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PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

By

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Abstract

Social media is extremely successful in today's world. This can be explained using psychology. This paper outlines three perspectives of social media use and the various psychological concepts that explain them: the Poster, the Viewer, and the Connector. The Poster creates and uploads content to social media in hopes of the feedback given by those who see it. This can lead to addiction and provides social approval. Many Posters also engage in a false identity to some extent. The Viewer utilizes social media for many reasons, all of which fall under four categories: education, inspiration, entertainment, and socialization. They are also susceptible to addiction and parasocial relationships. The final category, the Connector, involves those who utilize messaging on social media as well as dating apps.

Keywords: social media, psychology, connection, reward, relationships, social networking site

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Thank you to my husband, for your constant support.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The success of social media is a result of the adoption of various psychological theories because a person who uses social media is a person who is being influenced by psychology. The terms 'social media' and 'social networking sites' have, in the past, been inaccurately used interchangeably. Social media refers to any website or app that allows the capability of creating, sharing, and collaborating online content with other people (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). This can include anything from collaborative projects (like *PowerPoint* presentations), virtual social worlds, and gaming sites, to blogs (weblogs), *Wikis*, and, of course, social networking sites. Social networking sites are a specific type of social media that are online communities that allow users to make personal public profiles, interact and communicate with people they've met in person, and meet new people who have shared interests (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). The difference between the two is that social networking sites focus on connecting people, and there are facets of social media that are not necessarily focused on the connection between users.

This paper uses both terms, depending on the research being discussed, though the terms can not necessarily always be used interchangeably. The first social networking site launched in the US was SixDegrees, in 1997 (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Since then, many other social networking sites have been created and have been successful. Arguably the most notable one is Facebook. Its launch in 2004 was originally for Harvard University students, but its success expanded its use to the greater population. It went on to become the most used social networking site in the world. There are also many other social networking sites used in the US such as Instagram and Snapchat (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

In 2021, 233 million Americans used social media, which is 70% of the population of the United States (Edison Research, 2021). Since the beginning of social media, it has grown

exponentially to become an integral part of millions of lives. It has become an almost necessary part of everyday life. In society today, it seems as though one must utilize social media to "not miss out, to stay up to date, and to connect" (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017, section 2.3). At this point, more people have to choose to log off than to actively log on to the internet. The reason for this lies in theories explained by psychological research.

Psychology of Social Media

While many different psychological practices are at work here, it is important to determine which point of view is being examined. One point of view is what will be referred to in this paper as the "poster." This is the person who is uploading content onto their preferred social media platform in hopes of receiving positive feedback in the form of viewer interaction. This can look like a photo posted on Instagram in hopes of receiving likes, comments, and follows. It could also be uploading a video to YouTube hoping there will be many views and that those viewers will subscribe to their channel to see more of their videos.

The second perspective is the "viewer." This is the person who is scrolling through their feed or searching for the content and providing the rewards for the posters. A Viewer is a person who scrolls through the "For You Page" on TikTok and sees a video they like; they might comment on the video or share it with a friend. Facebook viewers see a status update on their News Feed and give it a "thumbs up."

A third perspective is an overlooked one: the "connector." This is the person using social media to connect with people they know or to meet new people. The direct message feature that is a part of most social media platforms is a common way the Connector uses social media. It could also look like the use of dating apps and messaging-only apps. Facebook Messenger is an app in which only direct messaging between two or more people happens. Typically, this doesn't

happen between strangers because these messages are not public, whereas the Viewer may leave public comments on a Poster's public post. Any person can be any combination of these three things and most social media users are.

This paper summarizes various aspects of social media through a psychological lens. Much of the way social media works has to do with the way the human brain reacts to it, as social media supplies the brain with much of what it is looking for. Social media users continue to use their accounts for various reasons, and unbeknownst to many, that is because social media is the perfect medium for studying psychological theories. Some of those theories include dopamine and addiction, social approval, the fear of missing out, authenticity, uses and gratifications, social connection, and love and sex.

The Poster

Scherr and Wang (2021) discovered that 58.8% of TikTok users have produced and uploaded their own videos, so it is logical to begin by examining the psychology of the poster. For without posts or uploads, social media would not exist; this is the "meat" of the platform. A person posts and continues to post to hopefully receive positive feedback. This is usually because of two reasons: the need for reward and the need for social approval (Sherman et al. 2018). Sherman and her colleagues (2018) found that Likes on Instagram provide a reward by igniting the brain's reward system and provide social approval by allowing the poster to see that viewers approved of their post by providing a Like (Sherman et al. 2018).

Rewards

Guy-Evans (2021) wrote a summation of what rewards are and how they work in the brain. She describes that rewards are stimuli (the 'cause' portion of cause and effect) that are given to reinforce an action. When an action is followed by a stimulus that the brain deems

beneficial, the brain sends a message to repeat the action, and a reward has been given. Concerning the idea of operant conditioning, this is also considered positive reinforcement. The brain experiences something that releases dopamine (a chemical that makes us feel pleasure and joy) and sends a message requesting that action be repeated to get more of that pleasure and joy. The brain's reward system is fueled primarily by the release of dopamine when a reward is received (Guy-Evans 2021).

Dopamine

The main chemical involved in reward is dopamine, which is a neurotransmitter (a chemical carrying a message). Once a rewarding stimulus is experienced, dopamine is created in the ventral tegmental area of the brain. From there, it has the option to travel on the mesolimbic dopamine pathway or the mesocortical dopamine pathway. The most common and most important one is the mesolimbic pathway. When this pathway is activated, the brain sends a message to repeat whatever caused the activation (the reward). Dopamine travels along the mesolimbic pathway to the nucleus accumbens, which is found in the ventral striatum, an area of the brain associated with motivation and reward. In the nucleus accumbens, it will bind to one of the five receptors that tell the body how to react to this reward. The ventral striatum and nucleus accumbens are involved in complex circuitry connecting them to the amygdala and hippocampus. The amygdala is the center of emotions in the brain, which is why emotions are tied to reward (Guy-Evans 2021). The hippocampus is associated with learning and memory, which is what helps our brain remember these feelings. For example, when an individual works at their job, they receive a paycheck. This paycheck is what keeps them motivated to continue going to work every day because it emits positive feelings such as relief, happiness, or excitement. Their paycheck is the reward for their work. The brain releases dopamine when it

sees that more money has been deposited in their bank account and tells the person to go back for more because it remembers the good feelings that were emitted when the last paycheck came.

Humans need these rewards and dopamine to thrive. Any dysfunction in this reward system can cause a slew of mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, ADHD, schizophrenia, and more. Rappaport, et al. (2020) found in their study that "reward system dysfunction is a well-known correlate and predictor of depression in adults and adolescents," (p 754). Research findings indicated that those that had depression showed decreased response in the brain's reward system to a monetary reward.

Social Media Rewards

Social media is a perfect place for the brain to receive copious amounts of rapid releases of dopamine. When a person posts and receives positive feedback, this triggers the reward center of the brain, and dopamine is released. The reward systems in the brain (like the nucleus accumbens) are structures that become activated when a reward is experienced. When a person posts something to social media they are looking for direct feedback on their post in the form of likes, comments, follows, etc. 'Likes' are given to a Poster when a Viewer decides that the post is satisfactory in some way. When more 'Likes' are given, the Poster knows that they did a good job by posting what they posted; this makes the feedback given on social media rewarding (Sherman et al. 2018).

Sherman et al. (2018) indicates that when a social media Poster receives Likes on their own posts, the reward center of the brain is activated. Investigating how social media impacts high school students, Sherman and colleagues had high school students provide about 40 of their own photos to be used in a simulation of the popular photo-sharing app, Instagram. They were then told that they would be seeing a feed of photos like what they would see on Instagram that

included photos the other participants provided, and that 50 other participants had already done the study before them. The photos that weren't their own were standardized for all participants and were taken from publicly available Instagram posts. Participants were then put under fMRI and were told to either 'Like' the photo or select 'Next'. They were also exposed to their own photos with a simulated number of likes on each one. When their own photos came up, the ones with higher numbers of Likes activated the nucleus accumbens, visible on the fMRI scan. This means that the brain's reward system was activated when Likes were given on a social media post (Sherman et al. 2018).

If the brain sees likes as rewards (Sherman et al. 2018), then comments and follows would likely elicit the same brain response. The comment section on social media platforms provides a way for Viewers to comment on Posters' posts. An increased number of comments on a post might provide an increased amount of reward activation in the brain. Positive comments might create an even better reward response (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). A Poster might see that they have received many comments on a post, and the brain tells them to try to get more. Then, because of the brain's response to reward, the Poster then might want to make more posts on their social media. Theoretically, the more they post, the more viewers will be interested in their content, which will theoretically increase their follower count. Similarly, an increase in followers might also provide plentiful rewards to the poster. An increase in likes, comments, and followers a Poster receives might provide an increase in dopamine levels in the brain. These rewards theoretically happen almost immediately after posting if the Poster already has a following. This would theoretically provide instant release of dopamine, making this whole process potentially addictive.

