

NAVIGATING THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES OF SOCIAL MEDIA  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

by

John Ryan Dunne

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the navigation of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience for post-secondary education instructors in higher education. Correspondent inference theory was used to understand how observers assess behaviors that correspond with their own actions. The central research question focused on the lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors who utilized social media personally and professionally. Three research subquestions were more intensely focused on gaining a deeper understanding of (a) how post-secondary education instructors experience and comprehend the partition that separates personal and professional social media use, (b) how post-secondary education instructors experience and understand the institutional expectations of personal and professional social media practices, and (c) how post-secondary education instructors share information through their social media accounts. Within the research, I examined how instructors coped with the challenge of developing ethical boundaries between their personal and professional social media use. Participants included post-secondary education instructors in the Midwest region of the United States. Data were collected through individual interviews, a single focus group, and a review of pertinent documents. Data analysis revealed the essence of how participants navigated personal and professional social media practices. Findings from the present study included the reliance on post-secondary education instructors to ensure ethical social media practices. Additionally, the findings revealed institutional policies and guidance pertaining to instructors' social media use.

*Keywords:* institutions, instructors, personal, professional, social media

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### **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, without whom none of this would be possible. I owe a special debt of gratitude and appreciation to my wife for supporting me through the many challenges and sacrifices; without her this would not have been possible. I promise to make her unforgotten investment into me worth something and will attempt to pay back all she has given up and more. I love you more than you will ever know. I also extend my gratefulness to my parents and brothers for their encouragement throughout this research and planning.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT)

Faculty of Education (FoE)

Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

Health Insurance Portability, Accountability Act (HIPAA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Pedagogical Formation (PFE)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Post-secondary education instructors guide an estimated 12 million full-time learners each year (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Questions exist as to how they navigate the intersection of personal and professional social media use (Orr et al., 2015). Many of the approximately 1.5 million U.S. college faculty members rely on institutional policies and personal morals to navigate the line between personal and professional social media use (Fuentelsaz, Maícas, & Polo, 2008). Research on personal and professional social media use among post-secondary education instructors has yielded no definitive findings, especially with respect to the progressive nature of social media (Hatlevik & Christophersen, 2013). A better understanding of how these individuals navigate personal and professional social media use is essential to the field of higher education because of the evolving nature of technology (Khokhar, Gulab, & Javaid, 2017).

Chapter One presents a framework for the current qualitative research. This chapter also includes an explanation of the significance of the current research and presents the research questions used to explore the phenomenon under investigation. The background of this research is discussed within the framework of recent literature on social media use in the field of higher education. I discuss how this topic relates to my personal background and why it is of personal interest. The significance of this study is explained. Key terms are conceptually defined and the chapter concludes with a comprehensive summary.

## **Background**

With the turn of the millennium, institutions of higher education face the challenge of policing the evolving nature of employees' social media (Vie, 2017). As the structure of higher education continually evolves, administrators must stay abreast of trends in the field (Walster, 2017). Post-secondary education instructors are part of this evolution and their superiors are tasked with monitoring instructors' performance (Walster, 2017). While institutional leaders expect the evolution of foundational principles, these fluctuations create moral concerns that cause distortions and highlight a new progressive norm (Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018).

Institutional administrators determine how instructors use technology and social media inside and outside of the classroom (Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018). Policing social media use within the institutional community is not the main challenge for leaders, nor is the question of whether such platforms should exist in classrooms. However, the boundary between technology and social media use becomes an ethical challenge when instructors must determine where the line exists regarding social norms and employer expectations (Jacquemin, Smelser, & Bernot, 2014). The landscape becomes even murkier when the navigation between personal and professional social media use and ethical boundaries are determined via user assessment (Walster, 2017). Questions also emerge regarding the role of institutional social media policies in instructors' decisions related to social media use (Jacquemin et al., 2014).

## **Historical Context**

During the 21st century, the expansion of communication methods created opportunities for instructors and learners to easily connect around the world (Fox & Bird, 2017). With the progression of communication networks, apprehensions have grown regarding the navigation

and governing of internet communications are navigated (Fox & Bird, 2017). Since the dawn of social media during the early 2000s, social networking applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have complicated codes of professional and academic conduct (Hodgin & Kahne, 2018). Factors that were once barriers to technological communications, such as internet access and location, no longer exist (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017). The introduction of the smartphone and tablet amplified access to social media and stimulated use across demographics (Fox & Bird, 2017).

As social media use has increased, so too have initiatives to quantify its use among various groups (Hodgin & Kahne, 2018). According to findings from a 2018 Pew Research study, approximately 75% of adults reported using at least one social networking site on a consistent basis; this represents a 40% increase in adult internet use since 2008 (Hodgin & Kahne, 2018). Regarding specific social media platforms (e.g., Facebook or Instagram), 68% of Facebook users and 73% of YouTube users visited the platform at least once daily (Hodgin & Kahne, 2018). Alongside the proliferation of social media is increasing debate concerning how ethical social media behaviors are defined, especially in terms of personal and professional use (Auer, 2011).

### **Social Context**

The increase in personal and professional social media use and the lack of clarity regarding ethical lines has placed many prominent educational leaders under public scrutiny (Auer, 2011). Such scrutiny occurred in 2017, when a dean at an Ivy League school was placed on leave for writing racially-charged Yelp reviews (Hauser, 2017). The dean, June Y. Chu, was removed from her position when she referred to customers of a New York City restaurant as



“white trash” and described movie theater workers as “barely educated morons” (Hauser, 2017, p. 2). Her words proved controversial and the racist context of the reviews raised concerns. Chu voluntarily left her position, preventing the need for disciplinary action (Hauser, 2017).

In another example, Randa Jarrar, a professor at Fresno State University, received backlash for her expressed opinions on Twitter towards Barbara Bush (Farnsworth, 2018). Jarrar referred to Bush as an “amazing racist” (Farnsworth, 2018, p. 1) and criticized the former First Lady in a series of Twitter posts. In response, the university stated it could not control the opinions of its employees (Farnsworth, 2018).

Just as the household telephone provided flexible communication to users during the 20th century, social media has provoked changes to the scope and reach of new social networks (Hickerson & Kothari, 2017). Such changes in social media practice were catalyzed by the shift from Web 1.0, or static data being transported to a user in the form of text or images, to Web 2.0, which encourages users to interact and generate content (Kul & Birisci, 2019). Social media created nearly limitless communication possibilities entrenched in daily life (Aijan & Hartshorne, 2008). Consequently, leaders are increasingly interested in filtering the benefits of social media and understanding the consequences of its use (Aleksandrova & Parusheva, 2019). The more pressing issue of social media use involves handling negative occurrences (Aleksandrova & Parusheva, 2019); these governance challenges indicate the need to establish a balance between guidance and governance.

### **Theoretical Context**

Edward E. Jones and Keith E. Davis (1965) developed correspondent inference theory to understand how observers assess behaviors that correspond with their own actions (Gibbins &

Walker, 1996). Correspondent inference theory provided a baseline for the current research as it corresponds to how individuals experience their own actions (Gibbins & Walker, 1996). The observer cultivates their experiences relating to the observed behavior to develop conclusions concerning the observed (Gibbins & Walker, 1996). The five factors developed by Jones and Davis include (a) whether considered behavior is voluntary, (b) what is unexpected from the behavior, (c) whether the behavior is socially desirable, (d) whether the behavior influences the observer, and (e) whether the behavior is of personal interest to the observer (Gibbins & Walker, 1996).

Social identity theory is a corresponding theory developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979). Social identity theory is based on three components, including categorization, social identification, and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The theory abridges perceived experiences (the essence of self) with the experiences of surrounding individuals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The third component of the theory aligned with the present study, which states when individuals designate themselves as part of a group through their previous experiences, they often compare their group with the experiences of other groups (McLeod, 2008).

### **Situation to Self**

For this qualitative study, I investigated the literature pertaining to personal and professional social media use among post-secondary education instructors. Within my role as a higher education leader, I pay close attention to news stories that focus on instructors' use of social media and their navigation of personal and professional boundaries. My thoughts gravitate toward how instructors' social media use affects institutions and stakeholders. With increased

media coverage of unprofessional behaviors in higher education, I became interested in the actions taken by institutional leaders to guide instructors' social media practices. I also developed a curiosity about how instructors utilize their experiences to make decisions concerning personal and professional social media use. Furthermore, I question the impact of social media policies on instructors' decisions regarding social media use (Bassell, 2010). I enjoy utilizing social media to maintain contact with friends and colleagues, and to stay abreast of current events. Although I use social media, I limit what I share and have distinguished between my personal and professional use. I fear my expressed opinions or thoughts on social media could be misconstrued and negatively affect my career.

The philosophical assumptions of the present study were ontological, epistemological, and axiological. The ontological assumption of this research highlighted how reality and experiences are defined and viewed from one's own perspective (Creswell, 2013). To limit researcher bias, I appraised transcriptions of participant interviews numerous times to comprehend their experiences with social media use in higher education (Creswell, 2013). The epistemological assumption of the present study was the rapport between participants and myself (Creswell, 2013). I developed a fluent understanding of social media practices from my research; I endeavored to understand participants' experiences rather than simply transcribe them into the literature of the study.

Axiological assumptions are used to develop and emphasize a study's values (Creswell, 2013). According to Arthur Holmes, if the observed secular distinction fades and all truth is granted as God's truth, then intellectual work can be God's work as much as feeding the hungry or healing the sick. (Probe for Answers, 1994). I relate to this statement as a Christian, and

incorporated my views into the present research. Because of the concept of assumptions, I appreciate that the researcher can articulate personal values into their research (Creswell, 2013).

Creswell (2013) asserted that the positivist paradigm entails operating in a way that is distant, independent from the study, and objective. Although I have my own morals and ethical opinions, I remained fully transparent regarding my interactions with study data. The goal of the current study was to contribute to the literature in a way that may guide the development of policies to govern instructors' social media use. It was imperative to bracket my personal thoughts and feelings throughout data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013). During the individual interviews and focus group, I asked semistructured, open-ended questions. I documented participants' expressed experiences about social media use and its place in higher education (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Paradigms drove the development of this research as I searched for the best ways to provide content-rich information (Creswell, 2013). Paradigms are essentially "models or frameworks that are derived from a worldview or belief system about the nature of knowledge and existence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Paradigms are shared by scientific communities and guide how researchers act with regard to inquiry (Shek & Wu, 2018). The present research related most to the model of positivism. I employed deductive reasoning to draw major conclusions regarding the essence of the study (Shek & Wu, 2018). Participants' experiences were essential to my interpretive conclusions and a positivist paradigm allowed me to examine the essence of participants' experiences (Shek & Wu, 2018).

## **Problem Statement**

Post-secondary education instructors must ethically navigate the line between personal and professional social media use (Forbes, 2017). With an instructor standard devoted to technology incorporation, as well as the use of technology by learners, the topic of how to properly utilize technology emerges (Cuseo, 2018). Little research exists on the lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors and their navigation of social media use in and out of the classroom, especially in relation to institutional social media policies (Dorfield, 2018). A pedagogical focus has taken precedence over potential behavioral questions that may exist regarding social media use (Kolowich, 2013). As social media evolves, professional, social, and ethical issues become more prevalent (Kolowich, 2013). Walster's (2017) study on social media policy revealed that 88% of professors participated in some form of social media for personal or professional use. In addition, Walster found that 55% of professors were unaware of social media policies at their institutions.

Although research exists on social media practices, there is a dearth of studies on how instructors navigate the line between personal and professional social media use (Blankenship, 2011). In addition, research is lacking on the role of social media policies in instructors' decisions regarding personal and professional social media practices (Blankenship, 2011). Instructors who are expected to abide by institutional governance should rely on social media policies to inform their technological practices (Blankenship, 2011). Findings from the present study may help reshape existing and potential principles, and emphasize social media policies across all levels of the policy-making (O'Toole, 2000).

Establishing frameworks to properly summarize and define personal and professional social media use, recognizing key contemporary guidelines and the concerns associated with them, and understanding the best practices for oversight may contribute to solutions to overcome issues associated with social media use (Cuseo, 2018). Findings from the present research may help leaders provide oversight on social media use, potentially improving reputations of higher education institutions (Fox & Bird, 2017). As the availability and popularity of social media networks grow, guidance and regulation of its use is needed in professional settings (Cuseo, 2018). Teixeira and Hash (2017) stated that adults progressively look to social media for professional, academic, and personal use. While only 7% of American adults used some form of social media in 2005, that number increased to nearly 65% in 2017 (Teixeira & Hash, 2017). The goal of social media applications in education is to enhance learning, but there is a need to understand the lived experiences of instructors who traverse personal and professional social media use. Therefore, the problem addressed in this transcendental phenomenological study was the navigation of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience for post-secondary education instructors in higher education.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the navigation of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience for post-secondary education instructors in higher education. Personal and professional social media use was defined as the use of Internet-based platforms that enable users to create and share content or participate in professional or personal social networking (Walster, 2017). The main theory guiding this study was Jones and Davis' (1965) correspondent inference theory, which is useful

for exploring how observers assess behaviors that correspond with their own actions. An additional theory used was Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory, which explains how personal awareness affects individuals' perceptions of other individuals. I collected data via semistructured interviews, a focus group interview, and a review of document and artifacts. Findings from this study may provide leaders of postsecondary institutions with a basis for governing educators' social media use.

### **Significance of the Study**

The evolving relationship between social media and academic learning has ignited a transformation between instructors and their teaching practices, thus generating a revolution in higher education (Klašnja-milićević & Ivanović, 2018). According to the United States Department of Education, 69.2% of students enrolled in college immediately after high school graduation in 2015 (Teixiera & Hash, 2017). The number of students pursuing post-secondary education has increased significantly in recent decades (The Economics Daily, 2017). Alongside this growth in enrollment has been an increase in the use of social media by post-secondary instructors, which can have considerable impact on instructors and students (Teixiera & Hash, 2017). Farnsworth (2018) stated that professors at higher education institutions should be aware that free speech in academia is a right that must be used responsibly. Professors may choose how they utilize personal and professional social media accounts, but that freedom should be accompanied with thought and consideration (Teixiera & Hash, 2017).

Through teaching and professional experiences, instructors have the ability to shape and influence those around them on multiple levels (Walster, 2017). Emphasis is placed on instructors and in many cases, instructors lead the charge for pivotal academic initiatives in the

United States (Hickerson & Kothary, 2017). Numerous officials at the postsecondary institutional level report their use of social media is significant (Walster, 2017). Recent research has centered on the personal and professional use of social media in higher education; however, the focus of technological practices tends to emphasize pedagogical challenges (Teixiera & Hash, 2017). Conversely, little research exists on the behavioral challenges associated with the navigation between personal and professional social media use (Teixiera & Hash, 2017). The present study aimed to explore the social media practices of educators and how their experiences shape their viewpoints of personal and professional social media use. For academic instructors responsible for safe and constructive education, incorporating social media into coursework can create a number of problems (Hickerson & Kothari, 2017). Hickerson and Kothari (2017) appraised the plethora of problems emerging from the use of social media inside and outside of the classroom but did not address the navigation of personal and professional social media practices. Hickerson and Kothari urged institutions to address social media practices in employee agreements.

A survey of over 8,000 faculty members revealed that 41% of college professors use social media as a teaching tool; this figure increased by approximately 34% in 2012 (Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013). While this increase indicates instructors are comfortable with personal social media use, gray areas exist regarding their personal and professional social media practices (Greysen, Kind, & Chretien, 2010). Such gray areas emphasize the need for additional research (Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013).

In the present study, I sought to add to the current body of literature concerning how post-secondary education instructors define and experience personal and professional social



media practices. Despite problematic social media use among faculty members, this issue is rarely addressed in the literature (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017). Amid increases in poor decisions regarding social media use, institutions must provide employees with social media use policies (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). In light of recent controversies surrounding social media use, findings from the current study may provide greater understandings of how instructors navigate personal and professional social media practices. As Malesky and Peters (2012) stated, “Ethical codes are not designed to provide concrete answers to all questions; however, they can provide guidance in determining a proper course of action” (p. 136). Research is needed to answer questions about personal and professional social media use (Browning & Sanderson, 2012).

### **Research Questions**

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the navigation of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience for post-secondary education instructors. One central research question and three subquestions guided this investigation.

#### **Central Question**

What are the lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors who navigate between the personal and professional use of social media in higher education?

Lederman’s (2015) informed the central research question on instructors’ social media practices at post-secondary institutions. Lederman found that only 11% of higher education institutions had policies regarding acceptable social media use. I designed the central research question to explore how post-secondary instructors navigated the line between personal and professional social media use.

The increased use of social media in classrooms creates questions regarding appropriate use (Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018). Increasingly, institutional leaders find technological oversight is necessary to protect community members (Walster, 2017). It is useful to understand how social media are used in professional and personal capacities. Questions exist regarding whether instructors understand ethical use social media and whether increased social media policy would improve ethical use of social media. (Walster, 2017).

### **Research Subquestions**

**SQ1:** What are post-secondary education instructors' perceptions of how the boundary between personal and professional social media use impacts decision-making as a lived experience?

I based the first research sub-question on Walster's (2016) exploration of social media's impact on instructional decision-making, which highlights the need to understand boundaries between personal and professional use. Walster argued that educators are responsible for demonstrating a high level of professionalism and ethical thinking. Subquestion 1 highlighted the need to understand more about ethical decision-making among post-secondary instructors.

**SQ2:** What are post-secondary education instructors' perceptions of the institutional expectations of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience?

I developed the second sub-question to explore the experiences of instructors regarding social media use. According to Forbes (2017), confidentiality and the professional expectations of educators are ethical philosophies to consider with social media use. Understanding instructors' experiences can guide the development and implementation of policies regarding appropriate social media behavior (Forbes, 2017).

**SQ3:** What are post-secondary education instructors' perceptions of the information they share while using their social media accounts as a lived experience?

I based the third research sub-question on Kolowich's (2013) findings, which revealed 81% of professors used social media in general, and 29% used social media to communicate with students. According to Kolowich, the actions and expressed feelings of educators through social media, and the nature of information shared, can be professionally detrimental. Subquestion three sought to understand how social media were perceived by instructors, in terms of information shared through the platforms.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions clarify the meaning of relevant terms used throughout this research.

1. *Facebook* – Facebook is a web-based platform where users create profiles that allow them to message other users, acquire *friends*, and customize their profiles to disseminate information to those with shared interests, occupations, trends, or locations (Moore, 2011).
2. *Friends* – In the context of Facebook, *friends* are connections made and people followed. Friends are able to see and engage with one another's Facebook pages (Forbes, 2017).
3. *Instagram* – Instagram is a web-based platform where users create profiles, with images serving as the focus of user posts (Byrd, 2010).
4. *Instructors* – Instructors are individuals who operate in post-secondary educational settings. Instructors educate learners and develop curriculum (Forbes, 2017).

