for isolated or marginalised communities, social media is often the only accessible platform that can be used for fundraising and relationship building (enhancing bridging social capital).

#### *5.8.1.5 Sonheuwel*

Sonheuwel Caravan Park is a privately-owned property in Onderstepoort, Pretoria, situated close to the Bon Accord Dam. Once a holiday camp ground, over the past twenty years it has evolved into an informal settlement where residents either erect their own wooden or corrugated iron homes, or take over existing ones. All residents pay to live at Sonheuwel, where they share ablution facilities. No organised meals or community-facilitated donations are provided. The owner of Sonheuwel, "Dup", is not actively involved, but he has formally employed a property manager Hendrik who lives in the management home on the property. Neither Dup nor Hendrik canvas for financial support or donations for Sonheuwel residents. Over the years, however, benefactors have learned about Sonheuwel, and donations are dropped off

sporadically. These are then mostly managed by Hendrik unless the deliveries are a response to a resident's Facebook requests.

Participants at Sonheuwel told the researcher about Oom Mossie who brings food parcels for every household once a month. They also spoke about Oom Leon and Oom Ben who, as part of an Afrikaner aid community organisation, hand out "large donations" (Bokkie, 66 Sonheuwel). These gratuities include food, clothing, school supplies, second-hand furniture and used appliances. Whilst Mossie delivers the first day of every month, the contributions from Leon and Ben are dropped off when available. Salome (42, Sonheuwel) also told the researcher about a restaurant owner nearby who delivers "leftovers" to the community every Tuesday. Participants are very fond of his cooking especially the olive and feta salad. Jannie (36 Sonheuwel) also mentioned an "Indian group" that brings biryani to Sonheuwel once a week. This is also a very enjoyable affair much looked forward to by residents. Hendrik coordinates these aid efforts.

Certain Sonheuwel residents have used Facebook to garner support in the form of food, clothing and furniture donations. However, since most Sonheuwel residents are employed in some capacity, Facebook donor-recruitment remains a small-scale activity in this informal settlement. Louis (55, Sonheuwel) is the father of a four-year old mentally and physically disabled girl. He shared that news has travelled about the special needs of his daughter and that they have received help as a result:

What she [the donor] does when she is here, she takes photos of Monique [Louis's daughter] and the donations they've given. Then she puts it on her Facebook, and that's how she gets help for us with nappies and things.

This is yet another example of how Facebook networks of donors work behind the scenes to facilitate aid. Often the recipients, like Louis, are not aware of the intricacies of the long arm of Facebook.

Sonheuwel has no website or social media presence. Hendrik explained that benefactors and aid organisations have become aware of Sonheuwel over time, and that they contribute "because they want to help poor people." Furthermore, due to the infamous Sonskynhoekie - which is a prominent feature on Facebook - not too far from Sonheuwel, many donors have redirected their efforts to Sonheuwel where drugs and alcohol are not as rife and conspicuous.

The networks of the respective informal settlements illustrate how bonding and bridging social capital is needed to survive (Adato, Carter & May, 2006: 245; Saracostti, 2007: 520; Santini & De Pascale, 2012: 19; Granovetter, 1973: 1364). Where bonding social capital or primary networks provide assistance with everyday tasks, it is the bridging social capital of the poor - their loose ties to people in a higher socio-economic bracket - that ensure they are able to provide for themselves and their families, and perhaps even uplift their standard of living (Adato, Carter & May, 2006: 245; Saracostti, 2007: 520; Santini & De Pascale, 2012: 19; Granovetter, 1973: 1364). In the five informal settlements of this study, there is a reliance on better-resourced and more affluent people, groups and communities. Some informal settlements are entirely dependent on what they receive from others while in others, the donations they receive are a welcome addition to the little they already have. Either way, bridging social capital keeps these communities alive, and Facebook and WhatsApp groups are instrumental in facilitating the process of connecting the donor with the recipient. Without these two social media platforms, residents of these communities would be almost completely removed from anyone that could potentially assist. Their physical isolation and marginalisation would render them largely uncontactable and invisible to the wider world. Perhaps in Filadelfia Ark, residents would remain looked after, but this is a very unique situation. The essential service that Facebook provides in breaching a gap between a person in need and a potential benefactor (Miloni et al., 2014: 333; Davis & Moscato, 2018: 283) has cemented the survival of these communities and their residents.

#### 5.8.2 Topic 2: WhatsApp network among informal settlements

During the interview with Dirk at Filadelfia Ark, the researcher learned about a WhatsApp group of informal settlement farm owners, property managers, community leaders and aid organisations.

It's a group we're on. So, if someone leaves here from me, I post him. Like if he's stolen, or something. That's how we all know ... We try to stop the people who damage the camps' names. So, let's say they leave here, the [other] camps will know. We all know each other. So, now he arrives at another camp, but then they will tell him "No, you damaged that one's name, we don't want you here. We call them "mission hoppers". They go from the one camp to the next to the next ...

They don't want to work and they steal, smoke *dagga*,<sup>29</sup> and drink. They don't want to ...

Aside from preventing “bad apples” (Dirk) from re-entering one informal settlement after the other, this WhatsApp group also aims to assist other communities when needed. As Dirk put it: “Someone would, for example, ask if I need anything, if he has an oversupply of something there at his place. We would tell each other to come and collect this or that.”

Out of the five informal settlements involved in this study, only Filadelfia Ark was part of the *Blanke Kampe* [White Camps] WhatsApp group. Dirk said that he was not aware of Funny Farm or Endicott, and that Sonheuwel's owner has not reached out to any of the other farm owners or informal settlements managers. Due to philosophical differences between the aid organisations on *Blanke Kampe* [White Camps] and Pango Camp, Hugo at Pango Camp has never been asked to join the group. This WhatsApp group is another example of the organised efforts behind the sustainability, support and survival of the informal settlement communities. Although not being part of such a group or community does not necessarily prevent a community from coping, being part of a wider support network of similar communities and aid groups certainly eases potential challenges.