Dopamine and addiction

It is well known that dopamine is an addictive chemical, as it is the reason cocaine and sex become addictive, but one doesn't typically think of social media addiction. Dopamine addiction begins as increased amounts of dopamine are released. The brain will continue wanting more and more because of the mesolimbic pathway activation. When too much dopamine is released, the brain's reward systems become overstimulated. This overstimulation is what leads to an addiction to whatever is causing the overstimulation (Guy-Evans 2021). Guy-Evans (2021) states "addiction is the result of reinforcing or rewarding behaviors being carried out compulsively, despite any negative consequences, a main feature being that there is a loss of control over the amount of the addictive substance" (para. 33). Theoretically, any reward can become addictive because the brain will always want more of it. Feedback such as Likes, comments, and follows on social media can act as these addictive rewards. This type of feedback also provides the poster with a sense of social approval.

Social Approval and Belonging

Social approval, as defined by the APA Dictionary of Psychology, is the "positive appraisal and acceptance of someone or something (a behavior, trait, attribute, or the like) by a social group. Its manifestations may include compliments, praise, statements of approbation, and so on" (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2022, para. 1). This idea of giving or receiving approval to and from our peers is something that has been around since the beginning of humankind. It stems from a sense of belonging and without it, humans feel cast out and are unlikely to thrive. While there are varying levels of need for social approval, everyone has the need, to some degree. Baumeister et al. (2005) state "human beings rely on group life for their health, well-being, comfort, and other positive outcomes. Being accepted into a social group is, therefore, an

almost indispensable goal of human striving" (p. 589). In other words, humans cannot thrive and be successful without a sense of belonging. Part of that sense of belonging involves the idea of approval and acceptance into the spaces humans belong.

Social media is an excellent medium for people to receive the social approval they crave. By uploading a post to a social media platform, they can obtain a quantifiable amount of acceptance and approval from peers in a matter of minutes. This is achieved through any interaction the post receives (Sherman et al., 2018). Most platforms have the option to Like, comment on, and share a post, and the option to "follow" the poster. All of these can provide the poster with an increasing amount of approval given by other people. In person, this would look like the poster is walking down the street and everyone who sees them is giving them a high five, paying them a compliment, telling their friend to check this person out, or making sure to be on the street at the same time every day in hopes of getting a glimpse of them again. This person would be nearly overwhelmed by the amount of social approval they received from all these people if it were to happen this way in a face-to-face setting. The fact that it is on a social media platform makes it easier to control and digest since the post can be deleted if need be and the poster has the option to only check their notifications when they so desire. Someone who has a high need for this social approval will turn to social media to get it since it is so much easier to obtain it this way (Sciara et al. 2021).

Sciara et al. (2021) found people with higher needs for social approval were found to be more likely to have public profiles on social media. Having a public account on social media means that anyone has access to a user's posts and information at any given time. Depending on the platform, this may even mean that it is accessible without having to search for it. For example, TikTok and Instagram have a feature that allows public videos from anyone in the

world to be placed in front of any given person at any time, making these videos even more public than any other type of post because the user has no control over who sees their public posts. This indicates that social media is a way to fulfill the social approval need in a way that isn't accessible outside of the online world; a Poster can gain access to approval from anyone in the world, including their peers.

Fear of missing out

The fear of missing out, or FOMO, is something that motivates humans to do things they would not normally do just for the sake of ensuring that they don't miss out on something their peers are doing (McMahon, 2019). FOMO stems from this strong sense of belonging. Humans feel like, to belong, they must follow along with their peers and essentially do what everyone else is doing. Social media can only exacerbate this feeling of being left out or behind. McMahon (2019) writes that FOMO is prevalent among young people, especially young men. The most common age group for social media use is also among young people aged 18-29 (Pew Research, 2021). This correlation between young people being the most common to experience FOMO and the most likely to have social media accounts can indicate that social media may be a contributing factor to this increased amount of feeling left out or behind. A Poster may post something on their social media in hopes of eliciting this feeling to make more people interact with their post, whether it is true or not.

False Identity

Someone who is looking for a way to use social media to their advantage may choose to enter the world of social media with a false identity. It is possible to falsify almost any piece of information imagined on the internet and the same goes for social media. A person can use a

false name or alias, a vague or no profile picture, or something as simple as broadening their location to only include their country (McMahon, 2019).

Why Present a False Identity

There are many reasons a poster might want to form a false identity on social media. One of them is privacy (McMahon, 2019). It is a dangerous world out there and just about anyone with internet access can create a social media account. This means that even the worst kinds of people could have access to anyone's information they share on social media. Rapists, stalkers, murderers, and more all have a much easier time achieving their goals with social media providing all of the information they may need. Falsifying this information is one way to prevent unwanted attention. Many choose to refrain from adding certain information to their profiles and others choose to use fake information.

This begins the conversation about authenticity. McMahon (2019) found that while carrying out an entirely false narrative is too difficult to sustain for very long, it is also difficult to be perfectly authentic. It is so easy to falsify information online because profiles and posts are so easily controlled and manipulated. For example, one person began a blog sharing intimate details of first-hand experience of a Syrian American woman living through the war in Syria (McMahon, 2019). The author turned out to be a middle-aged white man who decided to create this character because when he had attempted to write about issues about the Middle East in the past, his blogs were not well received. He decided after so long it was becoming too difficult to carry on this false narrative and came up with a story as to why the blogs would be ending. The story was that the female character had been kidnapped. As would be expected, people were concerned about this fake person (who was perceived to be very real) and news of it spread like wildfire. Once the author of these blogs thought it got out of hand, he revealed himself

(McMahon, 2019). The author of these stories wanted his identity to remain confidential so that he could freely speak on the issues he was so passionate about without receiving negative feedback because of who he truly was. In the end, though he discovered that pretending to be an entirely different human from a different area of the world was not possible for very long. Many social media users also falsify their information on social media to present a more ideal self-image, just as this blog author did.

Michikyan's (2020) research about online self-presentation, self-identity, and social anxiety highlights motives for false online identities. Michikyan (2020) defines self-presentation as "the process of sharing aspects of oneself to others" in a way that includes the "real, false, and ideal parts of the self-concept" (p 545). This idea of self-presentation is used both in-person and online. Social media users have the option to choose how they present themselves online in a similar way to presenting themselves in person. Someone who wants to appear fashionable may choose to wear clothing that is trendy and fashion-forward so that the people they interact with can assume that fashion is something they care about. Online, that could look like adding "fashionista" to their bio in their profile or posting daily "outfit of the day" photos. Having a passion for fashion isn't necessarily the easiest thing to fake, nor is it something many people would care to lie about. There are other things people may want to lie about though, and Michikyan outlines three reasons someone may want to have a false self-presentation: to deceive others, to compare to or impress others, and for self-exploration.

A person may want to deceive others by falsely presenting themselves. This can be seen with the man who pretended to be the Syrian American woman. He had the goal of avoiding pushback from readers who felt as though that was a topic he shouldn't be writing about (McMahon, 2019). Michikyan (2020) explains that people present themselves in a less than

truthful way with a goal of deception to "advance self-interest, avoid social embarrassment, avoid actual or perceived threat and hostility, and maintain and enhance self-worthiness and positive self-image" (p 545). The blog writer wanted to avoid social embarrassment and hostility, so he pretended to be an entirely different person (McMahon, 2019).

Social comparison is a driving force when it comes to the motivation to present a false self. There are three different types of social comparison: lateral social comparison, downward social comparison, and upward social comparison. Lateral social comparison is a situation in which a person sees themselves as equal to those around them. These people are usually more confident in their own identities and their self-presentation is more truthful. Downward social comparison occurs when there is a comparison with someone who is not as well off as they are (Michikyan, 2020). An example of this in a social media setting may be a user falsifying the amount of Christmas gifts they received in a YouTube video because they see that others are posting videos featuring fewer gifts. Upward social comparison is comparing oneself to someone who is more well off than them (Michikyan, 2020). This can look like seeing a peer's photo of them driving an expensive car, so a user may want to edit their photo to make it look like they, too, drive an expensive car. The latter two types of social comparison result in a self-presentation that enhances their true self-concept (Michikyan, 2020). This can also apply to self-comparison. For example, someone may remember how happy they used to be six months prior, so they post a smiling picture to recreate that, regardless of their true feelings.

Self-comparison may also be a part of self-exploration, which is another reason social media users might have a false self-presentation. Self-exploration could involve presenting certain aspects of the self-concept that are not entirely true (at least yet) to test the waters, per se. It could be to see how something feels when it's presented to someone or to see how that person

reacts. Someone may present themselves in a way that reflects whom they wish they were or whom they have hopes of becoming when engaging in self-exploration related to false self-presentation. (Michikyan, 2020). An example would be using a fake name. Someone may want to see if a new name feels good to them, so they tell their barista to write the new one on their cup. Another example could be making a social media account using a pseudonym to be someone else.

Another reason someone may falsify their identity is because of social anxiety. Those with social anxiety have a heightened sense of social awareness, which involves a fear of being "negatively evaluated by others in real or imagined social situations" (Michikyan, 2020, p 547). People with social anxiety may choose to strategically falsify parts of their self-presentation to appear more socially desirable. They are attempting to "garner positive reactions and social acceptance from others and to maintain and enhance a positive self-image" (Michikyan, 2020, p 547). In person, this might look like being in a conversation with someone who enjoys hiking.