5. *LinkedIn* - LinkedIn is a business-oriented social networking site with over 380 million members located in over 200 countries and territories. LinkedIn was founded in December 2002 and is mainly used for professional networking (Cuseo, 2018).
6. *Live streaming* - Live streaming is the act of delivering content over the internet in real time. The term *live streaming* was popularized in by social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018).
7. *Newsfeed* - A newsfeed is a feed consisting of news. On Facebook, the newsfeed is the homepage of users' accounts where they can see updates from friends. The newsfeed on Twitter is called Timeline (Forbes, 2017).
8. *Reply* - A reply is a Twitter action that allows a user to respond to a tweet through a separate tweet that begins with the other user's username (Fox & Bird, 2017).
9. *Retweet* - A retweet occurs when someone on Twitter sees a message and decides to share it with their followers. The retweet button allows users to quickly resend messages with attribution to original sharers' names (Walster, 2017).
10. *Tagging* - Tagging is a social media function of Facebook and Instagram that allows users to create a link back to the profile of the person shown in a picture or targeted in an update (Forbes, 2017).
11. *Twitter* – Twitter is a platform where communication is delivered in short, 140-character chunks, which may be accompanied by links or images (Byrd, 2010).
12. *Viral* - Viral is a term used to describe a situation in which a piece of content achieves noteworthy awareness. Viral distribution relies heavily on word of mouth and the frequent sharing of particular content all over the internet (Walster, 2017).

## Summary

In Chapter One, I provided a background of the problem of instructors' personal and professional social media use in higher education. Despite existing literature highlighting the pedagogical challenges associated with the incorporation of social media into classrooms, little research exists on the behavioral issues surrounding social media use among post-secondary education instructors (Walster, 2017). An examination of recent literature indicated scant research on educators' navigation of personal and professional social media use. To understand the phenomenon of personal and professional social media use, it was important to explore the experiences of post-secondary education instructors who utilized social media on personal and professional levels. The theoretical framework guiding this investigation consisted of Jones and Davis' (1965) correspondent inference theory, and Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory. Chapter One also included a description of the study scope and my role as the researcher.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

Chapter Two contains a review and synthesis of existing research necessary to contextualize the current investigation on the lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors regarding personal and professional social media use. I examined the essence of the literature to understand the experiences of instructors and the implications of social media policies. The question surrounding instructors' social media use relates to lived experiences that explain personal and professional social media use and related policies.

This literature review offers a summary and synthesis of the current, related research. Chapter Two begins with an elaboration of the theoretical framework and its correlation to the lived experiences of social media use and navigation. The second section provides a synopsis of recent literature focused on social media, ethics, and professionalism. The synopsis explores the literature with respect to cultural expansion, ethics, and moral implications. Gaps in knowledge and practice are exposed to help rationalize the current study and its unique contribution to the existing body of research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of a qualitative study has a significant influence on the research process (Creswell, 2018). A theoretical framework is comprised of scholarly concepts and definitions (Creswell, 2013). Jones and Davis' (1965) developed correspondent inference theory to understand how observers assess behaviors that correspond with their own actions. (Gibbins & Walker, 1996). Correspondent inference theory also provided a basis for the present study, as it directly relates to how individuals' foundational principles are interpreted through

their lived experiences (Jones & Davis, 1965). The observer develops an ethical foundation and cultivates an opinion towards a behavior through his or her lived experiences (Jones & Davis, 1965). Jones and Davis (1965) describe the theory as follows:

Whether the behavior being considered is voluntary and freely chosen, what is unexpected about the behavior, whether the behavior is socially desirable, whether the behavior influences the person doing the inferring, and whether the behavior is of personal interest to the person doing the inferring based on their previous experiences. (p. 221)

When individuals construct opinions through their lived experiences, they compare social norms with alternative actions, which provides a means for evaluating their choices (Jones & Davis, 1965). When external behaviors do not align with individuals' ethical beliefs, they often assume misalignment is due to ethical partialities or character flaws (Jones & Davis, 1965). Jones and Davis' (1965) theory relates to social media use in that individuals tend to draw assumptions based on their lived experiences. An example may be a post-secondary education instructor who utilizes a public Twitter profile (accessible to the instructor's students) to express a political opinion. From the instructor's lived experiences, ethical assumptions were drawn based on social beliefs that ultimately influenced decisions regarding social media use.

An additional theory used in the current study's framework was Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory. This theory is comprised of three components: (a) categorization, (b) social identification, and (c) social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity helps explain how personal awareness affects one's perceptions toward others (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In alignment with the present study is the third component of this theory, which states: "once we

have categorized ourselves as part of a group and have identified with that group we then tend to compare that group with other groups” (McLeod, 2008, para. 2). When individuals develop strong self-perception and understandings of their experiences, they also create a basis for decision-making (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). An example, in context of the present study, may be an instructor who has developed a foundation of ethics that influences the way he or she electronically shares personal beliefs. The instructor develops an ethical foundation through principles based on previous experiences.

Jones and Davis’ (1965) correspondent inference theory and Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) social identity theory are useful for examining lived experiences based on individuals’ behaviors and reactions. Understanding how instructors’ experiences relate to social media practices was essential to gaining a better understanding of how social media use decisions are affected. Yang, Holden, and Carter (2018) elaborated on social identity theory by explaining that when individuals observe roadblocks in the decision-making process, they take social approaches, such as discussion and persuasion, which relate to previous experiences and reduce opinion gaps. Examining how decision-making relates to social media policy was a major focus of the present study.

### **Related Literature**

Instructor presence in higher education has become increasingly pivotal in recent years (Record, 2015). Instructors are integral to developing the field of higher education, setting good examples, and recognizing the implications of their interpretations of ethical norms (Walster, 2017). Stakeholder groups agree on several key elements that should be included in new faculty roles, such as restoring professionalism or differentiating roles based on teaching or research



(Holcombe & Kezar, 2018). Educators are expected to display high levels of professionalism and understand the implications of their decisions; this ultimately affects how their performance is viewed. Learners perceive educators as role models and they emulate decisions made by instructors in their own endeavors (Aykaç, 2016).

Aykaç's (2016) study of educational leadership illustrated the importance of being an effective role model. The researcher distributed a 36-item questionnaire to 100 pre-service teachers to understand their role in the classroom. Findings revealed educators served as role models to students and administrators alike, in addition to the importance of their overall performance (Aykaç, 2016). Understanding the current climate of ethical norms is important to education, as is displaying high levels of professionalism during interactions (Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011). Assessing an instructor's reputation involves taking into account his or her actions and decisions (Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011), such as the navigation of personal and professional social media practices.

Instructors often attempt to enhance their reputations via social media, which is based on the fundamental principle of creating a personal or professional electronic profile that represents an individual or a group within a broader network of individuals or groups (Ellison, 2007). As Record (2015) explained, the concept of social media is almost analytical in that it proposes a shared intellectual language based on perceptions of all societal members affected by print media and other known symbology. Modern social media websites evolved from a simple campus resource to a more intuitive platform that allows users to share photos, music, video, and locations (Asunda, 2010). According Barnes and Lescault (2011), Facebook is the most popular social media platform, utilized by 98% of postsecondary faculty and students. An increasing

number of postsecondary institutions have also adopted Twitter, with an 87% participation rate in 2010 (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). Referencing broad research provides additional basis from which supplementary research on social media in higher education may develop. However, studies that emphasize a highly specific population is not as valuable in a broader context and may stall the overall progress of research in this field (Vie, 2017).

### **Educators and Ethical Determinations**

Instructors are pivotal to higher education (Unlu, 2018), serving as guides to students and preparing them for life. According to Evans (2015), instructors are tasked with raising competent individuals and facilitating their personal growth. Bezen, Aykutlu, Secken, and Bayrak (2017) collected data from 40 pedagogical formation and 40 faculty of education to examine how instructors' experiences influenced their abilities to make decisions. Data indicated that ethical decision-making was a topic that should be explored further, and instructors should consider how they are evaluated (Bezen et al., 2017). Instructors are responsible for structuring the ethical lines that exist within education (Evans, 2015) and cognizance is imperative during this process of self-assessment.

Instructors must understand their influence in higher education and recognize that ethical principles play a major role in how their reputations evolve (Koc, 2018). "Teachers are the most important role models that the field has in shaping behaviors in all environments" (Unlu, 2018, p. 165). Researchers have examined the needs of learners, administrators, and key stakeholders to test educators' roles and how their performance is shaped by their actions (Hodgin & Kahne, 2018). Instructors' actions reveal institutions are integral to the development of students' critical thinking skills (Unlu, 2018). Educators' role and ethical principles influence the field of higher

education (Unlu, 2018). Any action or behavior deemed unprofessional may endanger an educator's reputation (Evans, 2015). Instructors' perceptions influence their decision-making skills and ethical principles (Evans, 2015).

Academic leaders examine educators' decision-making abilities according to progressive professional expectations. Goldstein (2011) asserted the importance of exploring the theoretical interpretations of professionalism in education by applying theories to understand how professors' experiences correlated with their performance. Evans (2015) explored the role of the educator in the development of ethical principles by gathering data on professors' leadership beliefs. Evans applied a two-phase data collection process that resulted in 1,223 responses to a questionnaire on educators' roles and how personal experiences shaped their ethical principles. Results revealed a lack of clarity in the otherwise defined professorial role (Evans, 2015). Questions emerged from Evans' study regarding how the educator's role is defined. Researchers have argued that ethical principles directly correlate with instructors' actions (Fox & Bird, 2017)

Regarding the ethical nature of the educator, Evans (2015) asserted that professors should be all things to all people. Within the professorial practice, professors are defined by "distinction, knowledge, and relationality" (Evans, 2015, p. 668). Professionalism evolves with time and previous experiences inform one's ethical principles (Dorfield, 2018). Through the implementation of learning aids such as social media, educators can adapt to the progressive landscape of higher education (Bruns & Liang, 2012). Educators must ensure they meet the evolving expectations of their employers and students while considering the ethics of their social media practices.

Although institutional expectations for instructors may seem direct, online environments complicate and obscure issues of self-expression, especially within higher education (Blackmon, 2015). Faculty members often possess the ability to virtually share and convey information. Such information is shared with members of the academic community, blurring the line between personal and professional practice (Camus, Hurt, Larson, & Prevost, 2016). The decision to share personal information may depend on a number of factors, including departmental guidelines, ideas of professionalism, privacy concerns, or the need to distinguish between one's personal and professional lives (Blackmon, 2015). The introduction of new resources such as social media can complicate professional expectations (Savin-Baden, 2010). Savin-Baden (2010) argued that present-day instructors and students vary in age, tend to be employed while teaching and studying, teach and learn on the move, and possess diverse educational principles. The progressive landscape within the evolving field of higher education emphasizes the need for clarity regarding the role of professional social media practices (Forbes, 2017).

The concept of professionalism has evolved. According to Blackmon (2015), the majority of educators value professionalism, although their concepts of professionalism in virtual settings may differ. Chugh and Ruhi (2018) discovered connections between proficiency and professionalism in the virtual world, but consensus was lacking on the meaning of professionalism. Forbes (2017) emphasized the future of teacher education and implications for educator development, professional expectations, policy, research, and practice. Social media's presence in current learning settings will continue to expand; developing expectations for personal and professional social media practices is essential to avoiding ethical issues in higher education (Forbes, 2017).

The professional and technological expectations for professors include understanding and learning how to manage social media processes. Future learners will need to participate in these learning networks to grow in their respective fields (Forbes, 2017). Professors are expected to lead this trend by exhibiting clarity, technological literacy, involvement, and contribution, reinforced by social responsibility to the field of education (Gibbins & Walker, 1996). Gradually, these functions and outlooks have become a professional expectation in higher education, and personal social media practices mix with professional expectations (Weber, 2013). The introduction and analysis of educators' professionalism and technological incorporation can adversely affect one's ethical perceptions, which ultimately affect instructors' reputations (Forbes, 2017). The importance of professionalism in social media utilization necessitates an understanding of instructor experiences and how those experiences affect the ethical boundaries of personal and professional use.

### **Increased Social Media Presence in Higher Education**

Higher education instructors' use of social media has increased drastically during the past decade (Williams, Field, & James, 2011). According to Teixeira and Hash (2017), educators increasingly rely on social media in their classrooms, in addition to their personal use. Research conducted on social media use indicated that while only 7% of American adults used some form of social media in 2005, this number increased to nearly 65% in 2017 (Teixeira & Hash, 2017). Many academic leaders have never known life without the internet and prefer to communicate via technologies such as social media (Walster, 2017). Social media has increased instructors' opportunities to relate to their learners (Teixeira & Hash, 2017). However, initiatives behind

social media in education have introduced the challenge of defining the line between personal and professional use (Teixeira & Hash, 2017).

Social media is a mainstay in modern culture, including higher education (Al-Bahrani, Patel, & Sheridan, 2017). Researchers have explored how students perceive social media, and how instructors utilize the platforms in their courses (Foss & Olson, 2013); such research reveals the importance of introducing an ethical conversation concerning the gray areas between personal and professional social media use (Foulger, Ewbank, Kay, Popp, & Carter, 2009). Al-Bahrani et al. (2017) found that 20% of faculty participants reported utilizing social media for assignments, and an additional 14% used social media for projects. Researchers agree that social media has permeated the classroom and is commonly utilized by educators and learners (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011).

College instructors have explored the usefulness of social media platforms in classrooms by examining the problematic issues associated with online discussions (Camus et al., 2016). Keeping academics relevant to learners often requires the incorporation of social media tools (Wandel, 2008). Khokhar, Gulab, and Javaid (2017) examined differences in participation, learning, and performance when using Facebook instead of traditional online learning platforms for online class discussions. Findings revealed that Facebook could be a more effective teaching tool than traditional platforms, especially when facilitating certain types of student activity and engagement (Khokhar et al., 2017).

Online learning has become more prevalent and applications such as Facebook fill the need for increased engagement and participation. Hentges (2016) stated that social media provides opportunities for community-building in traditional, face-to-face classrooms as well as

online classrooms. As online learning increases in popularity, social media has emerged as a tool to keep learning fresh and alluring (McBride, 2012). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tumblr allow instructors to engage in these new realms, making learning more interactive and attractive (Oden, 2011). However, concerns have emerged regarding risks associated with social media use (Oden, 2011).

### **Risks of Educating through Social Media**

Educators often embrace social media as a way to relate to learners (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). As technological developments increase, instructors are expected to *catch up* with technology to appeal to social media users (Osman, Wardle, & Caesar, 2012). Dogan and Gulbahar (2018) introduced a set of principles that described the new roles of educators, which included building relevant connections through technology. Educators often seek to connect learning materials with real-world applications via social media (Gao, Barbier, & Goolsby, 2011). Dogan and Gulbahar (2018) solicited 26 pre-service teachers to complete a course that highlighted social media practices in an effort to understand the integration practices of social media. Findings revealed that Facebook groups had the potential to connect students with instructors (Dogan & Gulbahar, 2018). Barnes and Lescault (2011) also found that social media provided powerful and dynamic tools that were both accessible and affordable. Educators can also utilize social media to understand students' social problems, deepening the potential use of such platforms (Barnes & Lescault, 2011).

Ahern (2016) examined teachers' reservations of social media use in academics due to associated risks. The scholar argued that social media could be an appropriate tool when aligned with clear goals (Ahern, 2016). Chromey, Duchsherer, Pruett, and Vareberg (2016) referenced

Bloom's taxonomy to describe how social media evolved from simplistic to complex, in nature. The researchers suggested that social media was not originally designed as an instructional tool and its use in academics must be clearly outlined to prevent ethical dilemmas (Chromey et al., 2016). Although social media has gained popularity, it lacks a concrete presence in learning. Consequently, educators, administrators, and leaders must define proper classroom use of social media (Ahern, 2016).

### **21st Century Teaching**

Preparing educators for 21st century teaching skills includes understanding digital literacy, inventive thinking, effective communication, teamwork, and the ability to create high quality products (Walster, 2017). Educators should rethink *what* and *how* they teach today's students (Walster, 2017). A pedagogical shift is occurring within contemporary teaching practices (Fox & Bird, 2017). The educator is no longer simply the transmitter of knowledge, but a classroom facilitator engaged in authentic and situated problem-based activities (Lenartz, 2012). These facilitators advise students, create structures to support student activities, and monitor student progress (Lenartz, 2012).

Educational expenditures on technology integration were in excess of \$14 billion in 2015 (Piotrowski, 2016). This significant investment was prompted by the need for institutions to provide 21st century teaching skills. While now commonplace, it was only during this century that 99% of U.S. schools became connected to the internet, with more than 81% linked to social media (Piotrowski, 2016).

Today's educators carry personal tools and technologies that can be used for communication and teaching. Advances in technology catalyze the need for inquiry into learner



preferences, skills, and study behaviors (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2013). Technological advances are changing expectations of teachers and students (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2013). Educators may struggle with these technological changes, perpetuating a disconnect between educators, education, and students (Walster, 2017). Gerlich, Browning, and Westermann (2010) conducted a study utilizing the Social Media Affinity Scale and found that learners were so familiar with this social media that they become removed from this crucial connection in class. Undergraduate learners use social media for socializing as well as academic collaboration and multitasking (Grinter & Eldridge, 2003; Grinter & Palen, 2002).

Shek and Wu (2018) found 21st century skill development required educators to be active collaborators in the teaching and learning processes, and cocreators of knowledge in project- and inquiry-based learning. Some educators may be at a disadvantage as they recognize a shift from lecture-style instruction to participatory learning (Shek & Wu, 2018). As today's students are conditioned to learn through interactive resources such as social media, Henry and Webb (2014) asserted that effective teachers must tailor their instructional strategies to better assist learners. Part of the push for 21st century skills includes the need for today's learners to be able to compete professionally and academically on a global scale. It is therefore paramount that students learn relevant skills and utilize technological affordances in order to perform in a digital world.

### **Professional Development with Technology**

With the push for 21st century learning, professional development on the integration of technology has become paramount. However, the means by which educators effectively utilize technology is the focus of much professional development. It should be noted that regardless of

the availability of technological affordances, teacher quality is the factor that matters most for student learning (Vie, 2017). Along with resources, institutional and administrative support, and attitudinal factors, training and experience are noted barriers to technology integration (Fox & Bird, 2017). Obstacles to training and experience include insufficient professional development focused on technology integration (Garber et al., 2018). A lack of ongoing support following professional development efforts can magnify these barriers (Fox & Bird, 2017).

The lack of professional development on technological integration in academics has been an obstacle for many years (Hickerson & Kothari, 2017). Deficiencies in technological knowledge plague many educators. Regarding the emphasis of technology in education, a study conducted with 175 teachers revealed that teachers' perspectives of their vocation were transformed through their concept of the educator's role, as well as their worldview of education (Hentges, 2016). Technology shifts the teacher's role to that of a facilitator of knowledge rather than a disseminator of knowledge. The study revealed educators believe that technology expands the boundaries of the classroom (Hentges, 2016).

Hentges (2016) argued for the need for professional development that supports potentially transformative learning experiences through technology. Rather than simply focusing on technological skills, collaborative work groups and curriculum advancement may allow educators to test pedagogical strategies that integrate technology. Professional development may help educator reflect on their work in a global community and transform their perspectives of proper technology integration (Fox & Bird, 2017).

As social media is an emerging concept in technology, the study did not specifically address social media (Hentges, 2016). However, the conclusion of needed professional

development on technology can translate to the need for continued education on social media, its usage by educators, and its influence on the classroom environment. While social media was not created for educational purposes, its usage can potentially be leveraged for education much like previous technologies (Greysen et al., 2010).

