The influence of Social Media

A Qualitative Study Researching if Social Media has an influence on
Women between the ages of 18 – 25

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2017

In Memoriam

Maj Strandberg (1946 – 2016)

Frida Blom (1996 – 2016)

Abstract

The aim of the research was to study if social media usage had any influence on women between the ages of 18 – 25. The research questions answered were: How does Social Media influence young women? How do young women perceive their usage of SM related to their interaction with people? The study was qualitative and made five deep one-on-one interviews, held with semi-structured questions and used convenience sampling. The literature consisted of five articles related to the topic and the theoretical framework used was the social constructionist theory and the top-down, bottom-up factors theory. The results found in the study were that these women were influenced by SM on how they look upon their bodies. Further, news and companies influence the participants through SM in negative manners, but at the same time they experience SM as a great tool of communication. Thematic analysis was used when analysing.

Keywords: social media, influence, young women.

Acknowledgements

Contents

1. Introduction

Social media (SM) is part of people's daily lives and is present worldwide. It is no longer a phenomenon, but has grown thanks to new technology and the development of Internet. It helps people share their lives with others across the globe and Brooks (2015) states: "social media usage has become the most common activity on the web" (p.26). Being it so common, SM may have an influence on the individuals using it. Relating to the fact that it is so widely used, Best et al (2014) found evidence that SM can be both beneficial and harmful, and that more research on SM´s influence should be done. Kross et al (2013) found that the SM forum Facebook influenced people negatively regarding how they felt and how satisfied they were with their lives. On the other side, Foster (2015) found that women taking collective action on Twitter felt empowered and positively influenced. These results being ambivalent, it is interesting to further study the relationship between SM use and the individuals using it.

When using SM, it is shown by previous research that the outcomes can be positive, negative or either ways (Chang & Hsu, 2016) (Kross et al., 2013) (Foster, 2015) (Best et al., 2014) (Allen et al., 2014). Best et al (2014) reviewed an article that found, that girls were affected negatively by merely having a social networking profile. This correlation shows that their psychological well-being decreased and this was not present for the opposite gender. Because of this, the author finds it relevant and important to study if SM has any influence on young women. The group is chosen, not only because of previous research showing significant results for women, but also because it states that young adults use of SM is rising (Allen et al., 2014). Finally, the study might fill gaps that were discovered while searching for previous research on the topic. Moreover, it is important to study this topic to make young women aware of the influences SM might have on them.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this research is to study the influences SM usage has on young women between the ages of 18-25. The research questions answered in the study are:
- How does SM usage influence young women?

- How do young women perceive their usage of SM related to their interaction with people?

1.2 Essay disposition

In the next subcategory, the main concepts used in the study will be explained. Then a subcategory about the relation of the topic to International Social Work will be presented. The second section of this thesis consists of the previous research, where the earlier research is summarized with its results. In the end of this section, the author writes a short conclusion of the main findings of the articles. The third section consists of the theoretical framework where the main concepts and theories used in the study are explained. The section after that is the methodology part and starts with explaining the research design and ends by bringing up the ethical standpoints of the research. The fifth section is where the results are presented in themes and analysed as well. In the next section, the results are summarized and discussed as well as the methodology part. Limitations in the study and future research are also discussed in this section. The seventh section is where the references used in the study are written in alphabetical order. This to make it easy for the reader to find the sources used in this research. The last section of the study is the appendices. Here the information text of the study is presented as well as the consent letter and the interview guide.

1.3 Concept explanation

- Social media (SM): According to the National Encyclopaedia of Sweden (NE), SM is "an umbrella term of communication channels that allows users to communicate directly with each other through e.g. text, picture or audio" ("Sociala medier", own translation, 2016). In this study SM will be regarded as a digital forum, where people interact and share opinions, thoughts and photos/videos with each other. Example of these are: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and Tumblr.

1.4 Relevance for International Social Work

Social Work is a field that works with people and strives to make the world a better place for everyone in it. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) strives

for "social justice, human rights and social development through the promotion of social work" ("What we do", 2017). Since SM is a tool used in the whole world, it is important to study if it has any influence on individuals. The fast advancement of SM and the way people use it daily, should be a concern for future social workers, because it can be harmful or beneficial for individuals and future clients. If finding any remarkable results that affect clients of social workers, they are able to take part of them and assess their work depending on how SM influences their clients.

2. Previous research

2.1 Articles

Despite SM being a wide forum on the Web, academia is keeping up with research. Books focusing on SM have also been published, e.g. *Social Media: a critical introduction (2014)* by Fuchs. Since SM "use is rising greatly among adolescents" (Allen et al., p.18) and common anywhere in the world, it is important that research is conducted about it. Articles found about SM were many and five were chosen to be the previous research. Three of the articles found are quantitative studies and the other two are literature reviews. The article written by Chang and Hsu (2016), collected data from 305 users of Facebook in Taiwan. The area was chosen due to that many people in Taiwan are active users of the SM forum Facebook. A questionnaire was made to carry out the study and a hyperlink for this one was posted in different digital forums. The research used and combined the social capital theory and social presence theory to analyze the data. These theories were jointly used for the understanding of how social networking sites affect individuals (Chang & Hsu, 2016). It is stated in the article that researchers believe that Internet facilitates people's perception of how they feel (Ibid). The main finding provided in the study is that there is an "influence of social capital on subjective well-being" (Ibid, p.726), which means that social relations and strong bonds between people truly affect how people feel. Another main finding is that social networking sites used to connect with others "are highly related to the development of cognitive capital" (Ibid). This means that the usage of SM forums, where people communicate, is related to how users perceive how they feel.