The person with social anxiety may pretend to like hiking to elicit a positive reaction from the hiker and to enhance their self-image, despite only ever having been on one hike. People with social anxiety are worried about others' perceptions of them, so they're likely to obsess over how they look, how they speak and what they say, and whether people like them or find them valuable. This often translates onto social media, making those with social anxiety hyper-aware of who is seeing their posts and profiles, but it is less stressful for them because of the ability to control how they present themselves. Michikyan (2020) found that those who have a difficult time presenting certain aspects of their self-concept in person found it easier to present these aspects online because of an increased sense of control and have a choice in what parts of their self-concept they want to reveal and which ones they choose to hide online.

People may also feel safer online than in person due to a sense of community offering support they can't find elsewhere. A person who has a rare condition may feel more willing to talk about their condition in a Facebook group than in person because of a sense of community. Being in a certain space online, such as a specific group or area of the internet allows a person to choose who sees their content, removing the fear of not being accepted by certain people because those certain people would not be allowed access to chosen posts or profiles. To mimic a safe space, one may leave out or alter certain details about themselves. They may alter their self-presentation to avoid harassment, marginalization, and discrimination. For example, someone who is disabled and requires the use of a wheelchair for mobility may avoid sharing details about their disability online for fear of discrimination based on their disability (Michikyan, 2020). They may also fear being harassed or bullied for it. Because disabled people are a marginalized group, they face discrimination in areas of life that an able-bodied person would not. If this disabled person were to tell their social media following that they are wheelchair-bound, their followers may feel inclined to think the poster's content is less valid and will choose to not follow the poster's page because of it.

Gil-Or et al. (2015) found that those with low-self esteem and decreased authenticity in self-presentation were more likely to present themselves online in a way that deviates from their true self. They predicted that this may be due to a person's upbringing and attachment styles. For this study, 258 Facebook users were asked to complete a series of surveys. These surveys examined their demographics, their attachment style, their level of self-esteem, and their online authenticity. Attachment style refers to the way a person acts in relationships because of their relationship with their caregivers as a child. Results showed that those with a more avoidant attachment style were more likely to have a false self-presentation on social media. They also

found that on average most users admitted that they believe that how they present themselves on Facebook differs from their true selves. This is enhanced when self-esteem and authenticity are low (Gil-Or, et al., 2015).

Benefits and Implications of a False Online Identity

There are many reasons someone may present themselves in a way that differs from who they truly are. With this comes both implications and benefits. The implications to be examined include relationships that are less than fulfilling and a lack of sustainability. The benefits include identity play and a heightened sense of safety and privacy.

Implications of False Self-Presentation.

One of the implications of having a less than truthful self-presentation, both in-person and online, is less fulfilling relationships. As cited in Gil-Or, et al.'s, (2015) work, those who have more truthful presentations of themselves in person are also more genuine online and tend to have healthier, longer-lasting, and more honest relationships both in-person and online (Gil-Or, et al., 2015). Cosby (as cited in Meshi & gro Deters, 2015) discovered that self-disclosure is a pivotal piece in deepening relationships. Sharing intimate details of the self with another person is what draws the two people together and makes their relationship stronger. If a person is not sharing these details or is not being honest with these details, as one would be if presenting a false identity, their relationships will suffer. The same can be said about online relationships. Just like the old saying goes, honesty is the best policy.

Another drawback to falsely presenting oneself online is that it isn't sustainable. Just as described with the man who, for months, wrote a blog pretending to be a Syrian American woman and then had to come clean eventually, it just isn't possible to play pretend long term

(McMahon 2019). It is not possible to be another person, so it is nearly impossible to pretend to be, indefinitely.

Benefits of False Self-Presentation.

Although it may not seem like it, there are certain benefits to having a false self-presentation. One that Gil-Or et al. (2015) discuss is the idea of identity play. One of the three primary reasons for having a false self-presentation is self-exploration (Michikyan 2020). Someone has the desire to learn more about themselves by altering some aspect of the truth to explore how that feels or what kind of reaction it will grant them from others. They display their self-concept as if they were the person they hope to become or wish they were. This could mean pretending to be a selfless, giving person by posting on Twitter that they just donated $1000 to a charity, when they didn't. Identity play is a similar idea. Within identity play, "a person can explore and adopt different identities that are different from his or her own identity" (Gil-Or, et al., 2015, para. 7). Whether this means pretending to be a completely different person, like the blog author did (McMahon, 2019), or by just altering different specific aspects of the self-concept. A person who wishes to engage in identity play may keep their name and other trivial aspects of themselves but pretend to have an entirely different personality. For example, an introverted person with social anxiety who also has very few offline relationships, may turn to the internet and social media to pretend to be an extroverted, bubbly person.

Another benefit to displaying a false self on social media is a sense of safety and privacy. As mentioned previously is for those who have the desire to avoid harassment, marginalization and discrimination will be more likely to alter their self-presentation (Michikyan 2020). A person who is fat but wants to avoid the harassment they are sure to face from others online may avoid posting photos or videos that show off their body. A fat person knows just how horrible people

can be in person, and it can only be worse online because of a sense of anonymity people seem to

have online (McMahon 2019). Others may be concerned with wanting to feel safe in their online

communities (Gil-Or, et al., 2015). Keeping certain aspects of the self private can make someone

feel safer because they feel less vulnerable and less exposed (Michikyan 2020).

<p align="center">**The Viewer**</p>

The role of the viewer on social media involves observing the posts the posters create and

upload and interacting with them. This action of observing is motivated by four different

gratification categories. The viewer utilizes social media to learn something, be motivated or

inspired, be entertained, and see what their friends are up to (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2009; Kuss &

Griffiths, 2017). Because taking in this kind of information in such a readily available way can

be so rewarding, the viewer is susceptible to an addiction to scrolling (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Motivation for Social Media Use

The four categories of motivation for social media use are Education, Inspiration,

Entertainment, and Socialization. These four categories have been observed across various

studies examining the reasoning behind a person using social media. There of course are others,

but these are the main four reasons a person utilizes social networking services. For example,

according to Kuss and Griffiths (2017) "from a uses and gratifications perspective, these

[motivations for social media use] include information seeking (i.e., searching for specific

information using SNS), identity formation (i.e., as a means of presenting oneself online, often

more favorably than offline), and entertainment (i.e., for the purpose of experiencing fun and

pleasure)" (section 2.3). This perspective views socialization as the main motivation behind

social media use (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Their concept of 'identity formation' can fall under

the category described as 'inspiration and motivation,' as the conscious forming of one's identity

can stem from receiving motivation and inspiration. Brandtzæg and Heim (2009) conducted a study asking social media users in Norway what their main motivations for using social media are. Across four of the most popular social networking sites, 1200 of the most detailed responses were analyzed. Most of them featured multiple reasonings for their social media use, so only the first few (which were deemed most important) were added to the analysis. After analysis, researchers found 12 main motivations. These included: new relations (31%), friends (21%), socializing (14%), information (10%), debating (5%), free SMS (3.5%), time-killing (3.5%), sharing and consuming content (3%), fun (2%), profile surfing (1.5%), family (1%), and other (3%) (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2009).

‘New relations’ refers to finding and creating new relationships; ‘friends’ refers to engaging with friendships that are already established; ‘socializing’ refers to the interaction with others in general (this may include engaging with strangers that don’t necessarily spark friendships and seeking social support); ‘information’ refers to learning new things; ‘debating’ refers to discussing topics with new people, discussing new topics, and differences in opinion; ‘free SMS’ refers to the availability to directly message people at no cost; ‘time killing’ refers to using social media to cure boredom or to just pass the time; ‘sharing & consuming content’ refers to engaging with content like photos and videos by “liking” and commenting, as well as sharing with friends; ‘fun’ refers to general entertainment like one would receive from watching television; ‘profile surfing’ refers to the act of visiting someone’s profile and learning more about it; ‘family’ refers to using social media for keeping up with and interacting with family members (this one was rarely separate from “friends and family”); and ‘other’ refers to other reasons not listed above which “includes everything from using SNSs because they are curious about other cultures and users to more goal-oriented activities such as promoting their own

work" (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2009, p 149). These 12 motivations analyzed by researchers can be narrowed down to four overarching categories: Education, Inspiration, Entertainment, and Socialization.

Education

The people that look to social media for education are looking for new information and to learn something. They could be interested in learning more about a topic they're passionate about, finding new things to learn about, or learning more about themselves. For example, a person who is passionate about dog training could search "dog training" on TikTok and find probably thousands of videos explaining different aspects of dog training. They could then follow some of their favorite dog trainers so they can stay updated with new content to learn from. Finding new things to learn about could look like a person scrolling through Twitter, and they see a Tweet about Veganism. They maybe have never learned anything about Veganism and their interest is now piqued. From there, they will probably look at the Poster's profile to see if there is any other information about Veganism on their page. A person using social media to learn more about themselves could be posting content that is a bit out of their comfort zone, but it could also mean exploring the profiles of people who are different from them. For example, a person who thinks they might want to see if they're a funny person may look to social media for videos of comedians to learn more about what makes a person funny.