As educator apprehension is a noted barrier to technology integration (Chretien, Greysen, Chretien, & Kind, 2009), professional development on technology integration and initiatives can improve the self-efficacy of educators as they adapt to new technological literacies (Foss & Olsen, 2013). Moreover, transformational practice concerning educational innovations such as technology and social media usage occurs more effectively when supported and directed by institutional leaders (Foss & Olsen, 2013). According to Walster (2017), social media must be examined in the context of education. However, institutional leaders must direct and support this examination if social media is to be effectively addressed and incorporated.

### **Ethical Considerations of Educator Personal and Professional Social Media Use**

Given the presence of social media for learning purposes, educators are increasingly comfortable sharing their information and accounts with learners (Cain, Scott, & Smith, 2010). Students can search for professors on social media platforms and view shared information if profile settings are public. The implications of profile accessibility provoke questions surrounding personal and professional use (Byrd, 2010). Among a sample of 1,920 faculty members from various institutional types, more than 75% had visited a social media site during the previous month for personal use, and 90% indicated they used social media for courses they taught or for career advancement (Moran et al., 2011). The presence of educators on social media persists and it is difficult to determine which shared information is accessible to learners

(Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2013). Given the considerations of personal and professional social media use, ethical boundaries vary based on users' beliefs. Because little research exists on publicly-shared information, a definitive understanding of the correlations between instructors' personal and professional social media use and practices is lacking (Moran et al., 2011).

To address knowledge gaps, researchers have attempted to understand more about how educators perceive the usefulness of social media in academia. Veletsianos and Kimmons (2013) conducted a qualitative case study in which three faculty members were interviewed to explore their perceptions of professional social media use. Findings revealed the need for additional considerations concerning personal and professional social media practices (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2013).

In a similar study, Savin-Baden (2010) found that establishing boundaries within professional social media practices was inevitable. The researcher reported no concrete determinations that highlighted the impact of educators' personal and professional social media use on the field of higher education (Savin-Baden, 2010). The lack of understanding regarding appropriate social media practices illustrates a growing need for additional research on the boundaries of social media (Record, 2015).

Other studies have revealed a dearth of data on social media use. For example, Lenartz (2012) reported a lack of understanding regarding social media practices in the current research. In a study among faculty employed at a single community college system in the Southwestern United States, Moore (2011) found a lack of certainty regarding social media practices due to accessibility constraints. Kolowich (2013) conducted research to learn more about social media behaviors and the ethical boundaries of technological applications. The researcher found a lack

of research regarding educators' experiences with personal and professional use (Kolowich, 2013).

Walster (2017) explored how social media affected instructional decision-making, highlighting the need to understand boundaries between personal and professional use. Jacquemin, Smelser, and Bernot (2014) examined varying scenarios of social media professionalism, further described by the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) Code of Professional Ethics. Jacquemin et al. concluded that educators were free to choose and use whichever social media platforms they wished outside of the classroom but must do so with respect for their professional obligations. Kul and Birisci (2019) asserted that the information educators share on social media is within their control. Educators may have biases, different understandings, and preconceptions concerning how and why social media platforms are used (Lannin & Scott, 2013). Personal decisions for social media use are often in the hands of the educator (Bristol, 2014). Researchers agree that personal and professional boundaries regarding social media use in higher education are unclear in policies governing such use (Bristol, 2014).

Supplementary literature supports the concept that boundaries between personal and professional social media use lacks much definition (Junco, 2011). Vie (2017) stated that social media use has grown drastically in the United States, with organizations and institutions increasingly integrating these tools into practice. Within professional communication, scholars have started paying attention to social media, analyzing its potential to create, sustain, and structure knowledge inside academia (Junco, 2011). However, simply including social media in practice, whether personal, corporate, or academic, is not without barriers (Butts, 2008).

Research indicates that although institutions acknowledge the need for an active social media presence, they rarely recognize how to successfully integrate the technologies (Osman et al., 2012). Institutional leaders also fail to recognize which behaviors they should assess and how to evaluate them (Osman et al., 2012).

### **Implications of Professionalism with Social Media Use**

Jain et al. (2014) conducted quantitative research to understand what medical students perceived as unprofessional for instructors, administrators, and students to post on Facebook. The study shed light on how perceptions of professionalism, ethics, and social media within higher education differed from person to person, revealing no true consensus in the findings (Jain et al., 2014). In a similar study, Shek and Wu (2018) emphasized the business-customer relationship and professional implications that existed within electronic exchanges. Most of the discourse on social media has centered on its benefits, such as facilitating online communities, professional communities, and informal interactions (Shek & Wu, 2018).

A survey of enrolled medical students, medical school faculty members, and non-doctor/non-student employees at the University of Michigan was conducted to understand social media in education (Jain et al, 2014). The authors noted that 1,546 individuals responded to the survey and findings suggested that medical students were more likely to post comments, images, and photographs that medical school faculty members and the public would consider inappropriate or unprofessional (Jain et al., 2014). The presence of social media in higher education poses risks in respect to content and professionalism, which must be explored and understood (Ellison, 2007). Risks stemming from social media use demonstrate the need for further assessment in the area of social media use and policy implementation (Ellison, 2007).

Chester, Kienhuis, Pisani, Shahwan-Akl, and White (2013) supported the trend of social media practice and the incorporation of ethical decision-making in a study on social media tendencies in higher education. The researchers found no consensus among undergraduate instructors regarding what constituted unprofessional behavior, nor was there clear information regarding employers' expectations of behaviors (Chester et al., 2013). The challenges concerning professionalism lie in the subjectivity of decisions and reliance on instructors to make decisions, rather than following established policies (Vie, 2017). Professionalism can be defined by how it is articulated (Vie, 2017); it is inherently difficult to define, objectively measure, or teach (Osman et al., 2012). Many leaders agree that maintaining a professional image is essential to earning the public's trust, although this has not been concretely established (Osman et al., 2012). Current and future generations will increasingly rely on social media during the learning process; thus, it is imperative to define and enforce the elements of professionalism through clear expectations (Howard, 2013).

### **Benefits of Precise Ethical Boundaries**

The privacy of information is never certain, given advancements in technology (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2013). Discretion concerning how data are produced, stored, and shared is fundamental to any information policy, but it is not an assurance of privacy (Savin-Baden, 2010). The reliability of information disseminated on social media platforms is also a procedural concern, especially when post-secondary instructors assume an active personal presence on social media (Walster, 2017). The concern for institutional intent of policies, how instructors interpret those meanings, and how those meanings interact with personal social media use represents a tangled and complex set of relationships, values, and beliefs (Walster, 2017).

Prominent academic leaders are troubled by issues surrounding online safety and security (Forbes, 2017). A multifaceted set of concerns revolve around integrity, in terms of offending particular groups, and academia is vulnerable when social media are used inappropriately (Forbes, 2017). Such uncertainties and concerns are amplified by the absence of clear policies around the use of social media in higher education (Fox & Bird, 2017). Consequently, instructors may hesitate to use social media in educational contexts and limit use to private functions (Fox & Bird, 2017) to prevent possible challenges to their reputations.

The inappropriate use of social media stems from ethical challenges associated with a lack of awareness (Record, 2015). Educators may not always use social media in ways that enhance learning and student experiences (Record, 2015). Thus, educators must develop an attentiveness for how to utilize social media in ethical and socially responsible ways (Record, 2015). Instructors must examine threats of negligent use and challenge outdated concepts to encompass emerging opportunities in light of potential threats (Chester et al., 2013). Without such mindfulness, risky, inappropriate, damaging, and even illegal episodes on social media have led to promotion of electronic professionalism (Chester et al., 2013). Although it is easy to outline professional practices, unclear perceptions of professional practices may be best understood through additional research (Chester et al., 2013).

The professional use of social media is emphasized through ethical practices and professional standards, even outside of professional contexts (Forbes, 2017). Because social media involves public expression, professional standards apply regardless of whether an educator is working at the time of posting (Forbes, 2017). Ethical principles regarding social media use include confidentiality and professional expectations of those who work with clients and owe



loyalty to institutions (Fox & Bird, 2017). A standard of ethical social media practice is the commitment to responsible mindfulness in which professionalism involves doing right by the field and minimizing risks (Vie, 2017). The prevention of negligent behaviors translates to fairness, integrity, and respect for human welfare. Breaches of ethical principles could be regarded as breaches of a professional's moral commitment to learners, society, and the profession (Forbes, 2017).

Ethically accountable social media use acknowledges that practices are likely to affect others through the social components of communications (Orr et al., 2015). To combat negligence, professionals are expected to apply sound judgment to all communications and social media practices (Blankenship, 2011). Although the path to ethically sound social media practices may appear seamless, challenges arise within the different facets of social media use (Blankenship, 2011). The lack of clarity is even more evident when considering personal and professional practices (Blankenship, 2011). Understanding the navigation of personal and professional social media practices requires a better understanding of instructors' experiences. Such understandings may provide opportunities to develop and refine policies on social media use (Piotrowski, 2016).

### **Instructor Experiences of Social Media in the Classroom**

Little is known about how instructors use social media inside and outside of the classroom (Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018). Hoffmann and Ramirez (2018) studied a sample of high school teachers to determine if they were more engaged in teaching when they communicated via social media. The findings revealed that 76% of the participants experienced more engaged learning environments when communication started over social media (Hoffmann

& Ramirez, 2018). Similarly, Osman et al. (2012) reported that 86% of surveyed instructors believed learners were more engaged when technology was used during assignments. Although these findings do not cover personal social media use, they do attest to the increased presence of social media in education (Osman et al., 2012).

Research indicates educators are comfortable utilizing technology for instruction (Hoffmann & Ramirez, 2018) and are abundantly connected to various social media sites, both locally and globally (Greysen et al., 2010). Many instructors leverage technology as an instructional tool (Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016). Additionally, instructors desire familiarity with social media practices and functions (Forbush & Foucault-Welles, 2016). The utilization of social media as an effective teaching tool requires embracing its benefits while also providing policies and procedures to reduce associated risks (Fox & Bird, 2017).

Chromey et al. (2016) found that instructors and students perceived social media use as a favorable enhancement of learning. Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, and Madden (2015) reported that 70% of Facebook users log in daily, while 45% log in more frequently, indicating the exponential permeation of social media practices. Blankenship (2011) affirmed that 30% of instructors used social media to communicate with students. Findings from these studies suggest that higher education instructors are increasingly comfortable with social media applications. Educators are beginning to integrate social media into their weekly instruction plans while simultaneously incorporating it into their personal lives (Blankenship, 2011). Based on the prominence of social media incorporation, instructors often welcome the presence of technology within their classrooms (Chromey et al., 2016). Given this trend, instructors should be proactive

in ensuring they are prepared to make ethical decisions when utilizing social media (Chromey et al., 2016).

Research shows that instructors view social media as a tool to enhance learning (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2013). Many educators believe social media has a place in the classroom (Chretien, Farnan, Greysen, & Kind, 2011). Chretien et al. (2011) assessed the use of social media among students and faculty to evaluate perceptions of social media in course content. The findings showed that educators were comfortable incorporating Twitter into an existing course, and its application appeared to be seamless for educators and learners, alike (Chretien et al., 2011). Jacquemin et al. (2014) completed a similar quantitative study and found the majority of educators viewed social media as more convenient than traditional university online components, such as Blackboard. Veletsianos and Kimmons (2013) suggested that the gap between personal use and the academic incorporation of social media revealed a need to test and understand these technologies before implementing them in classrooms.

Social media is a prominent modern communication tool that must be vetted for utility in classrooms (Jacquemin et al., 2014). Apprehensions stemming from classroom integration of social media suggest that educators must be cautious during implementation (Chester et al., 2013). Although caution exists with implementing social media in education, optimism is existent due to the possibilities (Chester et al., 2013).

### **Attention on Faculty Social Media Dynamic**

Research is lacking on post-secondary education instructors' social media practices, especially in terms of behavioral foundations (Castagnera & Lanza, 2010). The shift toward classroom incorporation of technological resources has prompted additional research in the field

of higher education (Castagnera & Lanza, 2010). Piotrowski (2016) utilized the ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis database to learn more about dissertations related to learning settings in higher education. The researcher concluded that only about 12% of dissertations on social media were focused on higher education settings (Piotrowski, 2016). The reviewed dissertations tended to focus on pedagogical issues and the types of social media utilized (Piotrowski, 2016). Amador (2013) conducted a qualitative study that involved interviewing six instructors to understand interactions that occurred through social media with other members in the academic community, as well as the nature of those exchanges. Findings revealed that social media communication could significantly impact academic environments (Amador & Mederer, 2013). Social media use in academia presents a challenge to educators, as any errors in communication could disrupt the wellbeing of the institutional community (Record, 2015).

In a survey conducted by Kolowich (2013), 81% of professors reported using social media. Of those, 62% had more than one account and 29% used one of those accounts to communicate with students (Kolowich, 2013). Additionally, 12% of the sample used those same social media networks as collaborative tools for course-related projects (Kolowich, 2013). These findings indicated that additional research is needed to understand personal and professional social media practices in higher education (Kolowich, 2013). Mullen, Griffith, Greene, and Lambie (2014) examined faculty-student social media relationships and the risks associated with communication via social media. Findings indicated that while some instructors communicated with learners through social media, little was known about the nature of those interactions (Mullen et al., 2014). Questions remain regarding how instructors determine appropriate social media practices, indicating a need for additional research (Byrd, 2010).

## **The Emergence of Social Media Policy**

Although social media policies do not exist at many institutions, some have integrated technological oversight. These institutions demonstrate that oversight can help protect institutional reputations and community perceptions. Leaders from the University of Georgia (UGA Social Media Guidelines, 2019), Loyola University Chicago (2019), and Princeton University (2011) employed social media policies that provided key community members with procedures for protecting the institutional reputation. Some of the chief concerns addressed by social media policy at the institutional level included maintaining compliance to copyright, Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Health Insurance Portability, Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations, as well as protecting university images and logos (Blackmon, 2015). Guidelines for protecting institutional reputations included etiquette for sharing information within the community and preventing the dissemination of inappropriate content (Loyola University Chicago, 2019). Leaders at Princeton University discussed the contrast of social media roles as related to the professional demonstration of social media practices through refined institutional policy. Administrators at Princeton University reported that increased policies helped prevent irresponsible social media practices.

Researchers have deliberated on the importance of institutions recognizing social media policy and its role in preventing inappropriate social media use, arguing that institutions should not only screen employees' personal accounts, but also introduce repercussions for careless practices (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). Safeguarding institutional images should drive social media policy (Vie, 2017). The University of Georgia (UGA Social Media Guidelines, 2019), Loyola University Chicago (2019), and Princeton University (2011) implemented policies identifying

educators as institutional representatives. Instructors are consistently held to a higher standard due to their public exposure and influence within the community (Loyola University Chicago, 2019; UGA Social Media Guidelines, 2019; Princeton, 2011). These institutions also prohibit sharing inappropriate pictures, videos, commentary, or displays of illegal activities on social media websites. Although some institutions are addressing these problems via policy, others have not, leaving them susceptible to risks associated with employees' negligent social media use (Barnes & Lescault, 2011).

In addition to the role of social media policy in the protection of the institutional image, some institutions are implementing policies to protect employees and learners (Walster, 2017). The University of Massachusetts–Boston (2010), the University of Kansas (Kansas Board of Regents Policy Manual, 2018), and the University of California–Berkeley (2013) incorporated detailed personal and professional institutional guidelines for social media use. These guidelines were constructed to educate users on appropriate measures for safeguarding identity, ethical/civil qualities, and recognizing the lastingness of disseminated information (Kansas Board of Regents Policy Manual, 2018). Leaders at the University of Minnesota (2014) also created policies for maintaining personal image, which were introduced as short- and long-term tools for employee success. This social media policy encouraged students and faculty to consider their actions before participating in social media practices (University of Minnesota, 2014).

Montclair State University (2014) introduced social media policy to inform and educate faculty of procedural guidelines and repercussions for violations. The policy outlined appropriate use of social networking websites and accountability procedures (Montclair State University, 2014). Montclair State University, the University of Kansas, and the University of Minnesota

took actions to protect the reputations of their institutions and communities from the risks associated with negligent social media use.

Although many institutional leaders wish to oversee participation on social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, few have actually endeavored governance (Vie, 2017). Educational institutions around the country are responsible for determining the steps necessary to protect communities from irresponsible social media use. An obstacle between many institutions and the steps they wish to take is the lack of research on social media use in higher education (Record, 2015). Some institutions are in the process of reviewing the sufficiency of current policies (Osman et al., 2012). Although policies to govern social media practices are increasingly popular in higher education, research indicates that many such policies are outdated (Barnes & Lescault, 2011).

### **Policy Impact and Implications**

Research on social media policy and its impact on post-secondary education instructors is still burgeoning. Between 11% (Lederman, 2015) and 14% (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011) of institutions have policies to guide acceptable social media use. Most of the existing research on social media policies is quantitative in nature, with little research modeling a qualitative structure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Social media policy in higher education should exemplify the experiences of educators (Lederman, 2015). Influential literature could help reshape existing policies across all levels (Lederman, 2015).

Current researchers must appropriately define social media in its shifting context (Lederman, 2015). Establishing guidelines for social media use, particularly among faculty members, becomes increasingly difficult as norms for social media use change (Ellison, 2007).

Research indicates that current institutional environments play a considerable role in initiatives to create social media policies (Henry & Webb, 2014), but fail to define social media within the framework of the actual user. The institutional environment plays a substantial role in the introduction of social media policy (Lederman, 2015). Understanding the experiences of instructors is essential to creating and reshaping effective and beneficial social media policies (Lederman, 2015).

### **Addressing Personal Use through Policy**

The adoption of social media policy at institutions should keep pace with the increasing popularity of social media outside classroom walls (Ellison, 2017). Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) found that only 12% of randomly selected institutions had social media policies in place. Although the scope of the study was limited, findings revealed that institutional social media policies were uncommon (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). The social media policies that do exist in higher education seem to address technological concerns that occur during work hours (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2013). In response to negative media attention, institutions are recognizing the importance of addressing personal social media use through policy (Ellison, 2017).

After an institution determines that social media policy is worth implementing, leaders must examine policy components needed to protect the institutional image and employees (Chromey et al., 2016). If institutional principles for evaluating policy requirements do not exist, institutions may not recognize the necessity of such policies (Chromey et al., 2016). Kind (2010) conducted a quantitative study on the content of social media policy in medical schools and found that an awareness of current issues during the policy implementation process influenced



policy content and adoption. Without recognizing the full extent of policy requirements, institutions may not recognize stipulations (Kind, 2010). The current research reveals the need to assess the nature of the content within the policy adoption process and understand institutional goals for such policies (Hentges, 2016).

The process for social media policy implementation cannot be properly studied unless the landscape of social media use is also understood (Hentges, 2016). Limiting the exploration of social media policy to institutional stakeholders could prevent leaders from assessing all of the risks associated with social media practices (Garber et al., 2018). A qualitative research study conducted by Garber et al. (2018) used a combination of document analysis, open-ended interviews, and focus groups to develop and explore research questions directed at understanding a Midwestern university's experiences with social media policy implementation. Reasons for the implementation of social media policy ranged from motivation to protect institutional reputation to safeguarding employees (Garber et al., 2018). Protecting institutional employees and chief stakeholders may require assuming a presence over personal conduct (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). Current events, future implications, and general campus climate are integral to social media policy discussions, as well as implementation processes (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018).