### 5.8.3 Topic 3: Aid organisation networks

One large, well-known, country-wide organisation is actively involved in lending support to informal settlements and impoverished communities and individuals. Their work is not solely focused on alleviating white poverty, but this is a major part of their business model. In order to financially contribute to thousands of families, children and communities, a well-structured network needs to be administrated, maintained and grown.

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<sup>29</sup> *Dagga* is a colloquialism for marijuana.

The organisation's digital media is managed by a woman called Chantelle. She explained the many components associated with effective campaigning:

Fundraising is done on social media mostly by raising awareness of the projects we're involved in. Our content strategy is such that that we harvest content awareness by showing people how they can donate. Every project has its own donation section.

We also use lead generations where we gather data which we then allocate to our contact centre. We source new members this way. People can also join our website and contribute on a monthly basis.

Although this study concentrates on the social media behaviour of residents in white informal settlements, it is crucial to consider the wider networks and specifically the social media networks these informal settlement communities form part of. After all, these extended social media networks play a role and have an impact on the lives of residents of the informal settlements in this study. In only focusing on residents' Facebook and WhatsApp practices, the overall context that indirectly impacts their own behaviour will not be understood. Participants are not aware of the intricacies of the wide-reaching connections that affect their lives. However, the aid that is provided to informal settlement residents enables them to allocate their resources elsewhere – this often goes to data for social media engagements. Furthermore, some participants have successfully experienced the long arm of Facebook and continue to use Facebook groups to tap into a variety of opportunities. Personal connections or bonding social capital (Gowan, 2010: 51; Van Eijck, 2010: 478; Osterling, 2007: 130) is no longer needed to survive. Help from anonymous sources is literally the click of a button away. But, in order to reach the right person, culturally-aligned networks need to be leveraged.

## 5.9 Conclusion

This chapter discusses, in detail, the findings of this study. It illustrates how the findings tie into the literature review as well as the research aims.

Theme 1 contextualises and clarifies the sample in addressing the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty such as formal education levels, unemployment and means of income. It gives an overview of how participants manage to afford to pay for data for their social media access. In this, piece jobs, informal employment, shift work, trading and begging are unpacked as means of income. This leads to a depiction and explanation of social media access in the five informal settlements of this study. It highlights that participants only use Facebook and WhatsApp – not all the participants are active on both, but the theme concludes that no other social media platform is used in these communities.

In Theme 2, the researcher delves into the long arm of Facebook. Essentially, what this implies is that there is an entire Facebook network - visible or not visible to informal settlement residents - between donors, donation facilitators, informal settlement farm owners, community leaders and residents that aim to support and uplift informal settlement residents. These Facebook and WhatsApp group networks organise and facilitate donation deliveries that are enormously helpful in the informal settlement communities. Not only do WhatsApp and Facebook groups connect donors with those in need - indirectly or directly - Facebook is also used by participants to market their business ventures and find employment. But the long arm of Facebook can become the very downfall of communities and informal settlement residents. Participants explain that just as Facebook has been helpful in getting the word out about their suffering, the same platform is sometimes used to blame them for their circumstances, which then leads to a drastic reduction of donation support.

Theme 3 focuses on the negative aspects of Facebook – the harm, pain and embarrassment it has caused participants. Participants have felt exploited by others who post pictures of their impoverished circumstances (pictures that were either taken from residents' own Facebook pages or downloaded from the internet) only to collect money by pretending to do so on behalf of the informal settlement residents. Furthermore, in some instances, Facebook has become a platform to publicise internal disputes, which results in shame for participants who have fallen victim to someone



else's targeted fury. Misinformation and disinformation (fake news) are also a concern for participants. Some mentioned being worried about information they do not believe to be correct circulating on Facebook at a massive tempo. These all amount to what participants perceive to be dangers on Facebook. In some cases, it even results in participants avoiding Facebook entirely.

Theme 4 highlights the bright side of Facebook – Facebook engagements that add value to the lives of participants. A connectedness that mitigates and stretches beyond the physical restrictions of being poor and living in an informal settlement, to a great extent, meets participants' need to belong. Participants find emotional support, inspiration, practical advice and camaraderie through their engagements with Facebook users from all around the world. Positive anecdotes, humour and entertainment further attract participants to engage with Facebook.

Theme 5 highlights how both Facebook and WhatsApp groups are powerful tools for participants to stay informed about their immediate environment, the broader country and wider world. In this vein, Facebook and WhatsApp are seen as important sources of news through which participants engage in the act of surveillance.

Theme 6 emphasises and clarifies that although this chapter discusses findings related to the social media engagements of informal settlement residents, it is key to acknowledge that no generalised pattern can be deduced or category labelled when it comes to people affected by poverty. This pertains to social media use as well, since some participants use social media every day and others not at all. Their devices and points of access also differ. Not everyone in an informal settlement is there because of the same circumstances. Neither do they have the same ambitions or sense of stuckness. Some participants were born in the informal settlements and others had only been there for a few days. A variety was found in responses to each and every question which pushed to the forefront the individuality of each participant – something this study aimed to highlight. In other words, “the poor” is not a uniform category.

The last theme, Theme 7, details the networks of each informal settlement in this study. While the study focuses on the role and impact of social media in informal settlements, this theme also discusses the non-social media networks. This is done purely to highlight the informal settlements where social media plays an important role and the reasons for this. It also discusses a WhatsApp group that consists of informal

settlement farm owners, community leaders and aid organisations. This again highlights the role of social media in informal settlements and how these platforms are used to organise and mobilise people.