Using Brandtzæg and Heim's (2009) motives for social media use, education gained from social media can be explained study with the 'information', 'debating', 'sharing/consuming content', and 'profile surfing' categories. The person interested in dog training is looking for 'information' by searching the term. They may be discussing different topics related to dog training in the comment section or possibly sending a direct message to gain even more

information through 'debating'. They are engaging in 'sharing and consuming content' by watching the dog trainers' videos and sending them to their friends. 'Profile surfing' comes in when they go to seek out more information about the dog trainers on their profiles. The person on Twitter who is discovering Veganism for the first time is 'gaining information' on the topic through the Tweet and is 'profile surfing' the Twitter user to find out more. The person engaging in self-exploration is 'sharing and consuming content' by watching these videos and possibly sending them to their friends to see if they think it's funny. They are also 'profile surfing' individual comedians to find out what makes them funny. This may inspire them to use the tactics and jokes those comedians use.

Motivation and Inspiration

Many people use social media for motivation and inspiration. These are people who look to others to create an urgency to reach their goals, to light a fire in their souls. They may also look to others for new ideas and mental stimulation. These people are looking for a challenge, something new to do or try, or something to spark certain feelings. An example of this could be a person looking for motivation to exercise; they may turn to YouTube and search for workout videos. Seeking out a workout video and watching it will motivate them to exercise. A person who is looking for new ideas may go to Pinterest to find a new recipe to test out. This person is being inspired by the recipes and motivated to try new things. Someone who is looking to be inspired or for new goals to achieve may follow inspirational people on Twitter. They will see inspiring Tweets that make them excited about life. Many people look to social media to ignite certain emotions. Like the way some enjoy watching sad movies when they are sad, others may want to mimic those feelings by watching videos on Facebook of mistreated dogs being rehabilitated and rehomed. The emotions felt while watching these types of videos online may

motivate them to make a change or inspire them to feel better. These are all instances in which people find inspiration and motivation via social media.

The categories associated with motivation and inspiration from Brandtzæg and Heim's (2009) study are 'socializing', 'debating', 'sharing/consuming content', and 'profile surfing'. A person looking for exercise motivation may also turn to Facebook groups to socialize with others and receive social motivation. They may even debate with these people about things like how often they should be exercising, what the best exercises are for mobility, or what gym they should go to. The act of watching the workout videos on YouTube and sharing them with their Facebook group is the perfect example of 'sharing and consuming content', and if they liked the video they may 'profile surf' to find other workout videos they like from the same Poster. The person looking for a new recipe to try on Pinterest is primarily engaging in 'sharing and consuming content.' They are scrolling through their Pinterest page and looking at various recipes (consuming) and may share the recipes they like (sharing). If they are interested in finding more recipes made by the same person, they may engage in 'profile surfing'. Those that are desiring provoked feelings and are watching sad videos when they are sad are 'sharing and consuming content' by watching the videos and sharing them. They also may use social media to socialize and find social support to help them with their feelings and inspire them to stay positive.

Entertainment

Those watching videos on social media may also be looking for entertainment. With the way technology has become such a large part of the human experience, social media is the perfect way to receive entertainment, whether on the go or at home. It's a free way to access an infinite number of photos, videos, drama, information, and more to keep a person entertained.

Those that go to social media to be entertained are looking to experience joy and other feelings, cure their boredom, and find something to help them escape their lives for a brief amount of time. Someone who enjoys interior design may look to YouTube to watch videos of their favorite interior design creator designing different rooms, because that is what brings them joy. A bored person may scroll through their Twitter feed to see what others are saying, like reading a newspaper out of boredom. One looking to escape their world due to stress or just for a break may scroll through another person's Instagram who seems to be having a much more fun time than them. This person might wish they, too, were having a great time.

Entertainment on social media can be described under the categories 'socializing', 'time killing', 'sharing/consuming content', 'fun', and 'profile surfing' (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2009). The person watching interior design videos is having loads of fun watching the creator decorate various rooms. This is also an act of 'sharing and consuming content' because they're consuming these videos by watching them and may be sharing them with a friend or commenting on the videos just for fun. This act of commenting can be explained by the 'socializing' category. Someone may seek entertainment by talking to others on social media. The Twitter user is 'sharing and consuming content' for entertainment by reading the Tweets and Retweeting the ones they enjoy. They're also killing time by trying to cure their boredom using Twitter. It may also be quite fun for them to read new tweets to see what others have to say about many different things that they find interesting. The person looking to escape their world for a moment is engaging in 'sharing/consuming content' by scrolling through their Instagram feed. They are 'profile surfing' as they seek an online escape in exploring someone else's life.

When this person is seeking out an escape from their world to travel to another via social media, this can be considered psychological travel. McMahon (2019) explores the idea of

psychological travel, it can be defined as mentally transporting to another place, feeling as though one is truly, physically there. Social media users gain a sense of presence when using social media. Presence is "the illusion that occurs when a mediated experience does not feel mediated" (McMahon, 2019, p 49). Viewers on social media slip into somewhat of a trance while using the services and feel as though they are experiencing the things they are seeing, firsthand. For example, users love scrolling through someone else's vacation photos because it makes them feel like they were right there on the beach with them. This leads to the concept of realism, which is what occurs when someone feels like what they are seeing is the real thing (McMahon 2019). Like when a Viewer comes across a video of a laughing baby, they share in the joy the parents are feeling as they record the video. Their brain doesn't process that it's a video of a baby and not a real baby, so those feelings of happiness are real even though the object provoking them is not. Manikonda, et al. (as cited in McMahon 2019) discovered that "only 15% of Instagram relationships were reciprocal" (p. 51). This means that Viewers are mainly following people to use their content for their own personal reasons, likely for entertainment. Most of the time, Instagram is being used for entertainment and not for the furthering of relationships.

Socialization

Many people are using social media as a means of socialization. This can entail keeping up with friends and family by checking out their posts, making new friends, or deepening current relationships that may have begun offline. A Viewer looking to check up on how their friends and family are doing may go to Facebook and scroll through their News Feed to see recent updates made by them. If they're particularly interested in a certain person, they may scroll through that person's page. Someone looking to make new friends might use a Facebook group

related to something they enjoy. For example, someone interested in house plants may join a local house-plant-focused Facebook group. From there, they may connect with other members and have one-on-one conversations with them in the comments, which may blossom into a friendship. Another way of making new friends through social media is by way of dating apps such as Bumble BFF. A person interested in deepening an existing relationship may turn to Snapchat. They can send short-lived photos to one another to carry out various conversations. It was found that Snapchat was more commonly used for relationship deepening and was reserved for already established relationships as opposed to being used for "casual acquaintances" (McMahon, 2019, p 27). This is because Snapchat is used with fewer friends than on other social media sites and is a more intimate and vulnerable form of communication (McMahon 2019).

Brandtzæg and Heim (2009) outline a socialization piece of social media motivation with their 'new relations', 'friends', 'socializing', 'free SMS', 'profile surfing', and 'family' categories. The person who is scrolling their Facebook, looking for updates from friends and family to keep up with them is a part of the 'friends' and 'family' categories. They are also engaging in 'profile surfing' when interested in a certain person. The person making new friends via Facebook is engaging in the 'new relations' category by seeking new friendships. They are also socializing on their Facebook group by commenting and seeking out new people to talk to. This newfound friendship may shift to conversations in the direct message feature that most social media sites have, which falls under the 'free SMS' category. The Snapchat user is using a form of 'free SMS' by using Snapchat. They are also keeping up with friends and family by conversing with them using Snapchat, which is also a form of socializing.

Viewers on social media use their various platforms for socialization most of the time (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2009). This means that many of life's biggest moments and many of the

social and emotional processes that typically happen in life are happening through social media (Sherman, et al. 2017). Because so much of life is happening through social media, there is immense pressure and weight given to the posts Viewers see. This can quite easily lead to peer influence and peer pressure. It is well known that peer pressure is a large part of adolescent life, so Sherman et al. (2017) wanted to find out how that translates to the social media world. This study seeks to discover the prevalence and impact of peer influence and risky behavior via social media. According to their research, it is common for risky behavior to peak during late adolescence/early adulthood due to an increase in independence and a shift from living with caregivers to living among peers. To discover a correlation between peer influence from social media and risky behaviors, they set up a mock Instagram. Thirty-four adolescents (average age: 16.8) and 27 young adults (average age: 19.9) were exposed to various photos, including their self-submitted photos. Some of these photos featured risky behaviors such as profanity, rude gestures, drinking, and drug use (Sherman, et al. 2017).

While under MRI, they were encouraged to either Like the photo or pass. Following the activity, subjects were asked questions assessing their attitudes toward risky behavior and their experience with risky behavior (Sherman, et al. 2017). It was found that the high school group had less brain activity in their frontal cognitive regions. The frontal cognitive regions of the brain are responsible for decision making; this area matures around the age of 25 (Sherman, et al. 2017). This decreased activity in this area indicates that these risky images showed the high schoolers to be less capable of making decisions and having control when exposed to risky stimuli than the college-aged subjects.