The second article by Kross et al (2013) is a quantitative study where there is a focus on the SM forum Facebook and how the usage of it influences 82 persons. This study was made through three phases, where the first one compiled of a questionnaire, the second one consisted of the participants being text messaged five times a day in a lap of 14 days, and the third one of a follow up questionnaire. When analyzing the results, the researchers found correlations of Facebook use and how people feel. The results in this article "indicated that Facebook use predicts declines in the two components of subjective well-being: how people feel moment to moment and how satisfied they are with their lives" (Kross et al., 2013, p.4). In other words, Facebook use made people experience feelings of sadness regardless of time of day and affects their life satisfaction in a negative manner.

The third article by Foster (2015), is a quantitative study where 93 women followed a Twitter account where, in a time lapse of three days, sexist articles were posted. The participants were divided in one experimental group and three control groups. The one's in the experimental group were instructed to tweet about the articles posted each day. The second group was asked to tweet privately so only themselves would see what they tweeted. The third group was asked to tweet about something else like the day's weather and the fourth group was asked to not tweet at all. After, the participants were asked how they felt and reacted when reading these articles. The main findings were that the women were influenced by these articles and their content. They could feel anger and be sad when reading them, but also experience empowerment. This happened when they felt they took collective action with others and for example supported each other on their views of the articles posted.

The fourth article written by Best et al (2014) is a literature review where 43 research papers, that studied the effects of online technology on adolescents, were reviewed. Out of these, only 13 of them reported beneficial outcomes of social networking (Best et al., 2014). It is stated, that when using social networks, the social support perceived by a person can grow and in this way the self-esteem and belongingness can rise (Ibid). Many of the studies reviewed in this article, viewed "online communication as a weaker form of interaction" (Ibid, p.33), showing that interactions in the real world are stronger than the ones in the digital one. One of the studies reviewed, showed that there is a negative relation between psychological well-being and having a social networking

profile. The case for this was only occurring for girls, but not for boys, which can mean that girls are the ones being affected negatively by using SM forums and not boys.

The fifth article by Allen et al (2014), is a literature review where 11 studies that researched adolescents using SM were reviewed. Three themes were found in these studies: sense of belonging, psychosocial well-being and identity development. The "positive influences of social media" (Allen et al., 2014, p.23) found, are that adolescents who are socially anxious can have a great use of communicating through SM. They can do this, because they do not need to have real life contact with people and feel more secure to express themselves in the digital world. As it is stated: "Given this effect, online social media may allow socially anxious adolescents to form stronger relationships with their peers, which in turn could decrease their experiences of loneliness and enhance their well-being." (Ibid, p.24). Not only positive influences were found, but negatives as well. These are related among adolescents with learning disabilities. When making contacts online, the negative influence is that their loneliness increases, because these adolescents use SM mainly to establish "fewer meaningful social connections in face-to-face social situations" (Ibid).

2.2 Conclusion

The five articles presented in this section are highly relevant for the study being conducted. Thanks to their connection to SM and how it influences individuals, they constitute a solid ground for the study and have inspired the author on how to carry out the research. The findings from the articles differ from each other and none of them have entirely positive or negative outcomes related to SM usage.

The most important findings, related to the present study, are mixed. Foster (2015) found that "tweets increased well-being and decreased negative affect" (p.640), so when women tweeted about their views of sexist articles, they felt empowered, which then lead to an increased sense of them being able to influence. Kross et al (2013) found that "the more people used Facebook the worse they subsequently felt" (p.2), and "the more their life satisfaction levels declined over time" (Ibid), which in its turn means that Facebook has a wide influence on how people feel and how satisfied they are with their lives. Best et al (2014) found an article where the usage of SM decreased the

psychological well-being of girls and not boys. In conclusion, the present study is carried out due to the lack of evidence on how SM influences young women.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this thesis consists of the social constructionist theory and the top-down, bottom-up factors theory. These two theories have provided the researcher with knowledge on how to view the construction of realities', such as the digital one and how factors in society, such as work or news, play a big role when influencing an individual's life. These theories have also given the researcher important points of view on how to look upon the results and analyze them and at the same time, they have been chosen to enhance the way SM influences women.

3.1. Social constructionism

"It is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated" (Burr, p.4)

The above-mentioned description constitutes the idea of social constructionism. Where there is interaction between people, their reality is being constructed and it is described as "what exists is what we perceive to exist" (Ibid, p.3). When looking upon social constructionism, people should have a critical view on the reality they perceive, because it is constructed and subjective. Social constructionism is built in different ways and one is through language (Ibid). When people interact and speak, they create their own view on reality depending on what is said and how it is interpreted. Here there is a micro and macro perspective on reality. The micro perspective explains how language is used in interactions between people in their daily lives, whilst the macro one focuses on wider structures in society and how these linguistically affect our social and psychological life (Ibid). It can therefore be concluded that when people are interacting with each other, they are creating their reality and this interaction is primarily done through communication.