This chapter concentrates on the first two research aims – determining participants' access to social media, and establishing which social media platforms are used for what reasons by participants. The findings highlight that the majority of participants have access to social media, albeit intermittently. It also indicates that certain participants do not access social media simply because they do not want to – not because they cannot afford it or do not know how to use it. WhatsApp and Facebook are the only social media platforms participants report using, and they engage with these for a myriad of reasons that include surveillance of their environment, connectedness and to enhance and leverage their social capital. The next chapter focuses on the third and fourth research aims.



## **Chapter 6: Interpretation and reflection**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on addressing the third and fourth research aims. It discusses patterns of social media usage in the different informal settlements, and draws comparisons between the communities. In this vein, this chapter underscores the importance of including different types of informal settlements in this study as it aims to determine the role the actual informal settlement plays on participants' social media use. Chapter Six also explores the relation between social media and social capital.

### **6.2 Comparison and reflection: social media use in informal settlements**

The previous chapter focused on the first and second research aims. The third aim of this research is to deduce patterns of social media use and to draw comparisons between communities. The patterns of social media use in the communities of this study gave an indication of their access as well as reasons and drivers for their social media use.

WhatsApp and Facebook are the only social media platforms used by participants in the communities under study. Participants predominantly use their cell phones for access, although a handful use a personal computer and/or tablet. Although participants use WhatsApp as a messaging system, and not purely in the context of social media, it is also a popular medium for group participation (social media platform). Several participants join WhatsApp groups to engage in acts of surveillance and to feel connected to their communities. The inexpensive nature of WhatsApp allows participants to remain active on this platform on a fairly consistent basis. Social media access in general is intermittent for most participants, however, and directly related to their income. In other words, when participants receive money from piece work, trade, grants, or pensions, they allocate some of this to purchasing data bundles.

Patterns of social media use show how some participants use Facebook to connect with groups and individuals that can provide aid in terms of food and clothing. This has been a highly successful strategy in Pango Camp, where community leader Hugo refers to his social media engagements as “marketing” and “advertising” activities. As a result of the sustainability of Hugo’s Facebook donation campaigns, other Pango

Camp participants engage in the same practice. This has resulted in confusion among donors, and subsequent rifts inside the community.

Facebook is not only a source of positive support, however. In fact, patterns of social media use in the communities of this study point to the deliberate avoidance of Facebook by some participants. This is a result of Facebook being used as a public platform to shame and humiliate others. It is seen by certain participants as a gossip page that only serves to spread rumours that would embarrass others. In this vein, Facebook is used as a weapon – taking advantage of its potential to reach a large audience with a few simple clicks to maximise the damage caused. The push technology of Facebook and the fake news that is circulated on the platform has also alienated some participants who feel bombarded by notifications and information.

On the flipside of the cyberbullying and harassment coin, Facebook and WhatsApp provide a strong sense of connectedness to many participants. Due to their severe financial deprivation and the high cost of transport, several participants experience a sense of stuckness in the confines of the informal settlements they live in. Facebook enables many participants to have a voice in the public sphere, to participate in conversations with others outside their immediate environment and to feel part of a wider world. This fulfils their need to belong. Carvallo and Gabriel (2006: 697) and Stevens and Fiske (1995: 192) emphasise how crucial social connections are to human beings, which explains the driving force behind the pattern of participants using Facebook to feel connected beyond their physical restrictions. Many participants receive emotional support from religious, hobby and interest groups they join on Facebook. The messages of well wishes and encouragement are found to be motivational and inspiring by participants.

Participants' social media engagement patterns also indicate a need for surveillance – an understanding of their environment and what is happening in it. Several participants rely on WhatsApp groups to warn them about potential dangers in terms of crime and/or unrest in the area. Facebook, on the other hand, provides a bigger picture of what goes on in the rest of the country and the world. The presence of echo chambers and filter bubbles are evident, however, as participants appear to be exposed to news that gives a disproportionate account of particular types of current events.

In addition to understanding patterns in social media use, the third research aim is to draw comparisons between the five different communities in this study. In all of the informal settlements, the social media access of participants varies between no access and access to Facebook and/or WhatsApp. Pango Camp is the only informal settlement where all the participants have access to both Facebook and WhatsApp. Pango Camp really stands out in terms of participants' social media savviness. Pango Camp participants engage in Facebook communication that is incredibly fruitful in obtaining donations, goods, food and other discarded items. Although participants in Sonheuwel mention similar Facebook activities, it is not done with the same consistency, veracity and commitment. In Pango Camp, Facebook has essentially become a tool for survival – many participants are fully reliant on donations that are either self-managed on Facebook or done through Hugo's Facebook advertising. The donations received through Facebook engagements are reliable enough for participants to depend on them. In Endicott and Funny Farm, willing individuals who live outside the respective informal settlements manage Facebook networking on their behalf. They manage and administer donations as well as their distribution. Facebook and WhatsApp are important tools in their fundraising campaigns.

The participants in Funny Farm are the most detached from social media. Although participants do engage on these platforms, it is much less frequently than what was found in the other settlements. Possibly, one of the reasons for this is that Funny Farm participants, by their own admission, often struggle with alcohol and drug dependency issues which drains the little bit of income they do have. Due to the overpowering draw of their addiction, almost all their disposable income is allocated to feeding their habits. Funny Farm participants did not express the same desire for connectedness as the participants in the other informal settlements. It was not that they deliberately avoided Facebook, they just did not express the need to belong to other groups or to receive emotional support through these like participants in other informal settlements. An aspect to consider in this regard is the slander and shaming many participants have experienced on Facebook. According to participants, Funny Farm is regularly mentioned on Facebook, and there are even active pages campaigning against donations to Funny Farm – attempting to discourage potential donors from contributing to Funny Farm, advising them that their charity provisions will all be sold for drugs and alcohol. Participants therefore never broadcast that they live in Funny Farm, and, as

a result of the negative opinions others appear to have of them, socially, they choose to disconnect.