Walster (2017) suggested the protection of educators through social media policy should integrate perspectives on appropriate conduct outside of professional contexts. Institutional leaders often question what they are trying to protect with social media policies, adding another element to policy implementation (Garber et al., 2018). A majority of institutions cite student recruitment as a top reason for social media adoption, and associated policies centered around the university image (Garber et al., 2018). However, considerations for employee

professionalism and privacy should also be a concern for colleges and universities (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). The implementation environment of social media policy appears to be one-dimensional and institutional stakeholders should consider a variety of views and concerns associated with social media use (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018).

Precedent can play a substantial role in the implementation of social media policy in higher education and may influence policy focus and content (Oden, 2011). Some institutions question whether First Amendment rights are infringed upon by policies that govern social media use in higher education institutions (Oden, 2011). Administrators suggest that policymakers should incorporate legal precedent in overall policy focus (Oden, 2011). Fears of avoiding violations to First Amendment rights inhibit some institutions from addressing personal social media use (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). Castagnera and Lanza (2010) examined legal cases concerning the online activities of education administrators, faculty, and staff in order to consider policy implications. Analysis revealed that legal issues were associated with personal and professional activities of employees and students when using Facebook and Twitter (Castagnera & Lanza, 2010). The researchers also noted that legal backlash could occur if policies infringe on personal rights too aggressively (Castagnera & Lanza, 2010). The implementation of social media policies and the challenges associated with addressing personal social media use must be legally sound (Oden, 2011).

Institutions of higher education have many stakeholders who contribute their own unique perspectives when considering social media policy implementation and its content. For example, educators may utilize social media, such as Facebook or Instagram, differently from administrators. Regardless of varying perspectives, users could incur similar penalties for

improper use, no matter the purpose. Because of the diverse nature of higher education, social media policy should be applicable to all faculty, staff, and administrators (Oden, 2011).

Armstrong and Franklin (2008) analyzed the feasibility of policies designed to address personal social media use by gathering data from institutional leaders. The researchers conducted structured interviews to assess current and developing practices related to social media governance (Armstrong & Franklin, 2008). Findings suggested that each institution in the implementation process must be critically reviewed for specific behaviors on social media applications (Armstrong & Franklin, 2008). Additionally, the researchers cited the need for additional research to help institutions more thoroughly understand the scope of social media policy implementation (Armstrong & Franklin, 2008). The protective measures of social media policy are clear in the implementation process; however, institutions need to evaluate all facets of social media use (Garber et al., 2018).

When implementing social media policy, the maintenance of clear goals is necessary to address all potential challenges with social media use. Garber et al. (2018) distinguished the constant effort to keep institutional image a priority within potential social media policy. Garber et al. also noted that unclear or insufficient social media policies could make academic communities vulnerable to the consequences of negligence. In brief, future research could contribute to the development of social media policy by considering factors, such as objectives and content focus, to help institutions implement policies for social media practices.

### **Summary**

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two provided details on the nature of social media practices and the role of the post-secondary education instructor in navigating the line between

personal and professional social media use. Chapter Two also provided information related to social media policy and factors that may contribute to policy refinement among post-secondary institutions. Extant literature addresses the prevalence of social media in higher education and the evolution of its practices. Little research exists concerning the behavioral questions that surround social media use.

This review also indicated a deficiency of information on the experiences post-secondary education instructors who use social media, revealing an obvious gap in the literature concerning personal and professional social media use. The present study provided evidence-based research to needed to develop social media use policies, while creating a platform for post-secondary education instructors to describe their experiences. Additionally, the current research contributed to the existing scholarship and narrowed the existing knowledge gap regarding social media practices among post-secondary instructors.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the navigation of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience for post-secondary education instructors in higher education. I designed this study to provide participants with opportunities to describe their experiences with social media use. Since the introduction of social media into higher education, instructors' use of social media has evolved (Klašnja-milićević & Ivanović, 2018). The Babson Survey Research Group conducted a survey of over 8,000 faculty that found that 41% of college professors use social media as a teaching tool—an increase from 34% in 2012 (Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013). Educators are increasingly comfortable utilizing social media inside and outside of classroom settings (Chang, 2012).

While research exists on the prevalence of social media and associated pedagogical issues, little is known about instructors' personal and professional use of these platforms (Armstrong & Franklin, 2008). Chapter Three includes a presentation of the research design, participants, research questions, and research setting. My role as the researcher is explained, as is the data analysis plan. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and a brief summary.

### **Design**

This qualitative study employed a transcendental phenomenological approach following the suggestions of Moustakas (1994). The study was qualitative because it utilized a method of inquiry to gain an in-depth understanding of post-secondary instructors' navigation between personal and professional social media use (Creswell, 2013). A transcendental approach was

appropriate for this study because data were collected from post-secondary instructors who experienced the phenomenon under investigation, which was the navigation between the personal and professional social media use. Additionally, as mentioned by Van Manen (1990), the transcendental approach allowed me to generate a description and fresh perspective of the study phenomenon with limited researcher bias. Moreover, Moustakas (1994) noted it is the researcher's responsibility to describe the essence of the phenomenon in its entirety.

Phenomenology was an appropriate design for the present study because of its focus on participants' lived experiences, which were essential to this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, Moustakas (1994) affirmed that transcendental phenomenology is the scientific study of how phenomena appear, with the goal of developing fresh perspectives of those phenomena. Discovering the essence of participant experiences was the ultimate goal of the present study; as the researcher, I was responsible for uncovering every facet of that essence.

Moustakas (1994) asserted that phenomenological studies are contextualized through various philosophical paradigms that focus on diverse conceptions of reality and experiences. Additionally, a phenomenological design was appropriate because this study's objective was to reduce individual experiences to a composite description within the identified phenomenon. Creswell (2013) noted the researcher is responsible for assessing experiences and collecting data from individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon. A phenomenological design allowed me to explore the lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors and the role of social media policy in higher education. The transcendental phenomenological approach revealed a fresh perspective of instructors' experiences through deduction and understanding (Moustakas, 1994).

## **Research Questions**

### **Central Question**

What are the lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors who navigate between the personal and professional use of social media in higher education?

### **Sub-Questions**

**SQ1:** What are post-secondary education instructors' perceptions of how the boundary between personal and professional social media use impacts decision-making as a lived experience?

**SQ2:** What are post-secondary education instructors' perceptions of the institutional expectations of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience?

**SQ3:** What are post-secondary education instructors' perceptions of the information they share while using their social media accounts as a lived experience?

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was the Midwestern region of the United States. The Midwestern region of the United States is highly populated and home to many prominent institutions of higher education, which provided the rationale for selecting the area. Settings for participant interviews were best suited to take place in a natural setting (Creswell, 2013). However, due to travel constraints, individual interviews took place through video conferencing in locations. Additionally, the focus group interview had participants join from the grounds of their institution to encourage a wealth of responses.

Creswell and Poth (2018) noted the purpose of qualitative research is to provide an account of multiple perceptions across a topic's spectrum. A distinct private institution of higher

education was selected to contextualize the instructor experiences concerning social media practices. The research setting was a traditional undergraduate nursing program within the selected private institution. Nursing programs provide a diverse student and faculty population (Murray, Pole, Ciarlo, & Holmes, 2016), which represents the reasoning behind selecting undergraduate nursing programs. Participants were accessed through multiple modes of communication, which increased the convenience of data collection.

I have describe the participating institution using a pseudonym. Northern University (NU) is located in Wisconsin. The university is a well-known institution that boasts a large student body and offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees in areas such as arts, sciences, and education. NU was founded on Jesuit principles and expanded to several campuses throughout the state. Its efforts to grow and expand educational opportunities have made it one of the most reputable institutions in its area. NU is very proud of its undergraduate nursing program, as it is recognized as a popular offering in its area. The rationale for choosing NU was due to its reputation, location, size, and prestigious nursing program.

### **Participants**

To ensure content rich data collection, study participants were selected via criterion-based sampling strategy (Creswell, 2013). Inclusion criteria ensured participants possessed the knowledge and experience needed to answer the research questions. Koc (2018) articulated that criterion sampling is a practical approach for identifying participants based on study needs (Morse, 1991). Criterion-based purposive sampling aligned with the study's goal of providing a rich analysis of the topic. As Morse and Niehaus (2009) observed, in purposeful sampling, participants are selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study.



The goal of this study was to explore the navigation between personal and professional social media use among post-secondary education instructors. A transcendental qualitative study is useful for exploring phenomena from the perceptions of participants who have experienced them (Moustakas, 1994). The sample consisted of post-secondary education instructors. It was significant to inform each participant of the elements, foundation, and purpose of the study to ensure optimum participation. My role within the study was to develop a meaningful partnership with the educators selected as participants. Similar to the work of Moustakas (1994), my goal was to provide a precise and content-rich exploration of this phenomenon via partnerships with participants.

The sample consisted of 12 tenured and non-tenured nursing faculty members from undergraduate program at the selected institution. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated that qualitative sample size is based on the number of participants required to achieve saturation. This concept was important to the current research, as data saturation is valued more than the actual sample size (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Burmeister and Aitken (2012) stated that sample size is not necessarily correlated with data saturation. They observed that data saturation is achieved through the content attained, not the number of participants (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). The element of content-rich information is essential to any qualitative study, and data saturation is obtained through the foundations and elements of the study, as opposed to exactly what constitutes the sample size (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). Participants for this study were selected based on their experiences with social media practices. Additionally, all participants were associated with an undergraduate nursing program. Further, at least 1 year of teaching experience was required. These criteria ensures participants had longevity as academic instructors. The

requisite year of experience for the participants allowed them the knowledge and experience to address the research questions. The participants selected for the study were identified by their departmental dean and through a criterion-based search (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix G), I sought permission from the departmental dean to conduct research in the respective institution and with their professors, via a letter describing the study (See Appendix E). After receiving approval to conduct research, copies of permission letters were sent and suggestions for participants who met the criteria were sought from building principals through phone conversations. I followed up with emails and personal phone calls to the institution to answer any questions potential participants had. Informed consent was secured via the letter in Appendix B.

### **Procedures**

Preceding the application for IRB approval, a thorough review of the research proposal was completed by three doctoral professionals. The goal of the review was to ensure the quality of the interview, focus group, and document review protocols (Creswell, 2013). The first step of study procedures involved obtaining written permission from leaders at the selected institution. Permission from the institution was confirmed on school letterhead and contained the necessary signatures. At the stage of IRB approval, the permission letters were securely stored with the IRB approval letter. Following study permissions for the institution, the departmental deans sent a recruitment letter (see Appendix A) to current instructors to solicit eligible participants. Upon receiving emailed participant responses, those who best fit the criteria were selected for the study using a screening survey (see Appendix F). Those who agreed to participate in the study were required to complete a consent form (see Appendix B). The purpose of the consent form was to

detail the conditions of confidentiality to protect participants' identities (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). The consent form also provided participants with information regarding the study's purpose, procedures, associated risks, and rights (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014). The consent form was accompanied with an explanation of participants' right to withdraw from the study at any point, for any reason. Participants were also informed of how the study may be published. The individual interviews and focus group were conducted at times convenient to participants.

After necessary approvals and consent forms were obtained, I initiated the research with semistructured interviews of participants. The participants were personally interviewed through video conference over a 2-week period. Each interview started with a presented agenda, time restrictions (1 hour), and interview objectives. When all individual interviews were completed, I arranged for the focus group to be completed. The focus group consisted of the six participants who most openly communicated about their experiences during the interview process. Upon the completion and analysis of the focus group, a review of pertinent documents was completed with respect to the selected institution. Documents consisted of written social media policies from the selected institution. The interviews were electronically recorded through a recording feature of the video conferencing software to ensure accurate recordings (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2015). The interview and focus group recordings were collected and properly stored on password-protected electronic devices. The interviews were professionally transcribed. Following the transcription process, data were coded manually to develop themes relevant to the research questions.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher and human instrument for this study, I placed a high priority on remaining unbiased, objective, and ethical (Gall et al., 2015; Moustakas, 1994). Although I have focused much of my previous academic work on educational technology, I have never been the sole researcher of an investigation, which was important to the objectivity of the research. Additionally, I possessed no personal relationships with any of the selected participants.

A researcher's bias and preconceived notions are present in all research related to social phenomena (Creswell, 2013). Given that element of qualitative research, it was vital for me to recognize the principles upon which the study was built to effectively understand and interpret the behaviors and reflections of those associated with the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The researcher is crucial to the data collection and analysis processes (Creswell, 2013). To decrease the likelihood of researcher bias, I maintained a reflective logbook to document occurrences of any possible biases throughout data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was essential to understand that my role as the researcher was to assemble information from the source in a way that was not opinionated or biased (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Therefore, data were acquired and interpreted from the phenomenon and not my personal beliefs and perceptions. The use of the reflective logbook allowed me to focus on the study without bias.

I am a Christian higher education professional who has worked with academic programs that relied heavily on social media practices for success. I have worked with numerous programs that have varied in size, location, and organizational mission. Throughout my professional experiences, I have taken a particular interest in the practices that make an academic program successful and preserve its reputation nationally, regionally, and locally. I have often considered the various strategies that not only foster success, but also prevent risks to an organization's

integrity. Through my interest in news pieces and national stories concerning technology use, I developed a passion to learn more about these behaviors and how social media policies exist. As a higher education leader, I have done everything possible to ensure that through technology, I have conducted myself in a way that displays a high level of responsibility and accountability. I have tried to do the same in my role as a mentor for others in the field of higher education. Regardless of these efforts, I have noted numerous instances around the country where the behaviors of prominent leaders in the field did not align with ethical expectations. My sense of ethics and academic prowess would not be enough to make a significant impact in the field without effective research. Eikenberry (2012) asserted it is the responsibility of key leaders to do what is necessary to preserve the prestige and reputation of higher education. I participated exclusively as the researcher in this study and engaged ethically and honestly with the participants. To this point, I depended on the current literature data collected to guide and shepherd the present study (Gall et al., 2015).

An additional constituent of the researcher's role encompasses the prominence of self-care (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which is particularly important when examining emotionally-driven and overlooked topics (Kind, Genrich, Sodhi, & Chretien, 2010). Consequently, it was essential that I upheld an optimal physical, mental, and emotional steadiness to safeguard the exhibition of a focused and practical research study. An aid to maintaining emotional stability included maintaining a personal reflective logbook (Creswell, 2013).

## **Data Collection**

Data for this transcendental phenomenological study on higher education instructors' navigation of personal and professional social media use were collected using individual interviews, a focus group interview, and document and artifacts.

### **Individual Interviews**

The first method of data collection involved semistructured interviews with participants. The main goal of the interviews was to provide a means of social interaction to stimulate an understanding of the experiences of the individual (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) argued that in-depth interviews are the most effective data collection method for phenomenological study, as questions are focused, open-ended, and generalized (Creswell, 2013). An extended interview is reflected as the representative method to attain information in a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). Smith and Noble (2014) stated that the questions posed to interview participants should meet the criteria of description. There were 12 participant interviews within this research study. Creswell (2013) stated that there are no definite number of participants that are mandatory in a qualitative interview. Rather, sample size is determined by saturation, or the point at which no new information emerges from collected data.

I conducted individual virtual interviews with each of the instructors. The interviews were initiated with a casual conversation. The purpose of this dialogue was to minimize participant anxiety and apprehension (Gall et al., 2007). The goal was to create a relaxed and laid-back setting that encouraged open, honest, descriptive, and comprehensive responses from participants (Moustakas, 1994). The interviews (see Appendix C) began with a few icebreakers, followed by 14 open-ended questions (Gall et al., 2007). The generalized questions were

structured in hopes of gaining rich and substantive descriptions needed to understand how participants navigated personal and professional use of social media. In addition to the structure of the questions asked, the rhythm and timeliness of how the questions were asked enhanced the conversation and participant responses. I was very meticulous when recording my field notes, notating any specific tones, voice articulations, or facial gestures during the interviews (Gall et al., 2015).

The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and were recorded using a reliable recording feature through the Bluejeans software; a reliable videoconferencing service (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure clarity with the recording process, I tested the software beforehand to ensure the instruments were operating properly. The recorded interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service. After all interviews were transcribed, member checking was performed. This process involved sending participants copies of their interview transcripts to validate the accuracy of transcripts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were also provided the opportunity to correct any errors that may have occurred. The following were the interview questions:

1. Please tell me a little about yourself. (CQ)
2. What made you decide to become a post-secondary education instructor? (CQ)
3. What was the impact of academics in your journey to becoming an instructor? (CQ)
4. What is the role of social media in your personal life? (CQ)
5. What is the role of social media in your daily routine as an institutional instructor?  
(CQ)

6. What is the role of social media for your professional peers who also function as instructors? (CQ)
7. Looking back on your career as an education instructor, how would you describe your ability to navigate social media practices personally and professionally? (SQ1)
8. What concerns, challenges, or reservations do you have regarding the division of personal and professional social media practices? (SQ1)
9. What experiences contributed to your foundational principles concerning the navigation between the personal and professional use of social media? (SQ1)
10. What concerns, challenges, or reservations do you have for navigating social media in future settings? (SQ1)
11. What role do you believe instructors should have in determining the ethical expectations concerning social media use? (SQ2)
12. What has been the role of your employing institution in your ability to practice social media? (SQ2)
13. As you went through your onboarding process within your current role, please describe your experiences regarding the expected manner of social media practice. (SQ2)
14. How have previous experiences with the use of social media impacted the way in which you utilize it today? (SQ3)
15. Describe your decision-making process in treading the ethical boundaries that divide personal and professional social media practices. (SQ3)



16. To what or to whom do you attribute your ability to function ethically within your current role? (SQ3)

17. I appreciate the time you have provided to this study. What else do you think is important for me to know about your experiences regarding social media use? (CQ)

Questions one through three were utilized to provide a level of comfort and make the participants relaxed. I established rapport and a comfortable atmosphere for each participant (Patton, 1990). The questions were simple and straightforward, and did not require a great deal of thought. In addition, the questions were intended to produce an extensive dialogue that provided a basis for the theoretical framework.

Questions four through seven were developed to prompt vital and fundamental descriptions of participants' experiences related to social media use. It is becoming inevitable that educators utilize social media and other technological practices to reach their learners (Lenartz, 2012). These broadly-developed questions provided content-rich data on how instructors utilized social media, professionally and personally. Moustakas (1994) observed that by utilizing the standard rapport questions, subsequent questions may be used to encourage participants to think deeply about their experiences, any significant essences, and provide full descriptions of associated experiences. Social media and technology practices have become a component of instruction (Record, 2015), and these questions were significant to understanding how personal and professional practices influence the experiences of related decision-making.