Social constructionism within SM

Groups of people share thoughts and opinions when communicating in SM forums. Patton (2015) writes: "any notion of "truth", then, becomes a matter of shared meanings and consensus among a group of people, not correspondence with some supposedly objective reality" (p.121 - 122). In this way, the group creates a reality within the digital world. Posting opinions and uploading photos are only few of the ways people communicate and interact with others through SM. When doing this, they comment on others posts e.g. in Facebook and recognize each other. As Chang and Hsu (2016) conclude "the findings confirm that recognition from others and the emotional bond between individuals will facilitate social interactions" (p.726). However, there are differences on how social interactions are in the online and the offline world. In the offline world, people interact and construct the reality through language face-to-face (Burr, 2003). In the online world, social interactions are something constantly ongoing, since people have the possibility to always be available on SM, when for example using their smart phones.

3.2 Top-down and bottom-up factors

These factors affect individuals in their daily lives, directly and indirectly. Top-down factors are structural factors and these can be happenings in the world or in the society where a person lives and they are related with life satisfaction (Schimmack, 2008). An individual is not able to influence these factors since they come from "above". The bottom-up factors are seen as domain satisfactions (Ibid). They have to do with the everyday life of individuals such as work, leisure, social relationships, family and health (B. Heady, R. Veenhoven & A. Wearing, 1991). An individual has the chance to influence these factors depending on the preconditions the person has in life. The two types of factors will be combined and jointly used to gain a holistic view on how they impact an individual in relation to their SM use.

Top-down and bottom-up factors within SM

Top-down and bottom-up factors affect people differently. SM is a forum where people interact with each other, maintain social relationships and keep in contact with friends and family. It also gives people the chance to constantly be reachable and online. When something happens in society, chances are higher that news is spread quicker through

SM in contrast to conventional media. This is a top-down factor and seen, for example, in the *Occupy Wall Street* movement in 2011 where SM played a big role with spreading information about the protests. Fuchs (2014) informs that "broadcasting and newspapers had much less important role than the Internet" (p.85) in this movement and "Facebook was a very popular source of information" (Ibid). In this way, individuals taking part of the movement had information on what was happening very fast and could act according to it. There are also bottom-up factors seen in SM and the way individuals have the possibility to express their thoughts and opinions freely, is seen as one of them. When individuals express themselves on SM, they have the opportunity to influence their peers and hopefully, make a change.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

The research is a qualitative study, since the aim is to study the influences SM has on young woman. Qualitative research is based on the interpretations of the participant's realities (Grinell & Unrau, 2005). In this way, the qualitative approach is chosen, because the experiences of the participants are what will be researched. This study consists of an interview guide with 16 semi-structured questions. In depth one-on-one interviews were held with each participant. Grinnell (2001) highlights that with face-to-face interviews: "the presence of the interviewer makes it possible to capture nuances of responses that would otherwise be lost" (p.304). Meaning that the interviewer has the possibility to be present during the interview and in this way understand the person better. The participants are five women between the ages of 18 to 25. The age group has been chosen, because their usage of SM is significant and rising (Allen et al., 2014) and it is an age where the participants are regarded as adults in society.

4.2 Mode of procedure
4.2.1 Choice of literature

Academic articles were found in the Discovery database of Gävle University. To find reliable research articles, they had to fulfil the following criteria: *(a) peer-reviewed (b) full text (c) find all my search terms (d) apply equivalent subjects (e) English language*

(f) location all. The timeframe when the articles were published were chosen to be between the years 2000 - 2016. Three searches were made through this database. The first search used the terms: "wellbeing" or "well-being" or "well being" or "life satisfaction" as TITLE, AND "social media" as TITLE, AND "woman" or "women" or "female" or "females" as Subject Terms. Through this search, six articles were found where one of them was a duplicate, which makes a total of five articles. The second search used the same terms as the first search, but the term "social media" was used as a Subject Term. In this search, eleven articles were found, where six of them were the same ones from the first search. Five new articles were then added to the found articles. In the third and last search, the terms "subjective wellbeing" or "subjective well-being" or "subjective well being" were used as TITLE. The next two terms were the same as in the previous searches and placed in the No Field category. Out of this search, 24 articles were found and four of them were the same as before. In total 30 articles were found. The reason to why the search terms "well-being" and "subjective well-being" were used when searching for research, was that the author firstly had a focus on these terms when starting the research. After a while the author realized it was better to try to find out if there is any influence of social media on women and not how it influences their well-being. The research though, found with these terms, was relevant for the study and had other interest aspects the author wanted to bring up.

The abstracts of the 30 articles were read. After reading the abstracts, the author chose articles depending on their relevance for the study. Articles where the target groups were veterans or elderly were dismissed. Articles that did not mention the term SM were also dismissed. Out of the 30 articles, five were chosen and read. Three of these were relevant for the study. Two other articles are taken into consideration as well, due to their relevance for the study. These two were found through the Discovery database of Gävle University with the search terms "social media well being" and fulfilled the same criteria as the other found articles.