Funny Farm participants also very rarely engage in social media platforms to discuss hobbies or to seek/or receive practical advice. Most noticeable is that no Funny Farm participants reported using social media to kill time or for entertainment. Again, this is different to what was found in other communities, and the conclusion the researcher draws, after her discussions with Funny Farm participants, is that their days are occupied with trying to obtain drugs or alcohol, using said substances, being heavily under the influence of them, then “coming down” before the cycle repeats itself again. Little time is left to kill in between this and no money is really allocated to any other activity.

The above differences are the only real aspects that highlight disparities in the social media use of participants in the different informal settlements. Although the informal settlements vary considerably in terms of aesthetics, services, infrastructure and leadership, the social media engagements are actually quite similar between participants irrespective of which informal settlement they are in. In other words, the patterns of social media use that have been illustrated apply to the majority of participants, and the respective informal settlements they reside in do not appear to affect this.

In drawing on the theory from the literature, the researcher wishes to discuss her findings in light of what other studies have suggested. Axhausen (2002: 34) and Bayram et al. (2012: 375) mention the social exclusion, rejection and marginalisation that people affected by poverty suffer. Levitas et al. (2000: 63) further intimate that as a result of the social exclusion that accompanies poverty, people who are poor are often unable to receive support and assistance – practically and emotionally. Although the researcher agrees that a level of physical isolation and destitution is certainly associated with being poor, the researcher also argues that social media has mitigated much of this in the communities of this study. Participants are able to form meaningful connections with others they engage with on Facebook and these friendships are continuously developing and strengthening. In fact, the connectedness that participants experience through Facebook groups gives them a reprieve from the physical restrictions of their daily lives. Furthermore, as a result of being poor and yet

being active on Facebook, participants were able to obtain aid and support in the form of food, clothes, furniture, school stationary and medical care for children.

Qui (2009: 3) and Kamath (2018: 386) discuss how the current digital divide is better understood as the gap between the haves and the have-less, and not the have-nots mentioned in other literature (Cohron, 2015: 78; Bornman, 2014: 7; Britz, 2004: 192; Nwagwu, 2006: 167). These have-less have limited income, but they do use social media, predominantly on their cell phone devices (Qui, 2009: 4). This group of people are still marginalised and prevented from full social participation, however, as the virtual spheres of social media closely mirror those of the existing physical social sphere (Kamath, 2018: 387; Madianou, 2015: 1). The researcher concurs with the have-less designation, since a great majority of participants in this study have access to social media. However, participants are able to penetrate significantly higher socio-economic spheres and they even benefit from these relations. This is not to suggest that these connections are friendships, since the power imbalance remains, but this is not a result of the digital divide. It is more aligned with the dark side of social capital, in which relationships are embedded in unequal power positions that perpetuate the donor-recipient dynamic (Huda et al., 2008: 312).

In the literature, voice poverty is further associated with being poor, suggesting that people living in poverty constantly lack the ability, tools and accessible channels to make their voices heard (Mohr, 2008: 9). In the same vein, Tacchi (2008: 12) suggests that voice poverty is the exclusion and denial of a person's rights to partake in decisions that affect their lives. Although the participants in this study are not necessarily involved in political discussions with policymakers on Facebook, they do assert their voice and share their views and opinions on the groups they are part of. Participants did not imply that they felt censored online nor did they feel inadequate or shy to post comments. In fact, several participants eagerly contributed to Facebook walls and discussion forums on the Facebook platform.

The patterns of participants' social media use in Endicott, Funny Farm, Pango Camp, Sonheuwel and Filadelfia Ark tell us a story of how participants access social media, how frequently and which platforms they engage on. These social media patterns also illustrate what the driving forces are behind participants' social media use and what satisfaction they derive from this interaction. Participants displayed similar social



media behavioural patterns between all the informal settlements, with Pango Camp being the most active, and Funny Farm, the least. In other words, the only real discrepancies between informal settlements in terms of social media use pertain to Pango Camp's social media fundraising and Funny Farm's inactivity. For the rest, social media engagement should be considered in terms of individual use and not an overarching informal settlement approach since the informal settlements themselves appear to have limited influence on how, when and why participants use social media.

### **6.3 Relation between social media and social capital**

This section considers the relation between social media and social capital especially in light of the findings discussed in the previous chapter. This is in accordance with Research Aim 4. The literature differentiates between bonding and bridging social capital (Gowan, 2010: 51; Van Eijck, 2010: 478; Osterling, 2007: 130), and strong and weak bonds, and argues that people who are poor lack bridging capital with individuals or groups in higher socio-economic spheres that could assist with upward mobility (Adato, Carter & May, 2006: 245; Saracostti, 2007: 520; Santini & De Pascale, 2012: 19; Granovetter, 1973: 1364). Theory further suggests that to maintain a balanced economic life, both bridging and bonding capital is needed (Saracostti, 2007: 520; Woolcock, 2001: 78; Huda et al., 2008: 312). To establish such a balanced and mixed social network is challenging for the poor, however, since the exclusive nature of elite circles deter outsiders, and those who suffer financially have very little to offer any possible new relationships (Letki & Mierina, 2015: 22). Therefore, the poor tend to have fixed and unchanging networks comprising bonding capital (Letki & Mierina, 2015: 221).

The researcher in this study concurs that a mix of bridging and bonding capital is needed to survive. In the context of the informal settlements in this study, the bonding capital of participants extended to looking after children, borrowing kitchenware, sharing baby clothes and other basic requirements an ill-resourced person can assist with. It is bridging capital, however, connections with people in a higher socio-economic class, that sustains the survival of participants. This study argues that it is not impossible for poor individuals to penetrate better-resourced circles.