Questions eight through 12 encouraged participants to reflect upon their experiences related to challenges with this phenomenon. The navigation of the personal and professional use of social media practices in higher education is not always ethical (Walster, 2017). These

questions enabled me to probe into how the personal and professional use of social media was experienced by the instructors. Effective interview questions may evolve toward the theoretical constructs that frame a study (Maxwell, 2005). Productive qualitative questions encourage reflexive and interactive thought (Creswell, 2013). It is vital to develop a deeper understanding as to how social media in education is evolving (Vie, 2017). Subsequently, questions 13 through 17 stimulated participants to engage in deep reflection as they deliberated on their philosophical and professional experiences concerning social media practices.

### **Focus Group Interview**

After participant interviews were completed, I conducted the focus group interview. Focus groups allow thoughts and experiences to be exposed and comprehended by a group of individuals who perceive and think similarly (Creswell, 2013). The valuable collaboration stems from a group that originates within a common communicative ground (Maxwell, 2005). The focus group consisted of six participants who openly communicated about their experiences during the interview process. My role as the researcher was to act as a facilitator and explore how the participants experienced and navigated personal and professional social media practices (Creswell, 2013). Creswell and Poth (2018) revealed that participants were more likely to discuss the essences of their experiences in a group setting than in one-on-one interviews. The focus group met for 60 minutes and five questions (see Appendix D) were presented. Each participant had approximately three to five minutes to provide a response for each question. The focus group questions were:

1. What elements have you considered about social media use since completing the interview?

2. What changes have you implemented in navigating the personal and professional lines of social media since our initial interaction?
3. What is the main reason you believe you will mix or separate personal and professional social media use in the future?
4. What do you believe is important for educators to understand regarding the difference between personal and professional social media use?
5. How do you see yourself interchangeably using social media personally and professionally in the future?

Parkinson and Turner (2014) found that the evolution of social media use in education has made it difficult for instructors to determine the best ways to utilize such platforms. The first question of the current study was designed to understand if instructors considered how they utilized and experienced social media after completing their individual interviews. This question was designed to explore any new findings or experiences that may have occurred since the initial interaction. The second question focused on changes that were implemented concerning the personal and professional navigation of social media use. According to Blankenship (2011), many issues have risen for educators concerning social media use and users are responsible for determining how ethical decisions are formulated and carried out.

The third question was designed to explore the degree to which participants would fuse personal and professional social media use in the future. According to Piotrowski (2016), social media use in education has placed a gradation of responsibilities on teachers due to a lack of clarity within social media policy. This question was designed to understand how the participants perceived the significance of the line between personal and professional social media use. The

fourth question concerned understanding how much responsibility should be placed on instructors to approach the boundary between personal and professional social media use. Higher education professionals use ethics to understand how their application of social media occurs within their educational practices and this responsibility relates to the assessment process itself (Dindar & Akbulut, 2014). The fifth question asked participants how they would use social media in the future after being given time to consider the ethical repercussions that may occur. Moran et al. (2011) affirmed that social media challenges are a direct result of users and their abilities to make ethical decisions. This question focused on how the instructors plan to act as ethical decision-makers while utilizing social media.

### **Documents and Artifacts**

Analysis of documents and artifacts is a qualitative research method often utilized in phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). Document analysis is a significant research method in its own right (Creswell, 2013) and is an instrumental component of the numerous approaches of triangulation, which describes the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis is an efficient and effective way of collecting data because documents are convenient and practical resources (Creswell, 2013). Documents are conventional and can be obtained in a variety of forms, making them accessible and reliable sources of data (Creswell, 2013). Attaining and analyzing documents is more cost and time efficient than collecting primary data or conducting experiments (Bowen, 2009). In addition, documents are constant, non-reactive data sources that can be reviewed multiple times and remain unchanged by the researcher's influence or research process (Bowen, 2009). Document

analysis points to questions that need to be asked, helping to ensure the comprehensiveness of research (Bowen, 2009).

In the current study, document analysis was utilized to support and strengthen the initial research methods. Document analysis can be used either as a primary method of data collection or as a compliment to other methods (Bowen, 2009). In the present study, document analysis complemented the interview and focus group data. The documents provided supplementary data on institutional policies that related to social media use, particularly with post-secondary education instructors. Such documents regarding policy provided additional data to help contextualize the research (Bowen, 2009). The documents related to institutional social media policy contained data that provided details on the changes and evolution within social media policy (O'Leary, 2014).

Document analysis involved institutional documents that were reviewed after interviews and the focus group. Patton (1990) asserted that documents characteristically include records obtained from a fieldwork location that might provide data not obtainable through face-to-face interactions. The review of institutional documents allowed for a comprehensive understanding of current and past social media policies that influenced findings of this research. Site documents pertaining to social media policy and personal conduct expectations were reviewed to gain a better understanding of how instructors navigated personal and professional social media use. After conducting the interviews and the focus group interview, I accessed the institutional website to obtain documents pertaining to social media policy and personal conduct. Obtaining this documentation was essential to understanding how policies influenced the personal and professional social media practices of post-secondary education instructors. Each participant was

subject to professional expectations guided by institutional policies; understanding the exact influence of these policies was essential to the present research. The combination of these three data sources provided necessary information for this study.

The documents were reviewed following the interviews and focus group, which allowed me to draw correlations between the experiences of the instructors and existing policies. The review also allowed me to understand the degree to which social media policy was interpreted by the instructors, along with its ethical influence. I anticipated institutional documents would not only provide crucial information, but also answer the research questions related to the navigation of personal and professional social media practices by post-secondary education instructors.

### **Data Analysis**

Data for this transcendental phenomenological study of social media practices in higher education were classified through a labeling and grouping process that fulfilled the objective of describing the experiences of post-secondary education instructors and their navigation of social media practices (Vie, 2017). Following the suggestions of Moustakas (1994), I engaged in bracketing to prevent my personal background and experiences from influencing study data. Moustakas (1994) also suggested the use of a researcher's logbook when conducting phenomenological studies, as an approach to limiting bias. Therefore, in the present study, the reflective logbook I kept included my own thoughts and perceptions on the research topic in order to limit any bias.

Qualitative data from the structured interviews, focus group, and the review of documents were analyzed through a transcendental phenomenological lens to encourage supported and conceivable viewpoints backed by data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All interviews and the focus

group interview were transcribed by a professional service. The utilization of thematic coding assisted in the data analysis by recording passages that were linked by common themes. In addition to providing further support to me as the researcher, thematic coding was employed to support a methodical approach to storing and analyzing the data collected.

Moustakas (1994) asserted that phenomenological reflection should be used to create themes that appropriately represent the essences of participants' experiences. Therefore, the investigation of data for the present study occurred as I evaluated the transcribed interviews and documents through the processes of phenomenal analysis. Additionally, completing the analysis with the objective of isolating themes through thematic coding and reduction provided additional understandings and insights into social media practices in higher education. Initial codes were generated with the phenomenon and research questions in mind. Clusters of meaning were established from significant participant statements and articulated into themes (Van Manen, 1990).

Moustakas (1994) suggested that codes identified through the process of reduction should be clustered into the main themes of the phenomenon. Following the suggestions of Moustakas, establishing themes was important for the present study because themes are the foundation for describing what the phenomenon was and how it was experienced. The themes were reviewed and polished to represent the essence of each theme (Moustakas, 1994).

I immersed myself in the data through repeated review and interpretation of the data, as recommended by Moustakas (1994). Additionally, I engaged in regular reflection of meanings in the data to expose thematic characteristics, identify thematic statements, and deduce the essence of the phenomenon of social media practices in higher education through rich and descriptive

text. The resulting themes were analyzed in accordance with a transcendental phenomenological interpretation of social media practices in higher education (Van Manen, 1990). The syndication of the composite themes expressed a synthesis of the essence and elements of the phenomenon to gain a better understanding of how social media practices were experienced by instructors in higher education (Moustakas, 1994).

The development of content-rich descriptions of social media practices in higher education added to the trustworthiness and confirmability of the data (Elo et al., 2014). A description of the participants' perceptions was explained in detail, while ensuring confidentiality and articulating the details of themes (Moustakas, 1994). This was significant because credibility and transferability of the themes was developed within the present study for similar instances that occurred within the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Similarities between participants who experienced the same phenomenon of social media practices in higher education provided additional validity to the findings, as the essences of the experiences were triangulated (Van Manen, 1990).

### **Trustworthiness**

Member checking was conducted too ensure a high level of trustworthiness in the current study (Creswell, 2013). Trustworthiness was also improved via triangulation and participant feedback. These are all respected methods to ensure trustworthiness within a research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition to providing value to the study, triangulation helped ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Credibility amplified trustworthiness of the research process (Gall et al., 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) observed the nature of trustworthiness in credibility, dependability, transferability, and



confirmability. Researchers must consider these elements as essential criteria, which safeguard the precision of qualitative work (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). As information is gathered, it is also imperative that data are not manipulated to reflect the researcher's interests or investment in the research, in any way (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Credibility**

The purpose of credibility is to establish structural corroboration and consensual validation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The progression of immersing the analysis in accurate interpretation of the data are key to the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) observed member checking to be an essential technique for instituting credibility. I obtained valuable feedback from each participant interview. Moustakas (1994) described previous examples of studies in which the participants were utilized to validate research findings. In these roles, participants performed an examination, in which reviews of the data collection were completed to confirm data accurately depicted their experience of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given this approach, I established credibility using member checking.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability was essential to the present study as it refers to the solidity of data over time and under varying settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Dependability of the present study was established as the audit trail demonstrated how the study can be replicated (Creswell, 2013). In correlation with dependability, confirmability asserts that the data truthfully embody the information and experiences that participants intended, without researcher intrusion (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data and its analysis must mirror participants' expressed experiences and not the researcher's biases or perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I was diligent in utilizing

participant quotes to ensure the accurate portrayal of their sentiments. Confirmability of the present study was ensured through appraisal of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I provided an accurate display of the significant events that occurred during the research through the audit trail and consistency of the research process.

### **Transferability**

Transferability relies on the rationale that findings can be generalized or transferred to other settings, groups, or populations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher's role is to deliver rich accounts of the phenomenon so that the transfer is manifested (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described transferability as, it is not the naturalist's task to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers. A thorough description of the data allows readers to infer suitable transfer conclusions for their purposes as they prompt key elements from the text (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given the importance of participant-generated data, I utilized all the appropriate research elements and criteria to select the participants. It was important to replicate this study (Elo et al., 2014) so that other leaders can make the necessary inferences as they look to address the personal and professional navigation of social media practices by post-secondary education instructors.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The responsibility of an effective researcher is to contemplate and address ethical issues that may be present in a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) attested to the concrete prompts that social phenomenon is directed by ethical elements when working with human participants. Consequently, this study of professors' use of social media was performed

ethically by following the appropriate standard of practices crucial for a quality transcendental phenomenological study, as set forth by the American Educational Research Association (Gall et al., 2015).

This research study was conducted under the backings of Liberty University and the IRB. Once IRB approval was provided, informed consent was acquired from the necessary parties of the participating institution. The participants were given insight regarding the foundations of the research study and informed consent for the interviews, focus group interview, document review, and reflective logbook was acquired. The participants were informed that confidentiality would be maintained using pseudonyms. The participants were also provided with information regarding how the data would be safely and securely stored in a locked office and destroyed within three years of completion of the study. In accordance with ethical considerations, the participants were made aware that they were under no commitment to complete the study and could decide to withdraw at any time (Gall et al., 2015). Finally, there was the chance for the results of the study to be reviewed by the participants to ensure accuracy with data reporting.

### **Summary**

In this study, I explored the personal and professional navigation of social media practices by post-secondary education instructors. The data for the study were collected from individual interviews, a focus group interview, and documents and artifacts. An analysis of the data revealed existing and newly created themes from the study in relation to the research topic of personal and professional social media use occurring within the field of higher education.

Additionally, the theoretical implications were an important focus as the findings emerged. The

design choice, data collection methods, and data analysis strategy were all essential to the integrity and reputation of the research conducted.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the navigation of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience for post-secondary education instructors in higher education. The focus of this study was the lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors who utilize social media, both personally and professionally. The study was designed to gain a deeper understanding of how post-secondary education instructors (a) experience and navigate the line between personal and professional social media use, (b) understand institutional expectations of social media practices, and (c) understand how information is shared through social media. In this chapter, I present findings from the current investigation. This chapter includes a comprehensive description of participants, followed by results of the data analysis. I present results thematically, in alignment with the research questions guiding this investigation.

### **Participants**

This study included 12 participants who experienced the same phenomenon of navigating personal and professional social media practices. Each participant was a post-secondary education instructor who demonstrated a general understanding of social media. Additionally, each participant was associated with an undergraduate nursing program and possessed at least 1 year of teaching experience. Inclusion criteria were used to ensure participants possessed the knowledge and experience needed to address the research questions. Because this study focused on the social media practices of post-secondary education instructors, only those familiar with social media platforms were eligible to participate. Furthermore, because of the diversity of

nursing programs, instructors must have an association with an undergraduate nursing program.

Table 1 provides an overview of personal social media use (yes or no), professional social media use (yes or no), and tenure status (tenured or non-tenured) for each participant.

Table 1

*Participant Social Media Practices and Tenure Status*

Participant	Personal Use	Professional Use	Tenure Status
Allison	Yes	Yes	Tenured
Angela	Yes	Yes	Tenured
Colby	Yes	No	Tenured
Georgia	Yes	Yes	Non-Tenured
Gerard	Yes	No	Tenured
Jessica	Yes	Yes	Non-Tenured
Jim	Yes	No	Tenured
John	Yes	Yes	Tenured
Martin	Yes	Yes	Tenured
Samuel	Yes	No	Non-Tenured
Susan	Yes	Yes	Non-Tenured
Whitney	Yes	No	Non-Tenured

The following participant descriptions conceptualize information from interviews and the focus group. The descriptions should be considered truthful and original to each participant.

Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality of participants' identities. Participants ranged in age from 28 to 48 years old, and identified as Caucasian, Hispanic, or Other. Participants' Teaching experience ranged from 1 to 12 years. Six participants identified as male and six as female.

Table 2

*Participant Overview*

Participant	Race	Gender	Teaching Experience
Allison	Caucasian	Female	4 years
Angela	Caucasian	Female	5 years
Colby	Caucasian	Male	6 years
Georgia	Caucasian	Female	4 years
Gerard	Caucasian	Male	12 years
Jessica	Caucasian	Female	1 year
Jim	Caucasian	Male	5 years
John	Caucasian	Male	3 years
Martin	Other	Male	8 years
Samuel	Caucasian	Male	1 year
Susan	Hispanic	Female	2 years
Whitney	Caucasian	Female	1 year

### Allison

Allison is a Caucasian female with 23 years of education completed. She is a tenured employee with 4 years of teaching experience. At the time of the study, Allison was a faculty member of Northern University's nursing program. Although Allison is not from Wisconsin, she now calls the state home after 14 years of residence. She said that nursing is her calling because of health problems she watched her mother endure while growing up. Allison's biggest love within the field is instructing didactics in nursing. She says the greatest aspect of teaching nursing is the progressiveness of the field. She shared, "Nursing is changing every day...and understanding how those changes factor into academics gives me the best chance to relate to students." Although Allison is not oblivious to the daily changes occurring in higher education, she understands that a watchful eye must be present to prevent negligence. When asked what she

determined the most useful preparing herself as an instructor, she replied, “The resources are certainly out there. Between current research, publications, and networking opportunities... nursing faculty are provided with the necessary information to teach effectively if they put in the legwork.”

### **Angela**

Angela is a Caucasian female with 22 years of education completed. She is a tenured employee with 5 years of teaching experience. At the time of the study, Angela was a fieldwork educator at Northern University. According to Angela, the most rewarding aspect of teaching is being able to influence students' career paths. Angela helped develop the department's career resource center and enjoys maintaining a presence in her students' lives after they have graduated and passed the National Council Licensure Examination. When asked how technology impacted her teaching strategies, she recalled a situation when she used technology to help a student:

After I had created the career resources center, a student had reached out for assistance regarding assistance in securing employment. At the time...I was on maternity leave and was not able to be on campus. Through the use of technology...Skype in particular, I was able to use features such as screensharing to fine-tune the student's resume and preparation for interviewing. Several weeks after...she gained employment at a pediatric facility. I'll never forget the smile on her face when she came to tell me about her new opportunity.



According to Angela, the benefits of technology should not be taken lightly. Although Angela understands the challenges associated with technology implementation, she said it is essential to reaching future generations in higher education.

### **Colby**

Colby is a Caucasian male with 27 years of education completed. He is a tenured employee with 6 years of teaching experience. At the time of the study, Colby was a lab instructor with Northern University. Prior to joining academics, Colby served as a nursing lead for an emergency room in Houston, Texas and was distinguished for his accomplishments in the field. Colby believes his previous experiences in the field prepared him to be an effective educator; he also understands there is much to learn about being an effective educator. He understands many institutions are incorporating additional technologies but remains cautious in his approach to technology integration:

I see counterparts around the country bringing technology into the classroom. Though I do not oppose this trend...I do find myself reluctant because of the horror stories that have taken place because some were just not ready for the changes.

Colby understands that changing with the times is essential to maintaining a strong reputation as an instructor and medical professional. He believes that additional training is needed to help instructors integrate technology:

It is imperative that institutional support provide training and resources for those that just aren't...acclimated to simultaneously teaching with technology. I use technology regularly in my personal life but would not want to jeopardize my career...because I simply did not feel comfortable.

**Georgia**

Georgia is a Caucasian female with 25 years of education completed. She is a non-tenured employee with 4 years of teaching experience. At the time of the study, Georgia was responsible for heading the simulation lab at Northern University. Georgia graduated from Northern University's nursing program and felt obliged to contribute to the program's advancement because it facilitated her growth in the medical field. Georgia has used technology and social media for most of her adult life and thinks it is necessary for students to understand its uses:

I require my students to use and recognize social media...especially as they get towards the end of their time in the program. Considering technology gives students the ability...and opportunity to market themselves as they look for opportunities during life after their experiences in nursing school.

She experiences little pushback from students regarding technology integration because current generations are accustomed to utilizing at least one form of social media in their personal lives.

When discussing the way technology impacted her career, Georgia said: "I don't feel like I would have gotten to where I am without my ability to use technology and... carry its functions to my learners." Georgia regularly attends regional conferences that focus on nursing and academics and feels these opportunities keep her abreast of ongoing changes to the field.

**Gerard**

Gerard is a Caucasian male with 29 years of education completed. He is a tenured employee with 12 years of teaching experience. At the time of the study, Gerard taught didactic courses at Northern University. During most of his career as an instructor, he has volunteered to

help inner city children achieve high levels of self-care. He believes that as a privileged educator, he owes it to the community to give back however he can. It would be assumed that with all of his experience as an educator that Gerard would integrate technology into his classroom instruction. However, Gerard shared,

I understand that technology and social media are creeping into the picture when it comes to instruction. I additionally understand that technology will overpower education over the next decade or so . . . this is all clear to me...but I do share the same sentiments as my fellow educators when it comes to the risks.

This is not to say Gerard is against institutional requirements for technology use:

I am fully aware that there is a need for platforms such as Blackboard, Canvas, and Outlook. These are systems that I am familiar with and am comfortable using...once apps like Facebook and Instagram are presented to the curriculum...that is where I get lost in the shuffle. I do think there are a place for different social media initiatives in academics...but it does leave us susceptible.