4.2.2 Sample selection

The sampling method used for this study is the convenience sampling, also called accidental and availability sampling (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). The convenience sampling is a "sample composed of nearest and most available participants" (Grinnell,

2001, p.216) and that is why this study has found the participants within University Facebook groups and physically in a University. The method is suitable for the research, because the participants were found in SM forums and there was a shortage of time to conduct the study. The sampling was made through two SM forum groups on Facebook and the participants were all University students. Since the topic of the research is about the usage of SM, it is less complicated to find participants in that type of forum, because they are already users of it. The researcher posted an information text (see Appendix 1) in English in one group and Swedish in the other group. The reason why the text was both posted in English and Swedish, in the different groups, is because one of the groups is an international group where people post in English and in the other group people post in Swedish. When the text was posted, four interested participants sent an email to the author and they jointly decided on a time to meet for the interview. One of the participants was not available to participate the week chosen for the interviews and the researcher replied that if more participants were needed, that participant would be contacted. Three participants were then ready for an interview. Since not enough participants replied to this post on the Facebook groups, the researcher printed copies of the information text and left them in a Café and in a Library. Another interested person replied and a time was set for a fourth interview. The first interviewee asked the researcher if more participants were needed and the researcher confirmed this. The interviewee contacted her friend and she became the fifth participant.

4.2.3 Investigation process

The interview guide consists of 16 semi-structured questions (see Appendix 3). These were developed from the research questions and the aim of the study. The questions were open-ended allowing the participants to develop their answers. Follow-up questions connected to the interview guide questions were asked depending on whether the participants did or did not answer the questions fully. Also, the researcher sometimes asked the same questions differently, depending on if the participant had difficulty answering the questions. All the interviews were held in a public and neutral place and took 20 - 35 minutes.

4.3 Tools of analysis

The data collected through the interviews, was transcribed and written down on the computer. After this, the transcriptions were printed to have a better overview of them. In this study, thematic analysis is used which consists of identifying different themes in the data (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). To make a clear analysis, the researcher chose to use the theoretical framework and the research questions from this study when analyzing. Then the interviews were highlighted in four different colours depending on the most significant answers and the theories. The themes emerged from the theories and depending on what had been said in the answers, the researcher analyzed these within the theoretical framework. Each answer was written down and subcategories within the themes were found through common denominators.

4.4 Essay credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability should be used when examining qualitative research. These terms are used in this study instead of validity and reliability, which are terms more often used in quantitative studies. The reason for this is, that the four terms enhance the requirements needed in qualitative research and fulfil the premises for a credible qualitative study.

Credibility

The term is about the truthfulness of the study. As Grinnell and Unrau (2005) write, the researcher has to "provide chains of evidence and sets of narrative accounts that are plausible and credible" (p.442). At the same time, there are three things that could affect the credibility of the study. These are: reactivity, researcher biases and respondents' biases. Reactivity is about how the respondents act when the researcher is present, they might highlight their personality and answer in a certain way. The bias of the researcher is good to keep in mind, because it can make the research less credible if the researcher has a strong bias on the topic and wants certain outcomes from the study. To prevent this, the semi-structured interview guide was followed when interviewing the participants. Follow-up questions were asked, but these were related with the ones asked in the interview guide. The bias of the respondent has to do with the person presenting herself as something that the person is not, for example: "Respondents may

withhold information or present facts differently from how other observers may perceive them." (Ibid). Finally, to show and prove the credibility of the research, the author used peer debriefing. The researcher asked the participants the same question in a different way when interviewing, and this was made for those answers the researcher felt could be developed by the participants and were not clearly answered.

Transferability

The term is about how convertible the study is into another context. Grinnell and Unrau (2005) describe that this "depends on the degrees of similarity (match) between one sample and its setting events" (Guba 1981 in Grinnell & Unrau, 2005, p.442). It is being stated that when two contexts are similar, the knowledge of the study can be applied into the other context. In its turn the knowledge gained is transferred to the other setting (D'Cruz & Jones, 2014). For instance, the term can be set equal as generalizability in quantitative researches. To have a high transferability in the study, the researcher is as explicit as possible in the different sections describing the research. According to Grinnell and Unrau (2005): "qualitative researchers do not attempt to form generalizations that will hold all times and in all places" (p.442-443). If the second context matches the first one, then generalization can be made. Finally, to have valid transferability in the study, Guba (1985) points out that the phenomenon of the study has to be described sufficiently and then a person can see and evaluate if the studied phenomena is applicable and transferable into other contexts. In this way, the researcher writes detailed information about what has been found and in which context. Then other people reading the study can transfer it to other contexts if possible.

Dependability

The term is about how trustworthy the study is. To maintain a high dependability, it is important that all the steps of the research are consistent throughout the study (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005). To reach this, the author has received comments and feedback from classmates during the first stage of the research. When conducting the research and writing the thesis, a supervisor has read the drafts and commented on the study. In this way, the researcher has been aware of the consistency of the study. When thinking of dependability, Grinnell and Unrau (2005) write that changes while conducting the research may occur and that is why it is important for researchers to "document how their design decisions are made" (p.438). To keep track of this, the researcher has been

writing a diary when researching. Every workday, this diary has been filled with everything that has been done. In this way, the researcher has had the possibility to go back and see what happened in different stages of the study.

Confirmability

The term is about how objective the study is. This specific study is made by one researcher, which means that there is no other person that checks the transcriptions from the interviews. D'Cruz and Jones (2014) write that this term "proposes that all participants' points of view should be taken in account" (p.75). In this study, the participants consist of five women and their opinions constitute the data. Not everything they say is cited in the study, but the highlights of their experiences of their use of SM is. To reach a high confirmability in this study, the researcher asked the same question in different ways when interviewing the participants. This is verified through "asking informants by means of a process of consultation is a way of achieving confirmability" (Ibid, p.76).