In the case of Filadelfia Ark, it is Dirk who provides three meals a day, entirely out of his own pocket. In other words, it is the connections - their bridging capital - that residents have with Dirk that maintain their survival. In Sonheuwel, the participants who cannot rely on themselves to survive, sell the clothes donated to them by charity organisations and benefactors to have money for food and other essentials. Even though the contact may not be direct, indirectly the bridging social capital the community possesses assists Sonheuwel residents with their daily needs. At Endicott, Marnelle manages the bridging social capital for residents through her social media connections. Pango Camp is the best example of how important bridging social capital is to the settlement's economic life. The entire Pango Camp community is sustained through donations from benefactors that are in higher socio-economic spheres.

Although the researcher argues that poor people can, in fact, access better socio-economic networks, it brings into question, to what extent? Is maintaining a benefactor-donor relationship truly a meaningful connection that could lead to upward mobility? Or is it simply the dark side of social capital (Huda et al., 2008: 312), which preserves a power imbalance? This questions the role of social media in building social capital.

Viswanath et al. (2013) suggest that lower socio-economic groups predominantly use the internet to engage on social media platforms. Kumar (2014: 1130) supports this by noting that social media allows financially disadvantaged users to bypass their class, status and economic background to communicate with people from all walks of life. Schoon and Strelitz (2014: 25) and Madianou (2015: 1) argue that despite this access to a wider world and far-reaching social networks, low-income social media users struggle to reach beyond their physical social boundaries to form truly significant relations with others who are more privileged. This then results in a sense of stuckness – being confined to a world that seems impossible to actually escape (Schoon & Strelitz, 2014: 25).

The researcher agrees that participants in this study are able to access social media platforms, and that through these connections they reach beyond their immediate social circles. With regard to the stuckness Schoon and Strelitz (2014: 25) describe so aptly, the researcher concludes that she did not experience that participants in this study felt frustrated by being able to communicate with online connections and yet not

holistically befriend them. Participants expressed contentment with their connectedness, albeit virtual or online. In events where participants wanted something tangible from their Facebook groups and contacts, they were successful in eliciting these. In other words, the researcher did not find that for participants, their social media engagements were purely “window shopping”. They were able to extract what they wished to from their social media contacts – in some cases, donations and in others, emotional support, practical advice and shared interests. In this vein, participants in this study approached their Facebook engagements much the same as a middle-class person would. They understand that some connections are purely virtual, and that in itself is, in many ways, the appeal of them.

The researcher believes that social media is a critical component in the social capital of the participants in this study. Had it not been for social media, participants’ social circles would be significantly smaller and restricted to certain socio-economic spheres. The researcher would even go as far as to suggest that without Facebook their very survival would be in jeopardy. The bridging social capital participants possess is because of Facebook and the connections they have formed on this platform. The loss of Facebook would mean deprivation of essential supplies, emotional support, a sense of connectedness, joy and upliftment in a world characterised by poverty, deprivation and need.

#### **6.4 Social media, social capital and making ends meet: towards a guideline**

In the previous chapter it was explained that residents and leaders of the informal settlements in this study use Facebook and WhatsApp to make ends meet. In Sonheuwel, there have been attempts by individual residents to use Facebook to coordinate occasional donation deliveries. For Funny Farm, Ronel (51) manages fundraising initiatives and goods deliveries through her WhatsApp networks, and Marnelle (38) leverages her Facebook and WhatsApp groups to lend support to the residents of Endicott. At Filadelfia Ark, Dirk relies on his own networks and income to provide for residents.

At Endicott and Funny Farm, the donations received are sporadic and intermittent. In other words, although these help residents, the unpredictable nature of these donations makes it impossible to fully rely on them. In Sonheuwel, donations are highly infrequent and limited. No reliance can be placed on these deliveries at all. Residents of these three informal settlements therefore need to ensure they have other means of income – the donations will simply not be enough.

Pango Camp, on the other hand, through the structured and methodical approach of Hugo, has become a highly effective and successful marketing machine. So successful has Hugo's Facebook "advertising" campaign been that two large storage units have been built on the Pango Camp property and CCTV cameras installed to safeguard the donated goods. Donations are delivered daily and are enough to fully sustain residents. Residents survive on the steady stream of donations they receive – if not used directly, the money they make by selling their donations is applied to buy other essentials, including data. Hugo's approach to solicit donations could potentially serve as a guideline to other informal settlements on how Facebook and WhatsApp can be used to enhance a community's bridging social capital and to tangibly benefit from these connections. Whether or not a community should be reliant on the goodwill of others is a separate debate and perhaps a moral issue. This study, however, focuses solely on how social media can benefit impoverished individuals and communities.

On Facebook, Hugo taps into Afrikaans cultural groups and other groups that are sympathetic to people suffering from poverty. He believes the success of "advertising" is embedded in finding the right groups that are aligned with one's own mission and objectives. He has a dedicated Pango Camp Facebook page and he also reaches out via private, direct messages on Facebook appealing for help. He contacts organisations as well as individuals. Once contact is established through Facebook, Hugo sends pictures of the living conditions of Pango Camp highlighting the plight of residents. In communication with potential benefactors, Hugo appeals for help detailing the exact needs of residents. He welcomes all non-perishable donations such as clothing and furniture, but when it comes to food deliveries he specifies what is needed and how much. As he explained to the researcher; "Otherwise I will sit with an oversupply." He foregrounds the needs of mothers and children and, in this regard, secures assistance with diapers, baby formula, school books and stationary.

Hugo manages communication with donors directly. He also ensures that he receives all deliveries himself. Sometimes, when the donor relationship is well enough established, Hugo's wife Verona will assist with the process of receiving deliveries. In other words, a relationship of trust is fostered between Hugo and the donors. Hugo explained to the researcher that several donors have told him that they prefer donating directly to communities in need instead of giving help to charity organisations and never really knowing if it ended up in the right hands.