The follow-up questions also reflected this. Those that had more accepting attitudes toward risky behaviors were also more likely to engage in risky behaviors themselves, in both

age groups (Sherman, et al. 2017). Peer pressure happens in adolescence and throughout other times in life, and it also is happening on social media. Viewers, especially those of adolescent age, are highly susceptible to it. It's also hard to avoid, given there is only so much one can do to have control over the content they see while scrolling.

Fear of Missing Out (As the Viewer)

Przybylski (as cited in Kuss & Griffiths, 2017) states that "FOMO is a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent" (section 2.6). The fear of missing out (FOMO) is something that most people probably experience, but it's also likely that it happens more often with the presence of social media. More often, people can see what their friends are up to in real-time because of their social media accounts. Without social media, it's only possible to know what someone is up to after they've already done it. This in-real-time aspect of social media theoretically makes FOMO more present because more people are sharing about their lives much more often. FOMO isn't something that just occurs for the Viewer, though. All users of social media are susceptible to it. A Viewer might come across a friend who is sharing photos while touring Europe for the entire summer and feel like they're missing out, like they should be touring Europe, also. Without this in-real-time sharing, the person might only hear of their friend's trip afterward and will be able to share in the memories their friend has, as opposed to feeling like they should be there with them.

It was found that the fear of missing out is correlated with various psychological deficits. Those who lack, in general, "personal autonomy, relatedness, and competence" are more susceptible to FOMO (McMahon, 2019, p 33). If a person is lacking in independence from others, deep relationships with others, and capability in general, they are the most susceptible. It was found that these people were primarily young men (McMahon, 2019). People are using

social media more often because of this fear of missing out (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Those who have high levels of FOMO are also associated with lower mood, well-being, and life satisfaction, as well as having unsure emotions while using social media (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). This is likely due to that uneasy feeling that something is missing, or that they're not doing something correctly. Those with high levels of FOMO are also using social media at inappropriate and/or dangerous times (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). For example, they feel the need to check their social media while in class or while driving, just in case they miss something. There is also an association between high levels of FOMO and psychological symptoms such as low self-esteem and symptoms associated with anxiety and depression all related to SNS use (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). It was also found that FOMO can predict problematic social media use, which is associated with an addiction to social media (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Because people are so worried that they will be left out of something, or miss out on something, or as Kuss and Griffiths (2017) state they have, "an absolute terror of exclusion" (section 2.6), there is a constant need to check their social media accounts. This constant act of checking and refreshing, and ensuring they have seen everything is what leads to social media addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Addiction to Scrolling

Guy-Evans (2021) posits "addiction is the result of reinforcing or rewarding behaviors being carried out compulsively, despite any negative consequences, a main feature being that there is a loss of control over the amount of the addictive substance" (para. 33). This indicates that there are four components to addiction: a rewarding behavior or substance, compulsive use/abuse of said behavior/substance, a loss of control, and negative personal consequences. Addiction, at its roots, begins with the release of dopamine. Dopamine is released as pleasurable

experiences occur, and when too much dopamine is released (such as in the presence of drugs or certain behaviors in excess) reward systems become overstimulated. The brain likes reward, so it is going to seek out more of this overstimulation, thus beginning the cycle of addiction (Guy-Evans, 2021).

Social Networking Site Addiction

The acts of scrolling through social media, seeing the beginning and end of videos within a short period, and observing new pictures at every swipe of the thumb are all satisfying, rewarding stimuli for the brain. This makes them susceptible to addictive qualities. Social networking site addiction shares the symptoms of both behavioral and substance addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). A behavioral addiction occurs when "addicted individuals are dependent on a particular set of experiences," (Alavi et al., 2012, para 3). An example of this would be gambling or gaming (Alavi et al., 2012). A substance addiction refers to an individual being addicted to a certain chemical substance (Alavi et al., 2012). The symptoms of both behavioral and substance addictions include "salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, relapse, and conflict" (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017, section 2.4).

Salience refers to the idea that something holds great importance, in this case, social media would be considered one of the most important aspects of an individual's life (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). When someone uses social media to alter their mood, they're using it for mood modification. An individual may be using social media to induce pleasure or for a "numbing effect" (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017, section 2.4). Tolerance is achieved when it takes an increasing amount of time spent engaging with social media to feel the mood alteration and changed state of mind take place. An individual may decide to stop using social media; if they experience both negative psychological and negative physiological symptoms upon stopping, they are

experiencing withdrawal. Following the withdrawal symptoms, it is likely for an individual to return to problematic social media use, many times more often than before; this is considered a relapse (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Conflict occurs when the individual's social media use when "intrapsychic (conflicts within the individual often including a subjective loss of control) and interpersonal conflicts (i.e., problems with the immediate social environment including relationship problems and work and/or education being compromised)" arise (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017, section 2.4). This is when social media use becomes problematic.

There are various models of social networking site addiction that provide explanations for its development within an individual. The first is the Cognitive-Behavioral Model. In this model, the addictive use begins with excessive SNS use as a result of inadequate mental adjustment practices (or coping mechanisms), which are made worse by many external problems such as everyday stress, loneliness, or depression (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Another model states that individuals are becoming addicted to SNS use because they are using social media in excess because of decreased self-presentation skills and a "preference for online social interaction over face-to-face communication" (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017, section 2.4). This is the Social-Skill Model. The Socio-Cognitive Model involves "positive outcome expectations, Internet self-efficacy, and limited Internet self-regulation," leading to excessive SNS use, which then becomes addictive SNS use (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017, section 2.4).

The cycle of SNS addiction begins with excessive SNS use. This can be due to a multitude of reasons, including the fear of missing out. Once it has been used excessively, users have difficulty communicating offline, face-to-face. Social media also offers rewards, confidence in one's abilities, a sense of control, and satisfaction. These cause users to continue and increase their use of SNSs. With increased use comes consequences. These can include exacerbating

personal problems, such as causing them to neglect their offline relationships, as well as problems in their professional lives. Once these problems occur, users feel depressed and turn to excessive SNS use to cope with this depressed mood, and thus the cycle starts over (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

Many researchers have hypothesized that smartphone addiction may be a part of social media addiction, but that doesn't necessarily mean that smartphones are addicting themselves. Smartphones and tablets are the gateways to SNS use. They are "media that enable the engagement in potentially addictive activities, including SNS use" (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017, section 2.7). The analogy can be made that smartphone addicts are to phones that alcoholics are to the bottle, not the alcohol (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Fear of being without or away from an individual's phone, or Nomophobia (no mobile phone phobia), may instead be part of social media addiction. Like the idea of the fear of missing out, an individual can be afraid to be unable to constantly make social connections, but have a preference for doing it online. It was even requested that Nomophobia be featured in the DSM-5. The criteria for this are regular and time-consuming use, feelings of anxiety when the phone is not available, "ringxiety" (i.e., repeatedly checking one's phone for messages, sometimes leading to phantom ring tones), constant availability, preference for mobile communication over face-to-face communication, and financial problems as a consequence of use" (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017, section 2.8). Having Nomophobia can result in impulsive phone use, which is a contributing factor to SNS addiction because SNSs are accessed using smartphones and other smart devices (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic occurring in the early 2020s led some researchers to wonder if the lockdown increased the risk of social media addiction. It can be said that the lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic altered the psychological well-being of many (Marengo et al.,

2022). This is due to the fundamental need for a sense of belonging and connection for the well-being of humans, and those were scarce during the lockdowns. Having a higher need for support and belonging may have resulted in increased use of social media. It was found that "during the lockdown, adolescents increased the use of social media to regulate their emotional states, and to reduce perceived loneliness" (Marengo et al., 2022, para 2). This increased social media use puts them at a higher risk of social media addiction. Much of the time spent on social media was spent on Highly Visual Social Media (HVSM) such as TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. Marengo et al. (2022) asked 765 adolescents questions via survey to discover their social media use habits as well as their risk of social media addiction. They found that the use of TikTok (along with other HVSM) showed a higher risk of social media addiction among adolescents than for those who were not using TikTok. The lowest risk category included those using only WhatsApp and YouTube. It was also discovered that the amount of time they spent using their smartphones was correlated to their risk of social media addiction (Marengo et al., 2022).

Parasocial Relationships

One issue Viewers are at risk of is parasocial relationships. These happen (in the social media context) when a social media user, particularly one serving as a social media Viewer at the time, forms a relationship with a social media Poster, typically one with a large following, that is not reciprocal in nature (Yuan & Lou, 2020). Because of a shift from newspapers, TV, and radio being the main sources of information to the internet and social media, more people are flocking to these online sources to gain valuable life necessities like information and relationships. Some of the first research done on parasocial relationships was done by Horton and Wohl in 1956 (as cited in Yuan & Lou, 2020). They define the interaction that occurs within a parasocial relationship (parasocial interaction) as "audiences' illusory social experiences with media

personae" (Yuan & Lou, 2020, p 134). In other words, it is the interaction between an individual and a celebrity; the individual imagines reciprocal feelings and interaction, when it is one-sided. The difference between parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships lies in the abundance of the interaction. Parasocial interaction involves the one-sided, isolated experience of feeling an emotional connection after or during the exposure to a celebrity's media, often only happening once. Parasocial relationships are the abundance of parasocial interactions with the same celebrity that form a longer-lasting one-sided relationship involving a socioemotional bond.