4.5 Ethical standpoints

"The National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics requires us to evaluate our policies, programs and interventions - to develop professional knowledge while protecting our research participants" (Royse, 2004, p.60).

Ethical considerations have to be taken in account when interviewing persons about their experiences of use of social media. The topic can be sensitive in many ways. Royse (2001) writes about four guidelines regarding ethics that should be taken in account when doing research.

Consent requirement

The first guideline explains that the participants must be taking part of the study on a voluntary basis, besides "the act of participation is seen as giving informed consent" (Royse, 2004, p.51). A consent form (see Appendix 2) was sent to the participants through email the day before their interview took place. When they came to the interview, they signed it, and when signing agreeing to what was written. Like Royse

(2001) writes: "the use of written consent forms helps assure that research subjects know that they are volunteers" (p.52).

Demand for information

The second guideline is the one of giving sufficient information to the participants. In the study, this is made by sending the consent form to them and in it, giving the information needed about the study. It is written that: "benefits may be conceptualized as those that obviously reward the subjects" (Ibid, p.55) and incentives for the participants were given in form of a cinema ticket and free *fika* at a Café. The incentives can be the reason to why the participants are taking part of the study. After interviewing them though, they all seem to have been interested about the topic and therefore that being the real reason for why they participated. Participant C, did not even want *fika,* and participant D did not want *fika* nor the cinema ticket (the author gave her the cinema ticket anyways, that she can give to someone else). The author draws the conclusion from this, that the participants were not only taking part of the study due to the incentives.

Usage demand

The third guideline has to do with causing no harm to the participants. When researching on the topic, it can be sensitive for the participants depending if SM influences them or not. After conducting the interviews, the participants should not feel bad, guilty, or less-worthy. As Royse (2001) states: "social work researchers are not likely to propose research that would result in evident harm to their subjects" (p.55). To prevent this in the study, the researcher has been debriefing with the participants after the interviews, by sending them the results and analysis section of the study, in order for them to see if what has been concluded is accurate.

Demand of confidentiality

The fourth guideline is about sensitive information being protected. The participation of the women in this study will remain anonymous and confidential throughout the study. The participants are aware of this by being informed about it through the information text posted in Facebook groups and in notes in public places. At the same time, the women sign the consent form, where information about the strictly anonymous and confidentiality of the study is written. As Rubin and Babbie (2014) put it: "the

protection of the participants' identities is the clearest concern in the protection of their interests" (p.101). For the data gathered to remain confidential and anonymous, the participants' names will be coded as A, B, C, D and E. It will "help guard against the accidental recognition or identification of your subjects" (Ibid).

5. Results and Analysis

The results from the interviews will be presented and analysed in themes. The themes emerged when reading the transcriptions and looking for the answers for the research questions. Here, subcategories were found as well when finding common denominators in the analysis as mentioned before. After each theme, a short analysis will be presented in connection with the theoretical framework.

5.1 Theme 1: Influences of SM on the self and views of the world within it

Body image

The interviewees have the opinion, that Instagram is the SM forum where the most "good looking people" are portrayed and in this way, the women may feel that they look bad when seeing pictures presenting this. They would feel less worth, because they compared themselves to those persons and felt pressure in improving physically to look like them. The results also show that the participants are aware of pictures being edited online and how these influence them. For instance, participant C has actively chosen which people to follow on Instagram to prevent her from experiencing feelings of unpleasantness on her spare time. A quote from participant A illustrates how they can feel when using SM:

"Let's say, Instagram there is like a lot of good looking people out there so when you are scrolling down it's like: she has a nice body, oh! Wow! a person feels bad afterwards like why do I not look like that."

Despite this, some of the participants find it motivational to see all these "good looking people" in order to they themselves aim to be more fit. When seeing pictures of people training, the participants could be motivated to aim higher on their training goals. Like participant E puts it:

"I see it a bit as an incentive (...) cause when I see pictures that I strive to be like (...) then I know that I keep on training."

Analyzing from a social constructionist point of view, when the participants see "good looking people" online, the reality created digitally is not accurate. The way people are portrayed online is not representative for the population and because of this, the participants may feel that they need to look in a certain way to be like people online. This can in its turn make them feel bad and pressure them to achieve a certain appearance. In this way, SM has a wide influence on the women and influences them by pictures being uploaded of "good looking people". This influence is experienced as negative by most of the participants, because they feel bad about themselves when scrolling down on SM and seeing these pictures. It is experienced as positive though by one of the participants and this because it helps her stay motivated to achieve her training goals.

Views on the world within SM
The participants reported that they use the most common SM forums such as: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter. The women had a view on that the world within SM is created by its users due to several reasons. Some thought the world within SM is too digital and could not work in reality, and that is why many people "escape" the real world there. The results show also that this type of medium is a different way of expressing oneself and that is why it has to be different than the real world. When creating this world a participant had certain views on how people should act when they take part of it. This she explains as a world that everyone should conform to:

"It becomes that you live into it and then you almost become angry to the one's that actually don't (...) it has to do with the opinion I have; about what I can post is being mirrored on what other's are allowed to post. So if I feel that I cannot post pictures of me ... in underwear if I look ... am without makeup or look ugly or am eh.. above normal weight or what to call it, then I actually become a bit grumpy on the one's that actually do it and that is not so good" - Participant E

According to social constructionism, people are the ones constructing the reality (Burr, 2003). In the case of the online world, people are constructing a digital reality. This

means that the persons are the ones in power and have the responsibility to decide how the reality is created in the digital world. Which means that when posting and uploading texts or pictures online, the participants are the ones responsible on what they share and write. Since they have a view on that the world within SM has to be different, then they accept the way the world there is constructed and even contribute to it. In this way, it is the own users of the SM forums that are influencing each other there.