Another core element of Hugo's successful marketing campaign is the expansiveness of his network (primarily established through Facebook). The tentacles of his network reach far and wide and comprise hundreds of donors. This in itself secures high volumes of donations delivered at frequent intervals. Hugo understands that a large, far-reaching network is necessary to ensure that donations do not dry up. He also appreciates that while some donors such as supermarkets and other retailers are able to deliver regularly, other individual benefactors will only do so as and when they can – when they are spring cleaning their homes, moving, or throwing out clothes that children have outgrown. Then there are those donors that remain committed to assisting the residents of Pango Camp in any way they can. Hugo remains in contact with these benefactors and reaches out to them when specific products are urgently needed. He explains that there is a fifty percent chance of a donor being able to provide what is required at the time. Therefore, Hugo will contact several of them to maximise his chances.

Hugo is cognisant of the negative publicity that Pango Camp receives on Facebook. He appreciates that this may result in donors withdrawing their support from the community. In this vein, Hugo realises that the "lifespan" of a donor may only be three to six months. He explains therefore that he constantly needs to keep the supply chain of donors flowing – always recruiting more (on Facebook) as existing ones will eventually dry up and they cannot afford a void. Hugo does not seem concerned about running out of donors. He believes that there are always people willing and wanting to help out and it is his job to find them and connect with them. Facebook has been proven to be the perfect tool to do this with.

Following up with benefactors and thanking them for their contribution is an essential component of Hugo's networking activities. Once donations are delivered, Verona sorts them according to certain criteria. An organised handing-out process then follows. Residents are called to Hugo and Verona's house (either with a megaphone or through a messenger that runs through the settlement beckoning everyone to go to "reception"). Each resident has a number and when their number is called, they are allowed into the storage facility - only one resident at a time - where they can peruse the bundles of sorted-out goods and take what they feel they need. At the exit, a photo of the resident and their goods is taken, and Hugo duly sends these to the donor or posts them on his Facebook pages. Hugo emphasises the importance of assuring the benefactor that the donations have indeed been handed to the residents as the donor intended. Photos serve this purpose.

Special occasions such as Easter, Christmas, weddings and funerals are opportunities for increased "Facebook advertising". Hugo will post about upcoming events and planned activities for the children, and appeal to his networks to contribute to make these special. This is highly effective and has resulted in several donation drives that bring excitement and joy to residents.

Hugo's persistent, pragmatic, systematic and dogged approach to "Facebook advertising" has turned Pango Camp into a well-oiled machine sustaining itself and often its neighbours, through the steady stream of donation deliveries. In other communities their Facebook fundraising activities are non-coordinated and haphazard, which results in reduced assistance. Hugo's clarity of vision and discipline, in essence, proves that Facebook can be used to connect with an almost endless well of people who can and will provide help. The trick is to penetrate the right groups, liaise with the right individuals and deliver the right message. Hugo has mastered this and if it can be this fruitful in one community, one is inclined to believe that a same or similar model can be equally successful in other communities if applied with the same vigour and discipline.

Bridging social capital by definition often leads to upward mobility. Whether this is the case in the informal settlements in this study is debatable. One could argue that living in an informal settlement reliant on the goodwill of others cannot be seen as an enviable position. The "embeddeness" in existing racial divides, since donations are

distributed according to whiteness, is also an unfortunate and tragic perpetuation of South Africa's inequality. The alternative however is what is relevant. Without Facebook, the resources that assist the vulnerable and impoverished participants in this study would simply not be available. This would drastically diminish and erode the quality of life they are afforded through the donations and opportunities gained through Facebook. In other words, perhaps the upward mobility of participants, as result of their increased bridging social capital acquired through Facebook, does not extend to a lifestyle beyond the informal settlements they reside in, but it certainly affords them the comfort of surviving a little better.

This doctoral study aims to contribute to knowledge in the field of Communications with specific focus on informal settlements. The researcher believes that this guideline is a big step towards highlighting something that is not known in this field (Facebook advertising by impoverished communities), and towards further research on the enhancement of bridging social capital in the poorest and most marginalised of communities.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter concentrates on the third and fourth research aims. It illustrates patterns of social media use among participants, and compares the role and impact of social media between the different informal settlements in this study. It clarifies that the actual informal settlement participants reside in does not appear to affect their social media use except for the intensive social media “marketing” and “advertising” campaigns in Pango Camp. This chapter further details the relation between social media and social capital, and highlights how social media assists certain participants in this study to enhance their bridging social capital. The next chapter draws together all the aspects of this study. It clarifies the contributions of this study to the field of Communications, and encourages further research on social media in informal settlements.



## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The role and impact of social media in informal settlements is an understudied field, specifically in South Africa. This is despite the fact that a significant proportion of the South African population reside in informal settlements and that most of the population now has access to social media. In the same vein, white informal settlements are essentially unstudied when it comes to their social media use. For these reasons, the researcher explored these aspects in this study.

Social media platforms Facebook and WhatsApp are present in the five informal settlement of this study. Although participants can be considered poor, according to the descriptions and definitions of poverty discussed in the literature, this does not imply that they are the have-nots in the digital divide. Participants are consistently able to connect online and they do this to survive, to feel connected, to pass time, for surveillance of their environment and to air their grievances and frustrations.

These findings, indicating that even the most marginalised are able to not only connect on social media, but also to extract intrinsic value from these online liaisons, open up an entire field worthy of further exploration – especially in South Africa where opportunities are scarce for many who fall on the wrong side of the economic curve. If Facebook really can meet the needs of those who are less fortunate, as it has been found to in many ways in this study, then the survivalist nature of data availability needs thorough consideration.

### **7.2 Objective and aims**

The objective of this study was to determine the role and impact of social media in white informal settlements in Gauteng.