### **Jessica**

Jessica is a Caucasian female with 22 years of education completed. She is a non-tenured employee with 1 year of teaching experience. At the time of the study, Jessica was an adjunct professor for Northern University's nursing program. She enjoys her role as an instructor for the program and works full-time as a lab technician at a local hospital. Jessica feels a strong calling to teaching and believes the best way to be an effective educator is to understand students' needs. She described the general needs of her current students:

Learning has changed drastically compared to when I was in school. Nowadays, my students want to engage... in technological and interactive learning in order to achieve their goals. They see the nursing field evolving to using technology around every corner... and being able to adapt in the classroom makes them feel that much more prepared when they enter the workforce.

Jessica also commented that the field has gone from gaining knowledge through books alone to using resources, such as electronic databases and interactive videos online.

### **Jim**

Jim is a Caucasian male with 25 years of education completed. He is a tenured employee with 5 years of teaching experience. Jim is a proponent of the medical field and has completed an abundance of research on his own. He is passionate about providing quality geriatric care. At the time of the study, Jim was transitioning into an assistant dean role within the program at Northern University. According to Jim, his greatest success as a researcher was using the resources around him to help those in need. He specifically described the benefits of technology: "Technology has served as a catalyst for the information that we've been able to uncover for patients in the medical field... without the mentality to adapt and overcome, I would not be here today."

We spoke of the developments concerning technology and education, and Jim believes educators are responsible for ensuring learners are placed in situations to succeed. He also described how the needs of learners are constantly changing: "There are always going to be emerging methods to instruct... methods that help us to better reach our students. Without a hunger to adapt to what works best, we fail to serve our students and colleges." Jim explained

that being a researcher helped him to see that a one-size-fits-all approach simply does not work in academics. Even with his plethora of experience in academia, Jim said he is always open to change.

### **John**

John is a Caucasian male with 24 years of education completed. He is a tenured employee with 3 years of teaching experience. At the time of the study, John was taking on additional responsibilities at Northern University. He started as a trainer within a hospital system in Georgia but later moved back to Wisconsin. John currently teaches didactic nursing courses and helps operate the school's simulation lab. Through his role in the simulation lab, John is a proponent of incorporating technology into the classroom in order to provide students with the most realistic experience possible. John shared, "Though technology wasn't part of my academic upbringing... I feel that it is central to grow with the times. Without students in the program, our jobs cease to exist... which means working tirelessly to appeal to them." John described the importance of technology in the medical field, sharing examples of how many breakthroughs occurred in the nursing field over the previous 20 years, thanks to technology.

John believes educators must be equipped with the knowledge to handle problems related to technology integration. At a minimum, John would like for the institution, or even his department, to provide resources that prevent negligent use among educators. When John discussed the actions needed to better prepare educators to use technology, he often referred to training and additional resources.

### **Martin**

Martin listed “other” as his ethnicity and has 23 years of education completed. He is a tenured employee with 8 years of teaching experience. At the time of the study, Martin worked as an instructor in Northern University’s simulation lab. Martin’s determination to stay abreast of developments in academics and the field of nursing was inspiring. Martin discussed his appreciation for researchers in the field because they allow him to develop his teaching principles. Martin is a firm believer in the use of technology in academics, especially within the medical field. He shared that although he senses more training and support is warranted, educators are responsible for understanding the latest trends and progressions in the field. He shared, “I am fully aware that a fast-moving landscape leaves space for mistakes to be made... but I do feel that as educators, it is our obligation to sustain societal expectations.” Martin’s self-awareness and drive to support his peers was evident: “It is also my role to help shape those around me when it comes to my knowledge as an educator. We are a tight-knit community here... and we all rely on each other to make sure that we our completing the goal... of servicing our students.”

### **Samuel**

Samuel is a Caucasian male with 23 years of education completed. He is a non-tenured employee with 1 year of teaching experience. At the time of the study, Samuel was an adjunct professor for the Northern University nursing program. His favorite part of teaching is having the opportunity to help develop future nurses. Samuel felt strongly about the direction of the field and believes that educators must adapt to protect their image:

There have been numerous instances where educators have tried to adjust their teaching methods but did so without the fortified knowledge. I’ve worked with professors who

have made vast changes to their teaching styles...or implemented new ways of instructing...but did so in a way that endangered the student's learning. Even more important...they hurt their image because they didn't know how to properly operate the systems and software executed.

When explaining his cautious mentality, Samuel often referred back to the best interest of the student and the overall learning experience: "Our learners are going to be on the front lines in hospitals and not providing them a sound experience risks the integrity of the medical field."

### **Susan**

Susan is a Hispanic female with 24 years of education completed. She is a non-tenured employee with 2 years of teaching experience. At the time of the study, Susan was an adjunct faculty member of the Northern University nursing program. Susan attended Northern University's nursing program and is from Wisconsin. Susan was always drawn to nursing because her brother grew up with a physical disability and often worked with nurses. Susan's favorite aspect of the medical field are the breakthroughs in science. She hopes to further her experience in the field and secure a tenured faculty position, sharing, "My ultimate goal would be to bring all of my knowledge and experience to a university in the capacity of a department chair or dean." Concerning technology use within instruction, Susan understands that protecting one's reputation is key when it comes to advancement.

### **Whitney**

Whitney is a Caucasian female with 21 years of education completed. She is a non-tenured employee with 1 year of teaching experience. At the time of the study, Whitney was an adjunct skills lab educator at Northern University. Whitney is thankful to have been given an

opportunity to teach within Northern University's nursing program. Whitney eventually aspires to become a nurse practitioner and would also like to teach part-time. When describing how technology has impacted her teaching strategies, she provided an account of her experience as a student:

During my undergraduate experience, technology played a pivotal role in my ability to learn and apply the course materials. Simply looking at a text book was one thing...but being able to utilize interactive learning content was a game-changer. My program had state of the art equipment...such as medical mannequins and advanced ultrasound devices. Without the opportunity to use such technology, I would not have passed the NCLEX exam in my first attempt.

Whitney could not imagine higher education without technology. She recognizes that technology and social media are essential components of learning.

### **Results**

The following are the results of this transcendental phenomenological study of the navigation of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience for post-secondary education instructors in higher education. Data used in the analysis were collected from individual interviews, a single focus group, and a review of pertinent documents. Methods of coding and reduction were performed to analyze data and develop themes. Moustakas (1994) recommended that subthemes are developed before the development of major themes. Consequently, subthemes were developed as part of the participant description. Finally, through the assessment of subthemes, major themes were introduced as a final step in data analysis.

#### **Major Theme One: Self-Reliance**



The first major theme that emerged from the data was the theme of self-reliance. This theme focused primarily on social media practices. However, discussions of technology use were also present in most interviews and the focus group interview. For example, Jessica minored in information technology as an undergraduate student, which was the reason why she regularly used social media and utilized technology in the classroom. Reliance on decision-making and personal assessment served as subthemes to major theme one (see Table 2). The decision-making subtheme included general thoughts about decision-making, the perceived responsibility of decision-making, the confusing nature of decision-making, implementing change through decision-making, emotions related to decision-making, evaluation within decision-making, and the perceived error concerning the decision-making process. The personal assessment subtheme included data in which participants specifically mentioned a type of evaluation that required personal assessment, as well as data that were not explicitly related to decision-making but were related to assessment, in general.

Table 3

*Major Theme 1: Self-Reliance*

Subtheme	Code
Decision-making	Emotions (33), effectiveness (28), decisions (15), desired change (12), decision-making (6), challenging (5), irrelevant (4)
Personal Assessment	Assessment (14), personal evaluation (10), personal assessment (8)

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate code frequency.

**Decision-making.** The first subtheme of the major theme of self-reliance was decision-making. All participants described multiple aspects of the decision-making process in their

interviews. The effectiveness of decision-making was mentioned by 10 participants as well as 4 focus group participants. A quote from Martin illustrated the way many participants perceived decision-making: “I’ve worked in roles that encouraged the personal and professional use of social media...but the expectation of my employers was that I used my best judgement in the process.” Allison echoed a similar sentiment:

My responsibility is to guide our future graduates in successfully obtaining employment...after they complete their certifications. An integral part of completing my job is using the means that will help them get to where they hope to be...a lot of times...technology is a necessity which means deciding what is going to be most operative.

During the focus group, Angela commented, “It’s our responsibility to use sound judgement... when we’re deciding how our students will learn most successfully.” All other focus group participants commented in agreement to Angela’s statement.

Seven participants revealed there were elements of decision-making they found challenging. Susan stated,

Regardless of the risks... or challenges associated with using technology in the classroom, as educators... we must not hesitate to provide our learners with the greatest opportunities to absorb the learning materials necessary to find success.

Georgia not only described the judgement she must employ when using technology as a professor, but also when using it in her personal life: “After being exposed to instances where a personal social media account affected the image of an educator... I knew that I had to be more

careful.” The lack of guidance in the decision-making process led to a multitude of emotions for Georgia.

All participants, including those in the focus group, described emotions surrounding the decision-making process. During the focus group, Samuel commented, “There are certainly nerves associated with using social media privately.” Colby followed up with, “No matter the privacy settings available...there is always the risk that someone will see something.” At the end of his personal interview Gerard explained:

With social media in particular, I would tell my younger self to limit what is posted and to prevent sharing the social events such as going out to get drinks with friends...or that sports tailgate that was attended with family. That just doesn't reflect well as a professor.

These sentiments were expressed by all participants. Jessica shared, “The expectation for educators to represent their institutions definitely...creates a level of responsibly and apprehension in the process.”

Seven participants, as well as the focus group participants, mentioned changes they determined would make the decision-making process more reliable. Martin suggested,

There should be more uniformity involved with how we instrument technology...and social media in the classroom. Though I always liked autonomy, I do feel that possessing the necessary resources and means available to do so will ensure that technology is introduced in the right ways.

The sentiment of guidance was common in the subtheme regarding desired changes. Jim said:

Getting and receiving feedback is extremely valuable to me. I agree that independence is wonderful in the area of teaching...but I would like to know when making changes to the

curriculum...by adding some sort of software or technology...that I am doing so in a way that fits the expectation of the department chair and dean.

**Personal assessment.** The second subtheme related to the major theme of self-reliance was personal assessment. Four participants as well as the focus group participants mentioned personal assessment during the interviews. For example, Colby explained, “Understanding and weighing my foundational principles as an educator plays a big part in how I deliver course content.” The following quote from Whitney captured a common sentiment among participants: “Understanding what has brought me here as an educator is vital and... a part of that involves examining myself and my personal beliefs.” Participants understood the value of personal assessment, as any effective educator should. The disconnect between personal assessment and participants centered around the lack of guidance and support provided by leaders.

### **Major Theme Two: Professional Image**

The second major theme, professional image, pertained to areas in which educators were influenced to professionally utilize technology in their teaching practices. Two subthemes were associated with professional image. The first subtheme, professional practices, included activities that were desired, required, or limited due to decision-making. The second subtheme, academic development, included activities that had to be included in curriculum development, preparation for program plans, and methods of introducing course materials (see Table 4).

Table 4

#### *Major Theme 2: Professional Image*

Subtheme	Code
Professional Practices	Technology Introduction (27), technological requirements (20), voluntary implementation (4),

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Academic Development	Curriculum Development (16), presentation of new learning strategies (12), activities (5),
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*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate code frequency.

**Professional practices.** The first subtheme related to the major theme of professional image was professional practices of technology and social media use in the classroom. Ten participants, as well as the focus group, described influenced for introducing various forms of technological learning within curriculum. Georgia mentioned, “I felt a deeper connection with my learners when integrating social media sites such as Instagram and Facebook into curriculum-based assignments. This sparked the interest level... thus enhancing the student experience.” Susan shared that Skype generated an increased interest level for students when mixing the platform into the final exam:

Integrating Skype into the final exam and the secondary experiences that led up to the final exam was a major spark for my students... and their interest levels. Essentially... changing with the generation made them feel that their needs were valued as learners.

The field of higher education is always progressing. When asked if he would rather maintain his teaching strategies from 5 years earlier, Gerard said, “No. That would be a disservice to the students.”

Six participants and the focus group participants described institutional requirements to implement technologies and platforms in the classroom. Georgia described how institutional leaders influenced the implementation of applications and software: “Through a suggestion of the institution, my students are required to create a business profile on Google within a career development course... that I instruct.” She continued, “Within our healthcare ethics curriculum, I require the class to create and upload their presentations to Google Docs.”

Three participants mentioned technological resources they wanted to implement in their courses but were otherwise reluctant to do so. According to Samuel,

I often use technology and social media outside of my role as a professor... but I do not unite such practices into my teaching unless required by [Northern University]... the main reason being the challenges associated with avoiding the associated risks.

Colby also commented about a lack assurance meeting institutional expectations: “The challenge is not fully understanding what is going to fall outside of the ethical lines... and that is intimidating.”

**Academic development.** The second subtheme related to advanced technology was academic development. This subtheme described ways participants judged what was necessary to the learning experience, concerning developments in the field. Nine participants as well as the focus group described the importance of keeping up with developments in the field to provide a positive student experience. Jessica shared,

When I first started teaching... technology consisted of projectors and email communication... but in the last 5 years, I've seen instructors use platforms from Facebook, all the way to Twitter and Vinmeo.

Jessica explained the way she chooses to advance her curriculum:

It's really due to learners advancing their use of technology and social media...and the instructors having no choice but to do the same. There is definitely an obligation of keeping up to date with technological practices... but also worth noting that older methods of instruction, such as lectures, remain useful.

Eight participants, as well as the focus group, described the ways technology implementation was impacted by decision-making. Gerard described how he tried to stay current with advancements in the field:

I am willing to keep up with the methods of learning that appeal to learners the most... but I must also mention that I hold a desire to avoid dicey practices. Mainly... due to occurrences in the field...the necessity to avoid any action that would jeopardize my reputation as an instructor is on the forefront of my mind.

Jim shared that he “Will do whatever it takes to connect with his learners...but within reason and ethical consideration.”

Five participants described factors that influenced their selection of technology and applications for the classroom. Colby explained he sometimes focused on what was popular within the field, “which helps with familiarity when the student graduates and enters their first professional position. That type of familiarity helps their effectiveness... and ability to hit the ground running.”

Five participants referenced the responsibility to self-direct and as they saw fit. Martin shared,

Our leaders give us the responsibility and power to implement technology... and other strategies of instruction as we see fit. I have often found myself... contacting my acquaintances in academics to learn what they are using... which helps me with the curriculum-related decisions that I’m making.

### **Major Theme Three: Absent Governance**

The third major theme of this study was absent governance, which encompassed two subthemes. The first subtheme, institutional policy, included codes related to institutional leadership and philosophies: factors that directly affected the expectations of the instructors concerning implementation of technology and social media. The second subtheme, self-direction, related to the direction that instructors received in the management of their academic practices (see Table 5).

Table 5

## Major Theme 3: Absent Governance

Subtheme	Code
Institutional policy	Institutional leadership (27), philosophies (17)
Self-direction	Directional guidance (21)

*Note.* Numbers in parentheses indicate code frequency.

**Institutional policy.** The first subtheme of the major theme of absent governance was institutional policy. Six participants directly mentioned institutional policy as a factor that led them to determine decision-making was their responsibility. Colby stated that “observed differences among the interpretation of ethical technological practices within the department had caused confusion, previously.” Whitney made a similar statement concerning lack of policy and guidance:

The lack of specific guidance has deterred me from using social media... and honestly... I only use technology that is required by the university, such as Outlook’s email services... Blackboard technology... the university’s directory. I completely understand that technology can enhance learning... but too many hazards exist with some of these methods.



Martin revealed that even though leadership assumed educators understood expectations with technology use, he was not “fully aware of what was expected of him. There would be times where I would use my social media in a way that made me question if that would be alright by university standards”

Nine participants referenced the lack of institutional direction and policy, which clouded understandings of expectations. When asked how personal social media use was affected by his employee agreement, Martin explained:

When it comes to my personal social media practices... I would say that I am solely responsible for determining how I should conduct myself. There have been no trainings or debriefs... that explain what I can and cannot do. I assume that these expectations are delegated to me... but my concern lies within the gray areas where the answers are not always clearly indicated.

When discussing the policies related to social media, Samuel admitted, “I would not be able to tell you if they existed.”

**Self-direction.** The second subtheme that emerged in correlation with absent governance was self-direction. Ten participants and the focus group participants emphasized self-direction and accountability, which increased their responsibilities as instructors. Jessica said, “I agree... without documentation that directs technology... and social media use... there is a placed expectation on the instructor to operate in a way that meets the expectations... and needs of the program.” Colby explained that he never noticed direction concerning social media use: “I have not been told that I should act a certain way on social media... and for me, it is just assumed that

I conduct myself in a way that I see responsible.” Jim expressed a desire for institutional support and direction:

I would appreciate the opportunity to participate in a workshop or attend a conference that highlights the best practices for social media use...and technology as a whole. I feel that I act fittingly in my personal life...but I also feel that learning more about places where uncertainty exists...will help to build my knowledge and serve as a mentor to those around me.

### **Research Question Responses**

Data collected from individual interviews, a focus group interview, and review of documents were used to answer the central research question and three research subquestions.

#### **Research Question Responses: CRQ**

The central research question of this study was: What are the lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors who navigate between the personal and professional use of social media in higher education? Individual interviews, a focus group interview, and review of documents were used to gain insight into how post-secondary instructors navigate the line between personal and professional social media use.

Based on the data provided by the participants, the impact of personal assessment and decision-making contributed to self-reliance (Major Theme 1). For example, when describing decision-making related to social media use, Allison shared, “It feels that social media in academics is useful, but sometimes I wish there was more protection for instructors and the hurdles.” Furthermore, within the focus group interview, all participants provided words considered to have a negative connotation such as “anxious,” “concerned,” and “challenging.”

The personal assessment subtheme, similar to decision-making, generated words such as “challenging,” “negligence,” and “outdated.” Georgia shared, “I would have applied social media and technology more... if there was more direction and training.”

Participants also discussed how decision-making has become a factor in their ability to successfully use social media, both personally and professionally. Participants believed that potential negative impacts of social media use lasted much longer than the benefits (Major Theme 2). When discussing how he perceived the level of support with social media use, John said it is “a guessing game.” When asked what drives his decision-making, John replied, “As an educator, I am here for the benefit of my students and adapt in ways that I see will benefit them.”

Participants indicated the strategies they implemented in the classroom were dictated by what was best for students, but these strategies were limited by a lack of guidance from leaders (Major Theme 2). Martin expressed:

In my opinion... you’re always going to have to relate to the students in front of you, nothing is ever going to remain constant... teaching has moved on from its original and traditional form and relating to the students is key when presenting the curriculum materials.

Finally, participants also indicated opportunities for additional training and growth concerning the ways technology should be used personally and professionally (Major Theme 3). John recommended, “Additional support... training and informational sessions, communicating expectations, more about the best avenues of conduct, and not having to second guess our practices.”