5.2 Theme 2: Influences of SM from news and companies

Influence from news

The participants are aware that news spread on SM can influence them, but also give information on what is happening in the world. Some participants feel that they enjoy getting news through SM, because this helps them learn and inform others. The results also show that since news is spread online very often, it can get quite tiring seeing it repeatedly. News on SM is often not the whole story and people should be more critical towards it. Participant C says:

"Eh it's only titles, I almost never click on them, I don't bother, it is the same news, you get the same news seven times a day (...) I don't bother, I don't bother to care, you become slightly depressed, oh! fucking world, today again."

Despite news spreading fast and being all over SM, they have helped participants through their education by informing them about happenings in the world. Some participants have even been influenced by news and realized what they wanted to study thanks to them.

News is a top-down factor that plays a big role on how the participants perceive what is happening in the world. The participants build an opinion of the news seen online and this can be negative, because there may be no critical thought behind it. It can also be the case, that the participants build their opinion on the title of the news and not the whole article. In other words, it can be said that this influences the participants to have a certain view of the world, which may not always be accurate. Because of this, the participants may be influenced or not by the news online. As stated by the participants, they may feel that they can do something about the world's situation when reading

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about the happenings in the world. They may also keep updated and be informed and in this way feel they gain more knowledge. At the same time, a consequence could be, that they may feel they are not able to do anything about the world's situation.

Influence from companies

The participants experience they are influenced by companies through SM, but in a more discrete way than directly by news. The way the participants are forced to agree, to policies and terms of conditions to be able to use SM forums, they dislike. Participant B says:

"Just the privacy I guess cause most of the time you look at the terms of conditions they say they will, well they will keep your information (...) and you thought it was gone but then they have it in the system."

Companies owning SM forums can decide what is allowed and what is forbidden on their pages. When the participants share things with each other and then delete them, regretting what they posted, it is not completely deleted and still present on the web. Despite companies' power over users, some participants enjoy staying updated and getting new ideas, such as makeup and fashion ideas, on SM forums.

Companies are also a top-down factor and when owning SM forums, they have the power to decide what is okay and not on their pages. The terms of conditions decided by the companies affect the users on how they should behave on their forums. The privacy of the participants is being ignored when companies keep posts and pictures on the web instead of deleting them when the user wants to. Most of the companies also aim at making profits and by advertising themselves on SM forums, they can influence people to buy their products. In this way, companies influence the participants out on SM and steer their online behavior.

5.3 Theme 3: Influences of SM on peers

Interaction with people

The participants find the SM forums as good tools when using them to communicate smoothly with other people. They find it good that they can keep in touch with families

and friends that live in other places, or are too busy to meet up. At the same time, using these forums makes the women follow their friends and stay updated on world events. The results highlight that their peers are the strongest influence on them when e.g. liking and commenting their posts or pictures. In this way, they can be influenced positively or negatively. For example, positively when they get comments that are complementing and negatively when they read comments that hurt them. The participants also disclosed that the more likes they get from people, the more pleasant feelings they have after posting something. Despite SM being mainly used to communicate with people, some of the participants experience that their relations in the offline world are affected by their usage of SM. Participant E acknowledged this:

"I am not that involved in my relations … it becomes … I am a bit too into my phone when it is about my friends."

The results show also that one of the participants, D, has even ended relationships with friends, because of them posting offensive statements online. She also thinks it is interesting with SM usage, because she gets to know a person on a different level since they dare to post things online that they would not say offline.

According to social constructionism, our reality is created by the social interactions people have with each other. Language is important here, because it is the tool people use to communicate (Burr, 2003). When interacting with people online, the participants' interactions with others are easier than in the real word, because they are behind a screen and can express themselves right away. For example, one of the participants felt that it was easier to communicate personal feelings to others through SM. The interaction online is socially constructed when people write different things, because when communicating by sharing thoughts openly, peers are able to see this right away and build an opinion on it. This makes the interaction online more direct, and can affect people to have certain opinions of other people depending on what they post. In this way, the participants experience that their usage of SM has a wide influence on their interactions with peers. This not only because it is a communicating tool, but also because it affects the way their relationships are in the offline world.