While parasocial relationships can occur with any person in media (like in movies and TV) many happen with social media influencers. Influencers, or "influential online personae" are social media users with a large social media following that have influence over their audience's attitudes toward various things and who create content as third-party endorsement. These people are essentially celebrities who become famous through social media and make money by creating content as advertisements for different brands and companies. Many will start on one social media platform and eventually branch out to multiple. Social media makes it easy for these online celebrities to directly interact with their fans, thus facilitating the potential for parasocial relationships. The two main differences between celebrities of mass media and influencers are the two-way communication between influencer and follower, and the reliance upon social media engagement with content that influencers have.

Influencers can easily gain the trust of their followers by responding to comments and questions directly. One study found that "consumers may register a similar level of trust in influencers as they do with friends" (Yuan & Lou, 2020, p 134). The most concerning portion of these pseudo-friendships is that the relationship is not at all reciprocal, despite the follower feeling like it is. This made researchers Yuan and Lou (2020) question how ethical it is that

influencers have such an impact on the consumer habits of their followers. Essentially, influencers tend to act as the 'middle man' between the brands they endorse and the consumer (who tends to be one of their social media followers). Through this influencer-follower interaction, the perception of the brand can be molded to be exactly what the brand wants it to be (Yuan & Lou, 2020).

Yuan and Lou (2020) sought to discover the importance of source credibility of influencers and justice as factors in the strength of parasocial relationships. The source credibility of influencers involves their general trustworthiness, expertise on the topics and products they post about, similarity of characteristics to their followers, and general physical and social attractiveness. It was found that followers are more likely to form parasocial relationships with influencers whom they find to be attractive and who share similar qualities. This also makes them more likely to purchase the products the influencer features on their social media. The justice factor related to influencers and the parasocial relationships they facilitate involves various forms of fairness related to organizational communication.

The influencer-follower relationship can be compared to a decision maker-employee relationship or a company-consumer relationship. The facets of fairness are distributive fairness (whether the consumer/employee receives a fair outcome), procedural fairness (whether the decision-making process was fair for the employee/consumer), interpersonal fairness (whether the employee/consumer was treated respectfully during the process), and informational fairness (whether the employee/consumer had fair access to necessary information during the process). When applied to the influencer-follower relationship, distributive fairness involves the extent to which followers gain benefit from the influencer's content, procedural fairness ensures followers can voice their opinions with influencers, interpersonal fairness ensures followers are treated

with respect, and informational fairness ensures that the influencer delivers information ethically and honestly (Yuan & Lou, 2020). Yuan and Lou (2020) wanted to study these because "these four components affect people's perceptions of the decision-makers and/or the relationship with the organizations," so it is likely that they will also affect the way followers view influencers (p 137). It was found that procedural fairness and interpersonal fairness are necessary for parasocial relationships, "followers build stronger parasocial relationships with influencers if they believe they are being treated nicely and that they can share their voices with influencers" (Yuan & Lou, 2020, p 143).

Parasocial relationships are a cause for concern for social media users. Because the relationship is assumed to be reciprocal, though it is not, the follower likely does not know they are in a parasocial relationship with the influencer (Yuan & Lou, 2020). This makes them highly impressionable to purchase products from the influencers they love so much. Influencers could be taking advantage of knowing their followers are forming one-sided relationships with them (Yuan & Lou, 2020).

Consider, for instance, a social media user who has been bullied for their weight their entire life and comes across this influencer who also has the same story. The user checks out their content, learns more about their story, feels a connection in their similar qualities and experiences, and thinks they're an attractive person. They might notice that the influencer lost the weight the user has been trying to lose for so long, seeing before and after photos and hearing stories that create emotional ties. The user follows their page and comments occasionally. They likely feel like the influencer is sharing vulnerable information with them, forming a bond; the influencer may even respond to some of the user's comments. Now there is reciprocal communication, this is what solidifies that imagined connectedness. So, when the influencer

advertises a miracle weight loss drink, it's extremely likely that the follower will now purchase it. The follower saw similar qualities between the two of them, saw they were attractive, felt like they had the opportunity to communicate with the influencer, and felt as though the influencer treated them nicely (Yuan & Lou, 2020).

Connectors

Posters and Viewers are social media users who create and engage with the public content shared on social media sites. The Connectors are those who utilize the direct message tool that is incorporated in many social networking sites. Many social media sites are messaging-only in nature, such as WhatsApp or Kik. The utilization of these messaging apps is a way for social media users to stay connected with family and friends, as well as get to know new friends on a deeper level. Another way Connectors utilize social media is to meet new people via dating apps or by using the direct message feature. Communicating via social media is an easy way to fulfill the need for social connection.

Social Connection

Before discussing the social media aspect of social connections, it is important to understand why it is they are used. Social connection is an integral piece of the social media puzzle, as it is the number one reason people use it (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2009). Social connection can be defined as "a person's subjective sense of having close and positively experienced relationships with others in the social world" (Seppala et al., 2013, p 412). When an individual has a sense of connectedness with another person, via shared experience or conversation, social connection is occurring. Humans have an inherent need for social connection (Seppala et al., 2013). This can be seen in many different bodies of research, but most famously in the work of Abraham Maslow.

   Maslow's hierarchy of needs outlines the needs of human beings in levels going upward. The needs that are on the lower levels must be met before the needs higher up on the pyramid can be fulfilled (McLeod, 2018). Starting from the bottom-up, the needs include physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization needs. Physiological needs include the needs that humans have for their bodies. These are essential for human survival, such as food, water, shelter, clothing, sex, etc. (McLeod, 2018). Without all of the biological requirements for human survival being met, nothing else matters; this is the most important stage. The safety need level covers physical and mental protection. This includes safety from the elements, law, order, security, and stability. Once basic human needs have been met, psychological needs can now be the focus. The first is a need for love and belonging. This is where the social connection comes in. It is essential for the well-being of humans to connect and have a sense of belonging (McLeod, 2018).

   On a very basic level, humans learn from the behaviors of one another. It is also important to have meaningful relationships with people on a psychological level. Once the need for social connection is met, esteem can be considered. This includes the need for self-esteem, independence, and self-respect as well as reputation and respect from others. Self-actualization needs follow the need for esteem. This is the stage in which a person will strive for personal growth, self-fulfillment, enjoyment, and experiences (McLeod, 2018). Social connection is the first psychological need outlined in Maslow's research, making it quite important (McLeod, 2018). Those who actively participate in meaningful social relationships are happier, have less anxiety and depression, and are more resilient to stressors in everyday life (Seppala et al., 2013).

   As more social connections are made, social capital is gained (McMahon, 2019). Social capital is the idea that as individuals get to know more or fewer people, valuable information and

opportunities are gained or lost (McMahon, 2019). Social capital is the collection of those gains and losses. Consider, for example, how much value and opportunities would be lost if social connections were not made. Maybe a teenage boy got a job at a pizzeria because his uncle owns the place. He may not have gotten that job without the connection between him and his uncle, and the connection between him and his uncle would be part of his social capital. Another example could be a woman who needs emotional support after a break-up. Her closest friend might help her during that time, adding value to her life. This friendship is part of her social capital.

There are two types of social capital: bonding and bridging (McMahon, 2019). Bonding social capital involves the type of social connection that offers emotional support and a great amount of life value. These are the relationships in which they would do anything for each other. These are the family and friends with whom a person spends the most time and energy (McMahon, 2019). A person will have bonding social capital with their best friend or parents with whom they share their feelings and emotions, like the woman going through a break-up. She is utilizing her bonding social capital to gain valuable support from her best friend. Bridging social capital involves casual acquaintances that provide information and connections to others, but no emotional support (McMahon, 2019). These may be coworkers or bosses, or maybe even a barista that teaches someone how to order coffee properly. Anyone who adds value, opportunity, or information (or takes away any of them) in someone's life can be considered a part of that person's bridging social capital. The teenage boy who got a job at his uncle's pizzeria gained opportunity by having a social connection with his uncle; he utilized his bridging social capital. Even though bonding social capital provides more value to people than bridging social capital, oftentimes people have more bonding social capital than bridging.

Social media is the perfect place to build and maintain social capital. Many social connections occur on social media. In a study done asking participants various questions about their Facebook usage, it was found that Facebook is more strongly associated with bridging social capital than bonding social capital. Many times, people will add someone they've just met as a friend on Facebook, but never see them or talk to them again. However, that person may create a Facebook post about a job opening that person is interested in, providing them with an excellent opportunity they would not have had previously; this would be an example of bridging social capital (McMahon, 2019).