### **Research Question Responses: SQ1**

The first research subquestion was: What are post-secondary education instructors' perceptions of how the boundary between personal and professional social media use impacts decision-making as a lived experience? Although each participant's experience was unique, there was little variation in the way they responded to interview questions regarding their perceptions of personal and professional social media use. During the interviews, participants frequently indicated they were responsible for determining ethical social media practices. These data directly led to the development of Major Theme 1: Self-reliance. Martin shared a sentiment that communicated a common theme among participants concerning social media practices:

In order to ensure ethical conduct ... the instructors will collaborate with each other... this provides a level of assurance ... knowing that were all on the same page makes us feel like we are not violating the terms of our employment.

Georgia offered a valuable explanation related to the first subquestion: "I would just recommend more support when it concerns any expectation placed on performance. Times are marching on... and it's important for us to also keep up." Georgia later explained her onboarding lacked an introduction to an employee handbook or policy-related guidelines.

Another development related to the first subquestion, in addition to the lack of support, was the desire for additional training and development opportunities. When questioned about confidence in their abilities to implement technology and use social media, participants offered anecdotes related to the level of support they received. Jessica said,

I think, making the policy better known... we know it exists and that it is out there... but sometimes we feel like the unknown areas leave us needing to fill in the... empty areas ourselves in order to remain compliant.

### Research Question Responses: SQ2

The second research subquestion was: What are post-secondary education instructors' perceptions of the institutional expectations of personal and professional social media practices, as a lived experience? This question resulted in the development of Major Theme 3, Absent governance, as well as two subthemes. Data connected to this research question indicated that participants' ability to make choices related to institutional policy (Subtheme 1) and self-direction (Subtheme 2) had been limited by the lack of influence from leadership. Specifically, participants indicated their institution failed to keep them notified of changes in expectations concerning conduct and performance, especially regarding technology. John said, "I guess, it must be a challenge, keeping up with the changes. It seems like something is changing, which makes altering policy a struggle." Allison said, "I was never discouraged in being acquainted to technology, in some cases it was encouraged ... but I was not fully aware of how to present." The majority of participants shared experiences they determined were representative of a lack of institutional support (Subtheme 1). Susan recalled her institution providing a workshop on technological resources, but it did not cover conduct or expectations:

No...I mean, they never really conveyed or constituted what behaviors were ethical. They were supportive of advancing our knowledge for use...but not informing us how we should operate ethically.

Colby also discussed apprehensions related to a lack of institutional support: "I felt like, a lot of times ... I felt that technology was necessary, but I just wasn't fully aware how I could use it. So...I pretty much just relied on my peers, you know." Samuel also shared how his decisions were limited due to absent leadership: "There were instances where I wanted to be creative in the

classroom, but I played things safe. I would partially attribute that decision to personal reservations...and a lack of confidence”.

A lack of training and professional development opportunities also greatly limited participants’ personal guidance (Subtheme 2). Jim stated, “We are an institution that is well known throughout the region...but it doesn’t feel like we are provided opportunities to back that up.” Jessica also described a lack of opportunities for professional growth:

In previous positions...I remember being afforded the prospect to attend various out-of-state conferences and workshops. There were also opportunities to learn virtually. I do feel academics...can be behind the times and should invest in growing with their biggest supporters...the students.

Some participants also discussed times when they believed their leaders could have enhanced their knowledge to support learners (Subtheme 1). Colby shared, “The best part of my role is serving the learners that I see on a daily basis. The need to keep up with their demands is essential and without the necessary tools...I’m useless to them”

### **Research Question Responses: SQ3**

The third research subquestion was: What are post-secondary education instructors’ perceptions of the information they share while using their social media accounts as a lived experience? This question resulted in the development of Major Theme 2, Professional Image, and associated subthemes. Participants expressed caution when navigating social media, both personally and professionally. (Subtheme 1). Georgia captured this sentiment, sharing:

I have seen too many instances of controversy when it comes to social media. Uh... I learned that keeping my personal profiles and professional profiles separate is critical. So,

being extremely careful, and, not risking my employment status, is something that I am very meticulous with. I even create fake profiles uh... to see what I can dig up on myself. It is important to live our personal lives, uh, but we also need to understand that we are representing an employer... so, keeping a distance between the two is important. Some people can be careless and I have no sympathy for those that fail to protect themselves. Likewise, Jessica stated, "I remember seeing friends ... in prominent professional positions... posting inappropriate content." Some participants highlighted the fear of tarnishing their reputations as a result of unethical social media practices. As John explained,

All too often... I'm seeing controversy in the news aligning with poor social media practices... and the content they share. My brother, who works as a human resource professional at a career-training institute... in Florida, uses social media all of the time to see how prospective employees conduct themselves.

Samuel described his careful nature using social media: "I actually have asked co-workers to review my social media accounts. This gives me piece of mind."

Other participants cited the need to appear professional and reputable to their learners. When discussing instances where she appeared unprofessional, Allison said:

I was involved in a situation where my students used their Twitter profiles to learn... of information that I would not normally share in class. I shared a political opinion and I felt that... this now known information compromised my professional image.

When discussing measures taken to protect his academic reputation, John stated, "inspiring my students can occur without sharing pieces of my personal life... students take what we say very seriously."

Other participants believed disclosing too much personal information was a detriment to the learning experience. John stated, “It’s important for my students to grow naturally and my social media accounts shouldn’t prevent this from occurring.” Georgia stated,

I use them [social media] to stay in touch with friends and family... it keeps me up to speed with them. Over the years, I’ve learned to limit what I share... I try to keep it to pictures of my dog and some of the trips that I take throughout the year.

Unfortunately, poor decisions can cost educators their reputations and jobs. Susan said the content shared on her profile “is very conservative, and is done so in a way that wouldn’t offend anybody or their beliefs.” Whitney said she is “tuned into the news and issues that emerge from social media use.” After that, she said “a mistake on social media can be similar to getting arrested.” Colby described his social media practices as “very vanilla and cautious.” Jessica said that she created a new profile to avoid her professor accessing any previous content shared. She said she learned: “You always cover your bases when it comes to your personal life mixing with academics... there is too much at stake to risk your reputation.”

The following table indicates the participants’ responses, either cautious or unconcerned, to questions that focused on the three research sub questions:

Table 6

*Research Sub-Questions*

Nature of Content Shared		Joint or Separate Accounts (Private/Professional)		Additional Measures to Protect Privacy	
		Joint	Separate	Yes	No
Cautious	Unconcerned				
11	1	3	9	7	5



### **Summary**

Chapter Four included detailed descriptions of the 12 participants of this transcendental phenomenological study. The participants included post-secondary education instructors within a nursing program at a private institution. The purpose of the study was to understand the lived experiences of the navigation of personal and professional social media practices for post-secondary education instructors in higher education. Data analysis was performed following Moustakas' (1994) recommendations for phenomenological data analysis. Coding and reduction were performed as the initial step in developing themes. After coding and reduction, subthemes were introduced. Through the analysis of subthemes, major themes were introduced as a final step in data analysis. Subthemes were given as a component of participant descriptions and major themes were introduced in the results section as well as the narrative related specifically to the central research question and three research sub-questions.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the navigation of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience for post-secondary education instructors in higher education. Additional research on this topic may help leaders provide employees with guidelines for social media use, potentially improving the reputations of higher education institutions. This final chapter provides a concise summary and discussion of findings from the current investigation. The discussion includes theoretical implications as related to the foundational theories of Jones and Davis (1965) and Tajfel and Turner (1979). Empirical and practical implications are discussed, along with recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a final summary of this study.

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to understand the navigation of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience for post-secondary education instructors in higher education. The central research question for the study was, “What are the lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors who navigate between the personal and professional use of social media in higher education?” To provide insight on the navigation of personal and professional social media practices, 12 participants shared their personal experiences and anecdotes via individual interviews and a focus group. The participants detailed their experiences with social media use, their interpretation of social media policy, and the experiences that shaped their ethical beliefs related to the navigation of personal and professional social media use.

Study participants possessed a great deal of knowledge and experience in education and nursing; however, little was known about their personal and professional social media use. Samuel, Gerard, Susan, Jim, and Colby all had social media accounts and discussed the ethical implications from a professional standpoint. Jessica and Angela both used a single account for professional and personal use. Because of the potential risks and professional repercussions associated with social media use, they took additional measures to protect themselves. Now both feel their social media practices are safe because they created secure accounts and took advantage of privacy settings offered by Facebook and Twitter. Other participants described similar experiences learning how to effectively and ethically utilize social media. For example, Colby developed several different accounts to maintain privacy, while Martin and Susan used concealment features to prevent unwanted visitors from viewing their pages.

Three subquestions were employed to investigate self-reliance and technological advancements within higher education. It was important to understand participants' navigation of personal and professional social media practices, the institutional support they received, and the measures they used to ensure their practices were ethical. Study data revealed participants' adaptations to the dynamic landscape of technology in higher education, as well as their use of privacy features offered by social media platforms.

Subquestion one assessed the boundary between personal and professional social media use and its impact on decision-making. Although none of the participants were removed from their positions due to inappropriate social media use, Gerard described repercussions faced by a former peer because of social media use. George admitted he would not have "taken time to exercise caution within his personal practices." Samuel understood the classroom utility of social

media and “its growing presence;” however, he witnessed professional repercussions experienced by others and preferred not to jeopardize his employment status or reputation.

Gerard regretted not taking courses and workshops to advance his technology and social media use. Gerard said he would consider incorporating social media into his instructional practices, but felt a lack of preparation could leave him “susceptible.” He said he wished his institution “would provide training and resources on social media’s functions.” Gerard believed that incorporating social media into his teaching practices would be “hard to do autonomously” and “without support.”

The effects of self-reliant social media practices were evident in the teaching practices and apprehensions shared by participants. Understanding the mindset of post-secondary education instructors and their adaptive instructional practices sheds light on what they are comfortable introducing in the classroom (Fox & Bird, 2017). Providing training and guidelines for acceptable social media practices is essential to helping instructors maintain the progressive nature of instruction.

Subquestion two addressed the institutional expectations of personal and professional social media practices. Data revealed that participants did not believe their institution provided enough guidance, clarity, and support concerning expectations for social media practices. John said, “the employer should afford informational sessions along with clear expectations” regarding conduct; he did not want to “second-guess the ethics” of his social media practices. Whitney indicated that an updated policy on social media practices was “not made available by institutional leadership.” Interviews and the focus group participants revealed that many participants did not receive up-to-date policies; some indicated that social media policies were

not provided during onboarding, while others felt the policies they did learn about were antiquated. Susan said that her institution “lists an employee handbook online...but it does not highlight specifics” regarding social media practices. Findings from this study echoed those from previous investigators, who called for the development of more clear and progressive professional policies regarding social media and technology (Parkinson & Turner, 2014). This need holds true for institutions with outdated social media policies as well as those that have not created and implemented social media policies (Vie, 2017).

Subquestion three was designed to investigate the nature of the information participants shared about social media use. Participants believed the tone of information shared could affect one’s reputation, which can be heavily influenced by the public availability of content. Prior researchers emphasized the importance of privacy settings on social media accounts (Parkinson & Turner, 2014) and taking precautions to ensure personal views and opinions remain private (Osman et al., 2012). Allison shared that students who became privy to aspects of her personal life “appear to alter their behavior throughout the learning process,” thus making it important to “keep her personal and professional lives separate.” During her first year of teaching, Allison shared her “involvement in a local campaign during a lecture on holistic care” with her students. Following this incident, Allison observed “changes in the mannerisms” of her students, which she attributed to the information she shared. Although the experience did not have detrimental consequences, Allison decided to “no longer share personal opinions and political affiliations during instruction.”

Gerard’s belief regarding “keeping up with the times,” in terms of his teaching practices, were “limited by a lack of institutional guidance.” Gerard’s goal was to continuously relate to his

students “in a way that does not risk breaking any sort of ethical guidelines.” The lack of institutional policy or guidance concerning technological practices often discourages post-secondary education instructors from advancing their teaching practices (Osman et al., 2012). However, given the progressive nature of higher education, social media incorporation is vital to maintaining pace with advances in societal customs and practices.

### **Discussion**

While qualitative researchers (Cuseo, 2018; Evans, 2014) have explored the practices of social media in higher education, few have focused on the navigation between personal and professional practices (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2013). This transcendental investigation into the navigation of personal and professional social media practices of post-secondary education instructors addressed a gap in the existing research. Current literature on social media practices in higher education emphasizes the significance of technological advances in the field, in academic practices, and in the importance of keeping pace (Mullen et al., 2014). Findings from this study revealed some post-secondary education instructors lack support and guidance related to social media use. Some post-secondary education instructors were presented with policies pertaining to technological practices, but believed the content of such policies was lacking. In response to unclear guidelines, some participants, such as Martin and Jim, developed their own standards for social media use (Malesky & Peters, 2012). Gerard described a very consistent and supportive ideology within his teaching practices, which was “heavily influenced by university policy” he was expected to abide by. The impact of policy gaps and antiquated expectations limits instructors’ abilities to implement adaptive teaching practices (Kolowich, 2013), undermining their abilities to relate to learners. In the present study, Jim experienced a lack of

institutional support and Angela naturally became stagnant concerning her goal to keep her teaching practices current.

Findings from previous studies also indicated leaders' failures to update or develop professional policies related to social media use (Kind, 2010). Findings from the current investigation aligned with those from past investigations, revealing that post-secondary education instructors lacked support from their leaders. Regular reviews of employee conduct and technological policies are necessary to provide post-secondary education instructors with opportunities to advance their teaching practices. Instructors may fail to adapt to advancements in social media because they lack the resources to ethically incorporate these technologies into the classroom. The missed opportunities then arise, as in Allison's situation, where students may have benefitted from the curriculum through creating social media accounts. She knew social media benefitted her students but hesitated to implement it because of lacking institutional guidance. Without policy to inform the ethical integration of social media into teaching practices, institutions become susceptible to ethical violations and undermine instructors' abilities to incorporate advanced teaching practices. Consistent reviews of policy content and employee expectations may help post-secondary education instructors advance their teaching practices (Junco, 2011).

This transcendental phenomenological study was unique in participants' distinctive and expressive stories of personal and professional social media practices. Although participants expressed similar sentiments toward their experiences navigating social media practices, each story provided insight from the perspectives of those experiencing the phenomenon. The themes that emerged contribute new understandings of technological practices in higher education.

Understanding participants' backgrounds and life stories conceptualizes their decisions and practices relative to social media use. Study findings expanded understandings of social media practices, policy governance, and how to adapt to fast-evolving technology practices.

Findings also support the theories upon which this study was based. Jones and Davis' (1965) correspondent inference theory was developed to understand how observers assess behaviors that correspond with their own actions. The nature of correspondent inference theory was particularly true for participants of the present study. While some participants chose to utilize social media within their teaching practices, others were reticent to do so because of potential risks and lack of institutional guidance. Participants expressed concerns about their professional reputations and there was evidence of deep reflection regarding the potential risks of social media use.

The secondary theory of this study was Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory. Tajfel and Turner sought to understand three components, including categorization, social identification, and social comparison. The theory links individuals' perceived experiences with those of their peers. The major concepts of the theory related to participants' decision about social media practices. Participants emphasized policy gaps and leadership's failure to express or update expectations related to social media practices. Participants were responsible for determining ethical social media practices in the classroom (Fox & Bird, 2017). Participants' confusion was amplified by the progressive nature of higher education and requirements to implement effective teaching practices. As generations of learners advance, so too do their expectations and learning styles. Consequently, educators must understand how to advance their



understanding. Walster's (2016) review of institutional documents revealed some institutions fail to update their employee handbooks, especially concerning social media and technology.

### **Empirical Literature**

Training and updated social media policies are essential to helping instructors implement appealing teaching strategies (Fox & Bird, 2017; Junco, 2011). Providing frequent and effective training and workshops on technology implementation may help post-secondary education instructors understand which practices are ethically acceptable (Walster, 2017). For Georgia, a lack of policy "limited" her when implementing social media into a career preparation assignment. Additionally, Martin experienced a lack of support concerning the implementation of a social media-based project in one of his courses. Had Martin and Georgia been provided with more direction on technology implementation through policy and training opportunities, they may have been more confident in their classroom use of technology.

Some institutions proactively update and restructure policies concerning technology and social media use. The University of Georgia (UGA Social Media Guidelines, 2019), Loyola University of Chicago (2019), and Princeton University (2011) altered technology policies as they each identified educators as institutional representatives. Because instructors are consistently held to a higher standard, due to their public exposure and influence within communities (Loyola University Chicago 2019; UGA Social Media Guidelines, 2019; Princeton, 2011), policy changes by these institutions emphasized expectations of educators. Some of the updated content prohibited the sharing inappropriate pictures, videos, commentary, or displays of illegal activities on social media websites (Loyola University Chicago, 2019). While some institutions have addressed these problems via policy and employee expectations, others have

not, leaving them susceptible to risks associated with negligent social media use by educators (Barnes & Lescault, 2011).

Uniform social media policies among institutions is essential to preserving the reputation of higher education (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). Participants in this study described similar experiences related to unclear social media policies. Allison recalled a “reluctance” to utilize new and popular platforms with her students; by the time she was comfortable leveraging new technologies, she felt she already needed new training “to learn fresher trends.” While Jessica was “excited to implement Google Docs” within an experiential learning project, she did so with feelings of uncertainty. John said his learners were “required each semester... to back and support the content on their departmental Facebook page” and said it was “important for nursing students... and even those professionals... to present a positive image in the community.” He also added that it is “equally important for those in need of healthcare... to display a level of comfort when seeking such services.” John realized “possible... and potential perils that accompany social media integration” in academics and he looked forward to “opportunities that will increase his level of knowledge.” Additionally, John believed there “must be further legislation and uniformity within technology in academics.”

Social media’s place in higher education may be new, but its presence will increase over time (Fox & Bird, 2017). Many institutions fail to develop and update social media policies and expectations, but needs for those very policies will only increase, over time. John’s incorporation of Facebook within academic curriculum posed its own risks, but he knew it was necessary to adapt to students’ ever-changing learning styles. John never considered the risks associated with social media until observing “instances within the media of careless social media use” by leaders

within the field. Allison also described the importance of utilizing technology in learning, but a lack of institutional guidance made her reluctant to do so. Although Jessica did not seem as reluctant to use social media in the classroom, she understood the need for ethical considerations. Martin also described a lack of institutional support and the need for more guidance and direction.

### **Theoretical Literature**

Jones and Davis' (1965) correspondent inference theory was created to understand how individuals assess their own behaviors. Assessed behaviors correspond to individuals' actions and parallel experiences of their own actions. Correspondent inference theory was foundational to the current study, as many participants were responsible for assessing the ethics of their own social media practices. For example, Martin discerned the need to "incorporate social media" into his teaching practices. Martin had implemented social media for several years and educated himself to develop assurance that his practices were ethical. Regardless of the resources available, Martin was conscious of how his actions aligned with the principles of his teaching methods. Susan said that her students had "benefitted repeatedly" from technology and social media, especially within her didactic courses. Susan engaged in a great deal of self-reflection to ensure that implemented teaching practices were executed with the "student's best interest in mind." Susan was able to develop consistent confidence in her abilities as an educator through subjective and all-encompassing self-assessment.