In order to reach the above objective, the specific research aims for this study were:

1. To determine participants' access to social media
2. To establish which social media platforms are used and for what reasons by participants
3. To deduce patterns of social media usage and draw comparisons between communities

4. Based on the above, to seek to establish the relation between social media and social capital.

Firstly, this study determined that the vast majority of participants have access to WhatsApp and/or Facebook. They predominantly use their cell phones to access these platforms although a selected few participants own personal computers, laptops and tablets. Access is for the most part intermittent and dependent on sporadic income.

Secondly, in terms of platforms, the participants use Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate, to elicit support and donations, to feel connected to a wider world and to people outside their immediate environment, to share common interests with others, and for emotional support. They also use Facebook and WhatsApp groups to air their frustrations – sometimes at the expense of others. WhatsApp and Facebook groups are also used for surveillance – to understand participants' environment and potential dangers in the area.

Thirdly, in terms of social media patterns, this study highlights participants' intermittent connectivity as well as what type of connections and communication participants foreground on their Facebook and WhatsApp. Bad news and slander alienate certain participants, whereas positive anecdotes and uplifting messages result in participants prioritising money for data connectivity. The comparison of social media use patterns between the different informal settlements underscore how a user's individuality guides and navigates their social media use and not the informal settlement they reside in.

Fourthly, the study finds that poor people's social capital is not necessarily static and restricted to their immediate environment and support networks. Social media, in this study, can be viewed as the panacea to increasing social capital and to building important bridging social capital. Through Facebook, participants are able to reach beyond socio-economic and educational barriers to communicate with others who they share interests with or who are in similar situations. They are even able to convert pure communication into tangible donation deliveries. Facebook is the only platform facilitating these initial introductions, and the success of these social capital building exercises has rendered Facebook a tool of survival. In the previous chapter, the researcher describes a possible guideline that could be replicated in other informal

settlements. It is based on the lucrative donation scheme that Hugo has devised. The dark side of social capital needs to be considered in this regard, however, since the relationships that evolve from being purely virtual to being physical do not manage to supersede or replace the power dynamics that exist between a donor and a recipient.

By combining the findings of these four aims of the study, the overall research objective, namely to determine the role and impact of social media in white informal settlements in Gauteng, found that Facebook and WhatsApp play an enormous role in the lives of participants. Whether as tools of survival or a means of connecting to a wider world, participants have stated that without these platforms they would feel invisible and forgotten.

### **7.3 Limitations of the study**

This study focuses on five white informal settlements in Gauteng. Although this is not a small sample, it is only a pinprick in the vast informal settlement landscape of South Africa. White people and white poverty are also the minority, which means this study does not give a fair or accurate reflection of what social media use in other informal settlements may or may not look like. Generalisations can therefore not be made to other similar communities or other informal settlements.

This study does however emphasise how important it is to consider each community and the uniqueness of each participant in understanding the role and impact of social media in informal settlements. Statistics can never tell us the whole story, but, in the same vein, too many stories can not give us quantitative data for policy making. In that, lies a limitation too.

### **7.4 Contributions of the study**

This study contributes to the field of social media research in vulnerable communities. Importantly, this study focuses on communities that are completely understudied. No statistical information exists on white informal settlements in South Africa, and very little research has been done in these communities at all. In other words, what goes on in these communities, where they are, how many people live in them and what life is like for residents is unknown, foreign and undiscovered. Considering the field of this study, Communications, this brings to the forefront, in white informal settlements, topics that have never emerged or even been broached. In this, new information

becomes available that highlights social media practices of understudied communities emphasising the uses of social media by people who are severely impoverished. Furthermore, this study looks at poverty from a centred position – as it is experienced by those who live and feel the effects of it every day. Instead of looking at poverty from the outside in, this study aims to view poverty from the inside, the middle or thick of it. The contribution of this research pertains to three respective aspects: the poor's access to social media as voice platforms; that people who experience poverty can have adequate social capital, including bridging social capital that leads to their financial benefit; and that social media plays an instrumental role in building and maintaining social capital for people who are impoverished.

#### 7.4.1 Access to voice platforms

It is often argued that people who are affected by poverty do not share access to the same information more financially advantaged people do. It is also suggested that poor individuals and communities suffer from voice poverty – the inability to make their voices heard, to partake in the public sphere and have an impact on decisions that affect their daily lives. The researcher believes that her study highlights that no such blanket statement can accurately be made about people impacted by poverty.

The majority of participants in this study are active on Facebook. They use this platform to share their views on current affairs, to communicate their experiences, to form connections and to assert their identities. Participants also exude their agency through Facebook – they take decisive, independent action and formulate strategies to improve their lives, and they do so using social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

This illustrates that although social media access may be intermittent and not as richly available to those who are financially disadvantaged, this does not necessarily deter participants from using Facebook and WhatsApp platforms in much the same way as the middle-class or affluent. Moreover, in addition to Facebook being used for similar need gratifications as other groups of society, the marginalised and disadvantaged also use this to mobilise aid efforts that benefit them. This points to almost the opposite of voice poverty – being powerful and skilful enough to activate change that improves lives.

#### 7.4.2 The poor can have bridging social capital

It is mostly understood that although people who are poor have social capital, it tends to be the wrong kind – bonding social capital, close connections with people in the same socio-economic class. Having said this, existing literature does indicate that social media can be used by individuals of lower socio-economic backgrounds to increase their weak ties with better resourced people. In this study, and as result of social media, participants illustrate having sufficient bridging social capital to meet their need to belong, to improve their financial situation and to engage with others on such a level that it provides emotional support and encouragement. The relations that provide the above are loose ties (bridging social capital) and stretch across socio-economic spheres and social class.