Influencing people

The participants were asked if they believe that they have an influence on SM. Some thought this was the case while others did not. It is shown in the results that the participants, who felt they had an influence on SM, had it on a micro level. The participants explained that they believed they could influence their peers when sharing information on SM. It was stated that when sharing e.g. an article about the low payment conditions for social workers, people would become aware of this and have knowledge about it. When sharing something online, a "chain reaction" starts and this can reach many and have an impact. The results also show that if the participants had, for example, a blog, they felt that their influence on others would be greater. The reason for this is that participants can write detailed texts about their thoughts on blogs and in this way influence the readers. In contrast, others felt that they do not have an influence on SM, but they have an opportunity to voice their opinion with the possibility of someone agreeing:

"And I can share my opinion, but it does not mean that other people are going to change their opinion because of mine (...) I hope for, I hope. But hope dies last. So it does not mean that it actually is going to have an effect (...)" - Participant D

According to the bottom-up factors, people are capable of influencing structures in society for example a person influencing a politician or people in the local community. Analysing the results of this sub-theme, participants mostly experienced they do not have an influence on SM. The reason for this could be that the participants experienced that not everything is taken seriously online, because the world there is constructed and digital, as mentioned before. The consequence of this could be that they stop expressing their opinions online. The women experienced they have an influence on their peers though. The reason for this could be that they experience that politicians and other influencers in society are harder to reach, but their peers are easier to reach and this may be because of same interests.

6. Discussion

6.1 Summary of results

The women in the study perceived SM as a good tool of communication and experienced it influences them in different ways. The participants experienced that their image on how they see themselves is being influenced by the pictures of "good looking people" that are uploaded online. These make the women feel less worth about their bodies, but also puts pressure on them on how they should look like according to the standards of society. The women find that the world within SM is constructed and because of this, not everything there is real and not always taken seriously. In this way, it is the own users of SM, such as the women, that influence each other online. The results show also that news and companies are influencers on SM. These can make the women keep updated on happenings in the world, but also make them experience they are not able to do anything about the horrible ongoing events. Companies influence them in how to behave on SM depending on their use of terms and also pursue them on buying their products. The women experienced SM as a great tool when communicating with people and interacting digitally. At the same time, they experience they can influence their peers online, but not other actors such as politicians.

6.2 Discussion of results

The creation of the world in SM and the interactions of people in it, are linked to how they are influenced by SM. Depending on the SM forum they use, they can be influenced negatively or positively. The women in this present research felt most influenced when using Instagram and Facebook, because there, pictures of "good looking people" and news are posted. This influences how they feel and is in accordance with Kross et al's (2013) study, where they found that "the more people use Facebook the worse they subsequently felt" (p.2) and "the more their life satisfaction levels declined over time" (Ibid). Life satisfaction is "based on evaluative beliefs about one's life" (Schimmack, 2008) and the top-down and bottom-up factors are related to the term. Factors from above and from the micro level of an individual's life affect the life satisfaction of the person. Depending on what is posted online and how the participants perceive this, they can be more or less influenced. Reading about news

online made the participants stay updated, which made them feel educated, but at the same time they felt exhausted when reading the same news over and over again. Hence, the conclusion can be drawn that seeing posts of news has an effect and influence on the participants. This effect is positive or negative depending on how the participants perceive the news.

The sample in this research were only women and the study made by Best et al (2014) reviewed 43 articles, where one of them "suggests that merely having a social networking profile may decrease psychological well-being" (p.33), and this only for girls. The reason for this could be that many of the pictures posted online are of modelling women. In this current study, the participants experienced they felt bad when seeing pictures of "good looking people" and models on Instagram. It made them feel pressured on how they should look, according to the standards of brands and companies. Another interpretation could be that when these women create profiles on SM forums, they want to give a certain image of who they are to others online. Making this, they are creating the world within SM and setting standards for what is accepted and not online. As mentioned by a participant, she has a view on how the digital world should be and when she sees other people uploading pictures she thinks are not acceptable, she dislikes it. In this way, the world in SM is a polished facade where only "perfect people" fit.

The communication part is an important result in this study. It shows, that the women interviewed mostly use SM to communicate with their peers. In the interviews they were asked how they felt when they received a "like" or a comment on what they posted. The women said they felt good when receiving likes and comments and stated that the more likes they got the better. Chang and Hsu (2016) found in their study that "recognition from others and the emotional bond between individuals will facilitate social interactions" (p. 726). This is consistent with the present research, because when receiving likes and comments, people are getting recognition from others and it is the way they interact online. This communication is made through words and consistent with the theory of social constructionism, where social interactions are created through language (Burr, 2003). It means that when receiving likes and comments, the women are constructing the digital world in SM. This can influence them in different ways. As shown in the results, the participants use of SM affects their relation to others in the

offline world. Some do not feel that they are involved enough in their friends when using SM and some have ended relationships, because of what their friends posted online. Because of this, the conclusion can be drawn that SM has a strong influence in these women's lives. Best et al's (2014) article found though, that online communication is seen "as a weaker form of interaction" (p.33). Since the world within SM is constructed through interactions such as comments and posts, it is seen as a weaker way of interacting. This means that the world constructed online is less accurate than the real one, because social interactions offline seem to be stronger than the ones online.

The article by Foster (2015) showed that the participants felt they had more influence when they took collective action on Twitter. In this present study, the women felt they had a small influence on their peers on SM and not on other actors, such as politicians. This means, that these results are differing and the reason for it could be that the women were not asked how they felt if they took collective action online. They were asked if they felt they had any influence on SM. Another explanation is that Foster's article focuses on the participant's experience of taking collective action on SM forums, and this present study does not.