Additionally, Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory is useful for understanding the components of categorization, social identification, and social comparison. The theory highlights observed experiences or the experiences of professional peers, in the case of the

current study. The major concepts of the theory related to participants' self-assessment and decision-making abilities. With the rapid growth of social media in higher education, post-secondary education instructors learned their decisions were essential to maintaining pace with those changes (Walster, 2017). As educators in a vital field, participants were responsible for making major decisions. Angela had always been cognizant of how her decisions could affect her professional reputation. Angela said that "being self-aware and accountable is important" in a field where so much influence is cast over formidable learners. Jessica was very aware of the potential professional consequences her decisions. Some participants described a mature level of self-awareness and accountability but still desired more access to training and resources related to decision-making.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the navigation of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience for post-secondary education instructors in higher education. The lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors contribute valuable insight into ethical social media practices. The following sections provide a discussion of the empirical, theoretical, and practical implications of the present study. This section includes recommendations for educators and institutional leadership pertaining to policy-making, curriculum development, educator expectations, and progressive direction within higher education.

#### **Empirical Implications**

Participants in this study were responsible for making ethical decisions concerning social media use. A review of Northern University's policies reviewed a lack of clarity for educators

seeking to implement social media. Although this study focused on the social media experience of participants and their navigation of personal and professional practices, participants described a void in the policy content provided by institutional leadership. John stated: “I think there is a department... wide confusion with expectations.” Some participants did not implement technology due to a lack of clarity regarding institutional expectations. According to Whitney, “It’s in the best interest of my... learners and students to err on the side of caution... you can’t be too careful.” Other participants indicated that although they knew the field was progressing toward increased technology incorporation, they remained reluctant about the implementation process. Gerard stated, ‘In my mind... it makes most sense to follow the lead of others.’

While an objective of higher education is to foster an environment for ethical decision-making, a lack of knowledge and proper training may leave educators susceptible to mistakes. In the cases of participants who experienced pivotal decisions, it was not evident they felt fully prepared to make ethical decisions that promoted a reputable image for themselves and their institution. Once an educator gains employment with an institution, it is the responsibility of the employer to ensure resources are available for success; therefore, when institutions fail to update policy content, educators are vulnerable to outdated teaching strategies (Vie, 2017).

Evidence from participants’ stories indicated educators only had as much ability as their institutions allow them to possess. Jim said that the purpose of the institution is “to empower the educator.” A lack of social media policies and training placed the responsibility of decision-making on instructors. Jessica, a user of social media in personal and professional capacities, identified the “need to unite... and combine social media within curriculum.” Her statement indicated she did not believe she was “provided enough support... when it came to technology in

the curriculum” and was put in a position to “ensure ethical learning environments through her own set of decisions.” Jessica was blessed with a comprehensive understanding of ethics, which was a testament to her ability as an educator. Jessica was unique in that her previous training and experience provided quality instruction to her students. Jessica’s case also illustrates the importance of providing support and training to post-secondary education instructors within a progressive field (Fox & Bird, 2017). However, not all institutions display a commitment to providing sufficient training to educators. Therefore, it is imperative that ample training occur throughout employment. Training content and resources should include key policy updates, such as those related to social media.

Some participants in the present study thrived in the self-incorporation of social media in their teaching practices, despite associated risks. Georgia said she “experienced mixed views” about implementing social media in curriculum due to associated legal risks. Nonetheless, Georgia “cautiously” incorporated social media platforms into her academic curriculum. Regardless of insufficient guidance and direction, she utilized her own experiences to introduce social media dependably (Malesky & Peters, 2012).

Another empirical implication of this study is the progression of technology within higher education. Participants were primarily recruited due to their involvement in social media practices. They each indicated an association with social media platforms, which was especially important for those who used social media, both personally and professionally. Other participants chose not to integrate social media into the classroom because of associated risks and a lack of leadership support and guidance (Malesky & Peters, 2012; Vie, 2017; Walster, 2017). Academic

leaders should evaluate policy and ensure they are aware of technological presence in higher education.

Due to the traditional nature of the field of higher education, regular changes are not always made, even when those changes are needed. A major indication of the need for change were instances of reckless social media use by academic instructors. Additional recommendations for empirical improvement would include the proper training, resources, and institutional support toward academic instructors. Implementing a one-size-fits-all institutional policy is ideal, but with rapid changes in higher education, additional support must be made available. Just as institutional leaders attend various trainings to stay abreast of changes in the field, ample trainings and resources should be made available for educators. Single reviews of policies and updated content will not address the problem. Rather, continuous reviews of policy and training resources are needed as the field of higher education is consider ever-changing.

Gerard said, “The thought crossed my mind to include additional technology within the curriculum...I did experience apprehension... which was not for a lack of motivation... but more so because of a lack of knowledge.” Learners in higher education need a means to best understand the curriculum in the most relatable way. Continuous changes occur in the lives of learners outside of the classroom and adapting to methods that complement their learning style is imperative; especially as educational formats increasingly shift toward online learning (Walster, 2017). Instructors may then develop instructional styles that correlate with the direction of the field. This strategy may provide learners with the best chance to understand course materials and how to apply learning to real world situations. While some recommendations involve legislative changes, other suggestions could be initiated through institutional governing bodies.

## **Theoretical Implications**

Jones and Davis (1965) developed correspondence inference theory to explore how observers assess behaviors that parallel their own. Especially for participants who utilize social media professionally, their decision-making skills improved through increased responsibility. Seven participants currently incorporated social media into their learning content as they identified benefits to the learning experience. As a management professional in higher education, I have observed a progression of social media that was not always accounted for in institutional policy. Allison, a user of social media both personally and professionally, said she developed her own “perception of the ideal process for social media application in learning.” Allison also stated, “I had mentors there to support me and guide me through the process, but at times it seemed like I had to do it all on my own, instead of receiving one on one direction.” Even though Allison’s experience and responsibility proved successful, she was unable to fully prepare to make key decisions regarding compliance and social media in the classroom.

Martin said, “I can always find a peer to seek direction from, that’s not the concern,” but that is not an ideal situation for reaching students. Institutional leadership teams, even at smaller universities, have access to a number of resources that could help to provide direction concerning technology use. Perhaps if Susan had been provided with more direction concerning expectations on social media use in curriculum, she would not have been “forced” to make her own determinations regarding what constituted “acceptable use.” It was evident from Angela’s description that social media accounts benefited her students, but with associated risks. It should be the goal of every institution to utilize resources to ensure sufficient technology plans are implemented to protect educators. Institutions should, at the very least, update codes of conduct



and employee expectations. Additionally, educators and institutional staff should be provided with trainings and resources to stay abreast of changes.

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory explains how personal awareness affects individuals' perceptions toward other individuals and corresponds to the decisions that educators are responsible for making. The assurance that post-secondary education instructors will conduct themselves accordingly is directly related to the institution's ability to keep expectations current. Some participant experiences related to perceptions of institutional expectations were positive, while others were not. Some of the negative experiences were due to inadequate resources, while others were attributed to poor communication between the employer and the employee (the institution and educator).

Instruction and educational training are needed by post-secondary education instructors throughout their tenure. Unfortunately, instructors do not consistently receive adequate training or updated resources. Even in the best of scenarios, post-secondary education instructors reported feeling unprepared for technology incorporation, including the proper use of social media. The theoretical findings of Tajfel and Turner (1979) were relevant to the perceptions of the participants as, in some cases, a lack of direction placed them in situations where their perception was the only factor to fuel the decision-making process. One minor incident could cause major setbacks for instructors and institutions; therefore, it is important to establish protocol to keep all employment literature and resources current.

### **Practical Implications**

It is important to note that although post-secondary educators are routinely tasked with making ethical and sound decisions, such decisions are often a reflection on employers.

Participants who refrained from implementing technology and social media in their academic curriculum noted the lack of institutional guidance as the main reason. Participants who chose to implement technology described their perceptions as careful, aware, and cautious. While most participants who chose to utilize technology in an effort to enhance learning, the majority agreed that supportive resources were lacking. These experiences may leave instructors susceptible to code of conduct violations and other ethical implications. Georgia, an educator with 25 years of academic experience, claimed,

I feel that technology in the classroom, is essential given the form of our current society...and it's our job as instructors...to include social media and different types of software in teaching. But without help, sometimes dangers can become a factor, so I had to motivate and push myself to gain a greater understanding.

Without supportive resources, training, and updated policies, many educators have similar experiences and struggle with diminished support.

Post-secondary education instructors struggle when they teach without feeling supported or protected by their institutions. The significance for educators is the lack of institutional support that normally offers consistent guidance and support. If post-secondary education instructors fail to act ethically, they risk losing their jobs, risk their professional reputation, and most importantly, risk the experience of their learners. A practical solution involves revisiting institutional policies, providing training, and establishing continued dedication to providing resources. The availability of learning resources, training and development opportunities, and updated policies would provide educators additional knowledge in decision-making.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The delimitations of this study included limits regarding selection of participants. Participants were currently employed by the same institution and accessed and operated social media accounts. A transcendental phenomenology was appropriate for this study as all participants shared the experience of social media use. While participants used social media personally, not all implemented in their professional lives. The research and probing questions did not render extensive or detailed background information regarding the types of social media platforms used, which was another delimitation. As the focus for this study was the navigation of personal and professional social media practices, interview and focus group questions did not probe participants to share the types of social media they used and how they use the platforms. While some participants willingly shared their social media preferences, others adhered to the questions related to personal and professional practices, which was the goal of the study. The nature of working with this population was very unique, therefore the questions were designed to direct attention specifically to the navigation of personal and professional social media practices.

Limitations for this study also included no control for age, political views, or upbringing. This study also did not control for the amount of time participants spent using social media on a weekly basis. Participants were selected from an institution of higher education in the Midwestern region of the United States; therefore, limited exposure to participants outside of this area restricted geographical diversity. In order to reach the minimum number of participants, I communicated with larger institutions that fit the criteria and would allow educators to participate in this study. Due to the distance from participants and diversity of schedules,

interviews were primarily conducted virtually, as was the focus group, which limited the personal evaluation factors.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In consideration of the study findings, there are areas that warrant further research. The following research is needed to better understand the impact of the navigation of personal and professional social media practices among post-secondary education instructors. First, Major Theme Three, Absent Governance emerged as a result of data analysis. Absent Governance was beyond the scope of this research study. However, there was sufficient data to suggest a need for further research into the impact of social media practices in respect to absent governance. Specifically, a case study could be conducted to examine the ways institutional guidelines are composed and written, with respect to the governance of social media use.

Second, many participants mentioned enhancements that could be made to the current system of social media policy. Some participants suggested dedicating a team that ensured policy reflected the progressive nature of the field. Others suggested improvements in the time to update policy content and employment-guided literature. These findings suggest a need for further research into enhancements within institutional social media policy that would make the findings more consistent or more advantageous for institutions to use when developing policies. A mixed-methods or applied research study could be helpful in providing data on current social media policy or changes to the current system of implementation.

Additionally, many participants mentioned a lack of training resources related to social media use within their current teaching experience. Some participants mentioned a lack of training resources, others mentioned development content and the opportunity to attend

workshops and conferences. Further research could be conducted to explore types of learning opportunities that could be offered by institutions, as well as the type of support that may be provided by institutions to ensure ethical social media use. A phenomenological study could be conducted to explore how institutions can better support employees concerning their technology practices.

Finally, this study was regionally representative in nature, exploring the lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors in the Midwestern region of the United States. Additional research is needed to explore the lived experiences surrounding the navigation of personal and professional social media practices among those in other regions of the country. A nationwide phenomenological study on the navigation of social media practices of post-secondary education instructors would be helpful.

### **Summary**

Provisions of social media use for post-secondary education instructors have greatly advanced from the formulation of such platforms in the early 2000s. Still, improvements are necessary to encourage and reinforce ethical use for today's educators. This study supported current data that emphasized the importance of updating and improving content that governs how instructors navigate personal and professional social media practices. This study also diverged somewhat from current literature as to the success and importance of social media within the classroom. This qualitative study revealed three specific emerging themes— self-reliant social media practices, advanced learning through technology, and the lack of governance associated with social media use. These themes were supported by current literature.

Although institutions of higher education and their educators often strive for perfection, that feat is rarely achieved. The challenge for institutional leadership, once they have developed resources related to social media use, is to keep resources updated and reflective of progress within the field. Flexibility is another component of developing the best social media resources. It is never ideal to constantly update policies and resources; however, it could make a difference regarding quality of learning. It is important that researchers continue to highlight problem areas and move toward the development of stable solutions. Stable solutions for institutions and educators include available institutional support. Institutional leadership needs to refine trainings, learning aids, and policies related to social media use. With persistence and dedication to improve the existence of social media in the field, institutions will create environments that help educators become more positive, confident, and goal-oriented.

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## APPENDIX A

### Recruitment Letter

Date:

Dear Educators:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD degree. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the navigation of personal and professional social media practices as a lived experience for post-secondary education instructors in higher education. There are questions stemming from previous research that relate to how education instructors concurrently utilize each avenue of social media use. Additionally, the gray areas from previous research have introduced questions that surround the ethical nature of such uses and social media policy. Given the progressive nature of social media use in the field, I am seeking to learn more about this phenomenon and I am inviting you to participate in my study.

If you are over the age of 18, serve as a post-secondary education instructor in the healthcare field, practice social media in a personal capacity, and are willing to participate you will be asked to (1) complete a screening survey (2) complete a virtual interview which will consist of 17 questions; (3) participate in a focus group discussion regarding these same topics; and (4) review transcribed interviews for accuracy. I will record all interviews and focus group discussions for transcription purposes. It should take approximately two hours and 30 minutes for you to complete the procedures listed. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please return the attached screening survey to me at [REDACTED]. If you are eligible to participate, I will follow-up to schedule an interview.

A consent document will be emailed to you after the interview is scheduled. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me by email at [REDACTED] prior to the interview.

Sincerely,

John Dunne  
Doctoral Student, Liberty University

**APPENDIX B****Consent Form**

## CONSENT FORM

Navigating the Personal and Professional Practices of Social Media In Higher Education: A  
Phenomenological Examination

John Dunne

Liberty University

School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on social media use in higher education. The study will look into how post-secondary education instructors navigate the personal and professional practices of social media. You were selected as a possible participant because you are currently a post-secondary education instructor in the field of nursing. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

John, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of post-secondary education instructors that pertain to how they navigate the personal and professional use of social media in higher education. This study will address one central question and four research questions: **CQ:** What are the lived experiences of post-secondary education instructors



in utilizing social media personally and professionally? **SQ1:** How do post-secondary education instructors experience and comprehend the partition that separates personal and professional social media use? **SQ2:** How do post-secondary education instructors experience and understand the institutional expectations of personal and professional social media practices? **SQ3:** What is the essence of information that post-secondary education instructors share while using their social media accounts?

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a recorded interview session where you will be asked 17 questions related to your experiences navigating social media practices. This should take 45-60 minutes to complete.
2. Participate in a recorded focus group discussion regarding these same topics. This should take 45-60 minutes to complete.
3. Supply documents that relate to your institutions social media policy. These documents will be photocopied and returned to you.
4. Once an interview is completed, it will be transcribed. When the transcribed interview is ready, it will be given back to you to review for accuracy. You will have an opportunity to make any corrections needed and approve the final transcript before it is used in the data analysis. This procedure may take between one to two hours.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include an understanding about social media practices in higher education.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is John Dunne. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr.

[REDACTED] If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or [REDACTED]

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

- The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.
2. What made you decide to become a post-secondary education instructor?
3. What role did academics have in your journey to becoming an instructor?
4. What role does social media have in your personal life?
5. What role does social media have in your daily routine as an institutional instructor?
6. What role does social media have for your professional peers who also function as instructors?
7. Looking back on your career as an education instructor, how would you describe your ability to navigate social media practices personally and professionally?
8. What concerns, challenges, or reservations do you have regarding the division of personal and professional social media practices?
9. What experiences contributed to your foundational principles concerning the navigation between the personal and professional use of social media?
10. What concerns, challenges, or reservations do you have for navigating social media in future settings?
11. What role do instructors have in determining the ethical expectations concerning social media use?
12. What role has your employed institution had in your ability to practice social media?
13. As you went through your onboarding process within your current role, please describe your experiences regarding the expected manner of social media practice.

14. How has previous experiences with the use of social media affected the way in which you utilize it today?
15. Describe your decision-making process in treading the ethical boundaries that divide personal and professional social media practices.
16. To what or to whom do you attribute your ability to function ethically within your current role?
17. I appreciate the time you have provided to this study. What else do you think is important for me to know about your experiences regarding social media use?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Focus Group Questions**

1. What elements have you considered about social media use since completing the interview?
2. What changes have you implemented in navigating the personal and professional lines of social media since our initial interaction?
3. What is the main reason that you will mix or separate personal and professional social media use in the future?
4. Why is or why is it not important for educators to understand the difference between personal and professional social media use?
5. How do you see yourself interchangeably using social media personally and professionally in the future?

## APPENDIX E

### Permission To Conduct Research Form

Navigating the Personal and Professional Practices of Social Media In Higher Education: A  
Phenomenological Examination

John Dunne

Liberty University

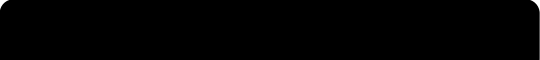
School of Education

My name is John Dunne. I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University. My research Navigating The Personal And Professional Practices Of Social Media In Higher Education: A Phenomenological Investigation is focused on the phenomenon of social media through the experiences of post-secondary education instructors. The aim of my project is to describe how professors navigate the line between personal and professional social media use. My research will attempt to inform institutions on how social media is influencing instructors, what areas of social media influence need to be addressed, and what areas of social media should be capitalized on. Further, the study will inform institutions on the perceptions of instructors, thereby allowing institutional leaders to make informed decisions on how to address and assist post-secondary education instructors.

I will be recording interviews while observing a maximum of two hours and interacting with the instructors. Also, I will arrange to meet with them at a mutually convenient time and via video



conferencing to conduct an interview. Further, I will conduct a focus group whereby the instructors will be able to share additional information, clarify previous thoughts, and answer follow up questions that may arise. After data has been collected, teachers will be able to examine the transcripts and notes of the recorded interviews, and make any changes that they would like.

Their participation is voluntary. All the data collected will be confidential and it will only be accessible to the researcher. I would be pleased to discuss any questions you may have regarding my research. You can contact me any time at 

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

John Dunne

Doctoral Student, Liberty University

**APPENDIX F****Screening Survey**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender:      Male              Female      Race: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Education Completed: \_\_\_\_\_ years (e.g., count grade 12 as 12 years)

Employment Status:   Adjunct              Non-Tenured              Tenured

How many years have you served as a post-secondary education instructor? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently employed as a post-secondary education instructor in the healthcare field?

No      Yes

Do you use a personal social media account?

No      Yes

## APPENDIX G

## IRB Approval Letter

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 11, 2020

John Dunne

IRB Exemption 4160.021120: Navigating the Personal and Professional Practices of Social Media in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Investigation

Dear John Dunne,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

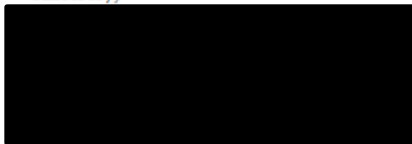
(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,



**LIBERTY**  
UNIVERSITY.

*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*