Although it was found that Facebook was associated with high bridging social capital, it had a weak association with bonding social capital. Facebook was not used to build or maintain social connections that involved emotional support but was instead used to keep a connection with the acquaintances with whom they are not in close contact (McMahon, 2019). A different study, though, found that Snapchat (a social media app that utilizes photo messaging) was strongly associated with bonding social capital (McMahon, 2019). A similar study was done examining participants' Snapchat usage habits. It was found that more people use Snapchat to have conversations with those they are closest to. They also had a much smaller number of friends on Snapchat than they did on Facebook. It is important to note, however, that this study was done before Snapchat introduced the "snap streak" feature. This feature rewards users for contacting the same person daily by providing a fire emoji when the streak is not broken (McMahon, 2019). This feature might change the dynamic of Snapchat social capital now that a reward for daily contact is present.

The number of people someone has social connections with regularly is somewhat regular among most humans. One study measured the head circumferences of multiple primate

species. They then determined how many other primates within their species were part of their social circle, or the number of people they made regular social connections with. The hypothesis was that the head size of the animal would correlate with the number of primates in its social circle. It was found that for the most part, the bigger the head size, the larger the social circle. When this information is translated over to apply to humans, according to the head size of humans, they should have around 150 people in their social circle. This number is known as Dunbar's number (McMahon, 2019)..

Dunbar (as cited in McMahon, 2019) also later discovered that humans typically have around 15 people in what he calls a "sympathy group" whom a person might contact regularly, and a "support clique" consisting of around five people who offer emotional support. Dunbar conducted a study to determine whether the number found for primates applied to humans and found that it did. In a study of thousands of adults in the UK, he found that "most of his participants' personal social networks contained roughly 150 individuals, and, within that, many did indeed have a sympathy group of about 15 individuals, as well as a support clique of about five" (McMahon, 2019, p 29). These numbers can be used in the context of social media. A different study discovered that most participants had around 180 Friends on Facebook, which is quite close to Dunbar's number (McMahon, 2019). While many of the participants in Dunbar's research said they had more than 150 individuals in their social networks (more than 150 Friends on Facebook), their quantities in their sympathy groups and support cliques did not change. Despite the ease of making many social connections, social media does not necessarily make it easier to form emotionally valuable social connections (McMahon, 2019).

Social Media Used for Communication

Social media is used by many as a means of communication. The direct message or private message feature on social media sites is utilized to have one-on-one or small group conversations. There are many reasons people use social media messaging features or social messaging apps for communication. The first is for privacy.

While much of social media is utilized to post content and information for many people to see, many need to be able to communicate in a more private setting with friends, family, and acquaintances through social media. Not everything is meant to be shared with everyone. The direct or private message feature on most social media sites allows users to have a private conversation away from the public eye that social media tends to have. While some small conversations can occur in the comment section on social media, not all topics are appropriate or comfortable for display. People also are more likely to be more authentic when in a private conversation.

As discussed in earlier sections, authenticity is important when creating and maintaining relationships because of how difficult it is to maintain a false self and because trust is essential to healthy relationships. Private messaging allows people to know exactly who is seeing the messages they are sending and the information they are sharing, allowing them to be more comfortable to be their true authentic selves (McMahon, 2019). Importantly, for those in the LGBTQ+ community, having the ability to communicate online is extremely valuable, especially for those in the community who "have trouble expressing their sexual orientation and/or finding a partner" (Castro & Barrada, 2020, p 13). Being a part of the LGBTQ+ community and having a minority sexual orientation can be difficult for so many, so being able to privately message about those things and with others in the community is so important (Castro & Barrada, 2020).

Another reason people utilize social media messaging is for intimacy. The number one reason people use social media is to create and maintain relationships (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2009), and to deepen relationships, it's important to have intimate conversations (McMahon, 2019). Whether the relationship began online, or offline, social media can be used to facilitate and harbor the in-depth conversations that are pivotal for relationship maintenance and development. It was found that Snapchat, an app used to send private photo messages to one or more people, was most reserved for close relationships and for creating close relationships, not for keeping up with acquaintances (McMahon, 2019). This indicates that messaging apps are mainly used for relationship development and maintenance.

Messaging apps and private messaging features also provide social gratification. This means that through one-on-one messaging via social media, users are provided with the satisfaction of receiving the social interaction that humans desire (McMahon, 2019). Users can comment on posts, receive and send Likes, and absorb content posted by others, but that may not quite be enough. It may be possible that using social media by posting and scrolling does not provide enough social connection for some users, so they turn to their direct messages to have conversations with friends and family to fulfill that need. Messaging provides a deeper layer of social gratification that social media alone does not have without it (McMahon, 2019).

Walther (as cited in McMahon, 2019) researched the reasons why people utilize online forms of communication. He sought to discover "how users of computer-mediated communication take advantage of its features to achieve their communication goals" (p 63). In his "hyperpersonal model of communication theory" (p 63), there are four different aspects of online messaging that Walther explains in his research that explain the attractiveness of using online messaging for many.

The first one is the editability of online messages. In a face-to-face conversation, it is impossible to perfect the words that are going to be said before they're said without social pressure. Online, every single word can be changed, altered, removed, switched out for another, stressed, or diminished. Spelling can be double-checked, jokes can be re-read in case they don't pan out well, and words can be put in bold or italicized if they need to be highlighted or to portray a certain emotion. All of that happens before the message is even sent. These are things that just can't be done in person (McMahon, 2019). It is obvious how helpful the ability to edit messages before they are sent is, making it easy to understand why many might choose to utilize online messaging as opposed to a phone call or in-person conversation. Part of the glory of being able to edit messages online is that there is no awkwardness if more time is needed in-between replies.

The second reason people use online communication is that it gives them more time to reply to the person they're conversing with. Having hesitation or needing time to reply when talking in person is a message in and of itself. It could send the message that the person is not confident in what they're saying, or that they don't know what to say. A pause before a reply can change the trajectory of in-person conversations, but typically isn't even felt in online conversations. Even the fastest of online messaging involves some length of a pause in between messages, allowing the other person to consider what they'd like to say with no pressure. This can ease tension and awkwardness between two people, and allows for emotions to be considered (McMahon, 2019).

The third reason Walther (as cited in McMahon, 2019) found that people prefer online communication is so that they can control their emotions when talking to someone. In theory, physical isolation, that is being physically in a different place than the person being

communicated with, allows different aspects of a conversation to be controlled. Often, it is difficult to control what the body does when having conversations; online, that isn't even a factor. Body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice are not involved in online communication, making it theoretically easier to convey the correct emotion and message with no confusion (McMahon, 2019). Because one is not looking at the person they are conversing with during the conversation, they can do other things at the same time.

This is considered cognitive resource real-location and is the fourth reason people prefer online communication. Things like maintaining eye contact, nodding in agreement, and occasionally saying short things to remind the person that they are listening are no longer necessary in online communication. The receiving end of the messages can assume the person is paying attention to what they are saying without the need for physical cues (McMahon, 2019). When a person doesn't have to give those physical cues that they are paying attention, according to Walther's hyperpersonal model, this should free up mental processing" (McMahon, 2019, p 64). This means that because a person no longer must concerned about their appearance and attentiveness during a conversation, as they would in person, there is more mental clarity and energy to put into the conversation. A person now has more space in their conscious mind to think about other things, and potentially engage in a more thoughtful conversation (McMahon, 2019).

Utz (as cited in McMahon, 2019) discovered details about the usage of messaging on social media and relationships. Utz's research involved 151 university students in Germany who were asked detailed survey questions about their habits on Facebook. Participants were asked to consider their most recent private messages sent via social media, the content they had recently posted, as well as messages and posts from Friends. Utz wanted to know the participants'

thoughts about the social media messages and posts they had received and sent recently in regard to "message content (positivity, intimacy), motivation (relationship maintenance, entertainment), and feeling of connection" (McMahon, 2019, p 69). Utz found that the more intimacy that was felt during communication, the more connected and closer a participant felt to the person that sent it; there was an even stronger indication of this with regards to direct messaging. On social media, users feel the most connected to one another when both are sharing personal information, especially when privately messaging one another. Relationship deepening only occurs when both people are intimately sharing information, which makes the number one reason people use social media, especially social media messaging, unsurprising. People are using social messaging apps and direct message features to deepen their relationships. It was found that posting personal details to a person's page made their friends feel closer to them, but only their closest friends. This indicates that simply posting intimate details on social media will not necessarily improve friendships in the way privately messaging will (McMahon, 2019).

Dating Apps

Another form of communication and connectedness via social media involves meeting new people. One popular way of doing that is by utilizing dating apps or dating websites. These are apps or sites where one creates a profile that displays photos of them and a synopsis of who they are in a nutshell so that potential suitors can quickly decide whether they'd like to get to know that person better. Profiles belonging to people within a certain radius are placed on the front page of the app, and the user may swipe right or left to approve or deny a profile after looking through it. From there if it is a match, the ability to message each other opens up. If the couple wishes to pursue it further, they may set up a date or something more casual (Castro & Barrada, 2020).