6.3 Discussion of methodology

One of the advantages, of the method used in this study, is that the qualitative approach enhances the experiences of the participants (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005) and this was the aim of the research. Recording the interviews with two devices was positive, because when transcribing, if something was not clear when listening to one of the devices, the other one was used. Giving the participants the opportunity to choose in which language they wanted to be interviewed was also positive, because in this way they felt comfortable when answering the questions. When writing the results part, there was no issue when using quotes from the participants that had their interviews on Swedish. On the other hand, the participants had the chance to email the author if their quotes were not in accordance with their views, this to increase the credibility of the study (D'Cruz and Jones, 2014). The sample selection was positive and helped the author find the participants in a smooth way. Limitations of the sample are discussed in the next section, 6.4.

It is important to acknowledge that there are disadvantages in the methodology of this study. Being only one author makes the confirmability of the research lower. This because, when being several authors the possibility of rechecking the data and the transcriptions is higher. Further, being several authors helps having different perspectives and views on the data. Because of the shortage of time, when being one author, the researcher may miss out on important information. If the study had several authors, other themes may have emerged. Further, having incentives, such as *fika* and a cinema ticket, may seem as a disadvantage when selecting the sample. The participants though, did not express that they were interested in the incentives when taking part of the study. It is then concluded, that they were interested in the topic and that is why they participated.

6.4 Limitations

The aim of this study was to research the influences SM has on women between the ages of 18 - 25. Since the study is at a level of a Bachelor's Degree, there was a shortage of time when researching. Because of this, the sample cannot be seen as representative for young women. Using the thematic analysis with the help of the theoretical framework is also seen as a limitation. If the analysis would have been carried out differently, then other results may have emerged. Further, the research is conducted in a Swedish context in a small city. If conducting the study in other contexts, the results may be different depending on the size of the city or the culture of the place. Different places may have other views and perceptions of SM than in the one of the study. Another limitation is that all participants were students. Being a homogeneous group could make the results more similar than they otherwise would have been.

6.5 Future research

SM use is growing and used mostly among young adults (Allen et.al, 2014) (Best et.al, 2014). When the author searched for previous research about the topic, not many studies were related to the exact same topic. Seeing a gap in the literature, the author felt that more research on this topic should be made. The reason for this is that since SM is

growing and becoming a wider part of people's lives, it is important to research if it influences people and how. When researching about it, people can be aware of its impact on them. Moreover, quantitative studies should be made on this topic to reach a wider group of people that are more representative for the population.

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8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Information text

Hi!

My name is Sofia and I am writing my thesis at the moment at the University of Gävle. I am looking for participants for my thesis and I am going to write about if social media influences young women. I am looking for women between the ages of 18-25 years old that use social media. Interviews will be held with each participant and take maximum one hour. Everything is strictly confidential and anonymous. The ones that choose to participate will get free "fika" from the University's Café Prego (something to eat+drink) and a free cinema ticket. Are you interested or know anyone who would, please contact me at vsn14sqa@student.hig.se. Thanks in advance!

8.2 Appendix 2: Letter of consent

Letter of enquiry to participate in a study conducted by University student of Gävle about social media's influence on the subjective well-being of women

The purpose of the study is to explore if the usage of social media influences young women. The study is being carried out through interviews and is aimed for women between 18 - 25 years old. The study is an undergraduate bachelor's thesis and part of the education International Social Work at Gävle University. The study will be conducted with interviews week 48. The interview will touch upon your experience of social media related to your well-being. The interview takes maximum 60 minutes and it is important that it is being held in an undisturbed environment, where student and participant agree on time and place. The interview will be recorded and written in text.

The information You provide will be taken care of in a safely way and kept locked so no unauthorized person will reach it. The presentation of the results will be made so no individual taking part of the study can be identified. The results will be presented in an oral presentation to other social work students and in written form as an undergraduate thesis. When the thesis is done and approved it will appear in a database by the University of Gävle. The recordings and the transcriptions of the interviews will be destroyed when the thesis is approved. You will have the possibility to have a copy of the thesis when it is ready. The thesis will be written in English, since the education is given in that language.

Your participation is voluntary and You can whenever interrupt your participation with no further reasons.

I ask hereby if You want to participate in the study.

Participants sign ---

Responsible for the study is the student Sofia Quiroga and supervisor Pinar Aslan. If you have any questions about the study, You are welcome to contact any of us.

Sofia Quiroga   Pinar Aslan
Student   Supervisor
vsn14sqa@student.hig.se   pinar.aslan@hig.se
0703 089 088   026 - 64 85 00

8.3 Appendix 3: Interview guide

Intro questions
- Which SM forums do you use?
- Which one do you use the most? How come?
- How much time would you say you spend on SM each day?
- What do you like the most with using SM?
- What do you dislike?

Feeling questions
- How do you feel physically when you have been using SM?
- How do you feel mentally when you have been using SM?
- How do you perceive that SM influences you? Positively? Negatively? Is it different depending on the SM forum?
- How do you perceive that your usage of SM affects your occupation/leisure/social relationships/family?

Interaction questions
- How do you feel when you receive a like on SM like Facebook/Instagram? How do you feel when you receive comments on something you have posted?
- How do you feel when x-nr of people want to reach/contact you through SM?
- Do you have SM free days? How come?
- How do you feel when a global news spreads through SM? How do you feel when a news that influences you indirectly/directly spreads through SM?
- Do you feel that you have the possibility to influence on SM? How?
- Do you feel that the world in SM is a constructed one? In which way?
- Would you like to add anything on how SM influences your life?

End question
- Would you like to add anything on how SM influences your life?