It is crucial to consider the South African context when evaluating the social capital of the participants in this study. White people in South Africa, 26 years after the end of apartheid, are still better off overall as a demographic group. In other words, it is relatively easy for a poor white person to penetrate a white resource group or network since economic imbalance is skewed in favour of South Africa's white population and there are enough white people in a position to assist. Being white and poor is enough "credit" to appeal to white resourceful individuals and charity organisations to provide aid and supplies.

Another aspect to consider is that, due to the country's poor economic growth and high unemployment, some of these participants are educated and used to circulate in different socio-economic spheres than the informal settlements they now live in. Just one example is Willie (72, Sonheuwel) who has a BSc degree in mining engineering. He still has contact with people he used to be friendly with, and his children are also on their own paths to success. For this reason, he has sufficient social capital to survive without a pension and charity in his old age. He admits that his family, friends and acquaintances provide for him. Wille (72, Sonheuwel) is just one participant of several who retain bridging social capital from their previous, more advantaged circumstances.

Although the unique context of white poverty in South Africa accounts for participants having social capital of the right kind, it does not provide the full picture. Not every participant's social capital is remnants from their previous lives. Many participants have accrued social capital while living in an informal settlement using social media.

#### 7.4.3 Social media helps the poor build bridging social capital

A valuable contribution of this study is that it indicates how social media can effectively be used by economically disadvantaged individuals and communities to enhance their bridging social capital. Although the dark side of social capital is evident in the donor-recipient relationships present in some of the informal settlements, it cannot be denied that participants are able to use social media to their advantage and to their economic benefit and even survival.

Pango Camp, under the leadership of Hugo (63) shows how effective Facebook campaigning can essentially keep an entire informal settlement of approximately 150 adults and 50 children fed, clothed and provided for – purely as a result of donations elicited through Facebook. Other micro examples of individuals in other informal settlements further support the findings that Facebook is an incredibly helpful tool to access potential donors and obtain much needed aid provisions.

The bridging social capital that participants build and maintain on Facebook extends beyond physical, tangible benefits. Meaningful virtual connections are formed by participants with people from all across the globe, which mitigates their physical stuckness, and which reinforces their connectedness with others based on similar interests, hobbies, daily challenges, and religions or spiritual inclinations. This can be compared to the bridging social capital borne out of the Facebook or social media liaisons of a wealthy or middle-class user.

In this vein, social media can be seen as the grand facilitator of introductions and bridging social capital to many, especially those who are poverty-stricken and, as a result, restricted to their immediate physical environment.

## **7.5 Recommendations for further research**

The researcher would like further research to explore the role and impact of social media in informal settlements in South Africa that have different racial demographics than the one in this study. She would encourage a comparative study between the informal settlements that form part of this study and a future study in black informal settlements.

The researcher also recommends further studies into the social media usage of residents of informal settlements in rural areas in South Africa. This study involves urban informal settlements and the comparative study the researcher suggests will focus on rural informal settlements as well. Considering the abject poverty that people in South Africa's rural areas face, a study considering their social media usage could be very valuable.

Lastly, a quantitative study depicting social media use in informal settlements could give a thorough overview not only of access but actual use. This should include rural as well as urban informal settlements.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

This qualitative study highlights that even in severely impoverished communities such as informal settlements, individuals still manage to have access to Facebook and WhatsApp, albeit intermittently. These platforms play an enormous role in the lives of residents of informal settlements. On the positive side, they connect informal settlement residents with benefactors and donors, whereas on the negative side, they become public platforms used to shame, bully and humiliate. Facebook does, however, give these users a sense of connectedness to a wider world and greater audience – something they would not have experienced inside the confines of their informal settlements had it not been for the social media platform.

This study contributes to the field of Communications by bringing to the forefront information on hidden and marginalised communities that little is known about. It argues that through Facebook even the poorest of the poor can accrue bridging social capital which is essential to survival, and it provides a guideline on how this can be done.



In raising awareness and understanding of the communities in this study – Sonheuwel, Funny Farm, Endicott, Filadelfia Ark and Pango Camp, the researcher hopes to inspire further research on the value of social media in informal settlements. She also believes that it emphasises the absolute uniqueness of each and every person affected by poverty – stories that cannot be told through numbers.



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## **Appendix 1: Interview guide**

### **1) Poverty, education, unemployment and social media access**

- 1.1 Do you have access to the internet?
- 1.2 Do you have access to social media?
- 1.3 What social media platforms do you use?

### **2) Social capital enhancement and support through social media**

- 2.1 Are you part of any groups on social media?
- 2.2 Tell me about these groups ...
- 2.3 What do you discuss in these groups?
- 2.4 I have seen groups on Facebook that advertise giving away free or cheap goods. What have you seen that is similar?
- 2.5 Do you use groups like these?
- 2.6 What help have you received from others through social media?
- 2.7 What community engagements are organised for residents here through social media?
- 2.8 Who manages these communication efforts (on social media for the community)?
- 2.9 Do you feel that social media gives you the ability to communicate with people that you would not otherwise have connected with, and why?

### **3) The dark side of social media**

- 3.1 Do you find that there are untruths on social media?
- 3.2 Tell me about ugly things that have been said on social media.
- 3.3 Have you or your community been impacted by cruelty of social media, and how?

### **4) The bright side of social media**

- 4.1 What do you use social media for?
- 4.2 Do you use social media for news?
- 4.3 What sort of stories or news do you read about on social media?
- 4.4 Would you say your life is better because you have access to social media, and why?

4.5 What do you think life would have been like if you did not have access to social media?

**5) Networks of community leaders, informal settlement farm owners and aid organisations**

Depending on the person interviewed, the researcher asked about their specific networks and the role that social media plays in these.





## Appendix 2: Photos of informal settlements

### 2.1 Sonheuwel



### 2.2 Funny Farm





### 2.3 Endicott



### 2.4 Filadelfia Ark



### 2.5 Pango Camp





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