Who Uses Dating Apps

Castro and Barrada (2020) sought to find out as much as they could using the extant literature about dating app usage. They discovered that many studies found that most, by a small margin, dating app users are male. The most common age group using dating apps is young adults, more specifically 24-30-year-olds. Those that are in sexual minority groups, that is any sexual orientation that is not heterosexual (gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, etc.), are more likely to engage in dating apps. While being single is a much more likely predictor of dating app use, a surprising number of people who are not single also use dating apps. Between 10-and 29% of those who have a partner are using dating apps. Those who used Tinder and "who had a partner had had more sexual and romantic partners than the singles who used it" (Castro & Barrada, 2020, p 13). It was found that those with a higher level of education were more likely to have used dating apps. Women using dating apps preferred to find a possible male partner who had a high level of education, and men preferred the opposite. They were more interested in possible female partners who had lower levels of education. Dating app usage is more popular in urban areas than more rural ones and tends to happen more often among those with higher incomes.

On a psychological front, dating app users tend to be more anxiously attached, less avoidantly attached, and tend to have a more open sociosexuality. Sociosexuality refers to a person being willing to engage in sexual activity that is not confined to a committed, closed relationship. They also are likely to be outgoing and open-minded. Theoretically, then, the average dating app user is a 24-30-year-old, single, well-educated, open-minded man who lives in the city, has an above-average income, belongs to a sexual minority, and has a high anxious attachment and non-restrictive sociosexuality (Castro & Barrada, 2020).

Why People Use Dating Apps

A common stereotype about dating apps is that they are only or mostly a way to seek out casual sex. This kind of stereotype has been criticized for potentially perpetuating a hookup culture, which reinforces "superficiality and sexual frivolity" (Castro &Barrada, 2020, p 16). Multiple studies found many other reasons to use dating apps, often having 'casual sex' ranked lower than others in terms of motivations for use. The uses of dating apps can be categorized into five categories based on collective literature: entertainment, socializing, self-esteem, love, and sex. Dating app users seek out entertainment via dating apps by using them to overcome boredom, pass the time, satisfy curiosity, and distract themselves. They also use them because they are fun, exciting, and trendy. People socialize by making new friends, expanding their social networks, talking to new people, practicing social and flirting skills, succumbing to peer pressure, having a sense of belonging, feeling an ease of communication, and meeting new people while traveling, via dating app connections. The self-esteem category covers those who seek self-validation, self-improvement, to feel better about themselves, and social approval via dating app usage. Those who use dating apps for love are looking for a romantic relationship and may be doing it because of or for their ex. The final category, while valid, is not the only motivation for dating app use: sex. People use dating apps to find a hookup, or someone to have casual sex with, as well as to experiment sexually, explore their sexuality, and gain sexual experience (Castro & Barrada, 2020). The most likely category of people to use dating apps to find casual sex is men who belong to sexual minority groups.

Benefits and Implications of Dating Apps

Castro and Barrada (2020) discovered in their literature review various benefits of using dating apps, as well as some implications. Dating apps are beneficial by opening a new means of

meeting new potential romantic partners. This allows many more people access to finding love,

such as those who are marginalized or have been silenced. Consider, for instance, a person who

is physically disabled and can not leave their house; they can now find love via dating apps. One

marginalized group dating apps have especially been important to are those in the LGBTQ+

community. These are people who may not be able to find partners in public for fear of

discrimination or harassment, but with dating apps, that pressure and fear are lessened when they

use dating apps to find romantic or sexual partners.

Four different advantages to using dating apps, mostly related to their technology, are

outlined in the research cited in Castro and Barrada's (2020) work. The first is the portability

smartphones and tablets have, which in turn makes dating apps portable as well. This means that

someone can be using their dating apps anywhere they go, both in public and in private. The

second aspect is the availability of dating apps. The use of these apps allows spontaneous and

frequent connections which can quickly translate into a face-to-face interaction, allowing online

encounters into offline ones. Locatability is the third advantage of dating apps. Matches on

dating apps occur between people who live or are geographically close to one another, making

in-person encounters simple to organize. The last advantage is multimediality, which means that

multiple media sources are used. The visual aspect of dating apps is important, as it is related

closely to physical appearance, resulting in more than one communication channel (photos and

messages). It is also possible on many dating apps to link other social media profiles, like

Facebook and Instagram, allowing matches to also explore those (Castro & Barrada, 2020).

However, including too much information on dating apps is not always a good thing.

Four blocks of disadvantages were also outlined by Castro and Barrada (2020). The first

implication of dating app use lies within the use and configuration of the dating apps themselves.

Because of how quickly they have emerged and become popular, they "pose risks associated with security, intimacy, and privacy" (Castro & Barrada, 2020, p 17). Dating app use allows for more frequent contact with insecure connections causing fear, especially in women, associated with the personal data included in the apps and their ease of localization. Users have more chances than they ever would have without the app to connect with new people and create new contacts, but that comes with a great risk of vulnerability. Also within this first block is the effects of problematic dating app use, which are interfering with users' daily lives. Some psychological problems that arise are observed within the link between the use of dating apps and life dissatisfaction, loneliness, and feelings of exclusion from the world (Castro & Barrada, 2020).

Secondly, risks related to dating app use fall into the category of aggression and discrimination. Some researchers have argued that "certain abusive cultural practices associated with deception, discrimination, or abuse (e.g., about body types, weight, age, rural environments, racism, HIV stigma)," have been accentuated and not reduced with the increased use of technology and dating apps (Castro & Barrada, 2020, p 17). Users' mental health can be affected by this. Another aspect of dating app use that can not only affect mental health, but also physical health is risky sexual behavior, which is the third block of research covered in Castro and Barrada (2020).

The relationship between dating apps and risky sexual behavior is complicated. While dating app use does not directly correlate with the increased prevalence of sexually transmitted infections, it is associated with the performance of increased risky sexual behaviors such as reduced condom use, more sexual encounters while under the influence of alcohol and other drugs, and increased numbers of sexual partners. These risky sexual behaviors occur more

frequently between people who met via a dating app who have a connection outside of said dating app. For instance, they have a mutual friend or some other common connection. It is theorized that this is due to these users avoiding the discussion of avoiding risky sexual behaviors because they either are treating each other with more familiarity or avoiding potential gossip. If the match did not have a prior connection, the more time spent communicating online before the sexual encounter was associated with an increased number of preventative measures; the more quickly they met up, the less often that conversation occurred (Castro & Barrada, 2020).

The final block of research related to dating app disadvantages centers around body image. Because dating apps rely so heavily on photos displaying a person's physical appearance, it is obvious how a person's body image will be a primary focus while using them. Dating apps can promote concerns about body image that can become excessive, which may lead to associated negative consequences such as unhealthy weight management practices, high body shame, low body satisfaction, and increased comparisons of appearance. It was found that a greater risk of body image issues related to dating app use was among men (Castro & Barrada, 2020).

Conclusion

Psychological concepts explain why social media is so successful. It is because of psychology that so many people continue to use their social media and social networking sites, and many want to stop using them but can not due to their addictive qualities. There are three points of view discussed here: the Poster, the Viewer, and the Connector. Any perspective on social media is susceptible to addiction, especially the Poster.

The Poster continues to post content because of a few different psychological theories. The first is rewards. The feedback given by followers and others who see their posts, in the form of Likes, comments, follows, etc., acts as a positive reinforcement to the brain. The brain then tells the Poster to post more and more because it likes the rewards it is receiving. This has the potential, though, of creating a social media addiction. Another aspect of psychology related to the Poster is social approval. This basic human need is supplied to the Poster when they create content and post it to their social media platforms. When people interact with it, the Poster feels a sense of belonging. Fear of missing out on that social approval keeps the Poster posting more content, and many Posters are aware of the power they possess to elicit a fear of missing out in their followers and will post more because of it. Power also lies in the Poster related to a sense of control over how they present themselves online. Many profiles are less than truthful on social media accounts and there are many reasons why; a few of them are because of safety, self-exploration, and social anxiety. Some may never even post because of this. That would make them fall more into the Viewer category.

Viewers seek out social media to absorb and interact with content posted by others. This is due to many reasons that can be summed up in four groups: education, inspiration, entertainment, and socialization. Viewers utilize social media to learn new things, be inspired by

others, be entertained, and interact with people. Viewers are also susceptible to the fear of missing out, but this time more so because they are seeing the content other people have posted and are wishing they could be a part of what others are doing. Just as feedback can be addictive to Posters, scrolling through content can be addicting to Viewers. The symptoms related to both substance and behavioral addictions are associated with social networking site addiction, as well. Because the nature of social media involves posting relatable, vulnerable content by Posters, Viewers become susceptible also to parasocial relationships, which are one-sided relationships that social media Viewers have with Posters.

The final viewpoint discussed in this paper is that of the Connector on social media. This is the user who utilizes social media mainly to communicate with others. Social connection is a pivotal part of human life, and social media effectively fills that need. Connectors are those who utilize the direct message feature of social networking sites as well as messaging-only ones. This area of study also involves meeting new people, which often happens through dating apps. Contrary to popular belief, dating apps are not just used to find casual sex, but for so much more. Many use them to find friends, to be entertained, and find lasting relationships as well.

As social media becomes more and more a part of everyday life, it is important to understand why that is: psychology. For without the psychological concepts behind the many aspects of social media and social networking sites, they would not be nearly as successful as they are today.

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